



2025/2026 SESSION
of the
BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
MAY 2025

(Sittings 4-13 of the 2025-2026 Session)
(pages 259-1106 and Index)

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

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**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
2 MAY 2025
10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 4 of the 2025/26 Session

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.
The Clerk will now lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 28 March 2025]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes from the 28th of March have been circulated.
Are there any amendments required?
There are none.
The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

[Minutes of 28 March 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGY

The Speaker: We have been informed that MP Fahy will be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: There are three such papers this morning. The first is in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance.
Premier.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

**NATIONAL ECONOMIC REPORT
OF BERMUDA 2024**

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the National Economic Report of Bermuda 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The second is in the name of the Minister of Tourism [and] Transport, Culture and Sport.
Minister Darrell.

**TOURISM INVESTMENT
(GROTTO BAY RESORT AND SPA) ORDER 2025**

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

I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Tourism Investment (Grotto Bay Resort and Spa) Order 2025 proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Tourism under section 3 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017, together with written agreement of the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 5 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017.

The Speaker: Would you like to do your second one?

**TOURISM INVESTMENT
(HILLCREST BOUTIQUE HOTEL) ORDER 2025**

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

I have the honour to attach and submit for the consideration of the Honourable House of Assembly the Tourism Investment (Hillcrest Boutique Hotel) Order 2025 proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Tourism under section 3 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017, together with written agreement of the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 5 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: Members, that now will lead us to the Statement that we are all here for today. And I will just give the camera guys a moment.

Are you set?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Okay.
Premier.

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

CONDOLENCES

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, before I begin my speech, on behalf of the whole House I would like to express our condolences to you and to the Honourable Member for Warwick West and to your entire family on the passing of your beloved wife, Ms. Miranda Lister.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: She was a woman of Christ, a lovely individual, always kind to all persons. And I know that she will be missed.

DOUBLE MURDER IN BERMUDA

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, further before I start into the scheduled business today, I am compelled to address the tragic and senseless events of last night in Somerset. The gunshots that rang out shattered not only the quiet of the evening, but took the lives of two people. Two families this morning are confronted with unimaginable loss. At a time of such tragedy, our community responsibilities support them and surround them with love and comfort.

As I have indicated to the Minister of National Security, the Bermuda Police Service has the Government's full support. And I likewise urge those who have knowledge of this incident to provide that information to police as part of the ongoing investigation.

It is understandable that emotions may be raw at this time, but there is no place for retaliation. The police have a job to do, and I am confident that, with the support of the community, they will work to apprehend those responsible. This is a time for unity, a time to speak peace over a troubled situation and a time to lift up two families whose lives are changed forever.

Mr. Speaker, if you will now allow me, I would like to deliver the annual Budget Statement.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

BUDGET STATEMENT IN SUPPORT OF THE ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE 2025/26

FAIRNESS IN ACTION—BUILDING A BERMUDA WHERE EVERYONE BENEFITS

Introduction

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in a time when the world is uncertain, divided and fractured, we meet again in this Honourable House to carry out one of the oldest and most important duties of parliamentary governance: the presentation of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the first budget of this new parliamentary term, delivered after the Progressive Labour Party earned a fresh mandate from the people of Bermuda on the 18th of February 2025. But today is more than a routine exercise. And in my remarks I plan to share with Honourable Members and every person living in Bermuda the good fiscal news that impacts all of us who call Bermuda home.

Mr. Speaker, we deliver this budget reflecting on where we were just five years ago and how far we have come. On the 2nd of May 2020, the COVID-19 shelter-in-place order was lifted. Our country was emerging from lockdown, shaken by a global pandemic that threatened every institution, every household and every person who calls Bermuda home. In that fragile moment, this Government made a promise: to rebuild Bermuda with Bermudians at heart, to chart an ambitious recovery and to do so not with austerity, but with investment in our people.

We committed to an Economic Recovery Plan informed by the best minds in Bermuda. We stuck to that plan. And today we stand here with the results:

- four consecutive years of strong GDP growth;
- record numbers of persons and Bermudians employed in international business;
- the lowest unemployment in 50 years;
- record investments in affordable housing;
- the renovation of our largest hotel, Fairmont Southampton, now underway; and, yes, Mr. Speaker,
- a balanced budget!

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, these are not political talking points. These are facts. They are the results of hard choices, clear leadership and a focus on rebuilding Bermuda with Bermudians at heart. Gone

are the days of persistent deficits. Yes, we still carry debt. But now, for the first time in a generation, we are positioned to repay that debt, build up our reserves and make investments for the future amidst a time of global uncertainty.

Mr. Speaker, this is the eighth budget of this Progressive Labour Party Government since returning to office in 2017, and through hurricanes, economic headwinds and a once-in-a-century pandemic, this Government has stayed true to its mission: fairness, opportunity and dignity for all Bermudians.

This mission is why we cut payroll taxes for 86 per cent of Bermudians. It is why we froze fuel prices and slashed energy taxes to protect household budgets. It is why we invested in our children through education reform and in our seniors through stronger expansion of FutureCare. These are not slogans. They are the hallmarks of a Government that governs with fairness as our core value.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has been tested repeatedly, and we have prevailed. We stood firm in the face of new economic substance requirements that threatened our international business sector. We remained resilient in the face of 40-year-high global inflation that increased prices everywhere. Each time, this Government responded not with fear, but with action. And each time, Bermuda came out stronger and Bermudians were protected.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we face new global tests.

The postwar global order that has underpinned our economy for the last 80 years is shifting. Historic alliances are being strained; trust in democratic institutions is under attack; even the ideals of free trade and liberal democracy are being questioned in global capitals once thought unshakable. And through it all, misinformation spreads faster than facts, leaving citizens around the world fearful, divided and distrustful.

These are serious times, Mr. Speaker, and serious times demand leadership that is focused on ensuring that Bermudians are at the centre of all that we do. As we debate this budget in the weeks ahead, we must keep the broader global backdrop in view.

Bermuda, though small, is not insignificant. The last five years—and the 400 that preceded them—have also shown that Bermuda has always been resilient. Global headlines may have many worried, but the work of governance is to ensure that we are prepared for whatever may come our way.

Mr. Speaker, this budget sets the course for the next stage of our Island's journey. It supports growth; it protects the vulnerable; and it invests in education, health care and infrastructure. And it does all of this while building a budget surplus to repay our debts and prepare for whatever may lie ahead.

Today, Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that in this Statement I can offer comfort and confidence to our people—comfort that they have not been forgotten and will benefit from Bermuda's success, and confi-

dence in this Government's ability to continue leading this Island through turbulent global waters.

Economic Review

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the last year has been shaped by growing uncertainty from shifting geopolitical alliances and economic realignments, to trade tensions that threaten to upend long-standing global supply chains. At home, our people continue to feel the weight of higher costs of living even as our economy shows signs of sustained growth and resilience.

Mr. Speaker, before I get to the details of this year's budget, I will provide an overview of the National Economic Report for 2024 tabled in this Honourable House earlier today, which looks at the evolving global [economic] environment and its implications for Bermuda. The report also reviews our local economy, which—though not immune to external pressures—continues to outperform regional peers. This performance has been underpinned by strong job growth, low inflation, record levels of employment in international business and a rebounding tourism sector.

GLOBAL ECONOMIC REVIEW

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, even prior to the recent upheaval in global markets due to international trade tensions, the year 2024 presented a range of global challenges. Geopolitical tensions, persistent inflationary pressures, volatility in food and energy markets, and the ongoing effects of past shocks such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war have continued to impact global economic growth.

The International Monetary Fund estimates that global growth is projected to slow from 3.3 per cent in 2024 to 2.8 per cent in 2025, before picking up slightly to 3.0 per cent in 2026. In advanced economies, growth is expected to fall from 1.8 per cent in 2024 to 1.4 per cent in 2025 and 1.5 per cent in 2026. Emerging market and developing economies are also forecasted to decelerate from 4.3 per cent in 2024 to 3.7 per cent in 2025 before rising modestly to 3.9 per cent in 2026.

Mr. Speaker, global inflation has fallen faster than anticipated with recent monthly readings from 2025 nearing pre-pandemic levels. Global inflation is projected to ease from 5.7 per cent in 2024 to 4.3 per cent in 2025 and 3.6 per cent in 2026. This decline has been supported by easing energy prices and a softening of labour market pressures. Faster disinflation may contribute to looser financial conditions, which could support global growth.

However, Mr. Speaker, the downside risks are significant. The escalation of global trade tensions through higher tariffs may have a profound effect on the global economy.

Since February this year, the United States has announced multiple waves of tariffs on key trading partners, some of which have responded with countermeasures. As a result, major economies including the US, China and Canada are now increasingly engaged in tariff-based [trade] disputes that are reshaping global commerce. These protectionist measures, if maintained, risk driving up the costs of goods and materials, inflating consumer prices and distorting well-established supply chains. As tariffs climb, businesses are faced with greater uncertainty and are responding with caution. This directly slows trade activity, curtails capital expenditure and drives up costs that are inevitably passed on to consumers, raising prices, eroding purchasing power and discouraging investment—risking a broader global slowdown.

Global forecasts reflect the expected economic slowdown across major economies. While the United States has demonstrated resilience in recent years, growth is projected to slow from 2.8 per cent in 2024 to 1.8 per cent in 2025, and further to 1.7 per cent by 2026. And of course, Mr. Speaker, first-quarter GDP for the US was just recorded as contracting. In China, growth is expected to soften from 5.0 per cent in 2024 to 4.0 per cent in 2025 and 2026. Canada is also expected to experience a moderate decline [with GDP growth] easing from 1.5 per cent in 2024 to 1.4 per cent in 2025 before rising slightly to 1.6 per cent in 2026.

Mr. Speaker, as the global economy continues to absorb the effects of past monetary tightening which led to increasing interest rates, many countries face mounting debt burdens and increased refinancing pressures. These financial vulnerabilities are further exacerbated by persistent geopolitical tensions and the rise in protectionist measures.

Together, these forces risk disrupting supply chains, fuelling price volatility, particularly in energy and food, and slowing the pace of global recovery. Navigating the year ahead will require a careful balance: managing global inflationary pressures; strengthening financial resilience; and advancing investments to boost productivity and support inclusive, long-term economic growth.

BERMUDA'S ECONOMY

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I will now turn my focus to our local economy.

Bermuda's gross domestic product [GDP], the main measure of economic growth, is estimated to have expanded in real terms between 4.5 [per cent] and 5.0 per cent in 2024. This positive momentum reflects the strength of our international business sector and the continued recovery in tourism supported by robust job growth, rising employment income, increased visitor arrivals and spending, and strong foreign currency earnings.

Mr. Speaker, the international business sector remains the main driver of economic growth. In 2024, there were 766 new international companies and partnerships registered. The sector supported 5,047 jobs, an increase of 120 posts, or 2.4 per cent, compared to the prior year. Total employment income in the sector further rose by 12.3 per cent, or \$195.9 million, contributing significantly to the broader rise in national income.

In 2020, for the third consecutive year, there is a record number of Bermudians employed in the international business sector, clear evidence that the policies of this Government continue to create inclusive opportunities and ensure that Bermudians benefit directly from the growth in international business.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's tourism sector also continued to recover. Air visitor arrivals increased by 9.6 per cent and cruise arrivals by 1.9 per cent. Air visitor spending surged by 22.0 per cent to \$416.5 million, exceeding pre-pandemic levels. Though cruise visitor spending declined by 7.0 per cent, the overall impact of tourism remains positive. This rebound has also had a positive effect on the job market, particularly in the accommodation and food services sector, which recorded a net increase of 81 jobs, or 2.2 per cent, compared to 2023, bringing total jobs in the sector to 3,780.

Employment across the country improved in 2024. The total number of jobs filled increased by 471 posts, or 1.4 per cent, marking the third consecutive year of job growth. Gains were primarily observed in the international business, administrative and support services, and accommodation and food services sectors. These three areas alone accounted for half of all new jobs created. In contrast, declines were noted in public administration, education, and the utilities sectors. Unemployment continues its downward trend and was recorded at 1.6 per cent in May 2024, which is lower than the rate of 2.5 per cent from a year prior and, Mr. Speaker, is the lowest since 1970. Though this is a positive development, a tight labour market can contribute to wage pressures across the economy. It is therefore essential that Government policy ensures a sufficient labour supply to sustain continued economic growth.

Employment income, one of the primary drivers of household consumption, grew by 8.0 per cent, or \$326 million, totalling \$4.39 billion in 2024. This growth contributed to a rise in personal consumption, which stood at \$4.1 billion, reflecting a 2.9 per cent increase. Total gross turnover in the retail sector was estimated at \$1.27 billion, an increase of 2.7 per cent compared to 2023.

Mr. Speaker, turning to the construction sector, the value of new projects started fell by 18.2 per cent to [\$164.7] million. However, residential construction remained a bright spot, with a 50.7 per cent increase in completed dwelling units, particularly two-bedroom and studio apartments. The total estimated

value of work put in place remained relatively stable at \$108.6 million. It is vital that the Government streamline planning processes to ensure that more projects can commence to support growth in the construction sector in the years to come.

Mr. Speaker, inflation eased in 2024, averaging 1.9 per cent compared to 3.3 per cent in 2023. Declines in transport and foreign travel costs helped keep overall inflation lower, despite sectoral increases in fuel, food and rent.

While inflation has fallen, Bermuda's external position remains strong. The current account surplus rose to \$1.69 billion in 2024 from \$1.36 billion in 2023, representing 18.8 per cent of GDP. This was driven by increased employee compensation, higher business services exports and stronger investment income. The international business sector alone generated \$2.87 billion in foreign currency receipts, up 9.4 per cent from 2023. The tourism sector contributed an additional \$522 million in foreign currency receipts, up 3.3 per cent compared to 2023.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's economic performance over the past two years highlights its relative strength and effective macroeconomic management compared to both advanced economies and regional peers. In 2023, Bermuda recorded real GDP growth of 4.9 per cent, outperforming the United States at 2.9 per cent; Canada at 1.5 per cent; the United Kingdom at 0.4 per cent; and developing economies around the world, which were measured at 4.7 per cent.

In terms of inflation, Bermuda posted the lowest inflation rate among the group in 2024 at 1.9 per cent, compared to 3.0 per cent in the United States, 2.4 per cent in Canada, 2.5 per cent in the United Kingdom and 7.7 per cent in developing economies. The lower inflation in Bermuda compared to our peers can be attributed to the measures that this Government has implemented to reduce taxes as a response to 40-year-high global inflation. These indicators underscore Bermuda's macroeconomic stability, sound economic policy and strong growth momentum heading into 2025.

Mr. Speaker, while the domestic outlook remains positive, we are not immune to external risks that continue to shape the global economic environment. The recent imposition of higher tariffs between major economies, including the United States and its trading partners, may lead to increased costs in Bermuda. If realised, these added costs will place upward pressure on prices and strain business margins, constraining long-term growth.

Elevated [global] trade costs, combined with high interest rates, are weighing on economic activity in key partner countries, particularly the United States. Slower growth in these markets can have spillover effects on Bermuda, including reduced tourism arrivals, lower levels of foreign investment and potential disruptions to vital supply chains—all of which may

hinder our economic performance. Geopolitical instability, particularly in Europe and the Middle East, could further impact global energy prices, while ongoing trade disputes may dampen investment and reduce consumer spending worldwide. These risks reinforce the need for continued prudent fiscal management to protect Bermuda's economic stability.

Mr. Speaker, recent economic performance leaves the jurisdiction well placed to meet these global headwinds. Through sound and prudent fiscal policy, investments in infrastructure and the implementation of our Economic Development Strategy, we will continue to protect Bermuda's economic interests and ensure that inflationary pressures and external shocks do not erode the gains that we have worked so hard to achieve.

BERMUDA'S ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027 provides a strategic framework to guide Bermuda toward sustainable economic growth and development. Since its launch, the Ministry of Economy and Labour has been focused on advancing key initiatives aligned with the strategy's five strategic priorities:

- Retaining and expanding existing and future international businesses within Bermuda.
- Attracting new businesses and promoting investment opportunities.
- Fostering entrepreneurship and the development of small businesses.
- Ensuring the continued execution of the Economic Recovery Plan.
- Investing in our people and our workforce.

Mr. Speaker, I will cover some of the key highlights, but during the debate in this House in the weeks to come, the Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour will share more details on the implementation of Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy.

Mr. Speaker, under the priority of local and international business retention and expansion, important progress has been made. The Economic Development Department has completed the draft Action Plan for the establishment of a one-stop permitting system for maritime tourism businesses, which was published under Goal 4 of the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Plan.

The Bermuda Economic Development Corporation has been progressing development opportunities across Bermuda's economic empowerment zones [EEZs]. The Urban Development Authority [UDA], as the leading body driving development and investment interest in the EEZs, received formal applications for two active development projects being considered under the Approved Residential Scheme—one for a 65 residential unit development and the second for a 28 residential unit development. This interest can be

partly attributed to the Bermuda Government's announcement of an aggregate \$50 million government guarantee to jump-start residential development in the Island's economic empowerment zones.

In tourism, the calendar of events for 2024 was filled with a diverse offering of events and experiences that contributed to a 15 per cent increase in leisure air visits and a 34 per cent increase in visitors attending sporting events. Since the beginning of 2024, five tourism investment orders for hotel projects have been approved, representing investor confidence in Bermuda's tourism future.

Meanwhile, Bermuda continues to enhance its reputation as a global leader in FinTech, supported by our robust regulatory framework for digital assets and continued international exposure at major FinTech events. Technology education initiatives are continuing, supporting workforce development through grants, training programmes and annual events that highlight FinTech opportunities for Bermudians. One such one is happening next week, Mr. Speaker, right here in town.

Mr. Speaker, attracting new business and promoting investment continues to be a key focus. The Bermuda Business Development Agency has transitioned into an investment promotion agency with continuing outreach to attract investment. The Registrar of Companies has amended its policy to allow unrestricted mixed-use development on corporate landholdings. And in addition, revised Family Office legislation is being finalised and will be tabled in this session, further supporting Bermuda's efforts to attract individuals of high net worth and related business opportunities.

Mr. Speaker, fostering entrepreneurship and supporting the growth of small businesses are critical parts of the strategy. The Bermuda Economic Development Corporation [BEDC] continues to deliver results. In 2024, a total of 22 entrepreneurs completed its Enterprise Bermuda Incubator and Accelerator programmes, while over 1,200 students have been engaged through youth outreach initiatives, inspiring the next generation of entrepreneurs. Educational programmes trained 96 participants through multi-week courses and a further 560 through seminars and webinars. In addition, the BEDC has conducted more than 650 client advisory meetings, maintaining a 94 per cent satisfaction rating. Through its ByBermuda e-commerce platform, 29 businesses have received direct support, helping to strengthen the digital sales capacity of local entrepreneurs.

Investing in our people is at the heart of the Economic Development Strategy. The Department of Workforce Development has made significant improvements to its services, ensuring that all clients receive career guidance through the creation of Personal Employment Plans. A newly redesigned website has been launched to connect jobseekers, [students] and employers with training and employment opportu-

nities in an efficient and user-friendly manner. Reforms to the work permit policy that improve the processes and ensure that there is adequate labour supply to support Bermuda's growing economy have been drafted and will soon be released for industry consultation.

To strengthen the development of a skilled workforce, the National Certification and Apprenticeship Board has been established to further improve training and certification programmes for Bermudians in trades and other high-demand sectors, ensuring that Bermudians are well prepared to take advantage of employment opportunities now and in the future.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is committed to the ongoing implementation of Bermuda's Economic Development Strategy which will continue the strong economic growth that resulted from the execution of Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan. This Government will continue to collaborate with stakeholders and provide regular updates on the progress of this strategy to this Honourable House.

2023/24 Fiscal Year Performance

Hon. E. David Burt: Now, Mr. Speaker, to the numbers. Mr. Speaker, it has been almost eight years since the Progressive Labour Party was returned to Government in July of 2017. We have seen many changes and challenges since then, especially during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. But throughout it all, we have stayed focused on improving Bermuda's economy to make life better for everyone.

Mr. Speaker, the audited statements for fiscal year 2023/24 have been presented to this Honourable House. These statements demonstrate the Government's continued commitment to responsible financial management.

Mr. Speaker, for the fiscal year that ended in March 2024, total revenue was \$1.176 billion, \$21 million, or 1.8 per cent, more than the original estimate of \$1.155 billion and \$49 million more than the prior year's revenue of \$1.1 billion. This increase was mainly due to higher-than-expected payroll tax receipts.

Payroll tax collections amounted to \$537 million, \$24.5 million, or 4.8 per cent, above the original estimate of \$512.5 million. Interest earned from deposits was \$11.1 million, which was \$10.3 million more than the original estimate of \$750,000.

Mr. Speaker, the total current account expenditure for fiscal year 2023/24 was \$977.5 million, which is just \$4.9 million, or 0.5 per cent, more than the original estimate of \$972.6 million. Despite significant unbudgeted expenditure that arose throughout the year—such as a \$16.3 million funding boost for the hospital, \$19 million in negotiated pay increases with public sector unions—total expenditure exceeded budget by only \$4.9 million, demonstrating firm budget control by the Ministry of Finance.

Salaries and wages were \$401.8 million, which is \$8.9 million, or 2.2 per cent, less than the original estimate of \$410.7 million. Government employer contributions totalled \$76.6 million, which is \$706,000 [0.9 per cent] more than the original estimate of \$75.9 million. This slight increase was due to negotiated pay awards for public officers, which required higher employer contributions to the Public Service Superannuation Fund [PSSF].

Capital expenditure for 2023/24 was \$97.1 million, \$1.1 million, or 1.2 per cent, more than the original estimate of \$96 million.

All other expenditures amounted to \$499.2 million, \$13.1 million, or 2.7 per cent, more than the original estimate of \$486.1 million. This increase was directly related to the aforementioned additional expenditure for the Bermuda Hospitals Board and was offset by savings in other areas.

Interest and guarantee management costs were \$131.5 million, \$1.1 million more than the original estimate of \$130.4 million. Interest expense was \$3 million less than forecast, while guarantee management was \$4.1 million more than forecast due to expenses related to Morgan's Point and the negotiation of the Fairmont Southampton redevelopment.

Mr. Speaker, when the aforementioned factors are taken into account, the Consolidated Fund deficit for fiscal year 2023/24 was \$29.5 million, which was \$14 million less than the original estimate of \$43.5 million. This, Mr. Speaker, is the fourth consecutive fiscal year where the [fiscal] deficit has been lower than originally forecast.

2024/25 Fiscal Year Performance

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, before I share the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for this fiscal year, I would like to provide an update on the Government's financial performance for fiscal year 2024/25, which ended on the 31st of March 2025.

REVENUE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the latest revised forecasts, which can be found on page A-1 of the Budget Book, project total revenue for fiscal year 2024/25 of \$1.248 billion, \$16.1 million, or 1.3 per cent, higher than the original estimate of \$1.232 billion.

Payroll tax collections are [projected] to be \$606.5 million, \$26 million, or 4.5 per cent, above the original estimate of \$580.5 million. The \$69.5 million increase in payroll tax collections from \$537 million in the prior year is due to continued job growth in the local economy and higher salaries in the international business sector, combined with last year's reform of the new hire relief, which was introduced in 2018.

Customs duty revenue is projected to be \$225 million, \$8 million, or 3.4 per cent, below the original

estimate of \$233.9 million. This lower-than-budget result is due to the 60.0 per cent reduction in taxes on BELCO fuel, which was implemented in July of last year.

All other receipts are projected to be \$417 million, which is \$2 million, or 0.5 per cent, below the original estimate of \$419 million.

EXPENDITURE PERFORMANCE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, current account expenditure is projected at \$992.1 million, which is just \$128,000 higher than the initial estimate of \$992 million.

This on-target expenditure has been achieved despite the mid-year review allocating \$17.6 million primarily to social spending, and also includes increased salaries for public sector employees due to the multi-year compensation agreement reached with public sector unions.

Capital expenditure is projected to be \$107.9 million. This is \$4.4 million, or 4.1 per cent, below the 2024/25 original estimate of \$112.3 million. However, Mr. Speaker, this level of investment is \$10.7 million more than the prior year and represents the highest capital spending since the 2010/11 fiscal year.

DEBT SERVICE

Hon. E. David Burt: Debt service and guarantee management costs are estimated at \$128.8 million, which is \$1 million, or 0.8 per cent, above the original estimate of \$127.8 million. This amount is \$2.7 million less than the prior year, a result of the \$50 million in debt that was repaid in December of 2023.

CONSOLIDATED FUND BUDGET SURPLUS

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, during last year's Budget Statement, I announced that the Government was expecting its first balanced budget in 21 years.

At that time, there were many who said that it could not be done. Some called it electioneering, others labelled it as a fantasy!

Some Hon. Members: Yes, yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Nonetheless, this Government, supported by our hard-working public officers, has achieved what many countries in the world find challenging.

Despite delivering significant tax reductions to help our residents [and businesses] cope with 40-year-high global inflation, including last year's 60 per cent reduction in electricity taxes, and despite additional appropriations during the mid-year review to provide support for the vulnerable and invest in tackling social challenges, we have grown our revenue and tightly managed spending.

Mr. Speaker, last February, the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure projected a \$210,000 surplus for fiscal year 2024/25. It is with a combination of humility and pride that I can share with this Honourable House and members of the public that the projected Consolidated Fund surplus for the fiscal year just concluded will be \$19.7 million.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: This surplus is \$19.5 million more than originally estimated and represents the first Consolidated Fund surplus to have been achieved in 21 years.

Such a milestone is not just a testament to this Government's commitment to fiscal responsibility, but it is also a culmination of many years of fiscal discipline. The people of Bermuda have experienced the effects of this discipline—whether in the conditions of our roads or the state of our national infrastructure. But, Mr. Speaker, just as I declared three years ago that the era of austerity had come to an end, today I declare that the era of budget deficits has now come to an end.

[Desk thumping]

Fairness in Action—Sharing the Gains of Economic Growth

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the 2025/26 budget . . . Let me pause, Mr. Speaker, because this section is entitled "Fairness in Action—Sharing the Gains of Economic Growth." Because I know during the election campaign people were asking, *What is "fairness"?* So, I want to make sure that we spell it out, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the 2025/26 budget marks a turning point for Bermuda. For the first time in over two decades, our fiscal planning is no longer consumed by managing deficit after deficit. Instead, we stand today with a budget surplus and a strong economy. And later this year, we expect to receive the first revenue inflows from Bermuda's new corporate income tax. This is not just a new budget year, but it is the beginning of a new era of budgeting. And with that opportunity comes the obligation to ensure that the benefits of our economic growth are shared fairly across our society.

Mr. Speaker, in the Pre-Budget Report tabled in this Honourable House in December, I outlined a number of tax reductions that were under consideration to ease the tax burdens faced by residents and businesses. This Government has a history of ensuring that better fiscal performance results in meaningful relief for taxpayers, and today I will share the tax reductions that will form part of this year's revenue estimates.

REDUCTION OF CUSTOMS DUTY ON BUILDING MATERIALS AND SUPPLIES TO 10 PER CENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, home ownership, construction and renovation are central to our economy and our way of life. As there is a national imperative to build and upgrade our existing housing stock, it is vital that we do all we can to reduce the cost of construction. Though the Government cannot regulate the rates charged for construction labour, we can reduce the amount of taxes paid on goods that are imported into Bermuda. Therefore, to support new homeowners, builders and those improving their properties, the Government will reduce the customs duty rate on all building materials and supplies currently charged above 10 per cent, such as air conditioners, paint, tile, steel, rebar, drywall, doors, windows and bathroom fixtures to a flat rate of 10 per cent. This reduction will reduce import costs for a wide range of construction materials, making construction and renovation more affordable for families and developers alike.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: Someone likes that.

Importantly, the few categories of building materials that are currently subject to a duty rate below 10 per cent will remain unchanged. This means that no duty rates will increase—only reductions will occur. The goal is simple: to reduce the cost of building and renovating homes to help stimulate economic activity in the construction sector.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give a practical example of what this reduction means for consumers. Prior to these reductions, if you were looking to replace the air conditioning units in your home or business, and those units cost \$4,000 to import into Bermuda, you would have paid \$1,400 in custom duty charges, as the [duty] rate for air conditioners was set at 35 per cent. With these reductions, the duty payable for these imports would be only \$400, a saving of \$1,000, or 71 per cent.

These duty changes will take effect from July 1 and are estimated to reduce customs duty revenue by \$4.6 million.

FURTHER REDUCTION IN ELECTRICITY TAXES

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, electricity costs remain a significant burden for households and businesses, and we understand the frustration many feel when they open their BELCO bill. While the Government cannot control the cost of fuel on global markets, we are doing everything within our power to lower the underlying costs that contribute to those rates.

Two years ago, the fuel duty on fuel used to generate electricity stood at 20 cents per litre (after being doubled, of course, Mr. Speaker, by the party

opposite). In July 2024 we reduced that tax by 60 per cent to 8 cents per litre. With this budget we will reduce that tax to just 4 cents per litre. The combined effect of these changes will result in an 80 per cent reduction in electricity taxes over the last year.

To date, Government fuel duty relief has reduced the average monthly electricity rates by approximately 6 per cent. The additional reduction [announced] today will bring the total relief to 8 per cent, saving the average customer \$300 per year. This estimate is based on average residential usage, and actual savings will vary depending on consumption.

This measure demonstrates the Government's commitment to delivering sustained relief on energy costs. While there is more work to be done across the energy sector, this initiative ensures that our tax policy supports lower electricity costs for every household and business in Bermuda.

This further reduction in the duty paid on fuel will take effect from 1 July 2025 and is expected to reduce customs duty revenue by a further \$4.2 million.

ELIMINATION OF CUSTOMS DUTY ON ALL MOTOR VEHICLE PARTS

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, recognising the strain that vehicle repair costs can place on families and businesses, customs duty will be eliminated on all motor vehicle parts imported into Bermuda. Yes, all. Whether it is keeping a family car on the road or a company's fleet operating, this measure is aimed at lowering maintenance and repair costs while the Government works to repave Bermuda's roads.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to give another practical example of what this reduction will mean for consumers. Prior to these reductions, if you were looking to replace the tyres on your vehicle and those tyres cost \$500 to import into Bermuda, the importer would have paid \$175 in customs duty charges, as the duty rate for tyres was set at 35 per cent. With the elimination of customs duty, there would be no duty payable for these imports, saving the importer \$175.

The duty elimination for motor vehicle parts will take effect from the 1st of July and is estimated to reduce customs duty revenue by \$2.9 million.

INCREASE OF DUTY EXEMPTION FOR RETURNING RESIDENTS

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Government will increase the duty exemption for returning residents by 50 per cent from \$200 to \$300. This means that after any overseas travel, residents will be able to bring back up to \$300 worth of goods duty free. This adjustment will make it easier for families to manage travel-related expenses and provide immediate savings for residents who may shop overseas for necessities, clothing and other goods. This rate allowance was last changed in 2012, or 13 years ago.

50 PER CENT REDUCTION IN MOBILE PHONE TAXES

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, access to communication is essential—for work, for education or for staying connected with loved ones. To ease the financial burden of mobile services, the Government will reduce the monthly tax on mobile phones by 50 per cent from \$12 to \$6. This measure will result in immediate savings for every mobile customer and is a part of our commitment to lowering the cost of essential services.

This tax reduction will take effect from the 1st of July 2025 and is expected to reduce revenue by \$2 million.

REDUCTION OF THE BASE RATE OF LAND TAX BY 50 PER CENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, land tax is a significant revenue earner for the Government, but it can also represent a burden for homeowners and renters alike. In 2019, a new base [rate] for land tax was introduced and set at \$300 a year. Given the Island's fiscal progress, the time is right to reduce this tax and provide more tax relief. The Government will reduce the base rate of land tax from \$300 per year to \$150 a year. This reduction will apply to all homeowners and renters who pay land tax.

This land tax reduction will take effect from the 1st of January 2026 and is expected to reduce land tax revenue by \$2.5 million.

10 PER CENT REDUCTION IN LICENSING FEES FOR PRIVATE CARS

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as we work to reduce the overall costs associated with vehicle ownership, the Government will implement a further 10 per cent reduction in licensing fees for private cars. When combined with the elimination of customs duty on all motor vehicle parts, this measure will provide further relief to families by lowering both the upfront and ongoing expenses of keeping a vehicle on the road.

Though this tax reduction is being announced today, it will be set to take effect from the 1st of April 2026 and will reduce revenue by \$2.6 million for fiscal year 2026/27.

TAX PROPOSALS NOT BEING ADVANCED

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, though we have committed to significant relief, this Government is also firmly committed to fiscal responsibility. Two proposals previewed in the Pre-Budget Report have been postponed, as the Ministry of Finance is determined to ensure that every measure is well-targeted, well-designed and responsibly implemented. These deferred items include

- the elimination of payroll taxes for employers who retain Bermudian employees over the age of 65; and
- an increase in the tax-free threshold for local dividend income from \$10,000 to \$15,000.

These measures will now undergo further policy review, with the intention to implement them in the 2026/27 budget.

A CONSISTENT RECORD OF TAX REDUCTIONS

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, this Government has consistently reduced taxes as economic conditions have improved. We make these changes not for the headlines they produce but for the Bermudians who voted for a government that focuses on fairness. For that single parent juggling bills, for the seniors who stretch every dollar, for the entrepreneur trying to make payroll, and for every Bermudian who has made sacrifices during difficult times and deserves to now receive some relief.

Mr. Speaker, let us not forget how far we have come. In the last three years alone, this Government has

- reduced payroll taxes for 86 per cent of Bermuda's workforce;
- expanded the child daycare allowance;
- eliminated customs duties on essential goods;
- cut energy taxes by 60 per cent;
- reduced private car licensing fees;
- abolished land tax for charities and nursing homes; and
- frozen local fuel prices during global price surges.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we have gone further with these changes that will save the average family of four about \$1,000 a year. We are proud of our record and grateful for the success of our economic vision that is rooted in fairness. But we are not satisfied. Because fairness is not a destination; it is our continuing mission. Together these initiatives represent a comprehensive package of further relief that will help to ease financial pressures while supporting vital economic activity.

2025/26 Budget Estimates

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, now to the numbers for this year.

Mr. Speaker, having just outlined the tax reductions that this Government will deliver to live up to our promise to make Bermuda more affordable, I will now turn my attention to the overall budget for the Consolidated Fund, for fiscal year 2025/26.

REVENUE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, revenue for fiscal year 2025/26 is expected to reach \$1.43 billion, which

is 16 per cent, or \$198 million, above the original estimates for fiscal year 2024/25.

Payroll tax receipts are projected to increase by \$11 million, driven by expected job growth in the local economy. There are no changes to the existing payroll tax structure, as the Government awaits the recommendations from the Tax Reform Commission. This increase is lower than projected in prior fiscal years, reflecting the Finance Ministry's consideration of forthcoming recommendations from the Commission to reduce the cost of doing business in Bermuda.

A provisional figure of \$187.5 million has been budgeted for revenue from the new corporate income tax, which came into effect on the 1st of January 2025. This figure aligns with the expectations that were set in last year's Budget Statement.

Customs duty revenue is expected to decline to \$214.9 million, a reduction of 8 per cent from last year's estimates, as a result of the package of customs duty reductions announced earlier. Land tax collections are estimated at \$87 million, representing a 5 per cent decline compared to last year's estimates. Telecommunications receipts are also projected to fall by 11 per cent following the 50 per cent reduction in monthly mobile phone taxes.

The other major changes in revenue are due to lower projected receipts from cruise ships, resulting from a reduction in cruise calls during the construction works at King's Wharf.

CURRENT EXPENDITURE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, Consolidated Fund current account expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26 is estimated at \$1.11 billion. This figure represents an increase of \$118 million, or 11.9 per cent, when compared to the original estimates for fiscal year 2024/25.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this figure without context may seem high, especially given the fiscal discipline that the Government has exercised to reach a balanced budget. However, Mr. Speaker, I will share the details of these changes so that taxpayers can understand how their tax dollars are being spent.

Baseline Increases to Ministry Budgets

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, all ministries were granted a baseline increase of 1.5 per cent from last year's original estimates to account for inflation. This 1.5 per cent increase is in line with the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) that was presented in last year's budget and amounts to \$13.7 million. In addition to this increase, additional funds were allocated to selected ministries to advance priority initiatives as outlined in the Speech from the Throne. The Ministries of Justice; Education; Housing and Municipalities; Public Works and Environment; Home Affairs; and Youth, Social Development and Seniors were

allocated additional funding above the 1.5 per cent baseline totalling \$4.7 million.

Social Investments

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, during last year's Mid-Year Review, the funds that were appropriated to ministries were not one-time investments. It was stated at the time that the new funding would be carried forward into this new fiscal year. These additional investments have been allocated to the respective ministries and represent \$14.9 million of the additional current account expenditure. (Now, of course, Mr. Speaker, those were appropriated in this past year, but we are comparing the figures to the original estimates. That is why I am making sure I go through all of the figures.)

Union Pay Agreement

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as mentioned earlier, the Government agreed to a four-year compensation agreement with public sector unions to assist in retaining our talented workforce. This agreement was a combination of inflation-indexed pay increases combined with additional increases, recognising that public sector compensation over the last decade has not kept pace with the rate of inflation. Additionally, to ensure that public sector workers did not experience a reduction in take-home pay due to required increases in pension contributions that I will detail later in this Statement, the Government agreed to fund the increases in employee contributions for both the Government Employee Health Insurance Scheme [GEHI] and the Public Service Superannuation Fund [PSSF]. The impact of these salary increases is \$22.3 million, and the additional overheads required for GEHI and PSSF contributions amount to \$3.8 million.

INVESTMENT IN HEALTH CARE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Government is committed to introducing universal health care. As we have seen on page A-1 of the Budget Book, this year's budget commits an additional \$56.25 million from the Consolidated Fund to invest in health care for Bermuda's residents. These funds will see additional investments made to the Health Insurance Department [HID] to support the expansion of the Health Insurance Plan [HIP] and FutureCare, additional funds to the Bermuda Hospitals Board, additional investments to ensure the launch of universal health care in 2026, and funding for the Government Employee Health Insurance scheme.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to detail these investments in health care, as they are important for Honourable Members and, of course, the public who are watching and listening to hear.

Finalising Universal Health Care to Launch in 2026

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, universal health care has been a long-time goal of the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party. That preceded my time before I was even a member of the PLP, Mr. Speaker. This goal requires the resources necessary to ensure that changes to our health care system are well planned and executed to minimise the challenges faced by those persons currently insured, underinsured or uninsured. A total of \$3 million of this additional funding will be allocated to boost the human resources required to implement this initiative in 2026.

Funding Boost for the Health Insurance Department

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, last year the Government used funds from the excess borrowing account to freeze the Standard Premium Rate for the third year in a row. This action shielded families and businesses from additional costs during a period of high global inflation. This year we are moving beyond freezes and making investments to improve the health care benefits available to Bermudians. Through an allocation of \$13.25 million from the Consolidated Fund, this Government is delivering on the pledges set out in the Progressive Labour Party's 2025 Platform—transforming health care to make it more accessible, affordable and preventative.

Mr. Speaker, this investment will expand coverage in the following ways:

Elimination of Waiting Periods to Access the Personal Home Care Benefit

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the first one which will be welcome news to many in Bermuda, we will eliminate the 12-month waiting period for new HIP & FutureCare policyholders to access the Personal Home Care Benefit.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as our population ages, access to affordable home health care becomes increasingly essential. Under the current system, newly enrolled HIP/FutureCare members had to wait an entire year to access Personal Home Care benefits—even when immediate support was urgently needed. That will now change.

By removing this waiting period, new policyholders will be able to receive assistance to help defray the costs of home-based care services when they need it most. While this benefit will significantly ease the financial burden for families, it does not cover the full cost of private home care. It is designed to assist families, supporting them in providing care while helping to reduce pressure on hospital services and long-term inpatient care.

This reform represents fairness in action, Mr. Speaker—helping seniors to age with dignity in their own homes and providing vital support to Bermudian families who may need assistance caring for a disabled family member. It is also sound fiscal management: timely access to home care reduces hospital readmissions, eases demand on inpatient beds and leads to lower health care costs over time.

Expansion of Prescription Drug Coverage for FutureCare and HIP

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, this year's health care investment will also fund the expansion of prescription drug coverage for HIP and FutureCare policyholders. Though we have increased access to prescription coverage over the last few years, many Bermudians, particularly our seniors, continue to face financial barriers when trying to access essential medications. This additional funding will increase the coverage limit for HIP from \$1,000 a year to \$3,000 a year and will increase the FutureCare limit from \$3,000 to \$5,000 a year, Mr. Speaker.

By enhancing prescription drug coverage, we will make it easier for individuals to manage chronic conditions like diabetes, heart disease and hypertension—leading to better health outcomes and reduced reliance on costly emergency care.

Expansion of Annual Examinations for FutureCare and HIP

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, preventative care saves lives. As we promised in the recent election campaign, this Government will introduce and expand coverage for annual health exams for HIP and FutureCare clients. Regular annual checkups catch potential health issues early before they escalate into costly medical emergencies. Ensuring that every Bermudian under HIP and FutureCare has access to an annual preventative health exam, with no out-of-pocket costs, is a transformational shift toward a healthier Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, these initiatives are not just good policy—they reflect our values. They are directly delivering on the pledges contained in the PLP 2025 Platform: expanding HIP and FutureCare to make health care more accessible, reducing the financial burdens faced by seniors and working families, and building a health care system focused on prevention and fairness.

However, Mr. Speaker, we must also be responsible stewards of our health care system. Medical inflation [globally] is forecast to exceed 10 per cent this year, driving up the costs of medical care, equipment and pharmaceuticals. Therefore, the Government will not be able to freeze the Standard Premium Rate [SPR] for the fourth year in a row, and it will be necessary to introduce an inflationary adjustment to

the Standard Premium Rate to ensure that we can sustain these vital benefits and maintain adequate funding for the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Additional Funding to BHB

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda Hospitals Board [BHB] funding model was changed in 2018, and I must commend the board, management, staff and of course the Minister of Health for their efforts during the worst health care crisis in a century. It is important that the Government support the hospital to provide a high level of health care in Bermuda, and \$22 million of the additional health care funding will be provided to the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

However, I must state, Mr. Speaker, that the Government and taxpayer cannot do it alone. When Bermuda constructed the new acute care wing it was supported by \$24 million of private sector fundraising by the Bermuda Hospitals Charitable Trust. The Bermuda Hospitals Board has restarted fundraising activity, and I urge the private sector both local and international to assist in ensuring that our hospital can acquire the latest medical technology so that it can continue to provide top-tier life-saving health care on the Island.

Support for GEHI Funding Shortfall

Hon. E. David Burt: Finally, Mr. Speaker, the Government Employee Health Insurance scheme has experienced a deficit in recent years, and shortfalls in funding have been financed from the excess borrowing account. This year, these shortfalls will be funded from the Consolidated Fund in the amount of \$18 million. This is not the full amount of the shortfall, Mr. Speaker, which is estimated at \$31 million; however, GEHI rates will be increased for the first time since 2018 as part of the agreement with public sector employees and will be increased over the next [two] years to close this shortfall.

MANAGING BUDGETED EXPENDITURES

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, although this increase in current expenditure appears significant, it is necessary that the full amount of expected changes be put forward to this Honourable House in this budget. However, as recent history has shown, it is unlikely that all funds appropriated will be spent. Public service recruitment normally lags behind forecasts, particularly in a tight labour market. As recent trends have shown, salary expenses are typically 8 per cent lower than budgeted before retroactive pay increases are included. This year's budget includes the full amount of negotiated pay increases as part of the union pay agreement. Given recent trends, the salaries expenditure will likely be closer to \$365 million, or \$20 million less than budgeted.

Mr. Speaker, some may ask, *If the Government is not expecting to spend all of these funds, then why are they in the budget?* The answer is not simple, but it is a reality of public sector budgeting. If all of these funds are not appropriated, then ministries will be constrained in the resources necessary to deliver public services that taxpayers expect. Experience has shown that it is better to allow these funds to be appropriated with the knowledge that some funds will not be spent rather than try to reduce those funds prior to appropriation which results in reduced service delivery.

Mr. Speaker, although the Government has made provision for significant additional investments in public services, health care and our workforce, the expectation remains that current account expenditure will not reach the full \$1.11 billion that has been estimated. And of course, any funds not spent will result in improved fiscal performance which the Government has experienced in every fiscal year since the pandemic.

And now, Mr. Speaker, if I may, I will move on.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in last year's budget the Government allocated the largest investment in capital expenditure in 14 years. This fiscal year we build on that significant investment with a provision for capital expenditure of \$149.8 million. This amount would represent the largest investment in our Island's infrastructure since 2008 and is an increase of \$37 million compared to the 2024/25 original estimate. Investing funds for capital expenditure is essential because it lays the foundation for long-term economic growth and stability. By investing in physical and digital infrastructure, the Government can improve public services, foster job creation and improve productivity in the public sector.

The most significant items of capital development in this budget include road works and the installation of a new asphalt plant, investments in affordable housing, upgrades to the Tynes Bay Waste Treatment Facility, capital investments for the hospital and the commencement of the replacement of Swing Bridge. Projects such as the new Agricultural Services Centre; upgrades to the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo; new facilities for signature schools and parish primary schools; and a new senior daycare facility are also funded, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of Capital Acquisitions, this budget allocates a record level of funding toward critical technology and equipment upgrades across Government. These investments include enhancements to the Government's IT infrastructure to support enhanced online services, the procurement of new buses and ferries, upgrades to information technology and equipment for public schools, the installation of speed

cameras to improve road safety, advanced border security technology to protect our borders, Mr. Speaker, and new equipment for the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service.

Mr. Speaker, by investing in our infrastructure, from our roads and schools to public safety and digital services, this Government is ensuring that the essential services Bermudians rely on are strengthened, modernised and also properly maintained for the future.

DEBT SERVICE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, debt service costs for the 2025/26 budget are projected to be \$127.5 million, largely in line with last fiscal year. There are no changes in long-term debt expected during this fiscal year, and with the prospect of budget surpluses for the foreseeable future, the amount of funds required to be committed to debt service is projected to decline in future fiscal years.

PROJECTED BUDGET SURPLUS

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, to recap, revenue for fiscal year 2025/26 is expected to reach \$1.43 billion, which is 16 per cent, [or \$198 million,] more than the original estimates for 2024/25. Current Account Expenditure is estimated at \$1.11 billion, an increase of \$118 million, [or 11.9 per cent,] above the original estimates for last year. The estimated Current Account Balance before debt service is expected to be \$320 million, \$80 million, or 33 per cent, more than the original estimates for 2024/25.

This Current Account balance will cover the costs of servicing our debt, projected at \$127.5 million. This results in \$193.1 million of funds available to meet capital expenditure. As I just covered, capital expenditure in fiscal year 2025/26 is estimated at \$149.7 million, \$37 million [or 33 per cent] higher than last year.

Mr. Speaker, with the budget that I have laid before this Honourable House today, this Progressive Labour Party Government is projecting a second consecutive Consolidated Fund surplus. This year's surplus of \$43.3 million is more than double the surplus achieved last year and places the country on an even stronger financial footing for the future.

Mr. Speaker, achieving and maintaining surpluses is critical to safeguarding Bermuda's financial stability. Surpluses provide the fiscal space needed to respond to global challenges without increasing the burden on Bermuda's taxpayers. Through disciplined financial management, combined with prudent investments, this Government will continue on a path to ensure Bermuda is positioned to reduce the Government's debt, leading to a brighter future for the next generation.

GOVERNMENT DEBT

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as of the 31st of March 2025, gross debt stood at \$3.29 billion. After accounting for the sinking fund, the Island's net debt stands at \$3.25 billion.

At the end of fiscal year 2025/26, the sinking fund is projected to grow to \$85 million. This includes the \$40 million balance carried forward, the additional surplus of \$43 million which we are anticipating for this year and the anticipated interest earnings of \$2 million. Net debt is projected to decline to \$3.20 billion at the 31st of March 2026.

Mr. Speaker, during fiscal year 2026/27, the Government expects to have sufficient reserves to repay at least \$500 million of Government debt, thereby reducing the Government's gross debt by \$500 million, ending the year with net debt of \$2.8 billion.

[Desk thumping]

MINISTRY HIGHLIGHTS

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, this budget fulfils the Government's pledge to invest in our people and our Island's future. And if you will allow me, Mr. Speaker, I would now like to cover highlights from various ministries that are funded in this budget. It is vital that budgets match the pledges made in our Throne Speech and also our election platform, and this budget, Mr. Speaker, delivers on those priorities.

Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet Office has been allocated \$53.6 million, an increase of \$4 million, or 8 per cent.

The ongoing digitisation of the Archives will expand public access to historical records and ensure their long-term preservation. The Digital Transformation Team, with an allocation of \$975,000, will continue advancing the One-Stop Shop initiative for online government services. Priorities include expanding the online payment portal and building a unified digital interface to make more government services accessible online.

Funding has been allocated to expand the Public Service Bursary Programme, increasing the number of scholarships awarded in exchange for a commitment to public service employment or health care service upon graduation.

Under Capital Expenditure, the Department of Information and Digital Technologies has received \$6.5 million in capital funding to strengthen cybersecurity, modernise network systems and improve public access to digital government services, including continuing enhancements to the Government's online portal. In addition, \$1 million of capital funding has been

given for a new round of community club development grants, and \$500,000 of capital funding has been allocated for the cooperative food supply initiative.

Ministry of Justice

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Justice has been allocated \$57.7 million, an increase of \$2.9 million, or 5 per cent. This allocation will support various departments under the Ministry in fulfilling their mandates more effectively.

The Attorney General's Chambers will enhance its resources and staffing levels to support the drafting of robust legislation and to provide comprehensive legal advice and representation to Government ministries and departments. These additional resources will prevent backlogs and ensure that the Government can swiftly move forward with matters of law reform that will benefit all of Bermuda.

This year, the Judicial Department will benefit from capital expenditure funding to implement a new electronic case management system which will modernise services and expedite justice. In addition, renovations to the Dame Lois Browne-Evans Building will begin this year to add purpose-built courtrooms and administrative space aimed at easing pressure on the court system and reducing delays.

The Department of Corrections will recruit new corrections officers to restore operational capacity and meet security standards. Funds will be allocated to officer training and welfare, as well as enhanced and individualised rehabilitation and education programmes for inmates that incorporate principles of restorative justice. Works will also commence this year on long-overdue repairs at Westgate Correctional Facility.

The Department of Court Services will complete its hiring initiative to strengthen the department's ability to meet a broader range of client needs in-house, including support for the new Domestic Violence Court Programme.

Ministry of Finance

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Finance has been allocated \$266.6 million, an increase of \$25.2 million, or 10 per cent.

However, Mr. Speaker, 85 per cent of the funds assigned to the Ministry are for employee overheads (which come to \$99.9 million) which has increased by \$19.8 million, and interest on debt (\$127.5 million). Most of the remaining increase is due to a \$4.8 million grant to the Corporate Income Tax Agency.

Key priorities for the Ministry include advancing pension reform while progressing critical international tax and regulatory reviews. Ministry Headquarters will support the Tax Reform Commission's work to recommend a revised tax framework for Bermuda.

This will take place alongside the work required to support the Corporate Income Tax Agency [CITA] in implementing the new Corporate Income Tax. The Registrar of Companies will advance implementation of a central register for beneficial ownership in line with Bermuda's international commitments.

The Ministry of Finance has been allocated \$2.1 million of capital funding primarily for IT upgrades in the Registrar of Companies, Office of the Tax Commissioner and the Accountant General.

Ministry of Education

Hon. E. David Burt: The Ministry of Education has been allocated \$149.2 million, an increase of \$9.8 million, or 7 per cent.

These funds will ensure programmes thrive and necessary resources are in place to deliver quality, safe learning experiences. The Ministry's Scholarships and Awards have increased by \$223,000 bringing the total to \$1.8 million for post-secondary education, providing more opportunities for young adults to access funding and pursue their dreams.

A 26 per cent increase in substitute teachers will support education reform efforts while assisting school leaders with day-to-day operations, in response to concerns raised by our cherished educators.

Capital funding has increased by 52 per cent to support the infrastructure projects for the Harrington Sound and Elliot Parish Primary Schools opening in September 2025. This funding will also support the transformation of Prospect Primary to an Exceptionalities Signature School and continued enhancements for Signature Schools at the Berkeley Institute, CedarBridge Academy and Sandys Secondary Middle School.

In addition to capital works, these additional funds will be used to improve technological infrastructure within schools, including updating computer labs, faster Internet access and incorporating more digital learning platforms into the curriculum.

Ministry of Health

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health has been allocated \$245.4 million, an increase of \$45 million, or 22 per cent.

A significant portion of this funding supports the Bermuda Hospitals Board [BHB], including \$112.5 million in patient subsidies for youth, the elderly and those in need, along with a \$42.1 million operational grant for the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute [MWI]. As mentioned earlier, additional funding has been allocated for hospitals, the Health Insurance Department, and Ministry headquarters to launch universal health care. The Bermuda Hospitals Board continues efforts to enhance service delivery quality through advancements in its electronic medical records system.

For capital projects, the Ministry has been allocated \$3.3 million for renovations to the Mangrove Bay Clinic, St. George's Clinic and Hamilton Health Centre, as well as architectural planning for the expansion of Sylvia Richardson Care Facility and the replacement of Lefroy House.

Additionally, \$6.6 million of capital funding is designated for BHB infrastructure upgrades, maintenance and system improvements at King Edward VII Memorial Hospital [KEMH] and MWI. The total capital allocation for the Ministry of Health for 2025/26 reflects a 9.83 per cent increase over the previous year.

Ministry of Economy and Labour

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Economy and Labour has been allocated \$27.5 million, an increase of \$1.8 million, or 7 per cent.

Funding will support the implementation of the Economic Development Strategy, with the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation receiving an additional \$100,000 to deliver Bermuda's first National Entrepreneurship Strategy. The Bermuda Business Development Agency's funding of \$4.23 million will continue to drive investment promotion and targeted economic growth initiatives.

At the Department of Immigration, an additional \$629,000 has been allocated to modernise the border management system, strengthen recruitment and enhance customer service as part of the department's digital transformation project.

The Department of Statistics will receive an additional \$816,000 to complete the Household Income and Expenditure Survey and begin preparations for the 2026 Census, including the hiring of Assistant Statisticians and the engagement of consultants to automate the reporting.

The Workforce Development Department's allocation increases by \$305,000, supporting greater access to overseas apprenticeships, local skills certifications and job training programmes that prepare Bermudians for new economic opportunities.

Ministry of Public Works and Environment

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Public Works and Environment has been allocated \$84.1 million, an increase of \$4.4 million, or 6 per cent.

The Government has allocated an additional [\$3.75] million in funding to commence the replacement of the Swing Bridge, a critical link between St. George's and the rest of the Island. Maintaining and improving road infrastructure remains a priority, with \$5 million allocated again for road paving. Preparatory works for the new asphalt plant are fully funded and underway, which will enhance the efficiency and quality of future road maintenance.

To better manage stormwater and reduce flood risks, the Ministry will ensure sufficient funding

for modern drainage cleaning equipment. In addition, [over] \$1 million have been allocated for the repair and restoration of large water tanks critical to the Island's water supply, ensuring greater resilience during drought and periods of high demand.

Environmental stewardship remains central to the work. An additional \$400,000 will support coastal protection projects to combat erosion and safeguard shoreline communities. The refurbishment of the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy facility continues to advance, securing Bermuda's long-term environmental health.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, to promote safety and enhance enjoyment at public beaches, the Government has invested in hiring additional full-time lifeguards who will provide [expanded] coverage at major beaches for the benefit of residents and visitors alike.

Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport has been allocated \$101.6 million, an increase of \$3.7 million, or 4 per cent.

A total of \$8.7 million has been allocated to strengthen Bermuda's ferry fleet, supporting the delivery of two new 550-passenger ferries expected by the end of the year. In addition, \$404,000 have been provided to continue the rollout of the digital fare media system under the Shorelink project, modernising public transportation payment options for residents and visitors.

Capital funding of \$3.5 million has also been allocated for the purchase of additional electric buses, allowing the retirement of more diesel buses and improving the reliability and environmental sustainability of Bermuda's public bus service.

An increase of \$274,000 for the Department of Culture will expand grants to cultural organisations, enhance Bermuda Day celebrations, and support the induction of a new National Hero to strengthen national pride and cultural heritage.

The Department of Sport and Recreation has received an additional \$1.6 million, supporting the launch of the new Active Kids Programme under the National Sports Policy, salary uplifts at the National Sports Centre and expansion of summer day camps to provide more affordable recreational activities for Bermuda's youth.

Ministry of National Security

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of National Security has been allocated a total of \$126.9 million, an increase of \$10.9 million, or 9 per cent.

This funding will enable departments under the Ministry to fill 18 additional posts in the Bermuda Police Service, Customs and the Cybersecurity Unit located in Ministry Headquarters. The Royal Bermuda

Regiment Coast Guard has been allocated funding for the impending opening of the St. David's Coast Guard station. This station will result in Bermuda's maritime capabilities being significantly extended, particularly in the east end of Bermuda.

Funding will provide for the implementation of the Uniformed Services Training Programme, which aims to prepare Bermudians for careers in our uniformed services.

Funding has also been allocated for the provision of individual and family counselling, intervention initiatives and educational programmes through our Gang Violence Reduction Team. Additional funding has been allocated to community and sports organisations to support their youth programmes and to enhance their security infrastructure.

Capital funding in the amount of \$9.3 million will cover the costs of completing the St. David's Coast Guard Station, the Police Headquarters project in Prospect, the purchase of new fire trucks, upgrades to the public safety communication system, a scanner for Customs at the Heritage Wharf in Dockyard, upgrades to the police network servers and a new building on the Hamilton docks to house Customs' X-ray machine.

Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors has been allocated \$91.2 million, an increase of \$5.9 million, or 7 per cent.

Funding has been allocated to support the hiring of a Project Manager to lead the implementation of the National Seniors Strategy as we work to improve the lives of older Bermudians. In addition, the Ministry will continue the successful Dementia Care Pilot Programme, which is providing vital navigation and support services to seniors who are uninsured or underinsured.

Recommendations from the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee will be actioned with the introduction of a structured treatment programme for perpetrators of domestic abuse and with the hiring of a Domestic Abuse Liaison social worker to improve response and prevention efforts.

To support Bermuda's youth, funding has been allocated to fully restore staffing for the Mirrors programme. In addition, long overdue wage increases have been provided for miscellaneous staff at Bermuda's community centres, many of whom have not seen a pay adjustment in more than 15 years.

Finally, an intensive family preservation programme will be launched, supporting high-risk families with coordinated, immediate interventions to keep them safely together and address the root causes of instability.

Capital funding will progress the new senior daycare facility at the former Gilbert Institute site in

Paget, with architectural planning now underway. This project will help provide much-needed care options for our ageing population and support families caring for elderly loved ones.

Ministry of Home Affairs

Hon. E. David Burt: The Ministry of Home Affairs has been allocated \$5.8 million, an increase of \$856,000, or 17 per cent.

Consumer Affairs has rejoined the Ministry Headquarters, and operational funding has been increased to accommodate additional personnel to advance the Throne Speech initiatives, with a particular focus on energy reform and addressing cost of living concerns.

The Ministry will hold a Cost of Living Summit in June focused on food and utility costs, confirming necessary legislative changes to provide economic relief and strengthen oversight across both regulated and unregulated sectors to ease cost pressures on residents and businesses.

The capital budget includes funding to upgrade the IT system within the Land Title and Registration Department, which is expected to assist in reducing the backlog of property and title registrations.

Ministry of Housing and Municipalities

Hon. E. David Burt: Finally, Mr. Speaker, last but not least, to the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities. Mr. Speaker, the newly formed Ministry of Housing and Municipalities has been allocated \$7.5 million, an increase of \$1 million, or 15 per cent.

Capital funding to the Bermuda Housing Corporation has increased by \$4.2 million, or 33 per cent, to \$17 million. These funds will continue the record investment in affordable housing made by this Government and are expected to support the delivery of 30 additional affordable housing units in 2025.

Funding to the Ministry will support the development of a long-term affordable housing strategy in collaboration with local stakeholders. Additional funding has been provided to complete the master planning for key residential neighbourhoods including Mary Victoria Road, Alexandra Road and Cedar Park, focusing on improvements to water and sewage infrastructure, lighting and general home upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, that concludes the Ministry Highlights. I will now move on to the next section.

Building a Sustainable Future for Public Sector Pensions

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in this budget we do more than just invest in today; we are also taking the necessary steps to ensure a secure fiscal future, and that means tackling the large unfunded liabilities in our public sector pensions.

PUBLIC SERVICE SUPERANNUATION FUND (PSSF)

Hon. E. David Burt: Following extensive consultation with our union partners, the Government will table amendments to the Public Service Superannuation Fund Act during this budget session, placing the PSSF on a sustainable footing for the future. These changes reflect years of careful analysis and many rounds of consultation and revision. When implemented, they will eliminate the growing unfunded liability for the PSSF, ensuring that the commitments made to current and future public service retirees can be honoured.

These changes will result in phased increases in the age where public sector workers will be eligible to receive a pension; increases in contributions from 8.0 per cent to 10.0 per cent for most employees, and from 9.5 per cent to 11.5 per cent for uniformed service employees; and a revision to the calculation of the reference wage for retirement, from the final salary to the average salary over the last 10 years. Finally, these changes when passed will reintroduce the annual cost of living increases for public sector retirees, which have been frozen since 2014.

Mr. Speaker, while the tabling of this Bill will represent significant progress, there is more work to be done.

CONTRIBUTORY PENSION FUND

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, with PSSF changes set to advance, the Ministry of Finance will turn our attention to the challenging task of securing the long-term sustainability of Bermuda's Contributory Pension Fund [CPF], which underpins the Social Insurance benefits for more than 14,000 Bermudians.

Mr. Speaker, at the outset let me address a misconception directly. Some have wrongly claimed that the need for reform in the CPF or even the PSSF arises from mismanagement or misuse of funds. That is simply not true. The Contributory Pension Fund is soundly managed, prudently invested and regularly reviewed by actuaries. The challenges we face are demographic. Like many nations around the world, we are grappling with longer life expectancies, fewer contributors and rising benefit demands.

This is not unique to Bermuda. In the United Kingdom, the state pension age has been raised with further increases scheduled. Barbados enacted major pension reforms in 2022 to prevent the depletion of its National Insurance Fund. The United States Social Security Trust Fund will be exhausted in just over a decade if changes are not made. The Bahamas, Trinidad and Tobago, and the British Virgin Islands have all acknowledged similar pressures and begun their own difficult but necessary reform journeys. These realities are shared. And like others, Bermuda must take action.

Mr. Speaker, the time for contemplation is over. With the reforms to the PSSF moving forward this year, Social Insurance must be reformed to reflect the realities of our time: a population living longer and a contributor base that is no longer [sufficiently large] to sustain the growing number of beneficiaries. When Social Insurance was put into place, Mr. Speaker, life expectancy was less than 65. Now life expectancy is 81 years. Advances in modern medicine have extended lifespans, a welcome achievement, but one that means the fund is now supporting more people for longer periods than it was ever designed to do.

To ensure our pension system can continue, as a community we must adjust our expectations as we plan for our retirement. Why is this necessary? Because today's 45-year-old—who has contributed to the fund for 20 years, who still has nearly 20 more years left to contribute—deserves to know that the fund will be there when they retire. If we fail to act, we fail them. And this Progressive Labour Party Government will not fail those who have paid into a system with the expectation of receiving a benefit when they retire.

Mr. Speaker, this Government will bring forward proposals to ensure that Bermuda's Social Insurance system is not only sustainable, but more equitable. These changes will include adjustments to contributions combined with a phased increase in the age that contributors can receive social insurance benefits.

Mr. Speaker, we welcome bipartisan cooperation on this vital national issue, as pension sustainability should not be a partisan matter. It is a question of economic security for future generations, driven not by politics but by the realities of changing demographics.

However, Mr. Speaker, the Government remains fully committed to our policy of increasing seniors' pensions in line with the rate of inflation and will do so again this year. However, until a full Social Insurance reform package is implemented in 2026, that continued commitment, while necessary to protect our seniors, also means that there must be increased contributions.

Mr. Speaker, the Progressive Labour Party has demonstrated consistent fiscal responsibility. We have balanced the budget while supporting families, investing in housing and expanding health care. Our legacy will be one of sound economic management—not only by balancing the books but by ensuring that our public pensions are stable and fair for generations to come.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the true test of leadership, the true record of fiscal responsibility—doing what is right, even if it is hard.

PROGRESS ON TAX REFORM

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, meaningful progress has been made to modernise Bermuda's tax

system. Reforms must be anchored in fairness, aligned with global standards, and focused on long-term sustainability. The introduction of the corporate income tax (CIT) marks a major shift, and with implementation now underway, broader reforms are expected to ensure Bermuda remains a jurisdiction of choice for international business.

Corporate Income Tax

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, on the 1st of January 2025, Bermuda's new corporate income tax regime took effect, and the new Corporate Income Tax Agency [CITA] has been set up to administer this new regime. The Corporate Income Tax Agency's role is paramount to reinforcing Bermuda's continuing commitment to global compliance and transparency and maintaining Bermuda's international competitive positioning.

A tax professional with significant relevant experience joined the CITA as CEO in January 2025. He is in the process of progressing the workplan and road map, including hiring further qualified employees to operate the agency to ensure that the implementation is a success.

As part of the road map, the agency is implementing a Tax Administration Platform [TAP] which will be the key interface and collection vehicle for taxpayers. This platform will provide a modern digital interface so that taxpayers can liaise effectively with the agency. The CITA is tasked with balancing the effective collection and determination of tax liabilities with the need to minimise taxpayers' administration and compliance costs.

Mr. Speaker, the CITA has been granted an operational grant of \$4.78 million in this fiscal year, which is in line with the current year grant. Further funding will be required in the current year to support successful implementation of the IT system infrastructure and to ensure that there are the required staff and related resources. It is envisaged that the CITA will be self-funding in future years through the interest from revenues that they collect, and any additional funding for this year will likely be as a loan against that future expected revenue.

The full year tax filings for 2025 will be due in 2026; however, the agency will collect the first instalments in August of 2025. This budget includes prudent revenue estimates of \$187.5 million and allows sufficient headroom to support any variability in receipts and, as necessary, adjustments to payments made.

Mr. Speaker, the Corporate Income Tax Agency and the Ministry of Finance will continue to work together on all legislative changes relating to the corporate income tax. We will continue to hold public consultations to ensure that legislation is developed to meet our international obligations while addressing the needs of our community.

Recent Global Developments

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the work to implement the new corporate income tax has required a herculean effort from Ministry of Finance staff, external technical experts, industry bodies and colleagues at the Corporate Income Tax Agency. We are grateful for the support and will maintain this collaborative approach as we continue to develop legislation in support of successful implementation.

Mr. Speaker, we acknowledge that work is ongoing globally to finalise the details of the Global Tax Framework, and we are actively engaged in monitoring developments through our international advocacy. Of course, there are ongoing discussions on how best to achieve the balance of tax sovereignty, certainty and fairness. Bermuda will continue to participate in these discussions to support the achievement of a fair outcome for all. We recognise that this is a significant change in the jurisdiction's tax framework and that successful implementation of the corporate income tax is an important step required for this jurisdiction to remain globally competitive.

Tax Reform Commission

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, this change in our framework requires diverse thinking and collaboration amongst those with technical expertise who have a vested interest in a stable and secure economic future for our Island. The Tax Reform Commission [TRC] is nearing the conclusion of its work to make recommendations to the Government on tax reform to sustain Bermuda's economic strengths, reduce the cost of living and doing business and to support increased equity with the advent of the new corporate income tax.

The commission's work has significantly progressed through three key workstreams:

First, Mr. Speaker, they are reviewing the implications of the CIT for local and international business. They also have a broader remit to recommend a framework to encourage investment and economic activity in Bermuda through appropriate incentives.

Second, the focus is on reducing the cost of living and business operations and the opportunity to assist with equity in Bermuda. This includes evaluating the social and economic impacts of proposed reforms on various demographics and modelling the impacts of revising two larger cost categories—payroll tax and health care—for both individuals and companies.

Third, the Tax Reform Commission have been working to inform, educate and engage stakeholders. This education has been through town hall meetings, radio and a website for public engagement. Over 30 stakeholder group meetings have been held since the start of the Tax Reform Commission's work. This "listening tour" has provided a strong indication of the

various stakeholder preferences that the commission will seek to address over the medium term through their recommendations.

The Government looks forward to receiving the report of the Tax Reform Commission in June 2025 and is committed to implementing recommendations arising from their report during the 2025/26 fiscal year. This will provide stability and certainty to our international business community while embracing the reforms that may bring fairness to Bermuda's tax system.

Making Government Work Better for You

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, last year as promised in the 2024 Budget Statement, the Government launched the Red Tape Reduction Consultation, inviting feedback from individuals, businesses and organisations across Bermuda. This consultation closed in May 2024 and received nearly 100 submissions reflecting a wide range of thoughtful suggestions on how to streamline processes, enhance accessibility and make government services more efficient.

Since then, we have honoured that call by advancing a series of impactful enhancements grounded in the feedback we received.

Mr. Speaker, on 1 July 2024, the Government launched pay.gov.bm, initially enabling residents to pay for parking tickets quickly and conveniently online. This platform will continue to expand, eventually supporting nearly all transactions that [currently] require a visit to a cashier.

Mr. Speaker, in February we upgraded the Online Services section of the Government's website. This new site offers simplified navigation, enhanced search functionality, digital application submissions, permit requests and online payments.

Additionally, in response to the public's requests for more accessible services for Social Insurance needs, the Department of Social Insurance has enhanced its digital capabilities. Applications for pensions, name changes, contribution records and various benefits can now be accessed online via socialinsurance.gov.bm. This move enhances convenience and significantly cuts down on paperwork and processing time.

Mr. Speaker, one specific area for which respondents to the Red Tape Reduction consultation submitted ideas was simplifying processes at the Transport Control Department [TCD]. The Government took this feedback on board and implemented more digitised services for TCD. On the 31st of March this year, the department launched the first phase of these services, which are now available on at forms.gov.bm with online applications for Project Ride Instructors; Exemptions for Tint, Seatbelt, Signage and Licensing Fees; and Importation and Replacement of Vehicles and Vehicle Parts.

These services represent just the beginning. In the coming months, more TCD services and applications will be digitised, continuing our work to modernise how residents interact with government services by reducing in-person visits, eliminating outdated manual processes and increasing processing efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, we are delivering on the responses made in the Red Tape Reduction Consultation.

The combined investment across government in new IT programmes and applications is \$15 million. This year we will see more applications placed online, additional online services launched and improved customer experiences from the Department of Immigration to the Judiciary, to the Office of the Tax Commissioner, and on public transport. To aid in simplifying navigation of government services and laws, we will implement AI-powered customer support, allowing people to better find the information they need from the government at any time, not just during working hours.

Cutting red tape is not merely about eliminating unnecessary steps; it is also about reshaping the way people experience and interact with the government. While there is still work to do, Mr. Speaker, the progress we have made demonstrates our commitment to listening to the people we serve. We will continue to modernise, streamline and innovate, making it easier for Bermudians to get access to the services they need.

Acknowledgements

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, before I conclude my presentation today, I must thank the persons who made this budget surplus a reality. Though I serve as Premier and Minister of Finance, today I stand here as a representative of this Government, and though I deliver the speech, many others have done the work.

I wish to pay homage to the Ministers and the Public Service Executive, the Heads of Departments and the Ministry Controllers who have laboured to ensure that we complete the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure in good time.

I would like to thank the team at the Ministry of Finance led by the Financial Secretary, Mr. Chidozie Ofoego, who is here in the Chamber, who support the work of the Minister of Finance in preparing the annual budget. I wish to also express a special thank-you to the members of the Budget Office, led by the Budget Director Ms. Tina Tucker, who is also here with us in the Chamber, who work with ministries to ensure budget control and the preparation of this year's Budget Book, and the communications team who ensure that this document is printed on time.

Thank you.

I also, Mr. Speaker, must thank the Junior Minister of Finance, the Honourable Minister Wayne

Furbert, who I can say, without his help and assistance, neither this Budget Statement nor the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure as they were presented today would have been possible.

Thank you, Wayne.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the public officers who deliver government services to the residents of Bermuda, and I must recognise the Honourable Members of the Government backbenches who I have no doubt will hold this Government's feet to the fire, ensuring that the priorities of the Government match the feedback from the doorsteps.

Conclusion

Hon. E. David Burt: In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the world's political and economic landscape is shifting before our very eyes. Institutions that once commanded deference now face growing scepticism. A decade ago we spoke of adjusting to a *new normal*. Today, Mr. Speaker, there is *no* normal—new or otherwise.

We are global citizens shaped by a shared past. Nations that once found common ground in measured immigration, public engagement and expanding trade find those shared goals now under strain. And while today we can still find stability, the real question is, What does tomorrow bring?

Mr. Speaker, these global changes demand that Bermuda be prepared to meet the challenges that could so easily beset us. Uncertainty must be matched by strong leadership and a clear vision for the future. The Progressive Labour Party has always been a party of vision both in Opposition and in Government. In January of 1997, the Jennifer Smith who was not yet Premier set out this party's timeless vision for the International Companies Division of the Chamber of Commerce. At that time, she said, Mr. Speaker, and I quote:

"Bermuda must become a place where we work together to meet our responsibilities, where people's differences are respected so that we can live together in harmony, a place where hard work is rewarded fairly and equitably."

"There is only one way an economy like ours can succeed in the new global marketplace. The greater the opportunities in education and work for each of us, the better the prosperity for all of us . . . Fairness will be the rule and social justice the hallmark of public policy."—Dame Jennifer H. Smith, JP, January 1997.

Mr. Speaker, building that fairer, more stable and more affordable Bermuda is no slogan formulated in the quest for votes. It is the core philosophy that undergirds all that the Progressive Labour Party, over generations, has set out to do. Three successive mandates won in varying economic conditions are a clear indication that the people of Bermuda know that we, the Progressive Labour Party, have their best interests at heart.

Mr. Speaker, our economic success does not make us triumphant. The facts in support of our policies' positive impact on the people of Bermuda represent a discharge of the solemn trust placed in us by the people. The pride in what we have achieved since 2017 is tempered by a healthy dose of humility, because we know that there is much more work to be done.

Mr. Speaker, as I commend these Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure to this Honourable House, I do so on behalf of my parliamentary colleagues and the members of the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party—staying true to the ideals of those women and men who ushered in the greatest era of political change Bermuda has seen. When we act together, when we lead with fairness and when we keep our focus on what matters—the people—Bermuda and Bermudians will always prosper.

This budget further cements our determination that all should benefit from the economic success of Bermuda, and Mr. Speaker, this budget will deliver a fairer, more stable and more affordable Bermuda for all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier, for the presentation of the Budget Statement this morning.

We are just going to take a couple of minutes for the cameramen to dismantle their equipment, and then we will move on.

[Pause]

The Speaker: Members, we will now move on to the other items on the Order Paper this morning.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are none.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: We will carry them over to next week.

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 Government Bill to be introduced this morning, and it is in the name of the Minister of National Security.

BILL

FIRST READING

EXPLOSIVE SUBSTANCES AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, colleagues and listening audience.

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: the Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: All Orders of the Day will be carried over until next week.

That brings us to a conclusion for today.
Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House do now adjourn until Friday, the 9th of May, at 10:00 am.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

No objections.

The House now stands adjourned until next Friday, the 9th of May, at 10:00 am.

Everyone have a good weekend, and we will see you next week.

[Gavel]

*[At 12:02 pm, the House stood adjourned until
10:00 am Friday, 9 May 2025.]*

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
9 MAY 2025
10:00 AM**

Sitting Number 5 of the 2025/26 Session

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.
The Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

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

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 2 May 2025]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of the 2nd of May have been circulated.

Are there any amendments required?

There are none.

The Minutes will be confirmed as printed.

[Minutes of 2 May 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGY

The Speaker: We have been informed that MP Pastor Leroy Bean is absent today. Thank you.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: There are four papers this morning. The first is in the name of the Deputy Premier.
Deputy Premier.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

**BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST
AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
FOR THE YEAR ENDING 31 MARCH 2024**

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Housing Trust Audited Financial Statements for the fiscal year ending 31 March 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Junior Minister of Finance has the second.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

**MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE
LEGISLATURE PENSION FUND ACTUARIAL
VALUATION AS AT 31 MARCH 2020
FOR FUNDING PURPOSES**

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund Actuarial Valuation as at 31 March 2020 [for Funding Purposes].

The Speaker: Would you like to do your second one?

**PUBLIC SERVICE SUPERANNUATION
FUND ACTUARIAL VALUATION
AS AT 31 MARCH 2020**

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Public Service Superannuation Fund Actuarial Valuation as at 31 March 2020. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

And the next is from the Minister of Labour and Economy.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: A pleasant good morning to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

**REGISTRY GENERAL ANNUAL REPORT
FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 DECEMBER 2023
BIRTHS, MARRIAGES, DOMESTIC
PARTNERSHIPS AND DEATHS**

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Annual Report of the Registry General for the year ended 31 December 2023 [Births, Marriages, Domestic Partnerships and Deaths], in accordance with section 19 of the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That is the end of Papers to be introduced this morning.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Speaker: We have nine such Statements this morning. The first is, again, in the name of the Deputy Premier.

Go ahead.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

**BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST
AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
AND CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to provide this Honourable House and the public with an update on the [Bermuda Housing Trust](#). I am pleased to inform this Honourable House that the Trust has achieved yet another successive, clean and unqualified audit for the financial year ended March 31, 2024. The audit was once again conducted by the Office of the Auditor General, and the Trustees are justifiably proud of this outcome.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will recall that the Bermuda Housing Trust was established by statute 60 years ago, in 1965, to provide affordable rental accommodation for seniors capable of living independently. Today the Trust comprises five properties Island-wide including Heydon Park, Dr. Cann Park, Elizabeth Hills Park, Purvis Park, and Ferguson Park—together housing approximately 200 senior residents.

While the audited financial statements reflect a sound financial position, the Trustees have request-

ed that I also communicate their caution: this picture must be considered in context. Financial pressures loom large, and challenges persist in fulfilling their mandate to provide affordable, quality rental accommodation for Bermuda's seniors.

The first of these challenges relates to demographics. The demand for senior housing is rising. As Members are aware, Bermuda's population is ageing, with projections indicating that by 2026, one in four residents will be aged 65 years or older. Seniors today are living longer and healthier lives. They value and require affordable accommodation that not only meets their financial needs but also supports independent living—a goal we all share for our parents and, one day, even for ourselves.

Currently, the Trust maintains a waiting list of between 50 and 100 qualified applicants. Applications, I note, are only accepted from individuals aged 65 and above. A second challenge lies in balancing priority placements for those in urgent need while maintaining the current housing stock. This is no easy task. Even more difficult is the Trust's effort to continue its long-standing policy of not increasing rent for sitting tenants—regardless of the length of tenancy. In today's climate of rising prices, this is no small achievement.

Although this policy has largely been maintained, the Trustees have, out of necessity, introduced marginal rent increases applicable only to new tenants. These increases are due to the mounting costs of maintaining an ageing housing inventory. Contractors for significant maintenance work are not always easily secured, and scheduling must be carefully managed around the needs of the elderly tenants.

Mr. Speaker, despite these constraints, I am pleased to report progress. Roof repairs at Dr. Cann Park—the Trust's largest property—have been completed, and necessary re-caulking and sealing work is now underway to address longstanding leak issues. This essential work has taken longer than expected, and I commend the patience and understanding of the residents who have endured these delays. The Trust has rightly prioritised sealing and securing the exterior before addressing interior renovations—particularly in currently vacant units.

In support of this work, the then-Ministry of Public Works provided private engineering resources to assist with oversight of the caulking and painting project. The Trustees have asked me to extend their appreciation for the support received from my predecessor in Housing, Lt. Col. the Hon. David A. Burch, OBE, JP. Additionally, the Trust has strengthened its operations with the appointment of an Executive Director, Ms. Chandra Arandjelovic. (Mr. Speaker, I would say that I have always had a problem pronouncing this lady's last name, and we did spend a lot of time in our younger years as teenagers, along with a few other of my young friends at the time.) But she is significantly improving business continuity, regulatory compliance and operational oversight. Mr. Speaker,

the Trustees have also formalised a long-standing part-time role into a fulltime position. Ms. Judy Knight, who for over a decade provided valuable support to tenants, has stepped down, and the position has been taken up by Ms. Quayante Watson as the new Rental Agent.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to note that the Bermuda Housing Trust currently receives no direct financial support from the Government. Nevertheless, last year the Ministry of Public Works, together with the Bermuda Housing Corporation, provided invaluable support through architectural, engineering, project management and maintenance services, for which the Trustees are deeply grateful. Looking ahead, I am committed to strengthening the partnership between the Bermuda Housing Trust and the Bermuda Housing Corporation to ensure we continue delivering the highest level of assistance possible.

Finally, in my capacity as Minister, I would like to express my sincere thanks and appreciation to the dedicated Trustees of the Bermuda Housing Trust for their unwavering commitment to serving our seniors. I especially acknowledge the following:

- The Hon. John Barritt, Chairman;
- Mrs. Rochelle Simons, Deputy Chair;
- Mr. Anthony Mouchette;
- Mr. Daniel Robinson;
- Mr. Juan Smith;
- Mr. Marco Bortelli; and
- Mr. Alexander Abbott.

And special thanks to retired Trustee, Ms. Thelma Hart, for her many years of service.

Mr. Speaker, the work of the Bermuda Housing Trust is vital to the wellbeing and dignity of our seniors. Their legacy is one of compassion, service and financial prudence. As the Minister responsible, I am committed to supporting the Trust as it continues to fulfil this essential mission.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Pause]

[Inaudible interjections]

PUBLIC SERVICE SUPERANNUATION FUND 2020 ACTUARIAL REVIEWS

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to advise the Honourable Members of the completion of the [actuarial reviews of the Public Service Superannuation Fund \(PSSF\) and the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund \(MMLPF\)](#) for the year ended 31 March 2020, which were tabled in this Honourable House today.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that the 2023 Actuarial Reviews for both the Public [Service] Superannuation Fund and the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund were tabled in this House on 21 March 2025. It was at that time that inquiries

regarding the 2020 actuarial reviews were made (by, I believe, Honourable Member De Couto). Upon investigation, I became aware that the reports had not been tabled. Once this oversight was identified, the Ministry of Finance reviewed its records and found that, although the actuarial reviews were completed in December 2020, they were never presented, something for which we apologise to this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, the PSSF provides contributory defined pensions to Bermuda's public service employees and to employees of some public authorities. The purpose of the actuarial review is to determine the going concern of the financial position of the PSSF, to estimate the costs of the benefits being accrued during the period up to the next valuation date and to determine the adequacy of the PSSF contribution rate. The report includes a three-year projection of the funded ratio based on assets, actuarial liabilities and normal costs projected to 31 March 2023.

Items of note regarding the actuarial review are as follows:

- The total invested assets of the fund at 31 March 2020 were \$559.4 million (\$571.2 million [in] March 2017). This represents an \$11.8 million, or 2.06 per cent, decrease since the 2017 review.
- Contribution income for the year ended 31 March 2020 was \$61.9 million (\$59.8 million [in] March 2017). And benefit payments and refunds totalled \$86.2 million (\$81.9 million [in] March 2017).
- There were 4,476 active members contributing to the fund as at March 2020 (4,312 in March 2017), and 3,188 [retirees who were receiving a benefit and 2,946] in March 2017).
- The PSSF Act was amended in 2019 to change the compulsory retirement age from the age of 65 to 68 years for all employees except for the police, fire officers, prison officers, judges and teachers.
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government enacted the Public Service Superannuation Temporary Amendment Act 2020 to provide a one-year suspension of the government's contributions and an optional suspension of contributors' contributions.
- The PSSF is not fully funded on the going-concern basis. As at 31 March 2020 the net fund assets were \$609.74 million, and the accrued benefit obligation was \$1.6[35] billion. The addition of the unamortised experience gain of \$12.84 million gives the pension liability of \$1.0[38] billion recorded and disclosed on 31 March 2020 audited statements of the Consolidated Fund.
- The three-year projected financial position to 31 March 2023 was done using the economic and demographic assumptions which were used for the March 2017 valuation, taking ac-

count of the one-year suspension. The funded ratio of the PSSF at 31 March 2020 was 37.3 per cent, and this is projected to decline to 30.3 per cent at 31 March 2023. The funded ratio measures the actuarial value of the assets of the pension plan divided by the actuarial liabilities.

MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE PENSION FUND 2020 ACTUARIAL REVIEWS

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The MMLPF provides contributory defined pensions to all Ministers and Members of the Legislature of Bermuda. Benefits in respect of service before 1 April 1988 are paid from the Consolidated Fund. The purpose of the report on the actuarial review is to determine the going-concern financial position of the MMLPF; to estimate the costs of the benefits being accrued under the MMLPF during the period up until the next valuation; to determine the adequacy of the MMLPF contribution rate and to estimate the future benefits payments under the Consolidated Fund of the Government of Bermuda. The report includes a three-year projection of the financial position of the MMLPF (excluding benefits covered by the Consolidated Fund, to 31 March 2023).

Items of note regarding the actuarial review are as follows:

- There were 48 active members contributing to the Fund as at March 2020 (46 active members in March 2017) and 59 retirees, spouses of retirees and other beneficiaries who were receiving a benefit.
- At 31 March 2020, the valuation date, the main assets of the Fund consisted of an amount due from the Consolidated Fund of \$11.06 million (\$12.75 million at March 2017).
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government enacted the Ministers and Members of the Legislature (Salaries and Pensions) Amendment Act 2020 to provide for a one-year suspension of the government's contributions and an optional one-year suspension of a member's contributions.
- The MMLPF is not fully funded on the going-concern basis. The members and government contributions do not cover the normal costs of benefits earned each year under the Fund. The funding ratio at March 2020 was 36.7 per cent, and this was projected to decrease to 29.8 per cent as of March 2023.

Mr. Speaker, the benefit payments made from all of the pension plans are important to the ongoing financial stability and security, along with the health of the seniors in our society.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members are advised that the 31 March 2023 (the next) actuarial reviews of the PSSF and the MMLPF were tabled in the

House of the Legislature on 31 March 2025, and the next actuarial review is scheduled for the period 31 March 2026, for both of the funds.

Mr. Speaker, as outlined in the 2024/25 and 2025/26 Budget Statements, the Government acknowledges the critical need for pension reform and has undertaken extensive analysis and consultation on this issue. After consulting with all relevant stakeholders, several recommendations have been agreed upon to address the increasing unfunded liability of the PSSF. These recommendations will be presented in this House during the budget session, ensuring that commitments to current and future public service retirees can be honoured.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Minister Hayward.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: I am pleased to introduce in the Honourable House today a Bill entitled the [Department of Labour Act 2025](#). This Bill provides for the continuation of the Department of Labour and establishes the Director of Labour as the public officer responsible for the supervision of the Department of Labour, subject to the general direction and control of the Minister responsible for labour relations.

Mr. Speaker, prior to July 2017 the Labour Relations section [(the section)] was a section within the Department of Workforce Development. In July 2017, after the General Election, the section was separated from the Department of Workforce Development and placed within the Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters as a standalone government section. Headed by the Manager of Labour Relations, all employment and labour related legislation was amended to provide the manager with specific legislative responsibilities that were previously held by the Director of Workforce Development.

Mr. Speaker, the Members of this Honourable House may recall that, in March 2023, Cabinet approved the transition of the Labour Relations section to the Department of Labour [(the Department)], and the Director of Labour post, amongst other posts, was created to ensure the efficient operation and management of the Department. Mr. Speaker, the creation of the new Department meant that the Employment and Labour Code of Bermuda (comprising the Employment Act 2000 and Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 2021), and corresponding and consequential legislation, regulations and orders

required amending to correctly reference the Department by name and reflect the continuation of the Department. This Bill does exactly that.

Mr. Speaker, by establishing the Director of Labour as a public officer with supervision over the Department of Labour, this Bill also ensures that the legislative responsibility for the Department, including but not limited to

- receiving all employment complaints and labour-related disputes;
- referring unresolved employment matters to the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal or to the Minister responsible for labour relations;
- imposing civil penalties for contraventions of the Employment Act 2000; and
- the granting and/or refusal of a union as the exclusive bargaining agent in respect of an application for union certification

is correctly assigned to the head of the Department and not the Manager of Labour Relations, which is a direct report.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I believe the next Statement is also yours. Would you like to do your second Statement?

REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, today I rise to introduce the [Annual Report of the Registry General](#) for the year ended December 31 2023. The Registrar General recognises the essential role that vital statistical information plays in planning for the provision of services in areas such as tourism, health, education and housing, to name a few, and has performed his duties to a high standard in the recording, collating and presenting of the data to include in the Annual Report.

Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 19 of the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949, "The Registrar-General shall, within ninety days after the expiration of each calendar year, compile for publication in such form and manner as the Minister may approve a summary of the births and deaths which occurred during the year, together with a general report on the increase or decrease of the population of Bermuda."

Pursuant to section 35 of the Marriage Act 1944, the Registrar General is also required to publish a summary of marriages conducted each year.

Unfortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Annual Report is being introduced late due to a number of circumstances including human resources and the need to clarify data. In preparation of the Annual Report, Mr. Speaker, the Registrar has relied on information received from the Records Office of the King Edward VII Memorial Hospital relating to births; from the local

funeral directors, medical practitioners and the Coroner's Office in relation to deaths; from local domestic partnership officers in relations to domestic partnerships; and from local marriage officers and Masters of Bermuda registered ships in relation to local and maritime marriages, respectively.

Mr. Speaker, the report, which deals primarily with the vital statistics pertaining to the Island's residential population, indicates that there has been a slight decrease in the number of births. In 2023 there were 436 births, a decrease of 43, or 9 per cent, over the 479 births recorded in 2022. Also, the live birth rate of the population has decreased by 0.6 points per 1,000, from 7.5 in 2022 to 6.9 in 2023. There were no home births or babies born at the residence of the parents for the year ending 2023, which was a decrease of two from the number of babies born at home in 2022.

Mr. Speaker, the distribution of live births by nationality, based on information provided by the parents at the time of registration of their child's birth, for 2023 reflects that 75.7 per cent, or 330, of the total live births have at least one Bermudian parent. Births that had parents who are both non-Bermudian in 2023 were 106, or 24.3 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, honourable colleagues are advised that in 2023 there were 622 deaths recorded amongst residents. A death rate of 9.8 per 1,000 of the population for 2023 reflects an increase of 37, or 6.3 per cent, from 585 recorded in 2022. The report also indicates that there were 12 deaths in respect of non-resident persons, which brings the total number of deaths recorded for 2023 to 634. Also, there was one stillbirth recorded for the 2023 period.

Mr. Speaker, it should be noted that the estimated population figures in the report take into account only registered births and deaths and not migration, because [those figures are] not available. This means the estimates in the report are not indicative of actual population levels. The next opportunity of an accurate population count will be the 2026 census.

Mr. Speaker, for the year ending 31 December 2023 there were 310 marriages performed in Bermuda, a decrease of 26, or 7.7 per cent, from the 336 marriages recorded in 2022. The decrease may be attributed to a number of unknown factors or reasons as to why, but there was no deterring the interest of couples who did desire to marry that year. During 2023, marriages between parties who were both non-residents accounted for only 109, or 35.2 per cent, of the total of 310. This figure, for the fourth consecutive year, breaks the trend where marriages between non-residents previously exceeded the number of marriages between residents, and marriages between resident and non-resident parties. The report also shows that there were 157 marriages between parties who were both residents and 44 marriages between a resident and a non-resident.

Mr. Speaker, of the 310 local marriages recorded in 2023, none were same-sex marriages. In 2023 there were five domestic partnership unions recorded for the period. All five domestic partnership unions were formalised at the Registry General's Office. Mr. Speaker, 329 marriages were performed on board 28 Bermuda-registered ships in 2023. This total represents an increase of 52, or 16 per cent, from the 2022 total of 277. The increase is due to the efforts of the cruise line industry to expand and improve upon services for weddings on board their ships. The cumulative number of marriages (local and maritime) processed through the Registry General for the year ending 31 December 2023 was 639 as compared to 613 for the year ending 2022.

Mr. Speaker, the annual report seeks to provide an illustrative statistical digest of vital events such as live births, deaths, stillbirths, marriages, domestic partnerships, adoptions and re-registration of births for the year ended 31 December 2023.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the Annual Report of the Registry General for the year ended 31 December 2024 is being compiled, and I expect to present that report in the second quarter of this fiscal year.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Minister.

FOSTER CARE MONTH—MAY

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to inform this Honourable House that the month of May is celebrated as [Foster Care Month](#). The Department of Child and Family Services [DCFS] uses the month of May to not only recruit foster parents, but also to honour Bermuda's foster parents. The Foster Care Team has an active month of recruitment activities planned that began on 1 May with a frontpage feature in *The Royal Gazette* highlighting the positive experiences of two foster families.

Mr. Speaker, on the evening of 2 May the Child and Family Services Department staff welcomed Mr. Antonio Grate to Bermuda. Mr. Grate is an author, motivational speaker, husband and father who is booked by numerous conferences, schools and welfare agencies to share his story. Mr. Grate is a visionary who grew up on the South Side of Chicago, where his formative years were shaped in the foster care system. Mr. Grate believes that the way we view our children who are in the foster care system is key for the development of their success in life.

Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, 4 May, DCFS held the Annual Foster Parents Appreciation Tea where Mr. Grate was the invited Keynote Speaker. He gave

a powerful, motivational and inspirational message on the topic *Fostering Hope*. Mr. Grate shared his life story growing up in Chicago, being in kinship and foster care and ageing out of the foster care system. He spoke about his mother's addiction to drugs and not having his father in his life, and the importance of connections for children who have experienced trauma. Mr. Grate stressed the vital role that kinship parents, foster parents and social workers play in the life of children in care. He reminded those present to always be cognisant of the trauma that the children whom they are caring for have gone through, though [through] no fault of their own, and the importance of not giving up on them.

Mr. Speaker, foster parents were gifted with copies of Mr. Grate's book *The Power of One*, of which he graciously signed copies for our foster parents. During the Appreciation Tea, persons were treated to entertaining music on the steel pan with Bermudian musician Ms. Laree Talbot, who was representing the group De Onion Patch Crew.

Mr. Speaker, DCFS presented two Spotlight Awards at the Appreciation Tea for Foster Care parents. Mr. and Mrs. Khabir and Melonie Dill were highlighted and appreciated as foster care parents for the vital role they played during a very critical time when the respite they provided to a teen boy served as a hands-on stabiliser for the teen while DCFS solidified an intensive clinical plan for him. It was noted that Mr. and Mrs. Dill covered the crisis while maintaining a long-term kinship care placement, which saw them having to blend the care provided for the two boys whom they cared for.

Another foster parent couple, Mr. and Mrs. Shlomo and Zipporah Yeshurun, received a formal salute from DCFS for their 18-year commitment to their foster son. The accolades placed upon this couple surrounded their never-ending dedication to the foster care child, who has been filled with numerous challenges, inclusive of ongoing advocacy for his special school plan and working with DCFS continuously to make sure that his vast medical needs, including several overseas appointments, have been met.

Mr. Speaker, this week, Monday, 5 May, Mr. Grate presented a professional development and practice enhancement session at BUEI [Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute] for the DCFS staff, family court magistrates, staff from the Police Services, therapists and other stakeholders. This was a two-hour interactive and engaging message on the topic of "How Labels Can Negatively Impact Children Socially and Emotionally." Mr. Grate's message moved all stakeholders. Some of the feedback from stakeholders was reflective of the engaging professional development session and included the following:

- "Antonio's presentation was insightful and informative. As he shared his journey, it reminded me of my why [and that] I have to be a support to our young people"; and

- “If I had to give this presentation a topic name, it would be *The Power of One!* How each of us as professionals has the power to make a difference in supporting a young person. Knowing our WHY, being INTENTIONAL and understanding the power of labels (both positive and negative). His passionate and personal message was inspiring, motivating all to remember their WHY as we show up consistently for clients. Even when it gets HARD we need to work from our HEARTS.”

Mr. Grate was extremely touched and inspired by the close to 50 online reviews that were uploaded within an hour after the professional development session, as all stakeholders were provided with the link.

Mr. Speaker, this week, Monday evening, 5 May, Mr. Grate had an empowering and dynamic interactive session with the young adults at the Independent Living Programme, those youth who have aged out of the care of the DCFS Director. He shared with our young adults the significance of *Seeds of Greatness* in that “seeds” can grow even if they have been through adverse situations. The session was dynamic and very powerful, having someone talk about their lived experience similar to that of our youth, which gave them hope.

Mr. Speaker, during the month all of the government's social media platforms will be promoting foster parents and recruitment. While we are pleased and thankful for the current pool of foster care parents, who are to be commended for the role that they play in providing stability to our foster children, we must express our plea—we need more foster care parents! Foster care parents open their hearts and their homes by taking in children who need nurturing, guidance and love. These children have different experiences and need care for a variety of reasons. Foster care parents fill that gap with the ongoing support of the Department of Child and Family Services. At present, there are 56 foster care families. The department needs 10 to 12 more foster care families for children of all ages, from birth to teenagers. There is also a need for foster care parents for children with special needs.

Mr. Speaker, I close by stating that our children, vulnerable for many reasons, need us. The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors takes this time on behalf of all of the children in foster care to thank those individuals and families who have opened their homes and have given of themselves to make a difference in the lives of children. We encourage more people within our community to become foster care parents. This will help the Department of Child and Family Services in its efforts to provide caring, safe, nurturing homes for children when their families are unable to care for them.

Mr. Speaker, in recognition of Foster Care Month, there will be a series of additional radio spots and a BBC interview that have been booked. Howev-

er, I encourage all Members of this Honourable House, along with all persons within the community, to salute our foster care parents during the entire month of May and beyond.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is by the Minister of Works.

Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

ROAD SAFETY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS: PAVING THE WAY FORWARD

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, everywhere I go, I hear the same question: *What is being done about our roads?* Whether it is the bumpy drive to work, having to navigate through potholes or the uneven surfaces near school zones, Bermudians are understandably concerned. The condition of our roads affects how we move; how safe we feel and how we experience life on this Island. This Government has heard the people loud and clear, and today I rise to provide an update on the work we have done, the challenges we continue to navigate and, most important, the actions we are taking to deliver [safer, smoother and more reliable roads](#).

Mr. Speaker, let me begin with a recent success. I want to commend the Ministry's technical officers for their outstanding work in completing critical safety improvements at Scaur Hill. As Honourable Members will recall, this project became necessary due to the deterioration of the retaining wall, originally built using outdated construction methods. The pace of deterioration had become alarming, undermining the adjacent road, and posed a serious risk to motorists and area residents. Thanks to the professionalism and dedication of our teams, the new wall was completed on time and within budget.

While carrying out the road surface repairs near Lantana Road, we also noted and received feedback regarding a dip that was causing concern for motorists. I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that this has now been corrected, and our crews are currently completing final reinstatement works. Weather permitting, all remaining works in the area are expected to be completed by the end of next week. I want to extend my sincere thanks to the residents of the area for their patience and especially to those who generously allowed traffic to be rerouted through their properties during the construction period.

Your cooperation is truly appreciated.

Mr. Speaker, the improvements at Scaur Hill are just one part of a much larger effort. The people of

Bermuda expect and deserve a road network that is safe, smooth and modern. That is why the Ministry has been working diligently to deliver a sustained island-wide programme of road improvements. Over the past two years we have made significant progress in resurfacing critical sections, including

- Collector's Hill;
- South Shore Road in Southampton;
- Middle Road from Flatts Village to Store Hill;
- the untrenched lane of Middle Road in Warwick;
- Middle Road in Southampton from George's Bay to Evans Bay, including George's Bay Road; and
- Somerset Road from Elly's Bay through to George's Bay.

And we are not stopping there.

Mr. Speaker, one of the key lessons learned in recent years is the importance of coordination. Paving a road today only to trench it next month is costly, frustrating and counterproductive. That is why we are working closely with our utility partners to ensure critical underground works are completed before we repave. This approach helps us avoid wasted time, money and effort, and ensures that once a road is repaved, it stays that way for the long term. This coordination has required us to delay projects in areas such as near Whitney Middle School, Cavendish Road and Flora Duffy Hill. But I firmly believe it is the right decision.

For example, near Whitney Middle School, shallow communication lines must be relocated before milling can proceed without risking service disruption. We have given the provider the opportunity to complete this work before we return to repave. In Warwick and Southampton, BELCO is undertaking major upgrades to its underground network. That work is nearly complete, but the ground must now settle before repaving can begin. Similarly, trenching is planned by local utility providers at Flora Duffy Hill and Cavendish Road, and so our paving works have been postponed accordingly.

Mr. Speaker, with that said, and based on the current coordination, our updated paving schedule includes the following:

- Later this month, upon completion of works at Scaur Hill, the team will begin work in St. George's—

An Hon. Member: What?

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Jache Adams: —from York Street to Ferry Reach.

- Next our team will address North Shore Road from the Shelly Bay Railway site, heading west, past the Aquarium and through Flatts Village.

- Then our team will repave Middle Road in Smith's from North Shore to Store Hill once the mentioned utility works are completed.

This updated schedule is expected to carry us through to fall of 2025. And as Minister I will continue to keep the public informed as we progress.

Mr. Speaker, I must also thank Surface Experts Ltd, formerly East End Asphalt Company Ltd., for their assistance as well. We have maintained a healthy relationship over the years, and as we plan ahead there may be opportunities to work with them on other projects as well.

Mr. Speaker, we have also ramped up patching and pothole response. Weekend crews are being deployed as needed, and we strongly encourage members of the public to report potholes directly to potholes@gov.bm. This is the fastest and most effective way to receive a response. While we understand the urge to post concerns on social media or message officers directly, using the dedicated email ensures issues are tracked, assigned and addressed as efficiently as possible.

Mr. Speaker, in terms of traffic signals, the control cabinets, essentially the brains of the systems, for Marsh Folly and St. John's Road are enroute and expected to arrive later this month. Components for Crow Lane are in production and anticipated by the end of the month, with installation to follow shortly thereafter. Roadside infrastructure works are ongoing as well. Fence repairs continue along North Shore Road, and Cabinet has approved the purchase of new aluminium guardrails for high risk areas like Shark Hole Bend, Harrington Sound and Barker's Hill.

We have expanded our workforce as well. Thanks to programmes launched by my predecessor, Lt. Col. David Burch, we now have 18 solo sweepers and dedicated vegetation crews working across the Island. In fact, this year's budget includes funding to further expand that programme. Private landscaping contractors and a low-risk prison crew have also been instrumental, particularly in the East End, clearing vegetation, maintaining road edges and contributing to the rehabilitation and reintegration of inmates. These crews will resume operations in June after a short pause.

Mr. Speaker, pedestrian safety remains a key priority. Flashing beacons are being installed at crossings in Somerset Village and Mullet Bay, and new traffic lights are under construction at the Aquarium. These modern crossings, modelled after the one at Harmony Club, provide clearer signals and safer passage for all road users.

Mr. Speaker, we cannot speak about the future of our roads without addressing the limitations of our current asphalt infrastructure. Our asphalt plant is outdated. To prevent breakdowns, we must limit operations to four days a week and cap production at 100 tons per day. These constraints affect the pace at which we can deliver new paving. That is why this

Government took decisive action, entering into an agreement with Astec Industries to procure a brand-new asphalt plant, screening equipment and paving machinery, along with long-term maintenance support. Three new machines—an asphalt paver, milling machine and material transfer vehicle—are already en-route and expected to arrive on 17 May. The screening plant is complete and ready for pre-delivery inspection.

Site works at the plant location are progressing, and we expect to begin equipment installation in October. The asphalt plant itself, complete with silos, burners and tanks, is currently undergoing final inspection and will begin arriving in July. It is important to note that once the new asphalt plant arrives it will take several months to construct, and therefore we anticipate the plant will be operational in the first quarter of 2026.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has heard the calls for better roads, and we are delivering. We have made progress, while accepting there is still much more to be done. We are coordinating with our utility companies. We are investing in new equipment. And most important, we are listening to the people.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Minister.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

CARIBBEAN RENEWABLE ENERGY FORUM (CREF) 2025: BERMUDA'S PARTICIPATION

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: This morning I rise to inform this Honourable House of the Government's participation in the [2025 Caribbean Renewable Energy Forum](#) (CREF), which took place from 7 May, and concluded today, 9 May, in Miami, Florida. Now in its 17th year, CREF continues to be a key event bringing together ministers, regulators, utilities, investors and international development partners united by a shared commitment to climate resilience and energy affordability.

As my first overseas engagement as Minister of Home Affairs, CREF offered an invaluable opportunity to represent Bermuda's interests on the international stage alongside our Caribbean neighbours in joint pursuit of a fairer, cleaner energy future.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's participation in CREF was grounded in the recognition that our Island faces complex barriers to energy equity—from our [reliance]

on imported fossil fuels to the constraints of limited land and ageing infrastructure. Through consultation, target-setting and disciplined execution, we will continue to champion a strategy that modernises Bermuda's power sector with the goal of lowering household costs, reducing emissions and building system resilience.

Mr. Speaker, CREF further provided a platform to share updates on Bermuda's clean energy progress, including our proposed Integrated Resource Plan [IRP] and the successes from the electrification of our public bus fleet through the support of Rocky Mountain Institute and other initiatives. While still under regulatory review, this proposed IRP builds on the foundation of the existing IRP and is further informed by technological advancements and critical insights that better inform Bermuda's prospective energy mix. Upon the completion of the Regulatory Authority's review process, I look forward to updating this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, while attending CREF, I had the privilege of participating in the Women in Renewable Energy Luncheon and the Ministerial Roundtable entitled "Diverse Pathways to Energy Transition in the Caribbean." I joined ministerial colleagues from islands large and small to discuss our respective policy approaches, regulatory tools and investment environments. It was a privilege to share Bermuda's experience and our ambition to balance affordability with innovation, to integrate public trust through education, and to ensure that our regulatory and legislative environment remains agile enough to accommodate emerging technologies and financing models. This roundtable affirmed that, while no two jurisdictions are identical, our region is strongest when we learn from one another and confront shared challenges together.

Mr. Speaker, I also held a bilateral meeting with the United Kingdom's Under Secretary for Energy Security and Net Zero, Under Secretary [Kerry] McCarthy, during which Under Secretary McCarthy expressed an interest to better support Bermuda through facilitating greater access to resources to advance our energy agenda.

Mr. Speaker, as Bermuda continues its work to finalise the proposed IRP through the RA [Regulatory Authority], expand solar deployment, explore the feasibility of innovative technologies and strengthen community resilience, CREF served as a powerful reminder that we are not navigating this path alone. We are part of a broader movement to redefine energy as a public good, not a luxury; and as a platform to advance equity, not exclusion.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Would you like to do your second Statement?

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

BULK GENERATION SOLE USE INSTALLATION (BGSUI) LICENCE UPDATE

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise to update the Honourable Members on the [Bulk Generation Sole Use Installation \[BGSUI\] Licence](#).

Honourable Members may recall that in September 2024 the Government tabled the Electricity Amendment Act 2024, which introduced a new licensing framework under the Electricity Act 2016 for developments generating electricity in excess of 500 kilowatts. This new licence [class], referred to as the Bulk Generation Sole Use Installation, or BGSUI ([pronounced] “big-suey”) Licence, was created to provide a pathway for entities to produce renewable electricity for their own use at their principal location.

Mr. Speaker, the intent of this licence was to address critical energy challenges faced by important public institutions such as the National Sports Centre, which offers accessible services to the public, but faces high operational costs including overhead electricity expenses. Similar challenges are faced by other government facilities and statutory bodies that provide affordable public services. These institutions must be empowered to reduce their energy expenses to maintain operations that directly benefit the people of Bermuda. I am pleased to update this Honourable House that the Regulatory Authority is now in a position to accept applications for these licences.

Mr. Speaker, under the conditions of the BGSUI Licence, the licence holder is permitted to generate electricity above the 500-kilowatt threshold solely for its own use at the principal location. However, to protect the financial sustainability of the electricity grid, the licence limits the amount of electricity that may be sold to the transmission, distribution and retail licensee to no more than 30 percent of the total electricity generated in any given month. Any electricity generated above the limit cannot be sold and will not be compensated. This condition ensures that the licence is used primarily for self-supply and is not a backdoor mechanism for commercial resale.

Mr. Speaker, while the BGSUI Licence is an important step in helping government departments and large institutions to reduce their energy expenses, the Government must also protect those residential customers who continue to rely fully on the grid and who may not have the financial means to invest in solar systems. If the cost of maintaining the grid is shifted away from large consumers who self-generate and toward households who cannot, the result would be an unfair burden on those least able to pay. And for this reason, the Government and the Regulatory Authority are working closely to ensure that fixed and variable electricity costs remain fairly allocated. This includes reviewing legislation, licensing conditions and regulatory tools to prevent unintended consequences that could undermine our goal of energy affordability for all.

Mr. Speaker, this Government remains committed to promoting clean, renewable and affordable energy for Bermuda while safeguarding the interests of all ratepayers. The implementation of the BGSUI Licence strikes this balance, offering a path forward for large institutions in need of energy cost relief while maintaining regulatory discipline to protect the public good.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

And our last Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Tourism.

Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

CAMP CONNECT SEASON 2: SUMMER DAY CAMP REGISTRATION

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, the Department of Sport and Recreation has provided the Government's [Summer Day Camp Programmes](#) each summer break for preschool, primary and middle school-age students for over 50 years. To facilitate these programmes the department works in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Works, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Health to ensure that the necessary facilities are secured, and health guidelines are met.

Mr. Speaker, as we approach the end of the school year, parents who cannot afford private camps will be stressed to find placement for their children. This often leads to children being left home alone or in inadequate conditions.

Mr. Speaker, last year on 14 May 2024, the Department of Sport and Recreation released Camp Connect on their website, the Government's proactive solution to increase camper enrolment and significantly alleviate the waitlist. Camp Connect is a partnership with private camp operators to offer additional programmes at an affordable cost to parents. Through this user-friendly, interactive portal, the reality of these partnerships with private educational and recreational groups came to life.

Mr. Speaker, Camp Connect is now the go-to hub for parents looking for comprehensive information on summer camps and an easier, streamlined registration process. Building on this, the department is pleased to share recent improvements to our Government's Summer Day Camp Programme as part of our ongoing efforts to ease the burden on parents seeking safe and affordable summer options for their children.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has been able to achieve the following:

- Increase capacity—an additional 540 spots have been made available over the summer

break for this year alone, offering over 4,000 spots for children to attend these camps this summer.

- Extend the camp duration—camps will be available between June 30 through September 5, 2025. The duration will vary between camps, so I encourage everyone to visit the website for availability.
- Expand variety—a broader selection of camp types is now available, ensuring diverse and dynamic experiences. We have added 11 new camps to the site, offering 40 camp experiences. Users can navigate by category of interest or by the zone of the Island that they live in.

We are extremely grateful to all of the Camp Operators who are a part of the programme this year.

Mr. Speaker, here is what everyone has been waiting for. On Monday, May 12, 2025, at 9:30 am sharp, the registration link for Camp Connect will go live. All camps listed on the portal will remain at last year's affordable rate, Mr. Speaker, of \$60 per week per child. Please note that online payments can only be made once registration has been approved. Parents and guardians are encouraged to visit our website www.sportsandrec.bm ahead of time to explore the available camps and decide which experiences they would like their child to enjoy this summer.

Mr. Speaker, Camp Connect is designed to make summer planning convenient and hassle-free, ensuring families have easy access to safe, enriching and affordable summer programmes.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, that brings us to a close of the Statements for this morning.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: As this is the second Friday in the month, the first part of the Question Period is the Premier's Questions.

PREMIER'S QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: I have not been informed of any Premier's Questions this morning.

There are none? There are none?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Oh, Opposition Leader, you have a question for the Premier.

Let me just start the clock for this.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: Put your question.

QUESTION 1: ROAD MAINTENANCE DELAYS

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you.

Would the Honourable Premier be able to specify why the delays in the development or the maintenance of the roads have been occurring so consistently?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I think that we just had a Statement on that. And I think the Minister of Public Works and Environment gave a full update on these particular matters.

But on a broader context, Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the Honourable Opposition Leader that we have returned this country to a balanced budget, and that has required significant sacrifices. I had mentioned in my Budget Statement last year we recognise that some of the things that have to, in many times and areas, be cut back in historical spending terms are in capital works. And that has not been going on just for the last seven years; that has been going on, as I mentioned in my Statement, since 2010 with the requirements in financial discipline to get us back to the space of a balanced budget.

But it is important to note that this Government has increased capital spending significantly over the past three years prior to our even achieving a balanced budget, made the decision to delay the achievement of a balanced budget to invest more money into capital spending, recognising that we need to make sure to invest in order to grow. So, I think that the Honourable Opposition Leader would be aware of what the Honourable Minister for Public Works had shared.

And I am certain that during the question time for Ministers there will be more on this particular topic, and I am sure the Minister for Public Works will be happy to give further updates to Members at that time.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Premier for his response.

Given that we have been hearing [from] the Honourable Minister and across the Island about delays in roadworks for a number of reasons including delays because there are parties to the roads developing the roads who are either late or they are not paying bills in a timely fashion . . . I believe that the Honourable Minister spoke to something about work-

ing together with multiple parties. What are the plans of this Government to update the regulatory framework governing the chipping-up of our roads and putting them back properly?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am happy for that question to be addressed to the responsible Minister. I am not exactly certain I can answer that off-topic. But what I can say is that, I think as the Minister reported, we are working with the other entities to ensure, and sometimes that means delays. Unless the Honourable Opposition Leader would like us to, you know, pave a road and then have someone dig up the road to repave the road after that. I do not think that makes sense. We are trying to handle this in a particularly efficient manner.

So, I am certain that if there are further updates and specifics that he wishes for, I am sure that his Shadow Minister of Works can find the time to meet with the Minister of Public Works to discuss these particular matters or to submit a specific question on that particular topic or to possibly actually have a debate on it.

The Speaker: Okay.
Second question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Was it supplementary or—

The Speaker: Yes, your supplementary on it. Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you. And I thank the Honourable Premier for his response.

I think what we are trying to get to is the accountability aspect. What we are hearing is that these roads are in a poor state for a number of reasons, and some of them relate to the accountability of people in their working on the road. And my question is, How are they going to be held accountable on a going-forward basis where they fail in their obligations and that results in even poorer infrastructure for our road users?

Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate where the Honourable Opposition Leader is going. But the reality is that roadworks and infrastructure are complex with regard to a lot of different things. There are lots of moving parts whether you are dealing with BELCO, whether you are dealing with water works, with Digicel, whether you are dealing with [Utilities] One, et cetera. There is work insofar as coordination. As I said, if the [Honourable Opposition Leader] wants to speak specifically on that, I am sure there will be plenty of time during the four hours that have been allotted for the Public Works debate during the Committee of Supply to discuss those particular matters

should his Members wish to ask questions in advance on that and so we can actually have a detailed discussion on those matters.

The Speaker: Second question?

QUESTION 2: VIOLENT CRIMES—ACTION PLANS TO HALT THE INCREASE IN

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, please. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My second question relates to the increase in violent crime, that the Honourable Minister Weeks attended a memorial yesterday and the Honourable Minister, Mr. King, Shadow Minister, attended it. And this is in your neighbourhood, Mr. Speaker. These are obviously sad, sad events. And what I would like to know is, What are the Government's immediate—*immediate*—action plans? We know of their strategy overall. Have these events changed those strategies? What are the Government's new, immediate action plans to resolve these clearly heartbreaking matters?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, violent crime is, without question, a concern for all of us in this Honourable House. And it is something that I know the Minister of National Security and, whether or not with Government House, who has responsibility for enforcement, that the police take seriously. The Government has put significant additional resources into not only supporting the work of the police, [but also to] upgrading the technology to detect crime to help persons to investigate and to bring perpetrators to justice. And in addition to that, Mr. Speaker, making significant investment in matters related to what is necessary to deal with the root cause of crime, whether or not that be mental health, trauma, counselling, family interventions and those things to break the cycle. Mr. Speaker, those works are ongoing. That work will continue.

In regard to the specifics on the implementation plan for the National Violence Reduction Strategy, that implementation plan has been prepared, and I am sure that the Honourable Minister will share it with this Honourable House in due course, most likely very soon in this budget session.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Your third question or supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

Yes. I did not quite get the specifics on that. I heard a lot of explanation about intent. But my question relates to, Are there any specific measures that

this Government is going to take, especially around the area of funding of policing or anything that is going to . . . Has anything changed? Or are we on the same glidepath? Are we going to keep doing the same thing?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Opposition Leader would know there have been significant additional funds, whether it was through the mid-year review or also during this budget, which we will be debating shortly in regard to additional funding for the police. It was stated inside of the Budget Statement. It was stated inside the mid-year review. I think there was a passing upgrade of 17 new police officers yesterday. There is continued money.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry. How many?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Twenty-two.

Hon. E. David Burt: Twenty-two new additional police officers just yesterday, Mr. Speaker. So, I know that [the Honourable Opposition Leader] is trying to make a suggestion that things are continuing as normal. But we are putting the resources in place.

But it is also not just the human resources, Mr. Speaker; it is also the investment in technology which is necessary. And it is also . . . you cannot enforce your way out of a particular issue. That is why it is around community solutions as well. That is why there is additional money that is going to community clubs, additional money that is going to helping agencies, additional funds that are going to the supporting bodies around this, which we have discussed in this House, which we unveiled in the mid-year review, which have been funded in this year's budget.

And we will look forward to hearing the Reply to the Budget [Statement] to see whether or not these additional funds that we have invested are supported by the Opposition. Because the only way that you can make an impact on this is to put the resources in place. So that things are not continuing as usual; we are putting additional resources in place. And I am certain the Honourable Minister of National Security will be happy to speak more on those particular matters should there be a specific question from their Shadow Minister.

The Speaker: Supplementary? You have a second supplementary.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: No. No, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Third question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Third question, please.

The Speaker: Yes. Go ahead.

QUESTION 3: FINANCIAL ACTIONS TASK FORCE ASSESSMENT, PREPARATION OF

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

There was some news coming out of the United Kingdom recently that Bermuda had missed a filing deadline relating to the development of beneficial ownership registers. And I know that we are preparing for our Financial Action Task Force assessment with international money laundering norms in 2027, I believe. Would the Honourable Premier be able to speak to the preparations for that? And have any other deadlines been missed in coordination with that project?

The Speaker: Premier.

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

As has been relayed to the United Kingdom Government, we are in the process of making sure we get this particular legislation done. It is currently being drafted. It is not insofar as a deadline. This is a *United Kingdom* deadline, not an international deadline. The international deadlines for the Financial Action Task Force are not until 2026.

We have always stated that we are going to be implementing legitimate access registers of beneficial ownership in line with our commitment to the European Union. The commitments to the European Union are not set to come into place until 2026 or 2027. This has been communicated to the United Kingdom on a number of occasions. The United Kingdom has their own view, but the Bermuda Government takes the position that we are going to implement these items in line with international norms to ensure that we are putting ourselves in a place and a space that is in line with our major trading partners on this particular matter, which [are in] the European Union.

The Speaker: All right.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Premier for his reply.

Just some questions relating to especially around the view of the United Kingdom. Will the view of the United Kingdom impact our ability to continue servicing clients in our international financial centres in any meaningful way? Or is this quite an arbitrary thing?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, it will have no impact on the work of which we are doing going forward. As has been stated on numerous occasions, we in this Honourable Chamber have that supremacy over our domestic rules and laws related to this. The United Kingdom has its views and wishes as has been expressed by Parliament. But I think that all Members on both sides of the House should understand that we should be the ones who are responsible for setting the laws for our country and not the United Kingdom Parliament.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm. Thank you.
Supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Yes, thank you.

Given the relative arbitrariness of this deadline, or of this option from the United Kingdom, what if any impact to Bermuda will we face if we do not comply with some of these matters that are arising, both internationally and from the United Kingdom?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, this is not a matter of deadlines. This is not a matter of anything outside of the fact that the United Kingdom in the new Government has put a particular focus on a matter which they say is something that is important to them. All governments will go ahead and implement their international commitments based on the times which work right and best for them. All Overseas Territories did commit to look to have legislation placed by April. We are expecting that legislation will be tabled during this particular budget session, to work through these particular matters.

But what we are going through on the realm of beneficial ownership is, number one, as has been stated, we are moving the dual vetting. So, all beneficial ownership vetting upon registration is moving from the Bermuda Monetary Authority over to the Registrar of Companies. So, there is one space of vetting. This is something that has been long desired, and that is the first step.

The second step will be the implementation of the Public Access Register. And then the definitions about legitimate interest, based in line with our European Union partners and the commitments of which we have made with the European Union in line with international guidelines which are set by the Financial Action Task Force and not by the United Kingdom.

The Speaker: Those are your two supplementaries. Okay. And you have asked all three questions.

The next question now this morning is from MP Dill. Would you like to put your question to the Premier?

QUESTION 1: BANKING AND MORTGAGE TRANSFERS

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, can the Honourable Premier elaborate on what steps the Government has taken to increase competition in the banking sector and to make mortgage transfers easier for Bermudians?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I appreciate the Honourable Member's question because I know that is a matter that is important for her, something that she raises in caucus on a particular basis.

Mr. Speaker, what I can say is that one of the biggest frustrations that is expressed by Bermudians is the lack of choice in banking and often the high cost in borrowing, especially when it comes to mortgages. So, the action of which we have taken, Mr. Speaker, certainly was one of the things that we did in addition to our Mortgage Guarantee Programme, which helped a certain segment of the population. We recognise that there is a broader segment of the population that needs to be helped.

And that is why we eliminated the tax, or the stamp duty, on the transferring of mortgages to ensure that there is greater competition inside of the domestic banking market. What we have seen is the response certainly from the banks on that, and we have seen that competition taking place. And I would urge and remind all persons who are listening and all Honourable Members when they are faced with their constituents who come to them with questions regarding high mortgage rates or the fact that mortgage rates are going up or the fact that when mortgage rates are going down overseas, their bank has not reduced their rates, to please make sure to know that they have options to shop around.

What we have also done, which was announced in the last Parliament, Mr. Speaker, is that we have also had an agreement with banks that they are going to roll into all of those particular costs, which may be other closing costs, into that refinancing to ensure that persons do not have to pay up-front costs to make sure that they refinance these loans. And we know that families are saving money, and the banks are doing this work. And we would encourage those banks who are not engaged in the practice of reducing their rates to make sure that they go ahead and reduce them.

And also, I would encourage anyone who is carrying a high mortgage rate to go to your bank and ask for a lower rate. And if they are not prepared to do it, tell them that you are prepared to switch. We have heard many stories where persons have gone to their bank. Their bank has said no. They have gone to another bank. The other bank has said yes. They went [back] to their bank to say, *I'm moving my mortgage*.

And that bank that they had their mortgage with who told them no the first time has then reduced their rate.

It is important that we have competition. We are doing the work on our side. But it is important for members and citizens and Honourable Members here to let their constituents know how they can be assisted through the law changes that we have made here to get lower mortgage rates.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to thank the Premier for that answer. And I know that it will be welcome news for my constituents.

Honourable Premier, do you believe it is really having the impact that you intended at this point?

Hon. E. David Burt: Here is what I would say, Mr. Speaker. I would say that it is having an impact. But we would like it to have more of an impact. The Government has put money behind this insofar as advertising on local news and others. It is something that I know that we have shared at least on this side of the House. I know that our Members and our MPs have shared that. I would hope Honourable Members opposite would also share that in their canvassing as well. And we have seen the impact. We know that one particular large local bank had a full campaign on trying to get persons to transfer their mortgages. And we do know that other banks are trying to respond as we are trying to promote a more competitive market.

I have heard from persons, as I stated in the previous answer, who have seen that impact. So, I have encouraged consumers to know that they have the ability to shop around. And I have no doubt that the Honourable Minister who has responsibility for housing, in addition to the Honourable Minister who has responsibility for Home Affairs and the cost of living and consumer affairs, will continue to support the Ministry of Finance in trying to get this message across.

There are options for consumers. We are making the banking market more competitive. And consumers must do their part to take advantage and to go to their bank and ask for a lower rate. And if not, be prepared to move to a different bank. If you have good credit, you will not have an issue moving and getting a better mortgage.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you.

The Speaker: Is there a second supplementary or are you done?

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

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

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

QUESTION 1: CORPORATE INCOME TAX LEGISLATION

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We learned through public statements of public companies at year-end 2024 that the OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] may not accept our current . . . Let me rephrase. Our CIT [corporate income tax] legislation allows companies to write down certain deferred tax assets over 10 years, 10 per cent a year. And we learned through certain public statements from public companies that the OECD minimum tax policy may not allow . . . other countries may not accept the full amount of that write-down, and they only allow up to 20 per cent over two years.

So, my question to the Honourable Premier is, one, what is the . . . Let me rephrase that, Mr. Speaker, as one question. Does the Government have any plans to adjust our legislation around the corporate income tax to become consistent with what seems to be this new ruling from the OECD?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I am not entirely certain how to answer that question. What I will say is that the Government will make sure they do everything to remain in line with our international obligations under corporate income tax. There have been many times that we have brought legislation. There is future legislation that is expected to come to this Honourable House. And we will continue to press along with that particular matter.

So, I know the Honourable Member has some knowledge on that. If he has specific questions that would probably not be accessed in the public domain, I am happy to have those conversations. These discussions are sensitive.

But when legislation is brought, we will have plenty of time to discuss and debate those particular matters. And I know the Honourable Member, given the fact of where he works, knows how sensitive these particular matters are.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Do you have a supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, supplementary, Mr. Speaker.

Today I am working for the people in this Chamber, and where I work, I wear a different hat. And there is quite a bright line between those two, for the listening public.

The Speaker: Okay. You can tie it in to your question.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: My specific question would be, my understanding is that companies that take advantage of our 10 year and 10-per-cent per-year deferred tax assets rule here in Bermuda may be liable to pay top-of-taxes in other jurisdictions. I can see how that might be not as efficient as we would have hoped or in keeping with the original aims of when we created our corporate income tax. Does the Government have any specific plans to adjust our legislation to make it as streamlined and consistent for Bermuda's corporate income taxpayers? Thank you.

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, when it comes to our Corporate Income Tax Agency, our corporate income tax legislation, we will continue to work with our international business partners as we have throughout this process to ensure that Bermuda remains competitive and a jurisdiction. In regard to specifics, I am not going to discuss future specifics, which may or may not happen during Premier's Questions time. If the Honourable Member wants to set up a meeting with the Corporate Income Tax Agency and to discuss those matters, I will make sure to arrange that particular meeting for him.

The Speaker: Okay.

Second supplementary? Third, yes?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Does the Government have a view on how the changes in OECD policy may impact our CIT income? Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the projections that we have laid out have not changed. And they have not changed since we have laid them out in 2024, despite how many questions, times or imputations that the Honourable Member may have. Those measures were set out as an estimate of [€]750 million on an annual basis, and they *have not been adjusted since then*. And there has been no information that will say that those matters should be adjusted.

The Speaker: Okay.

Those are your supplementals.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I do have a point of information, if you will indulge me.

The Speaker: Well, well, well. It does not allow for a point of information. Now, you asked your questions and your two supplementals. So, I will move on.

The next person who is on the list is MP Wilmot. Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: MORTGAGE GUARANTEE PROGRAMME UPDATE

Mr. Paul Wilmot: Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

We have not had any updates on the Mortgage Guarantee Programme since last year. Can the Honourable Premier please provide an update on the programme and how many Bermudians have been assisted through this initiative?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Member for his question and of course welcome him to his place in this Honourable House with some big shoes to fill following the retirement of MP and Minister Colonel David Burch.

What I would say, Mr. Speaker, is the Mortgage Guarantee Programme is a source of pride for this Government. It is something that I remember at the time of its introduction. It was ridiculed by the other side as electioneering and as trying to hand out and putting the balance sheets of the country at risk.

But here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. We stand up for home ownership for Bermudians in this country. And here is the good news that I can reply to the Honourable Member for constituency 27 . . . (You are getting excited there now. I see. You are getting excited.) Here is the good news, Opposition Leader. You can hear this too, because maybe some of these people are in Paget as well. Seventy-four Bermudians are either closing on their new homes or receiving mortgage approvals to actually look for a home. And that means—oh, yes, yes, yes, yes.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: Seventy-four, Mr. Speaker. Seventy-four Bermudians who would not have been able to get on the property ladder are on the property ladder due to the work of this Progressive Labour Party Government. That, Mr. Speaker, is fairness in action. Since the last time an update was given in November of last year, there are 22 more Bermudians. So that . . . we . . . We reported it at 52 at that time. Now it is up to 74. So, 22 more persons have benefited from that programme, Mr. Speaker. Inside of that number includes three who have taken advantage of the refinancing opportunity under the Mortgage Guarantee Programme as well, Mr. Speaker. This is clearly a benefit. This project and programme are working.

And I will state, Mr. Speaker, that there is additional capacity for more. So, if you are a first-time home buyer, if you are looking to be a part, please

contact Bermuda Commercial Bank. Find out if the Mortgage Guarantee Programme can work for you. And if you are a public officer who is looking to re-finance your mortgage, also make sure to go ahead to the Bermuda Commercial Bank and avail yourself of that opportunity, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Do you have a supplementary?

Mr. Paul Wilmot: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Paul Wilmot: It is good to hear the great number of Bermudians whom this programme has helped. (Excuse me. Sorry. I am a little nervous.)

Can the Honourable Premier provide the further details on how this programme has helped or has impacted the Bermudians regarding monthly savings and home ownership opportunities?

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I know full well that on Cedar Hill there are many persons who want to know about this. And I am happy that the Honourable Member is making sure to put forward these questions during this time.

Mr. Speaker, for many of these homeowners, this programme has provided real relief. And so, Mr. Speaker, as a reminder, prior to this programme average down payments were 20 per cent. This cut that down payment in half to 10 per cent, Mr. Speaker. In addition, we know that interest rates in the open market were between, you know, 7.0 [per cent] and 8.0 [per cent], sometimes 8.5 per cent. And the programme was at 5.0 per cent. So, for those persons who are doing, for instance, a \$600[,000] mortgage, that is a savings of \$550 a month; for a \$1 million mortgage that exceeds \$700 a month.

So, Mr. Speaker, that is significant money. You add that up for a year, it adds up to just under \$10,000 a year. So, these are real savings that are impacting Bermudians due to this Government's policies on promoting home ownership.

The Speaker: Second supplemental or you are complete?

Mr. Paul Wilmot: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

There is always a risk with guaranteeing. Can the Honourable Premier share any details as to the performance of those who have benefited from this programme?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Member for his question, and here is what is important to note: the Ministry of Finance does get a report every month on the performance of the guarantees that have been placed, because of course the Government is guaranteeing this mortgage. And I can state, Mr. Speaker, that out of all of the mortgages that have been issued, and persons have their house, there is not a single Bermudian who is delayed or late on their payments. That means that this project is working. And it probably is also a contributor to a strong economy.

The Speaker: Okay. That is the completion of your questions.

The next Member who has a question is the Deputy Opposition Leader.

Would you like to put your questions?

QUESTION 1: DUTY RELIEF INCREASE

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. Good morning, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, would the Honourable Premier be able to let this House know whether he has received any feedback from the retail sector, since the announcement of increasing the duty relief for people coming through the airport seems to be aiming toward the direction of more Bermudians buying overseas rather than buying Bermuda?

The Speaker: Mr. Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, whether or not we have had specific response from the retail sector I cannot state. I know that the Chamber of Commerce put out a statement speaking on this particular matter, raising some particular issues. What I would like to remind the Honourable Member is that that duty rates increase was the first increase in 13 years. I do believe that it is in good time, and certainly some persons may say *overdue*, as you want to try to make sure you do these things in good time.

But I think it is also important to remind the Honourable Member of the significant amount of tax reductions that this Government has given to the retail sector in its time and operations, continuing to reduce payroll taxes for the retail sector as we did in 2023 and in budgets before that, Mr. Speaker. So, we will continue to support the retail sector. But it is important to also recognise, note and understand that in Bermuda, which I know is certainly close to the Honourable Member's heart, Bermuda is another world. But we are in many ways, shape or form in the same space and place as other jurisdictions where we are dealing with the change of the retail landscape. And it is important that we adjust, and it is important that the Government supports that adjustment.

If the Honourable Member would like to recall our election manifesto and the conversations and dis-

cussions that we had around that and in the debate of the Throne Speech, was that it was a broader look and a relook in how we actually do assess customs duty overall. That is something that the Ministry of Finance will be taking on during this Parliament, and I look forward to hearing from the Tax Reform Commission if they have any recommendations there. But I want the Honourable Member to be reminded that we have cut payroll taxes for retail establishments to the lowest level in memory.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Ben Smith: Will there be any consideration of changing or lowering the duty rate for the retail sector considering that they are the ones who are hiring the Bermudians? As we continue to lower for people to buy outside of Bermuda, it is important that we are making sure, yes, retail is changing worldwide. But we have to take care of the retail that is happening in Bermuda. Because a thriving city is what is going to help people to want to be here.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, we will have many opportunities to debate a thriving city. As you would note inside of the Budget Statement, approved residential scheme matters are being approved. We are advancing those particular items. There is more investment that is taking place. The City of Hamilton Plan—which I believe if it was not tabled earlier today, it will be tabled in a future session of Parliament—which will deal with the removal of height restrictions in the City of Hamilton, looking to spur investments and doing further things. So, I certainly will agree with the Honourable Member that we need to have a vibrant city.

On the matters that he is speaking about, customs duty relief for retail sector specifically, it is important that Honourable Members know that the way that our customs tariff is currently constructed in line with international norms does not in any way or in the most cases discriminate between whether it is a retail person who is importing or a regular person who is importing. And as I had told the Honourable Member, and I know that he had taken a detailed look at the Progressive Labour Party's election manifesto where it actually did commit to a review of the customs duty.

And as I shared in a debate earlier, it was not something that I was minded originally to go down that road. But I was convinced by the members of my par-

ty that it was a good way to look. And I have said that if it is inside of our election manifesto, it is something that we will look at. Because absolutely we want support. So there is a question of whether or not we cut customs duty overall or whether or not it is that we look to make sure that we cut customs duty for retailers while also leaving a level in place for personal importers.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier. Thank you, Members. That brings us to a close of the Premier's Questions.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: But now we will start the next 60 minutes that takes us through the Question Period on other questions.

This morning we actually have written questions, so we will start the written questions before we go to the questions on the Statements that were given today.

The first question this morning is a written question. And it is a written question that requires an oral response. And that is from MP DeCouto to the Premier.

Would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: CORPORATE INCOME TAX AGENCY, CURRENT AND PLANNED STAFF

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide for this Honourable House the number of staff planned to be employed by the Corporate Income Tax Agency when fully staffed according to its planned operating model, and the number of staff currently employed today at the Corporate Income Tax Agency?

Do I put all three questions, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: No. Separately.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

Mr. Speaker, the current plan for the Corporate Income Tax Agency is to have a total number of staff between 30 and 35. The latest figure is 33 when fully staffed. The agency currently has three full-time staff and one secondee. They are in the recruitment process for 10 additional staff. That recruitment is set to conclude within the month, and there are ads that are set to go out for a further phase two employees, another 11 employees, taking the total number of persons up to 21. But the full complement is 33, and the expectation is by the time those corporate income tax

filings will take place in August, there will be 21 staff in place.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Yes, supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Let us see. If I heard correctly, there should be 21 staff by the end of next August. When will the full 33 planned be attained? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the answer to that question. But I will look to try to set up a meeting with the Honourable Member and the head of the Corporate Income Tax Agency so he can pose all of his various questions at that point in time.

The Speaker: Okay.

Do you have a supplementary or would you like to put your second question?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: No supplementary, Mr. Speaker. My second question.

The Speaker: Second question. Go ahead.

QUESTION 2: GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES PAY SCHEDULE FOR BACK PAY AND PAY RISES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, regarding the pay rises for Government employees as per the Premier's Statement on the 21st of March this year, will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide this Honourable House the most recent version of the payment schedule as of today for back pay as well as for when pay rises will go into effect for pay going forward? Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, before I provide an answer to the question, I must make sure that I set the record straight. Because I think that it is actually shameful—yes, that is the word, “shameful”—that the Honourable Shadow Minister is imputing in the public, not here, that the Government does not have the money to meet the commitments that it has made to the public officers. That is 100 per cent and categorically false. He said it last Friday. He said it on the radio last Sunday. He said it in a press statement, and he continues to state it. And it is false, Mr. Speaker. And so, I accept that—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: And what is most interesting, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Do you want me to sit?

The Speaker: Take your point of order then.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
The fact that payments are being delayed—

[Inaudible interjections]

Some Hon. Members: State your point of order.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Sorry. Mr. Speaker, the Premier is misleading the House.

Because the fact that we know payments are being delayed must mean there was not money for them. There was only one conclusion.

Some Hon. Members: No!

The Speaker: He was giving you the explanation. He was trying to hold you from getting on your feet.

Hon. E. David Burt: See, Mr. Speaker. I would ask, Mr. Speaker, that you would instruct the Whip and also the Opposition Leader on that side that when the Honourable Member puts down a parliamentary question and is waiting for an answer, to not then go into the public and speculate as to what he believes the answer is and why that case is. Which is what he is doing, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: There we are. Now I hear a lot of chirping. I hear a lot of chirping. But I hope they are ready for the answer.

The Speaker: Speak to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: But I had to make sure I prefaced that, Mr. Speaker, because notice: the Honourable Member will take one and one and will make twenty-two without waiting to see whether or not the answer is actually two. So here it is, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that, yes, this Government came to an historic pay deal with our public sector unions, Mr. Speaker. Not with one union, not with two unions as has been done other times where we have one agreement with one union one day and one agreement with another union and another one and all the rest. We came to them all at the same time.

Well, here is the fact, Mr. Speaker. You cannot process those changes in the system all at the same time. This has been explained, and that is the

only reason why these particular matters are being staggered, as has been explained to unions. It has nothing to do with the fact that the Government does not have the money to meet the obligations.

So, to answer his question, Mr. Speaker, I will go ahead and lay out the schedule which has been communicated to the unions.

April 2025, Bermuda Industrial Union [BIU]—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: They are chirping. Do they want to hear the answer to the question?

The Speaker: The public will want to hear you . . . the public will want to hear. Talk to them. Go ahead.

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

- April 2025, BIU, and that is 2024 uplifts and back pay.
- May 2025, BPSU [Bermuda Public Services Union], 2024/25 uplifts and back pay.
- 2024 and 2025/26, uplifts and back pay.
- June, BPSU school principals and Bermuda Union of Teachers, of course time at the end of school because that is a time when there are also adjustments that are made to those things. We have to remember that there are actually people who are required to make all of these particular adjustments. And the one thing you do not want to do, Mr. Speaker, is get those wrong, which creates additional work and additional challenges as well.
- July 2025, BPOA [Bermuda Prison Officers Association], which is prison officers, and FSA, which is the Fire Services Association.
- August 2025, Bermuda Police Association and Regiment.
- September and October 2025, GEHI [Government Employee Health Insurance] and Superannuation adjustments which will be processed. And that is in recognition of the fact that we are, as stated in the Budget Statement, increasing GEHI rates in addition to expecting to pass public service superannuation reform changes, and those adjustments also need to be made in this system so they are properly adjusted for all persons at that point in time.
- Going to 2025/26 for the persons who are done in April and May.
- Bermuda Industrial Union in November 2025.
- January 2026, Bermuda Public Services Union. There is a reason that you cannot do these things in December, Mr. Speaker, because there are a lot of other things that are taking place. That is what is coming from the technical officers.

- And then going to February 2026, for ex-employees and ex-pensioners.
- Moving on to 2026/27, uplifts and back pay.
- April 2026, BIU and BPSU will be able to be done at the same time, as we are not doing multiple years of back lifts.
- In May 2026, we will do BPSU principals and BUT [Bermuda Union of Teachers].
- June 2026, POA and FSA.
- July 2026, Police and Regiment.

The Speaker: Do you have a supplementary for that?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
That was very comprehensive, very comprehensive.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Very appreciated, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members, Members.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I have to say if my employer gave me a pay rise and that was the answer, I would say, *You'd better get cracking on the computer*, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Do you have a question or a supplementary now?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

Was this schedule provided to the various stakeholders in writing—i.e., were they fully informed as to this schedule at the time in writing? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay. All right.
Your third question.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Does the Premier anticipate—oh, sorry. Third question?

The Speaker: Third question. You only have—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: All right. *Much* appreciated, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

QUESTION 3: ESTIMATED GOVERNMENT CASH FLOWS 2025

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is fine. I will move to the third question. I believe we understand the point.

Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide this Honourable House—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide this Honourable House with the estimated Government cash flows, by month in calendar year 2025, broken out by revenue, expenditure and capital spending and in millions? Round numbers will be fine. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as I supplied to you from *Erskine May*, that information will not be forthcoming. What I will state, Mr. Speaker, is that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure are stated well and clearly inside of the Budget Book, which we will be debating during the budget session. In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, it is also important to note that this Government does give quarterly updates on our financial projections and will be happy to continue to do so.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, what I was asking for is not the estimates or the budget. I was asking for the cash flows. And I think anyone who runs a business appreciates the difference between those two numbers, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Sorry. I am repeating my question. I hope the Premier could perhaps explain why he is not able to answer that question. Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: I remain by the answer provided, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. All right. All right.
Thank you.

The next written questions this morning are from MP Fahy to the Minister of Housing.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Michael Fahy: These questions have been provided in writing. And I am satisfied with those responses. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You got your responses?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes.

¹QUESTION 1: PROPERTIES OWNED OR UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE BERMUDA HOUSING CORPORATION

Hon. Michael Fahy: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House of the total number of properties owned or under the control of the Bermuda Housing Corporation, broken down by name of property and address, and identify whether the properties are occupied for purposes of housing, currently empty or being used for storage or other non-housing purposes?

QUESTION 2: PROPERTIES OWNED OR UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE WEST END DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION/BERMUDA LAND MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

Hon. Michael Fahy: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House of the total number of properties owned or under the control of the West End Development Corporation/Bermuda Land Management Corporation broken, down by name of property and address, and identify whether the properties are occupied for purposes of housing, currently empty or being used for storage or other non-housing purposes?

QUESTION 3: PROPERTIES OWNED OR UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE BERMUDA LAND DEVELOPMENT COMPANY/BERMUDA LAND MANAGEMENT CORPORATION

Hon. Michael Fahy: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House of the total number of properties owned or under the control of the Bermuda Land Development Company/Bermuda Land Management Corporation, broken down by name of property and address, and identify whether the properties are occupied for purposes of housing, currently empty or being used for storage or other non-housing purposes?

¹ [Written answers](#)

The Speaker: Okay.

We are moving on. The next written questions this morning were from MP Cannonier to the Minister of Works. And I believe those were also written answers.

You have got your answers? Good.

²QUESTION: PROPERTIES OWNED BY THE GOVERNMENT OF BERMUDA UNDER THE CONTROL AND/OR MANAGEMENT OF THE MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Will the Honourable Minister please inform this Honourable House of the total number of properties owned by the Government of Bermuda under the control and/or management of the Ministry of Public Works and Environment including:

- I. the property name (if any), the property address and Ministry building/property identifying number;
- II. identifying whether the said properties are occupied and by whom and for what purpose;
- III. identifying whether the said properties are vacant?

The Speaker: The fourth is from MP Smith to the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. I should say MP Linda Smith just to clarify.

QUESTION 1: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE IN DUBAI, TOTAL COST OF TRAVEL

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

The question is, Would the Honourable Minister please provide this Honourable House with the total cost to the taxpayer [including airfare/travel cost, accommodation and per diem fees] for the 15-person delegation who attended the International Women's Leadership Conference in Dubai in March of this year?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And thank you for that question.

I first want to start by acknowledging the Bermudian women entrepreneurs and professional delegates who are listening for the answer to that question today who are taxpayers and went through an organised process for this partial sponsorship.

Mr. Speaker, there were six women who were partially sponsored and not fifteen. And they were selected for the Ministry's partial sponsorship. Four women received \$2,500 which went toward the cost of their airfare, accommodation, conference registration

fee. And two women entrepreneurs also received partial sponsorship at the amount of \$3,500 for their airfare, accommodation, conference registration fee, but they were also responsible for organising the delegates to the conference and side events that also occurred within the conference.

I just also want to mention really quickly, Mr. Speaker, that I have witnessed the women delegates who did attend the conference paying it forward and already providing educational sessions and informational sessions to our community. So, I am very proud of the work that they are doing. And they are doing this for free. They are providing informational sessions and educational sessions to entrepreneurs in Bermuda.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Ms. Linda Smith: Yes, I do. Thank you very much.

How was the composition of the delegation and the size of the delegation determined?

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

In collaboration with the project that we did with UNDP [United Nations Development Programme] and UN Women, Mr. Speaker, the women had to have participated in the programming that was offered through that Building Back Equal project. So, it went out to all of those participants, and they had the opportunity to apply to be a part of the delegation. The funds, you know, we had a budget that we stayed within. And that is how they were able to participate.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Further supplementary?

Ms. Linda Smith: One supplementary, please.

The Speaker: Just one supplementary.

Ms. Linda Smith: What has been the benefit to Bermuda of the participation in this conference?

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

I think what I would like to share is the investment in its people. Mr. Speaker, the women who attended are entrepreneurs and businesswomen. And I already spoke about the paying-it-forward. I have also witnessed and have been in sessions in which they are providing to our fellow Bermudians as far as information that they have learnt from the conference in building their businesses, building entrepreneur opportunities, also information as it relates to organisation and also self-confidence-building when pushing their businesses forward. So, I have sat into some of these sessions and have been able to see the work

² [Written answer](#)

that the women continue to do after attending the conference.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That brings us to a conclusion of the written questions.

Now we will move on to the Statements from this morning. And the first Statement from this morning is from the Minister of Housing.

Minister, you have Members who wish to put questions to you in reference to that Statement. The first is from the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

On a point of order, am I able to defer my set of questions to the Shadow Minister, principal substantive Shadow Minister, first and then go after him?

The Speaker: You would like the Shadow Minister to go first?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Shadow Minister, MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Opposition Leader.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: It is. And it is probably the wrong time.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister for Housing and Municipalities made mention in his Statement that there is a waiting list of 50 to 100 people waiting for housing from the Housing Trust. Why is that number not definitive? Why is it 50 to 100? Thank you. That is question one.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Because it is a moving target all the time, Mr. Speaker. It is a moving target.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. So, a supplementary on that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In terms of that waiting list, is the Honourable Minister able to provide statistics as to the waiting list for each of the five properties that come under the Housing Trust, particularly Heydon Park, Dr. Cann Park, Elizabeth Hills Park, Purvis Park and Ferguson Park at the current time?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will be happy to get [the Honourable Member] that information, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

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

In addition to that, what is the average waiting time for people looking for housing with the Housing Trust? And by the way, I understand that this is an independent housing trust. But it is in the Statement, so I think we would like to have some answers to those if possible.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will be happy to supply that, too, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.
Any further questions?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes. Thank you.

The Speaker: This will be your second question. You used the supplementaries.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Second question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 2: BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, in terms of choices of properties, are individuals on waiting lists just told which individual property they can go to? Or is it something that is allocated to a specific property for a specific person on a list? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I would certainly think that the Housing Trust, when they receive applications, you will know that seniors will probably have a favourite place that they would like to stay. And I would think that most of those are accommo-

dated by the trust as they can and as places are available.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Perhaps like the answers to the other questions, the Minister could verify that for us in due course.

I think that is the end of my supplementaries. I have one more question, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Third question, yes.

QUESTION 3: BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Hon. Michael Fahy: Can the Honourable Minister share for us as well the average monthly rent for residents? The Statement made reference to the fact, quite fairly, that rents have not gone up. But what is the average monthly rent for each unit? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will be happy to give a detailed average monthly rental of all of the units for the Honourable Member.

The Speaker: Okay.

The Minister said that he will provide it for you at another time.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I appreciate that. Thank you, and I will liaise with the Minister in due course. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Okay.

Opposition Leader, would you like to put your question now?

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I would. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to . . . I note that in his [Statement] there is a waiting list being of 50 to 100 qualified seniors and that the Government intends to increase the number of senior housing units available before 2026. And we have a projection of one in four residents who will be over the age of 65 by then.

My question is, Is this the only housing solution for seniors that the Government plans to provide going forward?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Absolutely not. The [Honourable Opposition Leader] will certainly . . . he mentioned the statistic, of which I am one. So, the intent is, Mr. Speaker, not only to increase affordable homes for our people, but that also includes affordable homes for our seniors as well.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

So, would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to the other housing solutions that he raised that will be specifically for seniors?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will certainly do that as soon as I possibly can.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Another supplementary or a new question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: A new question, please, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Second question.

QUESTION 2: BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AND CURRENT CHALLENGES

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Second question.

With respect to the Minister's confirmation that the Bermuda Housing Trust receives no direct financial support, would the Minister be able to clarify the Government's expectations relating to the rising maintenance cost that the Housing Trust will be incurring? In other words, what is the Government expecting the trustees to do about these matters?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, you will notice that once you have a look at the financial statements, you will see that the funding is there. But as I mentioned in my Statement, the concern as it is for all Bermudians with regard to any construction and maintenance, is that the concern is with the cost of materials and labour. And of course you will know, you will hear about it in detail in the coming weeks about what we plan to assist the country with regard to those costs.

The Speaker: Okay.

Supplementary or a third question?

**QUESTION 3: BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST
AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
AND CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Third question, please, Mr. Speaker.

With respect to the Minister's reference to the new executive leadership and operational improvements at the trust, would the Honourable Minister be able to speak to how these improvements will reduce waiting times and give greater accessibility to low income seniors?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Not yet. But that will be forthcoming.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Okay.

The Speaker: Supplementary? None.

Minister, you also have Member Campbell. Would you like to put your questions still?

**QUESTION 1: BERMUDA HOUSING TRUST
AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS
AND CURRENT CHALLENGES**

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

In view of our ageing population and the fact that the Bermuda Housing Trust [BHT] has a waiting list . . . Well, before that, Mr. Speaker, I just want to commend the chairman and his board, as well as the employees, for doing an excellent job in getting another clean audit opinion.

So, in view of the waiting list and our growing ageing population, have there been any meetings between the Minister and the BHT with a view to creating or constructing more units for our seniors?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Before I answer that question, I would just like to thank the Honourable Member Campbell, who just took his seat, because he was very heavily involved with the Bermuda Housing Trust in the past. And from what I understand, he did excellent, yeoman work, and I would like thank him for that.

But to answer his question, yes, I have. I have met with the Chairman, Mr. [John] Barritt, and that was one of the things that we did discuss also. So, as you will appreciate, being a new [Shadow] Minister with a lot of ground to cover in that particular area, I will have information forthcoming in the very near future.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

Mr. Vance Campbell: No. That is it.

The Speaker: That is it? Okay. Thank you.

Minister, no further questions for you on that Statement.

Members, the next Statement that has questions this morning is the Statement from the Junior Minister [Furbert].

Junior Minister, the Opposition Leader would like to put questions to you.

Opposition Leader.

**QUESTION 1: PUBLIC SERVICE SUPERANNUATION FUND AND MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE PENSION FUND
2020 ACTUARIAL REVIEWS**

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And with respect to the Honourable Junior Minister's admission that the 2020 actuarial reviews were completed in December that year, but not tabled until May 2025, would the Honourable Junior Minister be able to speak to the specific oversight mechanisms that failed that allowed this statutory omission to go undetected for four years?

Hon. E. David Burt: We would love to be able to provide an answer; we do not actually have that right now. We are trying to figure it out. It seems as though if through the transitions you would note that during 2022, there were some tragic experiences that did take place in the Ministry of Finance Headquarters. There are some things that got missed. One thing was tabled, the CPF. It did not come to the House; remember, there are three actuarial reports. That one somehow did not, and it was not pointed out until we tabled the subsequent reports. So, I cannot necessarily speak to that because there are a lot of persons who were in the Ministry who are no longer there.

It is not ideal. But it was raised to the accountability mechanism of this House, and we have tabled to ensure that.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.
Supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry. Second question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second question, okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. I thank the Honourable Premier for explaining. We do not always get straight answers. Thank you, Mr. Premier.

[Inaudible interjections]

QUESTION 2: PUBLIC SERVICE SUPERANNUATION FUND AND MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF

THE LEGISLATURE PENSION FUND 2020 ACTUARIAL REVIEWS

Hon. Jarion Richardson: My second question is remedial. Given that there is currently an inquiry ascertaining what failed, when would we be able to anticipate any remedial action to ensure that it does not take place ever again?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, there is no remedial action required. There was an oversight that happened. These things have not happened before. And I am quite certain, just as we tabled the three ones this time afterward, the next time there is a review we will table those ones as well.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary? Or third question?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I am sorry. Supplementary.

Can I just get some clarification? Something that was supposed to happen did not happen. Nothing went wrong, and we do not plan to fix anything. Is that the answer the Premier just gave?

Hon. E. David Burt: No, that is not the answer I just gave, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: The 2023 reports were tabled, and future reports will be tabled.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to do my best to not be more pejorative or as pejorative as the Honourable Member was. But if the Honourable Member, who I think may have been in the House at the time, would know, there were some tragic circumstances that took place in the Ministry of Finance, and some of these things that happened are understandable. And I would hope he would understand that as well.

The Speaker: Third question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, supplemental.

The Speaker: Oh, second supplementary. Go ahead.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. So, in industry, we call this *key man risk*. And what it is, we have this in many, many companies where a person is so key to our processes that we often have to in fact insure that person's life should something occur. So, what I am trying to get at is . . . and so my question is, Given that the Government clearly has some key man risk in this system, what are they going to do to ensure that when

we have a key man risk failure again that we do not miss our deadlines? Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I have no change to the answer that was given. This was an oversight; an oversight that has not happened again.

The Speaker: Thank you.

That was your second supplementary, second question. Do you have a third question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Given that the reports were completed in 2020, and this is across two fiscal administrations, and the key man risk clearly having been identified and there being no plans to remediate, my question is therefore . . . well, there are no plans to remediate. My apologies.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Okay. All right.

So that brings us to a close of the questions for you, Premier, on that.

We will move on to the next Statement that has questions. And the next Statement is the Statement from the Minister of Economy and Labour. And the question is from the Opposition Leader. And that is on your first Statement.

Opposition Leader.

QUESTION 1: DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT 2025

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statements. With respect to his Statement given, that the Department of Labour began operating in 2023. But we are only going to formally legislate that with the tabling of this Bill and obviously when it goes through. My question is, The department's actions between 2023 and 2025 undertaken, is there any statutory ambiguity or legal deficiency that could result in court challenges that this lawful authority needs to be given for?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, the answer to the question is none. The department was fully compliant with the laws that were enacted and enforced during that period of time. All documents were signed off by the person who had the statutory authority, which would have been the manager responsible for the labour relations action.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Second question?

**QUESTION 2: DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT
2025**

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Second question, please. Yes. I thank the Honourable Minister for that reply.

Any of those prior decisions, such as civil penalties, referrals and union certifications, will they need to be reviewed for validity given this structural and statutory change?

The Speaker: Okay.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: None, Mr. Speaker. As articulated, all procedures and matters that were followed were in total alignment with the law.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: No further questions. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: No further questions. Okay. Thank you. Minister, there are also questions for your second Statement.

And again, Opposition Leader, would you like to lead those questions?

**QUESTION 1: REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL
REPORT**

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My questions are in relation to the late filing specifically with respect to the Minister's Statement . . . I apologise, Mr. Speaker. I am just looking through my notes here.

The obligation to file the annual report comes under the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act, which requires publication within 90 days, and that obviously was not fulfilled. And my concern is about management and oversight, given that this is the second time I have risen to my feet to bring up the fact that something is late. These deadlines are not a matter of policy; they are a matter of law.

Could the Honourable Minister please explain whether this breach was escalated to Cabinet?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Upon taking over the responsibility of the Office of the Registry General, it was brought to my attention that we were late in terms of our submissions. Mr. Speaker, this morning I apologised to this Honourable House. I will endeavour to ensure that the reports are submitted in a timely fashion moving forward.

The Speaker: Supplementary or second question?

**QUESTION 2: REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL
REPORT**

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Second question, please, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Given that the deficiency was noted by the Minister and he moved to correct it, what remedial action will the Minister take now to structurally ensure that this mistake does not occur again?

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: When we have a compilation of statistical reports where we rely on data that are sourced from multiple agencies and organisations, it is about having conversations with those agencies so that we get the primary data in a timely fashion. Oftentimes we are waiting for data for the full completion of the report. So, you may have 80 per cent of the data that you need to complete a report, and you are just waiting on an outstanding 20 per cent. And sometimes that can hold up the process.

Instead of sending out multiple reports—one would be a preliminary report of the data and then a secondary one when we get all of the information—we have made the determination that you submit one complete report for that particular year.

So being mindful of that, not all of it is on the shoulders of the employees within the Registry General's Department. But again, we will ensure that we seek to be more proactive in our data collection so that we have timely reports according to the legislation.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, please. Yes, thank you. And I thank the Honourable Minister to committing to adhering to these Legislative deadlines.

My question goes down to accountability, where the Honourable Minister just explained that there are people who are not providing their necessary reports in a timely fashion. My question is, Are the right people being held accountable for performance failures as it relates to facilitating this process?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I would not categorise it as performance failure. There are a number of reasons why data are not compiled in a timely manner and

submitted. Some of these organisations are external to the Government of Bermuda, and we have no control over their internal processes. So, what I will say is, to the extent at which we can control our processes, we will make sure that we are expedient and efficient in our delivery of outcomes. But there are times where we are waiting on data. And when we look at the period of time in terms of waiting on data, we did have challenges across the board in terms of even classification of deaths and we were waiting for medical doctors and things of that nature to sign off on reports. That has been well discussed in this Honourable House as it pertains to some challenges we have had surrounding that.

So not all of them are attributed to staff. They do not mean that you have to be punitive or disciplinary as it pertains to one's conduct. I think the public simply wants reports that have accurate and timely data, and we will endeavour to get the public that information.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Second supplemental?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, please. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Would the Honourable Minister . . . and I thank him for his answer. Just to clarify, there will be no remediation action taken as it relates to the discovery of this failure?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Just a comment.
Do you have a third question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry. That was my question. There will be no—

The Deputy Speaker: Oh. So, you had no second supplemental?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: That was my second supplemental.

The Deputy Speaker: So, do you have a third question? No?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry. No.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Any other persons? I think it is Pearman, MP Pearman. MP Pearman, did you have questions for the Minister? Yes. Yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was not sure if [the Honourable Minister] wanted to answer the last one or not.

The Deputy Speaker: [The Honourable Opposition Leader] did not pose a question. He made a comment.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Jarion Richardson: It is that it was a question.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Well, you did not ask it like a question.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Oh, I apologise.

The Deputy Speaker: So, can you repeat the question?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, ma'am.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

Would the Honourable Minister be able to confirm that no remedial action will be taken?—question mark.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Minister can confirm that we will ensure that we provide timely and accurate data.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
And any supplementals to that? No.
MP Pearman, it is your turn.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, well, I have a supplementary to that question before my question.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, you do have a supplemental to that question? Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Scott Pearman: Given the answer just given by the Honourable Minister, when will we see the 2024 report, which is due 90 days after?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam [Deputy Speaker], the report indicates that we are in the process of submitting the 2024 report in the second quarter of this year.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Now, is this another supplemental or your—

QUESTION 1: REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes . . . no. This is my first question of the day. Madam, thank you.

I thank the Honourable Minister for his Statement on the Annual Report of the Registry General 2023 and for tabling this Statement in this Honourable House this morning. The report gives a statistical figure of the Bermuda population of 63,356. I acknowledge that that is an estimate, and I acknowledge that the report indicates that is for the year 2023.

In relation to your Statement to this Honourable House this morning (and I quote with your leave, Madam Deputy Speaker), you said this: "It should be noted the estimated population figures in the report only take into account registered births and deaths and not migration because it is not available. This means the estimates in the report are not indicative of actual population levels."

I know the Honourable Minister is by trade and by expertise a statistician. Would you agree with me that the estimate of 63,356 is far too high for the reality on our Island?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, according to Standing Orders, Ministers are not to stand to this floor and give a matter of opinion. We are to provide clarity and factual information.

The Deputy Speaker: Facts. Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Does the Honourable Minister have other ways to achieve a more accurate population figure?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The next accurate population figure will be provided at the conclusion of the 2026 census. When we get those 2026 census benchmark data, we will then include immigration and emigration

tracking so that we have an ongoing number that is more accurate on an ongoing basis moving forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second supplementary?

The Deputy Speaker: You may. Okay.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam.

Does the Minister himself and his department have a working figure that it uses for its calculations and determinations?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: After every census there is a population projection that is actually provided to the public. And we publicly publish that population projection. And that will give a population for a decade moving forward.

Understanding that, there are also other documents that have population numbers contained in them, which will be the Registrar's report and the Digest of Statistics.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Member.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, next supplementary, final supplementary.

The Deputy Speaker: No. Two supplementaries.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Oh, second question.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 2: REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Does the Honourable Minister take a view of the published statistics from the Chamber of Commerce and its accuracy or inaccuracy as compared to the 63,000 figure?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Unless population data take into consideration accurate statistics regarding migration and emigration, then those data cannot be deemed to be reliable.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Member, do you have a supplemental or—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I do.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: And in light of the Minister's answer just there, and indeed in light of his Statement where he said (with your leave, Madam), "The next opportunity of an accurate population count will be the 2026 census," which the Minister just repeated to Parliament, are there no other ways for the Bermuda Government and indeed Bermuda as a whole to have a more accurate figure prior to 2026?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, the Statement says that the next opportunity for us to have an accurate population figure will be at the conclusion of the 2026 census. I then do not understand how one can ask whether or not we can get to a more accurate figure before the time period when we state, "the next opportunity" for us to get an accurate figure would be the 2026 census.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
You have a supplemental on this?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Well, actually, a point of clarification if there was a misunderstanding.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of clarification?

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Scott Pearman: A more accurate figure would then be an estimate of 63,000 in case that was not clear. I was not saying a more accurate figure than the 2026 census. I mean a more accurate figure than the 63,000 estimate.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you for your clarification.

Do you wish to answer?

Hon. Jason Hayward: It is the Government's desire that we have accurate population numbers. I have looked into a number of ways in which we can utilise immigration statistics to get a better measure of what our actual population numbers are. I have come to the conclusion that it will be an exercise in futility to compile data based off of data which is not sound. As a result of that, the conclusion is that the next time we would have a more accurate population number will be the 2026 census.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Second supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second supplementary. Thank you, Madam.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

What figure is the Ministry currently using for all of its determinations and decision-making?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Statistically, we rely on the population projections in conjunction with the births and deaths outlined in the Registry General's report.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
And the—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Last question.

The Deputy Speaker: Question three. Go ahead.

QUESTION 3: REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. Thank you, Minister.

In relation to your prior answer about the next-most-accurate number coming when we have the 2026 census, when do you anticipate that to commence and conclude, and when will we have that number, do you think? Appreciating it as a timeline.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The 2026 census will commence in 2026.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Any supplementals?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Scott Pearman: Supplementary, yes.
Are you able to give a month within the calendar year?

The Deputy Speaker: A month within the year of 2026.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Prior to the release of the 2026 census, I will ensure that I will provide full details as to when interviewers will be in the fields knocking on household doors to collect the necessary data to complete the census.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: No. Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thanks. Right.

That moves us to, I believe it is Member King who had questions for you, Minister.

Honourable Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, Members of the House and the listening public.

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Robert King: I have a question regarding the statement that was made in regard to marriages. In 2023 there were 310, and there were no same-sex marriages. The question that I have is, Has the law been amended to allow for same-sex marriages?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The law is a matter of public record, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Supplemental or new question?

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Robert King: For clarification, so if it is legal to have same-sex marriage, it just seems a bit confusing to suggest there were no same-sex marriages. It would be like me having a store that sells apples, and then someone asks me, *How many chainsaws did you sell?* It does not make any sense.

[Inaudible interjections]

QUESTION 2: REGISTRY GENERAL 2023 ANNUAL REPORT

Mr. Robert King: The next question that I have is regarding the declining birth rates. It has been established a decrease of 43, or 9 per cent, over 2022 where it was 479. In 2023, it was 436 births. Understanding that a large number of Bermudians are leaving the islands and we have a declining birth rate—you know, leaving Bermuda due to the high cost of living and lack of opportunity—have the Minister and Government now reconsidered its position on Pathways to Status, understanding that we are basically in a crisis state as it relates to population stability? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, no.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Next question or supplemental?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Supplemental.

So, my understanding is that there is no consideration for Pathways to Status regardless of our declining population?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Member, point of order, point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Minister?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Deputy Speaker, this Statement had nothing in it about Pathways to Status. So, the Honourable Member is way out of parliamentary procedure.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

It has been confirmed that the Minister's Statement did not cover that subject material. So, can we have a different question?

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: What I was referring to is we have a declining birth rate, and we have persons migrating to other shores, which means that the birth rate continues to go down and persons are leaving. So, the population is declining. And we understand the implications for the pension, for the cost of living and other things. So, the question is, Is there a strategy in place to ensure that we have a stable Bermuda population by status or otherwise?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government put out a full report as it pertains to the challenges that we are going to have regarding our ageing population. The Ministry of Economy and Labour has been on the forefront of educating the public regarding the challenge but also providing recommendations as to how we believe we can have a sustainable population level and more in particular a sustainable workforce.

Subsequent to the report regarding the ageing population, we then put out a report in terms of reten-

tion of our local workforce because we determined that, based off of our ageing population, we needed to grow our local workforce. That particular paper had a number of policy goals and names outlined in it as it pertains to how we can ensure that we have a sustainable workforce to sustain our economy and our ageing population. And I will encourage the Honourable Member to read through that particular report because we are actively pursuing all of the goals that we had set out in that particular report.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Supplemental to that?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: So, what we are basically to understand is that the population is now increasing because of those measures that are being put in place?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I would say that the overall workforce in Bermuda is increasing. The statistics will show that our workforce is increasing year over year since the report was actually submitted. That report identifies that we need to ensure that we have retention and expansion of our local workforce. It has a number of goals set out there. In that particular report, the goals pertain to ensuring that local residents remain on Island attracting residents back to the Island by ensuring that they have opportunities. And then also ensuring that we have an appropriate balance between the supply and demand of expatriate labour that is required in our workforce.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Member, do you have any further questions?

Mr. Robert King: Nothing further. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
That takes us to the Ministry of Public Works. I think MP Cannonier registered that he had questions.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. My voice is a bit hoarse, so . . .

[Crosstalk]

QUESTION 1: ROAD SAFETY, INFRASTRUCTURE AND COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS: PAVING THE WAY FORWARD

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: On page 2, the Minister mentions midway through—and I will read the sentence: “One of the key lessons learned in recent years is the importance of coordination. Paving a road today only to trench it next month is costly, frustrating, and counterproductive.” As I recall, there has always been a coordinated effort in dealing with many of the stakeholders who actually do dig up the roads. Is the Minister suggesting when he says, *That is why we are working closely with our utility partners*, that that coordination that was put in place many, many moons ago has fallen by the wayside?

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

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, now. I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

The reality is no. That mechanism has not fallen by the wayside. There is a group of utility partners, as well as the government and other stakeholders who do meet on (I believe) a monthly basis. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

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

Supplemental would be then, Why, when the Minister says “paving a road today only to trench it next month” are these things happening if we have this coordination going on?

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, as the term says, *life happens*. There are opportunities where things, despite our best efforts, still go awry. But it is important and part of those meetings . . . it is not just where people trench, but how we can do the work better to avoid mistakes happening in the future. That is part of the process of having those meetings.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

The Speaker: Another supplementary?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, second supplementary.

Considering the answer then, and these lessons learned, can the Minister identify or highlight any new lessons, I guess, based on what is happening presently? Has there been anything that they have identified or highlighted that they were missing in the past that they are now doing with their current coordination?

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. Jache Adams: Two lessons. Effectively how to better communicate exactly where we are going, getting a more cohesive plan in place. But also, in particular, one of the lessons learned is, if you will, allow us to be able to have longer projections.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Second question?

**QUESTION 2: ROAD SAFETY, INFRASTRUCTURE
AND COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS:
PAVING THE WAY FORWARD**

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Second question.

Thank you for that answer, Minister.

Second question: On page 3 . . . sorry. It is just electronic; I am scrolling down. At the bottom of page 3, the Minister mentions in terms of traffic signals and highlights Marsh Folly, St. John's Road and then Crow Lane. These lights have been out for I would imagine now well over a year-plus maybe. And it does mention that we are . . . some boxes or something, trying to get to where it is here. Control cabinets.

Why is this taking so long? It seems like these lights have been flashing and out for forever. Why is it taking so long to get this stuff?

The Speaker: Minister.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Speaker, I will endeavour to get the Honourable Member the answer. The specifics of why it is taking so long I just do not have with me.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

The Speaker: Third question or supplementary?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: No. Considering that he can get the answer, I will hold off on the supplementals.

The Speaker: No problem.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Just to say that, yes, it has been a long time.

Third question. Then I will go to—

The Speaker: Your question, third question?

**QUESTION 3: ROAD SAFETY, INFRASTRUCTURE
AND COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENTS:
PAVING THE WAY FORWARD**

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. I will go down to page 4 where the Minister talks about dates and the operational dates of the plant, asphalt plant. This has been an ongoing saga, in my opinion, where we said that it would be up and running in 2024, by 2025 April. Then it has been pushed back. And I think the reasoning was saying that problems with shipping and the like. Or according to the previous answer, *Life happens*. We recognise that stuff happens.

But then we have a new trajectory rate of January of 2026 that we will have the plant fully up and operational. And I should clarify that April of 2025 was operational, then 2026 operational. And these are specific months, which I appreciate, which suggests that they had been working diligently on this here.

But now this Statement mentions that the first quarter. So it infers—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: January? You want January. Okay, okay. The [Honourable Minister] is going to say January.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, January, first quarter. January is in the first quarter. February is in the first quarter. March is in the first quarter.

So, they were very specific prior, but now we have changed the language to say *quarter*. So is the Minister . . . based on the timeframe (we are talking about several years now), is the Minister fairly confident that the first quarter now? And I will be checking in January to see if he has that stuff. He is fairly confident that we will have it?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Because, Mr. Speaker, I recognise why he is saying the quarter because stuff happens.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, is he fairly confident that in that first quarter, he feels, based on the past, that it has not been that way?

The Speaker: Minister, before you respond, let me just remind folks that it has gone 12:30, but we have only got less than five minutes left on the clock. We will run out the five minutes, and then we will break for recess.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And again, I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

The short answer is yes, we are confident. And a great telling point of where we are—a barometer of where we are, as I said in my Statement, we are expecting the materials to arrive in July of this year. So that will be a great telling to ensure that we are on target with our projections. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

All right. No further questions? All right.

The next item that has questions would be the Statement from . . . let me see. We may get one question in. The Statement from the Minister of Home Affairs.

Minister, your first Statement has the questions. And, MP Fahy, would you like to put that question?

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

The Speaker: Mindful we have only got three minutes left.

QUESTION 1: CARIBBEAN RENEWABLE ENERGY FORUM (CREF) 2025: BERMUDA'S PARTICIPATION

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

The Honourable Minister made a statement that suggested that the Integrated Resource Plan [IRP] had perhaps been presented at the conference. Can the Minister confirm if in fact the Integrated Resource Plan referred to in the Statement was presented in any way at that conference?

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

Bermuda has a current IRP and there is a proposed IRP. So, both are referenced in the conference. The proposed IRP is not open to consultation, Mr. Speaker, and we have a current IRP that was initially confirmed by the Regulatory Authority. Thank you.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

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

More specifically, then, and can I have leave to just read from the Statement, "CREF further provided a platform to share updates on Bermuda's clean energy progress, including our proposed Integrated Resource Plan and the successes from the electrification of our public bus fleet" It would appear that the proposed Integrated Resource Plan was presented at a conference. Yes or no?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: So, the proposed IRP is a public document that is open. It was discussed at the conference as such as a non-confirmed document that is currently under the remit of the Regulatory Authority, managed by the Regulatory Authority, but out to public consultations.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

And with that in mind, the last Integrated Resource Plan was 2019. A new one is supposed to be published at least every five years. Can the Honourable Minister advise when the Integrated Resource Plan is updated and will be published in final form?

The Speaker: Minister.

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

The Ministry and the Department of Energy have full confidence in the Regulatory Authority to do its function. As you would know, operationally there is a separation to safeguard its successes and its regulation. And so, I have full confidence that they will be doing the necessary checks to ensure that we are able to publish a new IRP, or the proposed IRP will be confirmed in short order.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Supplementary or second question?

QUESTION 2: CARIBBEAN RENEWABLE ENERGY FORUM (CREF) 2025: BERMUDA'S PARTICIPATION

Hon. Michael Fahy: Second question. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, if the Honourable Minister could provide a breakdown of attendees and costs for attending the CREF conference, please?

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Sure. At the time in which ministerial travel is published, I will send you a personal note to make sure that it is done. So, thank you.

The Speaker: Supplementary? Third question?

SUPPLEMENTARY

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

I would like to ensure as well that it is not just the ministerial travel, but also [information on those] accompanying the Minister. Thank you, Minister. Can I ask, Who appeared with the Minister at that conference?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: There was a full complement of Bermuda's energy sector, to include the Regulatory Authority and its representation. And representatives, Ministers present would be myself and members of the Department of Energy, as well as—

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Minister, the clock has run out on us at that.

So, Members, we thank you for your participation this morning in the Question Period.

Deputy [Premier], would you like to rise and have us break until 2:00?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I do ask that we now adjourn for lunch and return at two o'clock.

The Speaker: At 2:00 pm.

Thank you, Members.

Members, the House now stands adjourn until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:37 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:00 pm

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

The Speaker: Members, I trust everyone had a nice break from here. Now we are going to resume this afternoon's business.

This morning, we ended on the question period, which means the next thing on the Order [Paper] is the congratulatory and obituary speeches. So let me just open the House.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House now stands open.

Does any Member wish to make a contribution at this time under congratulatory and obituary remarks?

Mr. Premier.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

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

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as expressed last week in this Honourable House, I rise to ask that this House express condolences to you, Mr. Speaker, to the Member for constituency 28 and to your family on the passing of your beloved wife Ms. Miranda Lister.

I know that there will be many things that [will be] said, Mr. Speaker. The one thing that I do know, Mr. Speaker, is that she was kind and generous at all times. I do know that your family has asked that donations be made to the Miranda Lister Education Scholarship at the Bermuda Institute and I can confirm that the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party will be making such a donation. And so, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of this Honourable House we offer our collective sympathies to you and to your entire family. And I know that her legacy will continue, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I would also certainly like to extend condolences to the families who experienced loss in the tragic events of last week Tuesday . . . oh, sorry, last week, Thursday.

One of the victims was the daughter of one of my constituents and one of the most difficult things that we do in this line of work is console those persons who have lost their families to gun violence. And so, Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend my condolences to Mr. Lloyd Smith. I also can extend my condolences to Silita as well on the passing of her beloved daughter and to the entire family, Mr. Speaker.

I would also, Mr. Speaker, like to extend condolences to the family of Mr. Shaquan Williams as well, and I am certain, Mr. Speaker, that many Members will also wish to be associated with those particular remarks.

Mr. Speaker, at this same point in time, there are others who are close to our PLP family who have experienced loss in recent times, Mr. Speaker. First, I would like to extend or ask the House to send a letter of condolences to the family of the late Eugene A. Simmons who was the devoted father of the Senator Lindsey Simmons, who sits in another place, who has lost her father.

I would also like to ask, Mr. Speaker, that this House do extend condolences to the family of the late Fay Hayward, who is the mother of Senator Lauren Hayward Bell, who sits in the other place as well, and who lost her mother last week as well, Mr. Speaker. And I would certainly ask that Members be associated with those remarks. But I am certain that those persons will give their comments.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, inside sticking with the PLP family, I would also like to ask the Honourable House to send a letter of condolences to the family of

the late Alexander “Happy” Abbott, who is the father of Mr. Alexander Abbott, who is the deputy chair of our party, but also (as the Deputy Premier reminded me) a well-known and well-loved individual who unfortunately passed away very suddenly last week.

And in closing, Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I would like to extend congratulations to the outstanding teen of the year—

[Timer chimes]

Hon. E. David Burt: —who was honoured at the Outstanding Teen Awards, Mr. Speaker, thank you—Miss Esi Naylor.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

Mr. Opposition Leader, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do not mean to belabour the point, but I do [wish] to express the Opposition's condolences on the passing your wife and most especially we are very mindful of her legacy. For those of us who also went to the Bermuda Institute we have fond memories. I just would also remark the homegoing service was very beautiful and especially your youngest son's presentation was very heartwarming.

Mr. Speaker, I also rise to give my condolences to the families of the victims of the shooting in Somerset and the entire Somerset community. It is a very, very tight community and having already suffered loss . . . to suffer further must be quite significant. And I pray for their consolation.

Mr. Speaker, I also [send] condolences to the family of Mr. “Chuckie” Berg, a constituent of mine, who through his quiet charity has made substantial contributions to the benefit of our community. One of those was to the Bermuda Sloop Foundation and the *Spirit of Bermuda* ship, which, as we are all aware, does incredible work in the community to educate young persons and give them incredible opportunities to advance their life. So, with that being said, for all of these I give my condolences.

Thank you for this time, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Opposition Leader.

MP . . . Deputy Speaker. Deputy Speaker, you have your three minutes.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I would like to be associated with the remarks of condolences to both Senators, Lauren Hayward Bell as well as Lindsay Simmons during this time of their loss.

I would like to express congratulatory remarks in general for all young people who took part in the agricultural exhibition events and received prizes. But in particular, I will speak to those students from Saint

David's Primary and East End Primary and congratulate them. I will associate the whole House with that because we are proud of our young ones. We really are.

Mr. Speaker, finally, I would like to extend personal condolences to you and to the Lister family and to the Member from constituency 28. Indeed, as has been stated, your wife was a lady of excellence, par excellence. She was an outstanding person in the community. She gave much in terms of education as well as to this House when she worked with the Youth Parliament. And I can attest to the fact that I saw the product of her tuition during her time with Youth Parliament.

I would also like to say there are many who do not realise her entrepreneurial acumen and she is well known by those of us who partook of her peanut butter—she sold the best peanut butter in Bermuda. And I do want to say this, Mr. Speaker, I will be holding your sons to account because they cannot let that die. And you know that I will talk about Russell, in particular, and be more than willing to help him to achieve what his mother mastered. And so, condolences for you and your family, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Junior Minister Furbert, you have your three minutes

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, on behalf of my family, of course, I would like to express our condolence to you and your family, particularly because you are not only the Speaker of the House, and also Dennis Lister Junior III, who is in this Honourable House, we express our condolence to you.

Mr. Speaker it was [an] interesting comment from one of the speakers at the service and the scripture that they used was in Proverbs 31:10. It says, “Who can find a virtuous woman? For her price is far above rubies.”

Mr. Speaker, you found that in Miranda Lister. A virtuous woman uplifts others with grace, leads her family with wisdom and walks through life with quiet strength and unwavering faith. She is clothed in dignity, speaks with kindness and leaves behind a legacy that transcends generations.

Mr. Speaker, Miranda (as far as I know) was by every measure such a woman. Her presence brought light. Her character radiated strength, and her love offered comfort. The lives she touched were immediately richer and the values she lived by continue to guide and inspire all who knew her. Mr. Speaker, may her memory forever be a blessing and may we each strive to carry forward the legacy of integrity, love and unwavering faith that she so beautifully emboldened.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a comment? Minister Darrell, you have your three minutes.

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to send condolences to the family of Ms. Idabelle Simmons, who sadly passed away recently. She was a constituent of MP Ben Smith in constituency 8. And I met her during my campaign in the 2020 election. Her daughter is Ms. Zolita Smith who has been one of my greatest supporters since 2020, and as I learned at Ms. Simmons' funeral, she was a stalwart of the Vernon Temple AME Church. So may she rest in peace.

Also, condolences to the family of Ms. Cynthia Brangman. She is a constituent of constituency 15, and I think the Premier would like to be associated with these condolences as he is close to her daughter. She was from Band Room Lane, Mr. Speaker, and her daughters are Raynelle and Cher-Ann Brangman. Also, although I never met Ms. Brangman, those who do work in my office share fond memories of her. Their very first kindergarten experience—as she was a teacher at the historic kids' college over there at New Testament, and she has had many family ties with many people throughout the years.

Also, I would like to send condolences to the family of Mr. Daamian Simmons. He was a young chef who many people did know. I would like to associate the Premier and I think Minister Lightbourne with this one as well. I met him years ago when he was working at the Coco Reef Hotel. Many people in this community were very proud of the work that he was doing. He was known through COVID-19 through his very popular pop-up outdoor brunches. And his grandmother, Ms. Sylvia Edwards, is a constituent of Pembroke East, constituency 15.

Also, lastly on the condolences, Mr. Speaker, I would like to send condolences to the family of Mr. Robert "Butch" Taylor. He was one of my constituents from Dock Hill. Condolences to his wife Suzanne, his children Tanika, Tanaya, Takia and his son Taurianno. And I was able to greet the family during their time of bereavement. So that is the obits, Mr. Speaker.

On a brighter note, I would like to express my congratulations once again to CARIFTA athletes that participated in this year's games, especially those that returned to Bermuda with medals: Mr. Cameron Adkins, a silver medal in the 1500 metres. Mr. Thomas Cechini, who won three bronze medals in swimming and Miss Tatiana Sousa, who won a silver medal in javelin.

And finally, Mr. Speaker, I probably should have said this one before yesterday, but I would like to send congratulations nonetheless to Mr. Nahki Wells. For the second time in his illustrious footballing career in England, he has guided his team to the championship playoff. Although the result last night did not go

as all of us would have liked, I hope he can pull out a victory in the second leg and I hope that this time will be as successful as the first.

Thank you, Mr. speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister Hayward, you have your three minutes, sir.

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

Mr. Speaker, I want to echo the condolences to yourself and your family, [Junior] Minister Lister . . . I will leave it there. I echo in the sentiments of condolences.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that I have to rise to my feet and give congratulations on this particular matter, but I will do so with great pride. I want to give congratulations to the North Village community club for winning both the FA and the league cups this year.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I want to send congratulations to the president of the Club, Shervin Dill and the vice president of the club, Ralph "Gumbo" Bean, Jr. They did an excellent job, not just with the senior team but also with the youth programmes within the clubs. They were successful at under-18 levels. They were successful at the under-15 levels. They were successful at the under-13 level, and they were successful in the under-11 level this season, winning trophies in each and every one of those categories. And so, I am hearing that the whole house wants to join in—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: —in ensuring that the North Village community club receives a letter on behalf of this Honourable House regarding their success this season.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy Premier, you have your three minutes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. He sounds like he was talking about the Somerset Trojans of old for a minute there.

But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by congratulating Vernon Temple Church for celebrating 99 years last week.

I would also, Mr. Speaker, like to congratulate a young man by the name of Jayden Smith. He was recently appointed as Head Boy at Warwick Academy.

He received a distinction in business. He is also the top goal scorer for the under-18s at Vasco da Gama. This young man . . . oh, I have to declare my interest. This young man that just happens to be my great-nephew. So, he is very smart, very athletic, and I think he is going to go a long, long way. His very good friend, some might say girlfriend, also at Warwick Academy, Miss Chloe Saunders is also the Head Girl. So, they make a pretty good couple.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I would like to associate myself with the beautiful remarks about your wife.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You can say nothing but great, beautiful things about her.

Mr. Speaker, you will know, I do not know if you noticed it or not, but it was one of the biggest funerals I have been to in recent times. I mean, it was . . . there was not even standing room in the place. And what an experience and what a testament to the great lady that she was. And of course, the beautiful part about the service was Russell. He was fantastic—surely came out of his shell and it was a pleasure to witness.

Mr. Speaker, it was a week of heavy losses for our party. And of course, I associate myself with the condolences for the families who lost two loved ones. We had a very well attended vigil last night. I think I saw you there, Mr. Speaker, which was very good to see.

Also, the families of Lindsay Simmons, our Senator [and] our Senator Lauren Bell. My good friend Dean Alexander Abbott. We used to (what we say) run together when we were teenagers, so that was a shock to not only me, but of course to his family. So, my sincere condolences go out to all.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

Does any other . . . MP Whip? Would you like to have your three minutes?

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and good afternoon, colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, I also wish to be associated with the condolences sent on the loss of two of my favourite Senators' mother and father, and I send it to them and their family as well. But I personally want to also give you, Mr. Speaker, the condolences of my family on the passing of your wife. And that also goes to MP "D3" as well. Your wife certainly was a light to certain members of my family, and we will always appreciate it. So again, my condolences as well.

On a brighter note, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that congratulations be sent to a very good friend of mine. He received a [Department of] Sport and Recreation Special Achievement Award for football and that is the one and only David Sabir.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: David is what I would certainly describe as the second longest serving General Secretary in the Concacaf and CFU region and he has served several . . . a long line of presidents. He certainly has served us well and I say *us* because David was hired by the Bermuda Football Association when I was actually on the Council at that time, in 1993. I was on the panel that interviewed him and at that time it was the BFA admin assistant job that we were filling on the loss of Eugene Pearman. And since the reform of the role of admin assistants in football, David has graduated to General Secretary. He, as I said, has had the distinction of serving at least six presidents (and I include myself in that six) and he has a wealth of knowledge in the beautiful game.

He is sought out for counsel on the constitution of football around the world. David is known worldwide, and I would think David even has the capability of moving up a step higher in the ranks of football and FIFA as well. I certainly look forward to seeing that happening. So, I certainly ask that some sort of letter of congratulations be sent to him because it is well deserved.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Whip.
MP Simmons.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies, my microphone. There we go.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning and morning colleagues or good afternoon. I wish to start first by where the Honourable Member left off and that is to thank Mr. David Sabir and to congratulate him on that and for his contribution given to our community of sport here in Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, I also would like to be associated with what took place last night, which was the vigil at Manchester Street in Somerset. I believe that every single Member of this House recognises the hour and that we must all come together to work in community so that we are able to, at least at the very minimum, prevent this from occurring. So, this is bipartisan. It is something that we all see in this House as being important. And I would like to especially send out our best wishes to Mr. Kenny "Yogi" Simmons and his wife, Carmelita Williams for a wonderful event last night and those who participated and those to whom which we celebrated and also remembered and prayed for at this time.

Also, Mr. Speaker, if you do not mind, on a personal note, I would just like to extend to you my personal condolences on behalf of me and my daughter Isabela. And I would also recognise that I have known your wife for a very long time, and she knew me for a long time and in the Seventh Day Adventist community, firstly through Bermuda Institute and then

as it relates to our church family, she is someone who will not easily and not soon be forgotten. She made an impact. She certainly made an impact on each and every one of us. She will be sorely missed, and it is a testament to the life that she lived, to the family that she reared, to those great boys that she has: *by your fruits, you shall know them*. And certainly, Mr. Speaker, to the service that she provided, not just to her family, to church and also to you. So, we celebrate you, we celebrate your family, and we certainly remember you in our prayers today.

I thought it was a wonderful service. I thought it was an appropriate service in recognition of the life that she lived. May she, Mr. Speaker, rest in peace.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member . . . MP Swan.

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

Mr. Speaker, I would certainly like to be associated with those condolences offered to your family, ably put by the immediate past speaker, MP Simmons. I had the privilege of actually travelling with you and your wife to Africa on a CPA [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association] conference. Those tend to be most memorable. And the photos [allow us] to reflect and bring back great memories of interaction on a different level that we truly appreciate. To you and your sons our deepest condolences go out from not only from me, but also from my family who are somewhat intertwined with yours as well.

I would like to send condolences to the Williams and Gibbons family of St. George's and associate my St. George's colleagues with that from [constituency] 1 and [constituency] 3 in particular. Sinclair Williams has passed away this past week, and his nephew Kieshan Gibbons passed away in the UK a couple of months ago. But Sinclair was told by former Deputy Premier that he was an executive member of the Progressive Labour Party as secretary at one particular time—probably around 2007. And I would like to associate the whole House with those condolences there.

And I will be writing something about Sinclair, an outstanding man who I have had the pleasure of knowing both as a political opponent and political colleague but always a friend. His nephew Kieshan passed away in England and his family had to go and get him. He used to work for me at the golf club at another time, Mr. Speaker, so I am very close to that family. My condolences go out to them.

And certainly, I [wish to be] associated with those condolences to Senators Simmons and Bell on their loss as well.

I would like to congratulate the Bermuda Volleyball Association on the success, the silver medallist winning of beach volleyball, Megan Hands, Hailey

Moss and the men's team of Benjamin Barnett and Sean Tucker. They did us proud.

I would like the Littman family who visited Bermuda to celebrate their 30th anniversary . . . they have been spending for more than 40 years in Bermuda. I was happy to join them for dinner. It is always nice when our returns come back to celebrate those milestones.

And finally, Mr. Willet "Bill" Anderson from Southampton, my uncle, who was made a life member of the Blue Water Anglers Club. He joined there in 1958 on the urging of Mr. Reid Johansen, who went up and down the Island and got all the game fishermen to join that wonderful club.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Swan.

Does any other Member wish their three minutes?

MP Tucker.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon.

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

Ms. Robin Tucker: I would like to also associate myself with the comments made by everyone in here today, particularly as it relates to you and to your family.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Robin Tucker: I also attended the service. It was absolutely beautiful. I would want, in particular, to join my comments to what MP Simmons said. And what he said was absolutely spot on. I did not have the privilege that most people in this room and others who would be listening had, in terms of the interactions with your wife. What I did [have], though, was [being] able to see the two of you out and about, you know. [And I] would basically have just sort of like a "hello" sort of greeting and that type of thing. Every interaction that I have had with her, she just exemplified warmth and kindness, and so I was very much able to relate to what everyone else said about her.

And I think that one of the really beautiful things, listening to all the comments that were made by everyone, is that she made an indelible mark on every person that has had the privilege of actually knowing her. And that is a really big deal. And again, a testament to the life that she led.

The Speaker: Yes.

Ms. Robin Tucker: I would also like to associate myself with the condolences extended to Senator Lindsey Simmons on the passing of her father and to Senator Lauren Hayward Bell on the passing of her mom. And also, I would like to extend condolences to

Silita and to Lloyd and Mr. and Mrs. Trott on the passing of Jasmin Smith and also to the family of Mr. Eugene Brangman of Somerset. I have never met him, but he was such a colourful character. Whenever I would go into Somerset I would pass his house, I would look for any updates and all of that that he had written on the walls. Right? I mean, definitely a very colourful character and who will obviously be very much missed in the community.

And then also I would like to associate with the condolences expressed for Ms. Cynthia Brangman, who I knew. She was an ex-boyfriend's auntie, so I knew her quite well.

[Laughter]

Ms. Robin Tucker: So again, condolences to them and as well as the—

[Laughter]

Ms. Robin Tucker: —all of the families . . . there are a lot of families who are grieving right now. And so, I just want to take this opportunity to express condolences to all the families that are grieving the loss of a loved one today.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you very much.

MP DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

First of all, I wish to be associated with the numerous condolences to you and your family, particularly the comments by MP De Silva and MP Simons who have said it as well as I could ever hope to say it.

I also wish to associate myself with the condolences to those who lost loved ones in Somerset. And again, it has been said.

I also associate myself with the condolences to the family of Eugene Brangman. I think we can agree Bermuda has enjoyed his creative and inspiring messages, and I would especially like to extend my condolences to his son, Michael.

On a lighter note, I would like to congratulate Bermudian artist Graham Foster. His piece, *The Wreck of the Sea Venture*, has been put on display at the Hampton Court Palace in the UK, part of an exhibit of highlights from the Royal Collection. Mr. Foster is a very unique and talented Bermudian artist who has a deep passion and commitment to his art. And many of you probably know he did the piece, the mural *Hall of History* at the National Museum of Bermuda, and anyone who has a chance to go up there and experience that would have no question as to the particularly deep commitment he brings to his art.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: You are welcome, sir.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Robinson, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And also, I would like to associate myself with the condolences to your family as I have longstanding roots in Somerset. My grandparents spoke very highly of Mrs. Lister and yourself. So, I just wanted to be associated with that. The service was very phenomenal, well attended and I learned a couple of things that I did not know.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, you know I send strength to you and your family during this difficult time.

I would also like to associate myself with the condolences given for the loss of life in Somerset as well, as this has rocked the community and a lot of folks in Somerset are feeling the loss of such a devastating act. So, I believe that unites us all (as one of the speakers earlier said) in our fight to curb this violence.

On a lighter note, I would like to congratulate one of my constituents, Jasmin Simons, who is having a grand opening today at 6:00 PM for her art exhibit, *The Canvas is Black [Vol. 2]*. I wanted to bring this up because I feel like the collaboration of artists is very key to our culture, and she is bringing together over 22 artists. I encourage my colleagues if they have time since we are probably not going to be going home any time soon tonight, if they could pop out and go . . . I will say there is a \$10 entry fee. It is at 95 Front Street, so I do not want anybody to say I sent them there and they did not know they had to pay. So, 95 Front Street at Karma Nightclub at 6:00 PM.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MP Dill. You have your three minutes.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you. Mr. Speaker.

I want to join with my colleagues, first of all, in expressing condolences to you and your entire family. Your son who sits in this Chamber and certainly . . . your wife, she was . . . I was one of her first students. I can remember her coming home from college and just the encourager that she has been over the years. And she was a woman of great faith who set such a wonderful example, and we will deeply, deeply miss her.

I would also like to associate myself with the condolences that were offered for Ms. Cynthia Brangman, in particular to her daughter Cher-Ann who serves as the head of the Somerset Brigade Band. Ms. Brangman was also a woman who was a great encourager and an inspiration over the years who will be deeply missed.

I would like to also offer condolences to the family of Mr. Brunell Swan. Brunell came from the Somerset community and was a wonderful young man. At his homegoing his colleagues . . . he worked at the Supermart in Somerset. And the comment that was made about him was that it would take four individuals to replace him. That is the tremendous work ethic that he had and one that certainly can be replicated in our community today.

I would also like to associate myself with the condolences to Mrs. Idabelle Simmons, in particular to her daughter Zoleta who is a dear friend of mine. Ms. Idabelle was the [Godmother] to my husband and so we certainly offer condolences to all of them.

To the two Senators as well . . . I would like to offer condolences to them.

I would also like to offer condolences to the family of Eugene Brangman and the families of the individuals that were lost in the shooting last week and the Somerset family and just the commitment to them that we will come forth from this stronger than before, committed to turning around the situation in our community, wrapping our arms around these individuals that feel so hopeless that they believe shooting is the only way forward.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Last but not least, I want to congratulate my wonderful constituents in constituency 36 for the *Eggstravaganza*.

Thank you.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister Furbert.

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

Mr. Speaker, I also want to take the opportunity to associate myself with the condolence remarks that have already been made, particularly to you [on the loss of your] wife, Mr. Speaker. Sincerest condolences to you and your son and your families. Your wife, I mean, we used to share short conversations, but she has always been around and available and community oriented and I know when I had the opportunity to visit schools when she was subbing that she is a very passionate and dedicated teacher and really cared and had a great understanding of her students.

I also want to be associated with the condolences for Mr. Eugene Brangman. Mr. Brangman often used to visit this House, and I have many of the letters in my office from Mr. Brangman, where he was explaining some situation to me. And you know he is going to be a great miss, particularly during the times when the Ministry of Health has their Senior Sports Day where he would participate in the running events there. And so Mr. Brangman, definitely a spirited per-

son, will be greatly missed in the fabric of our community.

I want to also take the opportunity to give condolences to our Senators Lauren Bell and Lindsey Simmons who are heartbroken and devastated with their recent losses and we just want you to know that we love you and we are thinking about you and to continue to find your strength in God and the Holy Trinity.

Mr. Speaker, I want to also take the opportunity to give condolences to the family of Mr. Alexander Douglas "Timmy" from Harlem Heights in Hamilton Parish who recently passed. Just wanting to again hold that family up in prayer.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Lister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon to the listening audience and those honourable colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, first I would like to also associate myself with the condolences given to both Senator Lindsey Simmons and Senator Lauren Bell. I now know what it is like to lose a parent, and I offer them encouragement and strength going forward.

Also, I would like to be associated with the condolences to the families of the victims in the shooting last week, Mr. Speaker. I personally knew one of those victims and Somerset is a community tight knit and when one hurts, we all hurt. And so, for those families, we offer condolences. But for the wider community, we have to come together, and we have to . . . they say *Unity in the Community*. We need to come together—and not just the community of Somerset, but the Island of Bermuda—to stamp out this uncalled for, unnecessary violence that is happening.

Also, I would like to associate, Mr. Speaker, condolences for the unofficial mayor of Somerset, Mr. Eugene Brangman. Anyone that lives in Somerset knows that when you hit the bottom of Sound View and main road, Somerset, and you hit that corner, you look out for what he has written on his wall, painted on his wall that day. Whether it be something funny. Something that he puts out that might not be funny, but to him it might be funny. But you look forward to that. And as said, he was a person that, as a Somerset person, you see him around in the garden, also at Somerset Cricket Club. He was a passionate Somerset community member. And so, the community of Somerset will be feeling his loss. But we offer condolences to his family and to his daughters and his son, which I know, condolences to them.

And, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the rest of the colleagues for offering condolences on behalf of

them to my mother, your wife. Mr. Speaker, so much I can say, but I only have a minute left.

Mr. Speaker, I attended the funeral. And growing up my brothers and I always joked my mom knows so many people. She taught so many people all of this but—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: But attending her funeral—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —attending her funeral, you know, for us as her sons it brought to us . . . there was, I think someone said over 900 people at the funeral.

And, Mr. Speaker, it shows the impact that she had as a teacher, Youth Parliament, in the church, in the community. Wherever she went. And I think for us as her sons and even you, we just have to know that is the legacy she left and we just have to continue on and . . . we might not be teachers, but we just have to continue on what she left in us to carry that legacy.

And so, I thank the House for the comments, Mr. Speaker. And, last but not least, this is Mother's Day this weekend and it will be the first that I will be—

[Timer chimes]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —not having a mother. But I just want to wish Happy Mother's Day to all mothers out there, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, MP.

[Desk thumping]

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

No other Member?

Before we move on, my son has done a good job with thanking everyone just now. And I have to add my thanks to that—not only to those in this House, but to this entire Community—because there has not been a place that I have been able to go since where I see . . . I see . . . I see you there, Deputy . . . Where people are doing what the Deputy is doing with me: shedding a tear. Shedding the tears. It has been difficult.

It has been extremely difficult. But it just speaks to the love that she brought to this community, not only in this immediate family, but Island wide, because everywhere in this Island I have gone people have touched me in that way. And the size of the funeral . . . not only the funeral, but even the viewing the night before. It was just remarkable. The numbers of people that showed up on each of those occasions,

spoke to the love that she has shared in this community. And we always spoke about the journey that she and I had over the 46 years that we were together.

The journey was never about the destinations, but it was about the people who touched our lives and allowed us to touch their lives and if she could have impacted the people, the impact of her touching those lives and those lives touching us was definitely demonstrated in the outpouring that we received from the community, not only in Bermuda, but worldwide. I have just been impressed by people around the world who have phoned, who have sent words of condolences or cards, et cetera, et cetera. She left her mark everywhere she went. And if there is anything that we can take from that is that we are here to touch others. That is what we are here for.

As we walk and move about each day, wherever our walk takes us, we should try and leave a positive trail behind us with those who we have touched during that day. And if we live our lives like that every day, it would be fulfilling the meaning of why we are here.

We are here not just for ourselves, but to encourage those around us. And it is all walks of life, all persuasions of life. Because her . . . our journey took us to all those different places. I was telling someone earlier: in our travels we have sat on dirt floors and ate with people. We have sat across the table with royalty and ate with them. But in whatever setting it was, she was as comfortable no matter where it was. And she made people who she sat across the table from feel like they were a long-lost friend, and she was there to just uplift them, no matter what their circumstance was.

So, I am deeply, deeply saddened. My heart is extremely broken. But I am rejoicing in the life that she lived and the impact that she has had on others. And I am rejoicing in the fact that she walked a faithful life for her entire 46 years that I knew her. She was faithful to her God. And I know where she is going to be on that great gettin'-up day.

So, I rejoice in that.

I rejoice in that.

And I am going to close on this note. I am going to close on this note that what we all experienced this past weekend from her viewing on the Saturday evening, from the funeral on Sunday and the programme that you held in your hand. My three sons did that. When their mother died, they said this is our mother, the only mother that we have, and we are going to make sure she is recognised the way that we want to honour our mother.

And I salute them. And I am sure that their mother would be extremely proud if she had been there to experience what her sons did for her. So, I thank you, Dennis. I thank you, Russell. I thank you, Randall, for what you boys did for your mother. And you are always deep in my heart for that.

Thank you for allowing me those few words and we will now move on.

[Desk thumping]

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

The Speaker: There is one Government Bill to be introduced. Premier . . . oh, Minister of Labour. I am sorry.

BILL

FIRST READING

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: 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: the Department of Labour Act 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.
There are no other Bills.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are no notices of motions.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: Members in the Chamber and the listening audience, we are here today for the Reply to the Budget Statement. And as we have the technician sorting things out for us, once we get the okay . . . we will now start that matter. The Premier will lead us into that matter and then the Opposition Shadow Finance spokesman will present the Opposition's Reply to last week's Budget Statement.

Mr. Premier.

MOTION

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26 BE APPROVED

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Estimates for Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26 be approved, Mr. Speaker. And of course, my recital says you may wish to make a few brief remarks or wait until the conclusion of debate to do your reply. All I will say is, Mr. Speaker, is that we kick off this budget debate in a new time. A time where the country can look forward to increasing revenues and a better economy and I sincerely hope that our debate over the next three weeks will be worthy of the people of whom we serve. I hope that we can make sure that we stick to fact, and I hope that we can have a bipartisan, and full and frank discussions on how best to advance the economic interests of the people we serve.

So, with that, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure be approved.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Any objection? None.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am just rising on a point of order on a procedural matter to see if I can obtain clarification from yourself.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Jason Hayward: We often listen to the Budget replies, and sometimes they are filled with factual inaccuracies. It has been customary that Members do not rise and provide points of order during this period of time. And I am just asking for clarity on whether or not, if persons do intentionally or unintentionally mislead the House, points of order will be accepted during this time.

The Speaker: Well, you did say that it is customary that we allow it to flow without interruption, and I will stick to custom on this occasion.

But I will ask any Member who feels that there is a clarification or correction or inaccuracy that needs to be cleared up, to feel free to do it when you have the occasion to rise on your feet. Okay? On your turn to speak.

With that, we will call on the Shadow Minister [of Finance].

OPPOSITION'S REPLY TO THE BUDGET STATEMENT 2024/25

EMPOWERING THE BERMUDIAN DREAM

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon and good afternoon to the listening audience.

Today it is my privilege to present the Opposition's Reply to the Budget, with the theme "Empowering the Bermudian Dream." We will provide an overview of global and local economic conditions that affect us here in Bermuda, lay out our views on how the Government proposes to spend the people's money, and contrast the Progressive Labour Party's approach with the One Bermuda Alliance approach—that would be focused on empowering Bermudians, so they can dare to dream of a future in Bermuda. We will provide a vision for why Bermudians, especially our younger generations, should want to stay here and return here. Contrast that to the Government, which disenfranchised our up-and-coming generation of students at the recent election.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, while the Government claims to be focused on creating "fairness" for the people of Bermuda, its policies and actions have been ones of economic control and financial shell games. We know that there are many in Bermuda who need help and a hand up. And, like almost all societies, our society can and must be fairer for all.

The Opposition agrees, there have been some Government initiatives that helped many in need, and we have taken care to note and support those, both in this House and in the public. But this current Government has presided over an unprecedented shrinking of Bermuda's population and the associated long stagnation of the local economy that most Bermudians live and work in—even after accounting for the effects of COVID-19. This has meaningfully decreased fairness across the Island.

Mr. Speaker, while the current Government has spoken of many plans, strategies, and initiatives, with the exception of a few bright sparks, the favourable economic impacts on our local economy and finances have been lacklustre for everyday Bermudians. The blame must be laid squarely at the feet of the Progressive Labour Party Government and its failed policies. Many Government actions seem to benefit special interests, party insiders, and those otherwise connected to the Government party.

And, this Government has repeatedly refused to meaningfully engage with and address what has been and will remain our biggest challenge of these decades: a shrinking and emigrating population. This Government has failed to make a case for Bermuda's future.

1. Introduction

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, this Government has failed to convince the next generations that Bermuda is a country for them. And that is because the Progressive Labour Party Government's vision for the future extends no further than the most recent elec-

tion. This Government would rather preside over the decline and fall of Bermuda than take the actions required to see Bermuda rise.

A One Bermuda Alliance Government will make Bermuda rise again, by taking immediate action to address issues like . . . listen in . . . the shrinking population and lack of growth in the local economy. Our goal is to make Bermuda an attractive destination, for visitors, local and foreign investors, and most importantly, Bermudians. We are competing with other jurisdictions not just for business and investment, but for our own people.

Mr. Speaker, we fully acknowledge and support the role of Government to provide a critical social safety net, but we consider that to be a minimum requirement from Government. We know most Bermudians who are able would prefer the opportunity to have a good job, or start a business, or otherwise apply their energy and creativity to take control of their future. The One Bermuda Alliance would set the conditions to empower Bermudians to achieve their dreams, and create an environment of growth, optimism, and possibility. Government can provide a launching pad for success, not just a safety net.

We would do that by creating clarity, consistency, and predictability in Government policies and operations. By not competing with businesses or intruding into their financial affairs, so they are more likely to invest, hire and grow. By being responsive to and working with Bermuda's stakeholders in various sectors. By providing appropriate support via legislation, marketing, and where appropriate, financial support. By not ignoring our own home-grown experts. By judiciously managing our Island's finances to care for our people, Mr. Speaker. Not just today, or tomorrow, but for the long-term future of our people and our children.

And most importantly, by looking forward, and running the race in front of us

2. Global Economy

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's economy exists as part of a bigger global picture and is impacted by trends around the world. Of course, thanks to the unprecedented policies and activities over the recent months of our largest trading partner and neighbour to the west, the United States, forecasts and predictions are particularly difficult right now.

The various Trump policies on tariffs, shipping fees and other changes to international relationships and agreements have seriously disrupted the way the world has been working, Mr. Speaker.

These changes have introduced volatility and uncertainty to economies, businesses and supply chains around the world. At this point many countries and businesses are rethinking their trading relationships, their supply chains, and when, where, how or

even if to invest. And while some might argue that the Trump phenomenon will be short-lived, the impacts will not be. The changes that countries and companies make over the next few years will likely stay in place as organisations and countries seek to insulate themselves from any future volatility.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the world has reached a watershed moment. A decade-long period of stability anchored by stable US-backed international rules with a historically low rate of global conflicts is coming to an end. To some, this moment looks like the 1930s, which led into World War II, or the late 1800s around the American Civil War. Many parts of the world are moving back to a transactional and zero-sum approach, focusing only on themselves.

Mr. Speaker, as the global political system becomes more fragmented, companies and countries are focusing on safety and security rather than efficiency. This in turn leads to duplications in the global economy, adding delays and costs everywhere in the global economy. What does that mean for Bermuda?

First, tariffs and shipping fees will increase the costs of goods in the United States. This will impact Bermuda, since we look mainly to the US for our goods, increasing our cost of living. Even if tariffs are not as high as originally projected, and Bermuda companies identify alternate supply chains, sorting this out will take time and add cost.

Secondly, Mr. Speaker, we can expect an economic slowdown in the United States, and we are already seeing signs of it. As you know, if the US economy sneezes, the Bermuda economy catches a cold and continues to remain ill long after the US has recovered.

Thirdly, financing costs are now rising around the world on the back of increased yields on US Treasuries due to the economic uncertainty. This means increased interest costs when the time comes for Bermuda to refinance its very large debt, limiting our government's financial flexibility.

Fourthly, Mr. Speaker, economic uncertainty in the US may reduce the number of American residents who want to spend money to travel or the amount they spend if they do travel—perhaps negatively impacting our tourism sector.

There is some potential for silver linings, although they won't offset the bigger picture problems. For example, there is an opportunity to market to more Canadian visitors, who may now wish to avoid the US.

Mr. Speaker, our well-respected world-class regulatory regime and unique mid-Atlantic location should be attractive to businesses that wish to avoid the United States. The Government should continue and increase its canvassing of the various trade organisations on-Island to see how Bermuda can support initiatives in these areas.

Finally, this new era of global uncertainty means we cannot take any particular outcomes for

granted. We must plan for the future thoughtfully. We must manage our funds with particular care, knowing that economic downsides are real possibilities. We must carefully consider where to launch initiatives and place our investment bets. We must act swiftly and effectively to get the best results possible. The current Government status quo of poor decision-making and accepting mediocre results is no longer fit for purpose and has not been for a long time.

Mr. Speaker, put another way, we are looking at a potential economic crisis, on top of our current cost of living crisis and these demand action and results.

3. Local Economy

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, when we look to the local economy, it is important to dig beneath the surface of the available statistics and examine multiple perspectives to assess the true economic state of our Island. For our reference, we use 2017, the start of this current Government's economic stewardship. While this Government still likes to point to COVID-19 as an excuse for issues, the rest of the world has moved on. We must too.

3.1 GDP

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: At a high level, Mr. Speaker, the total economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product, or GDP, has seemed reasonable with increases over the last few years. And the overall unemployment rate—the fraction of the population that wants to work but cannot—is indeed low. But these figures hide troubling trends underneath.

Mr. Speaker, a closer look shows us that our total GDP improvements have been driven almost solely by international business and financial services. Local business output has remained essentially flat. And detailed jobs numbers show fewer people working in Bermuda, fewer Bermudian jobs, high youth unemployment, and an ageing workforce—our demographic crisis unfolding right in front of us.

Local business output has remained flat. Fewer people working in Bermuda. Fewer Bermudian jobs. High youth unemployment and an ageing workforce. As I said, Mr. Speaker, a demographic crisis.

In “real” GDP, after adjusting for inflation, [Bermuda's] economy grew 8.7 per cent from 2017 to 2023, or 1.4 per cent per year, on average. By comparison using OECD [Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development] data over the same time, the Euro Area grew 6.7 per cent (or 1.1 per cent per year), the USA grew 13.9 per cent (or 2.2 per cent per year), and the world overall grew 16.8 per cent (or 2.6 per cent per year).

Looking into the breakdown of Bermuda's GDP by industry, we see that a massive 76.1 per cent of the GDP growth was driven by international busi-

ness [IB], rising to 87.4 per cent after adding in other financial [and] insurance activities. Bermuda's GDP growth was due almost solely to [these] industries.

In fact, from 2017 to 2023, IB grew a whopping 25.0 per cent,—

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —or 4.1 per cent per year.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Local business, that is, everything except for IB and financial services grew only 2 per cent, or a meagre 0.3 per cent per year. That is essentially no growth at all.

And I know there were some comments earlier, but I would remind the viewers that these are government statistics. To aid understanding for the people in the Chamber and who get this online, there is a chart that illustrates.

3.2 Retail Sales and Shipping

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, other key indicators for the health of the economy are retail sales and shipping. These continue to show declines. Looking at full-year retail sales data for 2022, 2023, and 2024, after adjusting for inflation, total sales were 1.9 per cent lower in 2024 than in 2022.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Out of the seven sectors, after adjusting for inflation, lower. Out of the seven sectors reported, only motor vehicle sales and service stations showed an increase.

In fact, in 18 out of 24 months in 2023 and 2024, or two-thirds of the months, total sales were lower than the same month a year before, adjusted for inflation. To help those following along in the Chamber, for food and liquor, these numbers are 16 months and 20 months, respectively.

Now, I am just going to add something that is not written here. But the people—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —eating less and drinking less. That tells you something is up.

Thanks to emigration and cost of living increases, there are fewer people buying things, spending more, but getting less.

Mr. Speaker, container volumes point in the same direction of fewer goods being brought to the Island and purchased. Although container volumes from April through September last year were up from the prior six months, they were still down 9.6 per cent from the same period in 2020, before the pandemic.

And “breakbulk,” which includes heavy equipment and construction materials, was 27.0 per cent lower than the same period last year.

All of these data confirm our view that the local, bricks and mortar economy is not doing as well as we would like.

3.3 Jobs and Population

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, one of the Government's favourite-cited statistics is the unemployment rate, which was 2.8 per cent in the November 2023 Labour Force Survey. What is driving this? Fewer people and fewer jobs. The reality is that the number of people has shrunk faster than the number of jobs. Government has outsourced our unemployment, as people who can't find work have been emigrating.

Shockingly, youth (those between the ages of 16 to 24), their unemployment was a whopping 13.5 per cent, over four times the average.

Mr. Speaker, according to the [Bermuda Job Market] Employment Briefs report, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda lost 793 jobs from 2017 to 2023, or –2.4 per cent. This was actually a loss of 1,438 jobs for Bermudians and spouses, but a gain of 787 jobs for non-Bermudians. And all those missing jobs are for workers under 55—who should be the backbone of our workforce. The largest increase in jobs is for workers over 65 per cent, presumably they have been unable to retire due to the cost of living.

Mr. Speaker, we struggle to reconcile this disturbing loss of Bermudian jobs, high youth unemployment, and seniors having to work longer, with the Government's claims of a “fairer Bermuda.”

The reality, Mr. Speaker, which we all know, is that people are leaving Bermuda for opportunity. They are leaving Bermuda for social support. They are retiring. Or they are reaching the end of their life. Anecdotally, everyone has friends, family, and acquaintances who are either thinking about moving away or who have already gone. In fact, survey results [released] last year show that over 70 per cent of Bermuda residents are at least thinking about leaving Bermuda. And this is no doubt even more likely among our youth. They are looking for opportunity, they are looking for support, and they are looking for a dynamic, thriving place to live. And while many of our youth were denied a chance to vote at the ballot box, we can be sure the younger generation will vote with their dollars and their feet. Mr. Speaker, they already are.

Mr. Speaker, other reputable reports and data all reinforce that Bermuda's shrinking population is a crisis that must be treated as a national emergency.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Government's own report, “Addressing the Challenge of an Ageing Population [in Bermuda]” described the problems very well. It also

described the negative impacts on our economic growth, health care, and pensions. And I don't know about you, Mr. Speaker, I don't find any of this amusing.

Here is the short version: you can't grow the economy with a shrinking population. You can't reduce the cost of living with a shrinking population.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And you can't properly fund health care and pensions with a shrinking, ageing population. We can either have more people, each paying less tax, or fewer people, each paying more tax. Government's own estimate for the required increase in the working population at that time was 8,418 workers, or 25 per cent.

Mr. Speaker, organisations like the Chamber of Commerce—which I would suggest is reputable; you can have your own opinion—have done a commendable job of conducting research. Its March 2025 economic report [*Head or Tails—A coin has two sides*] provides a credible estimate of our population from as low as 54,651 to 56,683 people, or at least 10 per cent less than the 2016 census of 63,779. The Chamber also provides a perspective on the ageing workforce that is complementary to the Government's report—it's not just a loss of workers. It's also the loss of their experience and knowledge.

So how many people do we need working in Bermuda to maintain a growing and vibrant economy and society? Reasonable people can disagree on the exact number, but no one can disagree that the answer is more than we have now, by at least several thousands.

Mr. Speaker, we in the Opposition have seen no realistic, credible, or effective strategy from this Government that will address the shrinking population with the urgency and impact required. Instead, the Government has continued cynically to attempt to use the difficult and complex topic of immigration to divide Bermuda, for short-term political gain.

We know that part of the answer is to make Bermuda a compelling home that Bermudians want to return to.

3.4 Salaries and Cost of Living

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, let's talk salaries and cost of living. All those statistics might seem abstract to Bermudians who are working day-to-day. Our people who are trying to pay the rent, buy the groceries, keep the car running, and stop the house from leaking. How are these workers doing? Based on recent government statistics, we know that the median gross annual income across all workers grew 2.4 per cent from 2022 to 2023. But much like the higher-level economic statistics, there is a lot of variation here across industries. For IB and financial services, the

average median increase was 6 per cent, and for everything else, only 1.8 per cent. What does that mean?

Over the same period of time, based on the December 2023 Consumer Price Index, costs rose 2.4 per cent. This increase is just about the same as the median salary increase for all workers, and one-third higher than the median salary increases for workers in "local" industries.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: In fact, rent costs grew 2.7 per cent, driven by 1.7 per cent increases for properties under rent control, and 3.5 per cent for properties not in rent control. Mr. Speaker, I know that some in this Chamber find these statistics amusing. I can assure you, there are many areas of this country where these are matters of getting by in life.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Food increased 2.9 per cent and health costs increased 2.5 per cent. At the end of the day, while it is true inflation has slowed, for most people costs are still rising faster than their incomes. And that's why Bermudians remain very concerned about their cost of living.

I will say it a different way. Bermudians are very concerned about their cost of living.

3.5 Tourism

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, tourism has seen some improvements from 2023 to 2024, but remains far behind 2019, and continues to remain behind our competitors to the south. Tourism arrivals by air are 15 per cent higher from 2023 to 2024 but are down 27 per cent versus 2019. Airline capacity is 25 per cent higher than the prior year, but still 6.4 per cent lower than in 2019.

By comparison, Turks and Caicos has seen air visitors increase 51 per cent since 2019. Bahamas' air visitors are at the same level as 2019, and Cayman's air arrivals are down 14 per cent versus 2019 (or only half the gap of Bermuda since COVID-19). While many competitors are having record years for tourism, our Government is still talking about COVID-19.

It's clear that our snail's pace tourism recovery is another crisis that requires swift and decisive action.

4. International Business

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, while we rely on tourism as a key component of our local economic activity, providing a variety of jobs, attracting visitors, and consuming goods and services, it's currently IB that drives our economy. IB drives our GDP. As a sec-

tor, IB is our largest employer. IB employees are economically influential consumers of goods and services. Business travellers contribute to our air traffic and spend in our hotels and restaurants. IB spending fuels our professional services sector.

And IB provides a major component of Government's revenue—perhaps as much as 25 per cent in direct payments such as payroll tax and companies fees, and even more considering other tax payments made by IB companies and employees such as customs duty, land tax, and foreign currency fees.

With the corporate income tax (CIT), IB's contribution to Government's coffers will be even more influential. We must pay close attention to the dynamics of these industries.

Mr. Speaker, while IB encompasses much more than insurance and reinsurance, these two industries drive the lion's share of IB's economic activity on Island. Over the past few years, insurers have seen a relative “hard market,” with good returns as demand has risen, capacity has stayed flat or shrunk, and the market has brought pricing discipline to many areas. In addition, there has been very good growth in new markets such as cyber insurance.

These good years in insurance have led to above-budget Government payroll tax receipts. However, headwinds have already started for international business. Property reinsurance rates peaked in 2024, with increases slowing to only 2.3 per cent for the year, with average rate increases decreasing by 6.6 per cent at January 2025, and in some cases as much off as -15.0 per cent.

Insurance cycles don't last much more than a few quarters in today's market, and while the industry as a whole remains positive, it has already come down from its recent peak. New capital is available in the insurance market, suppressing prices, and many clients have had good history with their insurance and also demand lower prices.

Mr. Speaker, many large insurers are facing earnings headwinds from catastrophes such as the Los Angeles [LA] wildfires occurring early in the year, with peak hurricane season and other risk periods still ahead, and a backdrop of constantly growing natural catastrophe losses year on year. Fast-growing areas like cyber [insurance] are slowing, as insureds better understand their risk and control their insurance costs by buying less insurance or seeking lower premium, further reducing insurers' profits.

Mr. Speaker, the question mark of corporate income tax hangs over the industry. As IB starts to pay taxes, how will companies react? What business will stay? What business, if any, will leave? How much will IB reduce its charitable giving, leaving more for Government to pick up? Will the Government do what is needed to keep Bermuda attractive for international business? Will the OECD throw another wrench in the works to disrupt our economic model, which competes against their jurisdictions?

We won't know for a while.

5. Government Performance

5.1 Pension Challenges

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Bermuda's demographic crisis—an ageing and shrinking population—has negatively impacted our public pension funds: Public Sector Superannuation Fund [PSSF], for Government Employees, and Contributory Pensions Fund (CPF), also known as Social Insurance.

Mr. Speaker, for defined benefit funds such as the PSSF and CPF to work properly, all the components must be in balance: the proportion of active workers paying in versus the number of pensioners receiving benefits; the investment results; and the number of years that workers pay contributions into the pension fund versus the number of years they receive benefits.

In the case of both the CPF and PSSF, many of those elements have become unbalanced, and the ability of the funds to support their beneficiaries in the future has been compromised. The most recent actuarial review of the CPF in 2023 shows that the CPF funds will be exhausted in 2042, two years earlier than predicted in the 2020 review. As the report states, “the CPF is not financially sustainable for the long-term;”.

Mr. Speaker, there are fewer workers contributing into the funds, while the number of beneficiaries has increased. In addition, beneficiaries are living longer and receiving payments for longer. And the Government has increased pension payments for the CPF, without corresponding pension contribution increases. Government has cynically sought political credit for those increases, without doing the work to secure the foundation of those payouts for the future—even though the underlying issues have been known for several years.

We were glad to see that reforms to the PSSF have been agreed with the Public Service and look forward to the changes being implemented promptly. However, there has been no progress with the CPF social insurance. Without reform, [many] Bermudians working today should not rely on social insurance in the future. We are glad to hear that the Government says it plans to reform the CPF but are puzzled why this is delayed, yet again, to next year. Government's statement that the pension fund investments are well-managed is true, but irrelevant. Government's continued failure to address the long-understood structural issues is its own kind of mismanagement.

5.2 Health care

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, turning to health care. After eight years of this current Government, health care costs in Bermuda have continued to rise. And most of us have a story of a friend or relative

stuck on beds in the hospital hallways or suffering long waits due to lack of staff.

Government has focused on increased expenditures on electronic medical records, plans to shuffle the taxpayer money around without actually addressing the underlying costs, and they have damaged relationships with medical professionals after threatening to lock them up over paperwork. Meanwhile, key information required to inform decision-making, like the National Health Accounts, is delayed and incomplete.

Mr. Speaker, from year one, the block grant to the hospital was a bad idea. While the thinking behind it seemed reasonable—make the hospital pay attention to its costs—it's clear that it has not worked. The block grant is not enough money to properly run the hospital, pay for staff and equipment, and keep the facilities up to the required standard. Compounding the problem, at times the Government has not even made the payments as promised by the block grant on time or in full. This grant should be scrapped, or the amounts reviewed on a regular basis to properly support the hospital requirements.

Under the block grant, the hospital is not able to charge “fee for service” on most of its procedures, that is, charge for each procedure or service provided. This forces the hospital to view every part of its facility as a cost centre. Understandably, the hospital has trimmed operations to reduce its costs. This includes closing operating rooms, reducing services to our Island. In addition, Mr. Speaker, while the public service has just received a large pay increase, the hospital has been unable to increase wages, leading to low staff morale and difficulties recruiting staff.

Mr. Speaker, the knock-on effects have reduced health care performance and increased costs for everyone on the Island. For example, because there are fewer operating rooms open, more people have to travel overseas for procedures that could otherwise be performed on Island. These overseas procedures, with associated travel costs and “international patient” rates at US hospitals, have inflated insurers costs, which are then passed on to residents via increased health care premiums. So, Government's attempts to reduce costs have in fact increased costs.

We are also very aware of the problem of hospital wards filled with seniors because we lack the appropriate facilities to care for them. This in turn, causes a blockage of use for new patients.

Another issue of concern is Bermudians without health care or with poor coverage attending the hospital emergency room for ailments that could be dealt with by a family doctor or GP [general practitioner]. Put another way, Mr. Speaker, a huge driver of our health care costs is that we are not taking care of our people in the right place.

Mr. Speaker, we need a variety of facilities to take care of seniors and others, that are less expensive than the hospital but still provide the appropriate

care. These are sometimes known as “step-down” facilities, such as skilled nursing facilities, long-term care facilities, and residential and outpatient rehabilitation facilities. We also need to give all Bermudians access to a primary care doctor.

Government's promised “universal health care” to date really means some expanded benefits for people who already have some form of health insurance. This is a step in the right direction, but not the same as “universal” care. Almost 4 per cent of workers with permanent employment, 1,300 people, do not have health insurance.

We are also glad to see progress in reducing drug prices by ensuring people have access to the lowest cost provider possible—with the caveat that this has to be implemented fairly and efficiently for all stakeholders, not least the patients and pharmacies.

Similarly, while initiatives like electronic medical records are useful and increase efficiency, they do not address the core underlying issues, which we have outlined. Finally, underlying all of this is our shrinking, ageing population which requires more health care spending per person, with fewer people paying health premiums.

At the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, we support making sure that all Bermudians have access to quality health care. We believe that this can be done in conjunction with the private sector—doctors, allied health professionals, pharmacies, and insurers—with targeted Government support and programmes. We would not support a fully Government-run “socialised” health care medical system with a reduction of options for people in Bermuda.

6. Education

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, education is one of the most important components for success in life. It comes in many forms, from hands-on to bookwork. Bermudians need to be well-educated, in whatever form that means for each person, so they can be empowered to take control of their own success. A well-educated populace with a mix of critical thinking skills and hands-on technical abilities is required to power our economy, keep Bermuda running, and produce an engaged and informed citizenry.

Our public education system is in crisis. While many or even most agree that reform was and is needed, it's clear that the Government's current reform project is stalled or even failed. Now that Government's spending on the “Innovation Unit” consultants has grown to \$8.4 million, Bermudians can rightfully ask, *Are we getting results for our taxpayer dollars?* For many Bermudians, the answer is a resounding no, as shown by the increasing fraction of students enrolled in private schools.

Parents are particularly frustrated with the poor provision of special education and support for special needs, despite the fact that public education

costs far more than private schools per child. Many families leave the Island to obtain the education support their children deserve. Bermudians deserve high-quality public education, and getting this reform working effectively is critical to our future. We believe that a critical piece of the solution is an Education Authority that is independent from political control, and accountable for educational outcomes.

7. Housing

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Turning to Housing, Mr. Speaker. The One Bermuda Alliance believes that all Bermudians must be able to live in dignity, and this includes securing affordable housing. The housing situation [in Bermuda] has left many puzzled. Why, with an acknowledged decline in population, is housing harder and harder to find, at all levels of the housing ladder? The reasons for this housing shortage are incredibly varied, and include vacation rentals, rent control and landlord tenant issues, and shifts in society like divorces, post-COVID-19 splits, and younger generations wanting their own space.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Recent work by the Chamber of Commerce Economic Committee has provided valuable insight, that the average household size in Bermuda has reduced. That is, even with fewer people on Island, we need the same or even more units, as each unit will house fewer people. This is of course compounded by people not wanting to rent for fear of locking up their assets with a bad tenant or they choose to host a vacation rental for increased income.

Ultimately, we need more housing supply at a range of sizes and a range of price points. And we need to recognise that for many, home ownership may not be the right answer or even the desired answer. While “owning a piece of the rock” has been a dream and path to intergenerational wealth for many generations, that is no longer true for everyone. Younger generations often value experiences and flexibility over the anchor of a home. They may plan to live internationally for a while, or simply prefer to avoid the expense, risk, and hassle of ownership, while relying on financial investments for their retirement and family assets.

Mr. Speaker, the rate of development of new housing units has been at a historic low since 2014, and we can presume this has been further offset by buildings falling derelict and owners removing units from the rental supply. Therefore, housing is yet another national priority. Addressing it will require a mix of approaches, in balance.

Landlord-tenant laws and rent control need immediate reform to incentivise owners to rent, giving protection both to the property owners as well as the renters, in a fair and proportionate way. For example,

streamlining the process for removing bad tenants and ensuring legal disputes are handled quickly and fairly so all parties can get resolution without excessive delay and costs. Also, enabling property owners to raise rents in a measured way, so they can properly maintain their properties and get a reasonable return in the face of rising insurance, maintenance, and energy costs. Mr. Speaker, many renters will need support to afford their housing, but that support should come from the Government, not be shouldered by private property owners. We look forward to working constructively with the Government when it brings forward its promised reform.

Mr. Speaker, Government can incentivise the development of brownfield sites and derelict buildings, including unused Government properties. These incentives can include tax breaks on payroll costs for construction labour or land tax breaks, with increased incentives to provide rent-controlled or otherwise low-cost units. As an added benefit, this can be a way to move unused properties off the Government's balance sheet. We also support the Government's proposed duty breaks for construction materials, and suggest they go down to zero for affordable housing initiatives.

While we cautiously support in principle Government's plans to address derelict property in private hands, this needs to be handled in a very sensitive way, ensuring that the rights of families that own properties are fully respected and that they also gain a return from their family assets.

Mr. Speaker, we need to provide more flexibility in how we build. How can we amend our codes and techniques to enable efficient and cost-effective designs that can attract capital, while keeping up our high standards for safety and quality? Building technologies have advanced over the years, so should our regulations.

The City of Hamilton has an important, perhaps central role in expanding our housing supply, which we will discuss later.

It's clear, Mr. Speaker, that if we want different outcomes—more housing—we need to change how we do things.

8. Energy

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Turning to energy, Mr. Speaker, last but not least of the cost-of-living drivers is energy. We in the Opposition proposed to give the Regulatory Authority (RA) more legal power to take into account costs to consumers when setting BELCO rates. We welcome Government's promise to limit the costs BELCO can recover from customers and give the RA power to consider if pricing is fair. This will improve alignment between BELCO and the consumers when BELCO plans its investments and spending.

We would also support ways to streamline the deployment of renewable sources of energy so that they are cost-effective and ultimately reduce consum-

ers' costs. This may mean speeding up and simplifying permits, looking at duty relief for certain classes of customers, and allowing more flexible ways of connecting to the Island's energy grid. We welcome and support all Government initiatives that are aligned with these goals.

In terms of subsidising or directly investing in energy projects, we believe the private sector is best placed to assess and take that risk. The OBA will work to remove barriers and roadblocks to efficient deployment. Our decisions must make economic sense for consumers and the country.

9. Government's Financial Performance and Fiscal Plans

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, turning now to the Government's recent financial performance, it is disappointing yet unsurprising that the Finance Minister persists in his charade of a so-called "surplus" for the recently concluded financial year. It reflects poorly on his credibility as a steward of our finances and, by extension, the Government and our country.

The independent Fiscal Responsibility Panel 2024 report used terms such as "regrettable," "of particular concern," and "should not be repeated" to describe the Government's use of off-balance sheet spending to achieve policy goals. Alarm bells sound when governments spend money directly from the Sinking Fund without Parliamentary oversight, by-passing the very process of scrutiny we are engaged in today. That is strong language for a bureaucratic report. What is particularly galling is that the Government passed a law specifically enabling it to spend borrowed money without oversight.

Mr. Speaker, we would also suggest that if any Chief Financial Officer in international business manipulated their results like this, they would be fired.

These funds were spent on health care and housing—noble goals—but like any other spending, this spending must be subject to the oversight of the Members of this Parliament elected by the Bermudian people. And the fact that this sort of spending is normally "above the line," including in this current budget, shows that transparency is the proper approach.

Putting aside Government's misrepresentation, and properly adding up the spending, last year's finances came in at a \$54 million deficit, the year before had an \$80 million deficit, making a \$134 million cumulative deficit over two years.

Mr. Speaker, the table in the Statement restates the budget years 2023/24 and 2024/25 to present the true picture of the spending versus revenue by including the off-balance sheet spending.

Mr. Speaker, based on the revised estimates, last year's deficit was driven by \$1.3 billion of spending offset by \$1.25 billion of revenue. Revenue's \$16 million beat to budget (or 1.3 per cent above budget) was primarily driven by a \$26 million budget beat for

payroll tax, offset by other areas producing lower-than-expected revenue. We were glad to see an increase in the Hotel Occupancy Tax receipts but also note a 12.0 per cent decrease in immigration receipts, perhaps indicating a slowdown in work permits among other things.

Mr. Speaker, as the Government Budget Statement noted, the better-than-expected payroll tax result was driven by IB salaries, which would include bonuses (which is out of Government's control) and should be treated as a pleasant surprise, rather than an intrinsic result of Government policies. Additionally, income from payroll tax, customs duty, and the Foreign Currency Purchase Tax will rise with inflation (since IB typically increases pay with inflation), creating revenue rises. However, this is not true organic growth of Government revenue streams. So, while at first blush these rises seem to help Government budgets, they actually reflect pain for people working in the local economy, whose cost of living is increasing. Government expenses will increase with inflation as well.

Mr. Speaker, spending for last year is projected to come in at \$70 million over budget (5.7 per cent), driven by unbudgeted health care subsidies and support for housing. The overspend was reduced by staff costs coming in at \$12 million under budget, among other things. We also note the increased insurance costs, reminding us that Government is subject to the same cost pressures as regular Bermudians.

Government notes that it will continue to budget for staff increases that it cannot hope to fill in the financial year, explaining that this will create extra funds that can be used elsewhere. Mr. Speaker, we would suggest that this is not, in fact, how budgets are supposed to work. Government should set a realistic budget for staff, and departments and ministries should work within their agreed budget. If unexpected events cause budget overruns, that can be discussed at this time next year.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Finally, if Government truly wishes to maintain a contingency amount in the budget, which is not unreasonable, we suggest a separate budget line for that.

Mr. Speaker, we are very disappointed to see very little progress in reducing the backlog of audit reports across Government. And, for two successive years the Auditor General has had to provide a Qualified Opinion on our Consolidated Fund—that is, she could not provide a completely clean audit result. And that is because Government has not been able to support its estimates for liabilities for things like asbestos in buildings and underground fuel tanks. In our view, this lack of a clean audit is inconsistent with Bermuda's desired reputation as a jurisdiction. We

urge the Government to take the necessary actions to receive a clean audit next year.

9.1 Corporate Income Tax

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, the Corporate Income Tax (or CIT) is a potentially transformative resource for Bermuda. However, it is no silver bullet and brings its own challenges. We have spoken often of the uncertain nature of the timings and amounts of the CIT, and the uncertain number of taxpayers. This means we must budget conservatively around the CIT. It is far better to be overconservative in our use of CIT funds, only to find we have more than expected, than to craft a budget of promises around high estimates, which then cannot be funded.

Another challenge is that CIT payers will understandably expect more from the Government in terms of services, immigration processing, quality of our infrastructure and general costs of living and doing business. Will Government deliver? The CIT payers will demand value in Bermuda as a jurisdiction in multiple ways. There is significant execution risk.

Mr. Speaker, a third challenge is that the Government has set unrealistic expectations from the CIT. Through the Sovereign Wealth Fund idea the PLP has, perhaps unwittingly, suggested the CIT will solve all of our problems. At the same time Government has made numerous short-term promises relying on the CIT funds, without knowing how those cash flows will perform over the next two years. This Government has already had to make adjustments resulting in delayed or broken promises, including announcing initiatives this year that won't even happen until next year. We also understand the agreed pay rises have been delayed in some Government departments.

The One Bermuda Alliance would take a more moderate, transparent and realistic approach. First, we would craft a budget that works without including the CIT for at least the next two to three years. This would allow us to understand who the CIT [tax]payers are, what the CIT income looks like, and develop more realistic and achievable plans for the future.

Mr. Speaker, our National Debt is currently \$3.3 billion. This costs the taxpayers \$128 million per year in interest payments alone. To put these numbers in perspective, that means each worker in Bermuda is on average through our taxes, paying \$3,900 of interest every year. That's \$128 million per year of Government spending in US dollars that could otherwise be spent directly on programmes and services for Bermudians. Every year, not just one year. Think housing, think health care.

In addition, significant portions of our debt were placed with historically low interest rates by the previous Finance Minister. When this debt is replaced, our interest costs will go up. US Treasury rates are as much as 3 per centage points higher than 2020 levels,

and global uncertainty around US policies might drive them higher still. Since markets view the price for our debt as a "spread" on US base rates, that additional 3 per cent could translate to as much as \$100 million per year in additional interest costs, depending on timing.

Mr. Speaker, that is why the One Bermuda Alliance repeats its call to ring-fence the most significant portions of CIT to pay down our national debt, along with infrastructure and key social support for Bermudians. This would avoid the increased interest costs and make those funds available to help Bermudians every year, year after year.

We support the Government's medium-term plan to repay debt, and would go one step further, setting the CIT funds aside into a dedicated fund, so the public can be confident they will be used for the best results in the medium- and long-term. This fund would then make allocations to the Consolidated Fund, debt, infrastructure, and specific social packages based on a set of bipartisan national priorities, guided by bipartisan and non-political advisors.

Although this reduces political control over the CIT funds, that is exactly the point, Mr. Speaker. How we use the CIT funds is too important to be subject to short-term political thinking focused on election time.

Our approach is differentiated from the Government's as we would ensure CIT funds work sustainably for Bermuda over the short-, medium-, and long-term—not just until the next election.

9.2 Sovereign Wealth Fund

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, a key element of many of the Government's statements around the CIT is the establishment of a Sovereign Wealth Fund, funded by CIT revenue. It connotes wealth, obviously, and also plenty—a solution to our financial problems. This is, of course, politically attractive.

However, we have many other uses for the CIT money before setting it aside for such a fund that would further delay the time before a useful Sovereign Wealth Fund is attained. First, we need to set aside CIT funds as a "revenue stability fund," to help smooth out the volatility of CIT earnings for whatever portion is earmarked for regular Government revenue.

Secondly, we need to pay our \$3.2 billion debt down to a workable amount, perhaps no more than 50 per cent of our annual revenue. If we did not pay down the debt and instead invested CIT money into a wealth fund, our bondholders would view that as adding risk. This would increase our borrowing costs.

Thirdly, Mr. Speaker, we have large unfunded liabilities in our government pension funds and part of the solution could include CIT funds as a one-time reset as part of broader reform. There is also the \$270 million guarantee for the hospital. We might consider just paying that debt down to reduce the total annual cost.

Finally, we have large amounts of infrastructure that need repairs and replacement, [such as] roads, bridges, the incinerator and numerous government buildings.

So, while a wealth fund is a nice idea, it is not likely to impact the lives of any Bermudians for quite some years.

9.3 Gaming

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, after millions of dollars spent, we are very disappointed to see no progress on the development of gaming on the Island, and no progress in eliminating or reforming the Gaming Commission. As in most of the other areas of our economy, if we want a better result, we are going to have to change how we do things. We say, get gaming going or shut it down.

10. Empowering the Bermudian Dream

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, we have spoken a lot about the general state of Bermuda, its economy, the Government's plans, and its financial performance and we have provided a few points about what the OBA would do in specific areas. So now we turn to our overall vision for the finances and economy of Bermuda and her people.

10.1 Philosophy of Empowerment and Growth

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: At its heart, our philosophy is that all Bermudians must be empowered to achieve our dreams, and success in whatever ventures we choose. While we want to ensure the appropriate social safety net is in place, we must aim for fewer and fewer Bermudians to need it.

We view creating opportunity for Bermudians in three pillars: local business and economy, tourism, and international business.

Mr. Speaker, we start with the local economy, where we have the most concerns, and which needs the most attention. This makes up all the jobs, services and businesses that support the other two pillars, as well as other niche businesses that don't fall into them. The important characteristic of the local economy is that it provides a wide range of jobs, including many hands-on, technical jobs that pay well and provide job satisfaction. The small- and medium-sized businesses in our local economy are also a path to financial security for many Bermudians.

Ultimately, the local economy is completely driven by the number of people living on the Island, the quality of the jobs they have, and the goods and services they consume. It's the same issue underpinning pensions and health care. Bermuda must become a place that both takes care of its workers and is also friendly to businesses and investors so they will create projects and hire. These two groups of

stakeholders can enjoy a shared success, underpinned by a listening and cooperative government.

Mr. Speaker, Government must work closely with small- and medium-sized businesses, not just the larger ones that can catch their ear or have access to a Minister. Importantly, Government must not compete with private business. In areas ranging from the Office of the Tax Commissioner, Planning, Immigration, and numerous other departments that businesses work with, businesses need a responsive and friendly government that provides the required services efficiently. Now that the public service has received a pay rise, the public will be looking for the promised increase in morale, performance, and effectiveness from government departments. While the public service is not directly managed by the Ministers, we know that "tone comes from the top," and the Ministers should set an example of the approach and performance that the Bermudian public is looking for in its government services.

Ultimately, the Budget Statement had very little to offer for local businesses, especially small businesses and retail. For example, we hoped to see duty breaks for retailers. Instead, Government is encouraging more overseas purchases by raising the duty-free allowance for individuals, further disadvantaging local business. Success for local business depends on the number of customers, as already discussed, decreasing, and cashflow, where duty breaks can help.

Mr. Speaker, we would continue to grow Bermuda's portfolio of niche but diversifying businesses, where Bermuda brings a well-understood advantage, and investors have business plans that make sense. Typically, these are brought forward by experts with deep understanding in their areas, rather than consultants touting PowerPoint ideas.

Examples of good ideas that the Government has executed include the Google subsea cable and satellite launching slots. In addition, we support the Government family office initiatives, and we would also grow trust businesses, supporting relevant industry sectors in Bermuda that would benefit from serving and working with this business. We would continue to support FinTech, where there are legitimate business models that are a fit for Bermuda's regulatory regime—but not the hype-driven or scam-inducing meme coins and other cash-grab schemes.

Mr. Speaker, we are open to initiatives in the blue and green economy. But as with all initiatives, we would need to identify clear reasons for investors to want to do projects in Bermuda, with a clearly identified benefit. Typically, these projects make sense for investors because of external factors, such as a requirement to have a certain percent of "green" investment in their portfolio. Given the recent changes in US policy with greatly reduced attention or even antipathy towards Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) standards, we will have to watch this space carefully. Regardless, success here must be meas-

ured by dollars invested in projects on the Island, and jobs for Bermudians, not presentations at conferences.

10.2 Tourism

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, a second well-known pillar that creates opportunity for Bermudians is hospitality and tourism. These sectors bring foreign currency into Bermuda, and more importantly, provide a wide range of jobs for Bermudians and consume a wide range of services in our economy. Tourists provide a good market for many Bermudian entrepreneurs, retailers and service providers, that we should grow. It's a natural fit for our Island's convenient location, beauty and friendly people. Despite recent headwinds this industry has room to grow again in Bermuda. Our goals here would be to ensure that the Bermuda Tourism Authority [BTA] is working well and independently of political interference to market Bermuda effectively. This would include having a good range of industry representation on the BTA board and accountability for the BTA leadership based on results. We were disappointed to see reductions in the BTA grant and no mention of how to reform their funding model.

Recent news of a new owner for Elbow Beach is promising and we would seek out, market to, and work with investors to get other dormant sites open, such as Ariel Sands or reuse existing brownfield sites.

And, Mr. Speaker, we would seek to diversify the industry by getting multiple properties open with a range of sizes and styles so we as a country are not dependent on any one specific tourism property or owner. This includes vacation rentals. While some believe that vacation rentals are negatively impacting rental supply, the data indicates that the effect is small at best. And we know that vacation rentals can provide a uniquely Bermudian product that is attractive to many visitors—not just in the heyday of Bermuda's cottage colonies—but also in today's competitive global tourism market where consumers are seeking experiences.

Regarding concessions, Mr. Speaker, although we were not supportive of the scope of the concessions and guarantees given to Fairmont Southampton, the updated legislation has now set a new high level for them. The horse has left the stable. We would ensure that tourism concessions are awarded consistently and with accountability for targets such as numbers of Bermudian staff hired or amounts invested. The goal is a level playing field for all participants in the tourism economy with concrete results delivered in return for the loss of tax revenue.

10.3 International Business

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, International Business brings foreign currency into Bermuda and

provides high quality, well-paying, often comfortable jobs for Bermudians. Our objective with IB is to continue the growth and success of it in Bermuda. We'd maintain Bermuda's top-ranked regulatory reputation and provide IB with efficient and effective Government services, such as immigration processing and other local infrastructure like good roads.

Mr. Speaker, we would ensure that Bermuda remains an attractive jurisdiction of choice, where IB taxpayers feel their tax funds are being spent responsibly, and which is an attractive location for employees. This includes things like housing and health care, which impact everyone. Where useful, we would partner with IB to promote Bermuda as a jurisdiction, and work collaboratively to [help] promote new sectors to continue to broaden and diversify the scope of IB in Bermuda. And we'd ensure that Bermuda's education system can equip future generations of Bermudians to benefit from IB's success, where those jobs are a good fit with skills and interest.

10.4 City of Hamilton and Brownfield Sites, East End

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, a key opportunity for Bermuda's economy lies in Hamilton, which is the perfect site for creating the housing that Bermuda needs without further encroaching on the miniscule amounts of open space we have left. While Government has loosened some restrictions for building and development in Hamilton, more should be done. After all, if investors and developers wouldn't want to do projects in Hamilton, where would they?

The City of Hamilton provides an opportunity to build up and create vibrant zones of mixed uses. Many younger people, including guest workers, would welcome the chance to live and work in a vibrant Hamilton with shops and restaurants a few steps from their doors.

Mr. Speaker, the One Bermuda Alliance would work with developers, builders, and designers to create different types of housing for different segments of the market. We would also work with them on ways to reduce costs of projects. Government's reduction of duty on construction materials is a step in the right direction, but could go further, and costs need to be addressed at multiple levels, from zoning restrictions and requirements, building codes, construction techniques, and legal and planning overheads.

Hamilton has a unique location in Bermuda, and many natural assets. It's time for us to get us going again.

We shouldn't forget the ends of the Island either. St. George's rich history and position as our gateway to the open ocean means we should continue to develop and expand our attractions and services for yachts. As a deep-water port with beautiful views, surely Marginal Wharf can be put to better uses than industrial facilities and boat storage.

10.5 Immigration

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, as we have seen in multiple areas across our economy and finances, a critical underlying issue is the number of people living and working in Bermuda. We must consider it an urgent national priority to make it more attractive for young Bermudians to return home, for Bermudians and people working here to stay here, and for new people to come to Bermuda.

Immigration is understandably a controversial and emotional topic, due to Bermuda's history, the history of individuals and families in Bermuda, actions taken by Governments in the past, and the lack of action by Governments in the past and present. And this has all been overlaid by the cynical manipulation of immigration as a political tool by this current Government, alongside legitimate and important concerns about Bermudian culture and what being "Bermudian" really means.

But what we do know is that what we are doing now is not working. Change is required. Let's start by actually carrying out existing immigration policies with fairness, consistency, efficiency and transparency so families and businesses have confidence in outcomes and decision-making.

Then let's have a good-faith engagement on what we can do to turn our population around. It's easy for Government to say what they won't do, but we're more interested in hearing what they can and will do to solve this problem.

An Hon. Member: What would you do?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: What a timely question.

11. Specific Proposals

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, we were very disappointed that Government has not scrapped the sugar tax.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: It's well-known that this tax has not achieved its goals and only increased food prices for Bermudians. It's not too late for Government to get rid of it.

Another tax we would suggest cutting, targeting better or even eliminating, is the Foreign Currency Purchase Tax, or FCPT. This 1.25 per cent must be paid on all purchases of foreign currency such as US dollars. Since all of our goods are purchased from overseas, this adds 1.25 per cent to the cost of all goods, including essential goods purchased by Bermudians. While we appreciate this a very efficient tax to collect (the banks do it for the Government) it is also very regressive. That is, the FCPT disproportion-

ately impacts those who earn the least, and pay a higher fraction of their income on necessities.

In general, the One Bermuda Alliance would adjust tax reductions to be targeted to those most in need. This is in contrast to the Government's approach, which gives more dollars back to those who can afford to use the most electricity or drive the most expensive cars.

12. Conclusion

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, we have provided ample evidence that shows just how hollow the Government's claims of fairness really are, as businesses and Bermudians in the local economy continue to struggle and cost of living outstrips whatever small pay increases people are getting. We have shown how Bermuda's biggest challenge is our shrinking and emigrating population, which the Government continues to ignore. We have highlighted the lack of attention to our youth. And we have debunked the Government's financial performance. The parts of it that have been good are riding solely on IB. Meanwhile, Government continues to fail to address the key issues that put our IB success at risk: housing, infrastructure, cost of living, transparency, and accountability.

In contrast, we have set out the approach and ideas of the One Bermuda Alliance so that Bermuda can rise again. So that Bermudians can breathe easy and see and feel opportunity. So that our youth can dream of their future here at home in Bermuda. A Bermuda where the pie grows to feed us all, not a Bermuda where we are fighting over a shrinking one.

And it all comes down to integrity, accountability, and delivering results.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Members, we have just had the Opposition's Reply to the Budget [Statement]. We are going to take a couple of minutes and let the technical officer [remove] the connectors from . . . You are good? Okay.

So, we are in pretty good stead. We have got the okay from the technical officer.

Is there another Member who would like to make a contribution?

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: But before I call on that Member, I would just like to acknowledge in our Gallery today that the former Opposition Leader Mr. Cole Simmons is visiting with us today.

Welcome, sir.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Good. Okay. All right.

[Budget Debate, continuing.]

The Speaker: Junior Minister, I understand you are going to be the first up.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I am.

The Speaker: Are you ready to start?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead, sir. The clock is on.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
I can start?

The Speaker: Yes.

DEBATE ON THE BUDGET STATEMENT AND REPLY TO THE BUDGET

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
Let me make it very clear that I know most people have been sleeping for the last 30 minutes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But we are going to change that right now.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Absolutely right.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member DeCouto . . . we have talked about increasing, having a new economy, we are talking about increasing revenue, we are talking about surpluses going forward.

Mr. Speaker, I had the honour to be in the House with the Honourable Member's mother.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member Ann Cartwright DeCouto. I believe you also, Mr. Speaker, you definitely [were].

Mr. Speaker, what such a fiery lady she was. But, Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right now, that the Honourable Member is not Ann Cartwright DeCouto.

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker!

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.
Personalisations, Mr. Speaker. Personalisations.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: He was just making a distinction that you are her blood, but you are not her.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That's right, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That young lady, Mr. Speaker,—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That young lady was so fiery many of us . . . I remember the speech on . . . particularly when it came to the franchise. It was called the mother of all franchises. I think the Honourable Member Kim Swan, he was in the House, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: She woke us all up that day—

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —coming back from lunch after drinking ginger ale.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It was ginger ale. What's . . . what's . . . we all had ginger ale. The Honourable Member is trying . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Oh, okay.

So, Mr. Speaker, it is clear, the Honourable Member, like I said . . . and I will be preaching today.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I started . . . as you know, I started from the . . . speaking about a virtuous woman. But there are many things that we say about the gentleman, and I will not be saying [that] about the gentleman today.

But, Mr. Speaker, let me make it very clear. Let me just start from the very beginning when we talk about page 21—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —of the Honourable Member's [Statement]. Where did the Honourable Member get these numbers from? He talks about \$50 million off-balance sheet spending. If any Member on that . . . and I will sit down if he can tell us. He talks about \$50 million off-balance sheet spending in 2023/24. And I will speak about that year in particular. And also off-balance sheet for \$73 [million] in 2024/25. I will be willing to sit down so the Honourable Member can tell us where those numbers came from.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Because, Mr. Speaker, every one of us respect the Auditor General.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We respect the professionals within the Ministry of Finance. And this Honourable Member, Mr. Speaker, comes up with these numbers and no one in this House knows what it is about. Those 23—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, the 2023/24 numbers were audited and laid down in this Honourable House. But yet he, the Honourable Member, comes up with \$50 million of off-balance sheet. And I will speak later on about the Sinking Fund. I will be willing to speak about that. But you just can't make these numbers up.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: You just can't make these numbers up. Everything is being made up by the Honourable Member.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Everything. So how are we expected to believe the Honourable Member, the Shadow Minister of Finance . . . and he wants to be eventually the Minister of Finance, but it will be another 50 years from now. But the Honourable Member just makes these numbers up. And he is sitting by an

accountant, a professional accountant. We are both CPAs so we understand the numbers.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We understand the numbers. So where did the Member get that number from? I just know, like I said, Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General, who we respect, and we supported when we laid the Bill in this Honourable House, we all supported the numbers.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: He is checking out AI right now.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But, Mr. Speaker, that's not true. And I will be willing later on to speak about the Sinking Fund. I mean, we spoke just earlier about the Honourable Member Cole Simons in this House. I enjoyed listening to him when he was the Shadow Minister of Finance. And he had some facts in those days. But this Honourable Member here has very little facts at all.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, on page 22, the Honourable Member . . . if I can find this information. Not [page] 22, [page] 23, the Honourable Member speaks about the One Bermuda Alliance would take a more moderate, transparent and realistic approach. What does that mean? What does that mean?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: What does that mean? The cost . . . this costs taxpayers \$128 [million per year] says, "We will craft a budget that works without including the CIT for at least the next two to three years." So where would you get the revenue from? Ah! I'm sorry. They would not lower the rate that Bob Richards had, 20 cents per litre, on fuel.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We are lowering it to four cents.

Some Hon. Members: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member, where would he get his numbers from. And I will

speaking later on about how the increases in taxes under the One Bermuda Alliance from 2012 to 2017. We will get to those numbers. Compared to how the Progressive Labour Party from 2017 to 2025 has reduced taxes and continues to reduce taxes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Poor? Mr. Speaker, we are talking about a \$43 million surplus. Last year we budgeted for \$210,000 surplus and we are now up to estimating \$19 million. There could be some adjustments after the Ministry and the Auditor does her thing, there could be some adjustments. But it probably won't be any lower than \$18 million. But I would also speak, Mr. Speaker, about the deficits they have had since 2011 to 2017.

An Hon. Member: They don't want to hear that.

Another Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will also speak about the millions of dollars they borrowed in the first year. It was supposed to be lasting three years and it only lasted a year and a half.

An Hon. Member: And then they borrowed more.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And then they borrowed more.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: For the new Members who are here from the OBA, you may want to leave and not hear this stuff. I am sure they didn't tell you about all this good stuff that they did when they were there.

But, Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, I am not sure who was there.

An Hon. Member: Wow!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: There is not a Member . . . Ah! The Honourable Craig Cannonier.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Ah!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Craig Cannonier was the only Member . . . and I don't know if that Honourable Member has informed his colleagues how bad the deficits were under the One Bermuda Alliance when they were in Government.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I don't know if they remember that.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am going to say right now, I am going to go and let me . . . my topic is this: let the numbers speak for themselves.

An Hon. Member: There you go!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Let the numbers speak for themselves.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to talk about . . . the only thing I hear about the Honourable Members and what they will do is remove the sugar tax and the FCPT [Foreign Currently Purchase Tax].

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That is the plan?

An Hon. Member: Your mother gave you sugar.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Is that the plan that we expect to hear, Mr. Speaker, to grow the economy? You have more deficits. What would you do? What would you reduce? What expenditures would you do? You want to have capital expenditure. That's good. We need some money. We got to pave the roads. And the Honourable Member who spoke earlier this morning talked about how the Government is moving ahead with the road paving. I applaud him. Got some Hamilton Parish in there.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Right? We did around Smith's Parish. The Honourable Members who are from Smith's Parish will be appreciative of the Member. And finished Smith's Parish.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And Paget. And as a matter of fact, Mr. Speaker, if you know, those Smith's Parish and Paget don't end up in my territory. I will speak on that later on.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, I'm talking about as far as . . . you know what I am talking about. I am not going there at all.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But, Mr. Speaker, you can't at the end of the day talk about you are going to . . . not use CIT, you are going to do this and do that and

then don't tell the country how you are going to raise the revenue and how you are going to balance the books. You get it . . . the numbers do not add up. The numbers do not add up!

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, Mr. Speaker, let me just say this. A few points that the Honourable Member also said.

The Honourable Member said that . . . let me find my notes here. So, Mr. Speaker, so we will stand here today and not pontificate.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But one thing for sure, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I said earlier, let the numbers speak for themselves.

And one thing about the numbers, if they are right, we will have to all agree. One thing about us, we know that one and one, you can look at it as eleven. Which I am sure you looked at it. But one plus one is two, in my books.

But, [Madam Deputy] Speaker, over the past several years Bermuda's economy has been steadily strengthened under this Progressive Labour Party Government. And there is not one Honourable Member in this House who can stand up and deny it. There is not one Member who can stand up.

An Hon. Member: I will.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Not one.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We had the great Curtis Dickinson. We had the great—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. Former Minister of Finance. We had the great and current Minister Colonel Burt. Not Colonel Burt—E. David Burt.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I did.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But, [Madam Deputy] Speaker, these Honourable Members, we got through those rough times. I can't remember which Minister had the . . . I think it was the Premier. But we got through some rough times. But even going through the rough times we are in a position right now that we can say to the public, [Madam Deputy] Speaker, that

we are now heading toward a surplus. Now, I know that the Honourable Members on that side would not like to hear that. Right? We have now experienced four consecutive years of robust GDP. Record employment for Bermudians in our international business. And I understand. I understand how the man, the honourable gentleman, is trying to bring down the international business, he works for them.

An Hon. Member: Oh my.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member works for international business.

An Hon. Member: Oh wow. Bring them down?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: What is he saying? We appreciate what the international business . . . we appreciate it. I am telling you right now. We are not going back to the days when I was a busboy in a restaurant. And all . . . most of our families grew up in tourism. That has changed. It has changed! We are now international business.

Now how did we grow that? Well, it was through FinTech, or whatever it is. But we are not going back to where we were. And, yes, we will continue to help out small business. And I am sure the Honourable Member Jason Hayward will talk about what BEDC has been doing over the years about small business. And we have helped out small businesses, which we will talk about later on.

Some Hon. Members: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We have. But I am also going to tell you how you did not help out small business when you were between 2012 and 2017.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. We have to. I know you are the only Member, Mr. Cannonier, the only one standing at this time who was around at that time while the rest of them have gone home.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: [Madam Deputy] Speaker, do you know how long it has been for any Minister of Finance to stand in this Honourable House and say, *Madam Deputy Speaker, we are projecting a surplus.*

An Hon. Member: Whoa!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Do you know how long that has been? A very long time. As a matter of fact—

An Hon. Member: Four years.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: What?

[Inaudible interjection]

An Hon. Member: Four years.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That's right. I don't think anyone in this House, outside of myself, was in the House.

An Hon. Member: Been here a long time.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Probably Kim.

Some Hon. Members: You have been here a long, Wayne.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: A long time.

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I am. That's why I can say what I am saying. Because I know. I know what those numbers were in those days. I do. All right?

And, [Madam Deputy] Speaker, the other side can say what they want but they would rather not hear the word *surplus*. What they hear is *hidden off-balance sheet spending*. And I will speak about that later on. They will talk about presenting misleading financial statements. As a matter of fact, the Honourable Member said here, he said something . . . where . . . let me see where I have underlined it. Maybe I will get back to it later on. I don't want to pursue it. But there was something here, it was just off-track.

An Hon. Member: All of it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: All of it.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: All of it. And we rely on international business. Yes, we do rely on international business.

An Hon. Member: And we are proud of it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And we are proud of it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Can the Honourable Member tell us . . . I will appreciate the Honourable Member who stands up next for your side—tell us they appreciate international business.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Because I don't . . . the Honourable Member when he spoke in the One Bermuda [Alliance] office the other day, he talked about international business like . . . it was like some of us . . . like we did something wrong. We are happy and we want to grow more. I think it is 25 per cent to 27 per cent of our GDP now for international business. As a matter of fact, the Leader, Jarion [Richardson], when he was the Shadow Minister of Finance, said this. He likened Bermuda to a vehicle in a gigantic pothole.

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Those are the types of things that they would rather continue to be able to pontificate on or say. They do not want to hear the word *surplus*.

An Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They do not want to see what this Government has been able to accomplish and will accomplish. They do not want to see that. They do not want to see in 2026/27 that we are paying down the debt by the projected \$500 million. They do not want to hear that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, you don't.

An Hon. Member: Yes, I do.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, no, no. Don't be fooled people. No, no. The Opposition does not want to hear that. Because when they fight the election another four or five years from now, they want to be able to say that the *Government did not bring down the debt. Cost goes up again. They didn't help out the people.*

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That is what they want to say. And the Honourable Member knows that. That is why some of the things they said in their Reply is off-track. Off-track.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, talk is cheap. The true measure of leadership is not in eloquence, it is found in action. And this Government has taken action since 2017. You may not want to believe it but we have. Something they never did or had the heart to do.

An Hon. Member: No.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Now, the only person laughing is because he was the only Honourable Member on that side in the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this party has produced results which the other party, as I said, could not do. You could not do it. You did not do it.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, our comments are based on data, and it reflects the outcomes of policy and leadership during challenging times. In 2020—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Data is very important.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Data is very important. The Honourable Member who speaks for . . . I am not sure what ministry he is in now. But the Honourable Member is aware of data. Being, As I said, we both have the same profession. But data is very important. So, here is the question: The Honourable Member DeCouto delivered a well-rehearsed critique, similar to all his other colleagues. The Honourable Member Jarion Richardson, my good friend, the Honourable Member Cole Simons, but let us not confuse a cleverly worded speech with factual substance.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, let's go point by point.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Honourable Member comments about spending from one pocket while pretending it does not count is simply not grounded in facts. And they have not laid out those arguments. It is easy to say . . . it is easy to say stuff. One thing about the Opposition, you can just say what you want. The Government has to rely on some type of factual things.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I was in Opposition for a while.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, that's right. That is why I am learning this stuff now.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. So, I understand that.

The method used to report a surplus or deficit follows international accounting standards. The same approach used by his party when they were in Government. The same auditors were around. So, if ours is wrong, they must be wrong. Do you agree? It is the same auditors. Honourable Member Craig Cannonier,

were they the same auditors that were there at the time you were there?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I don't remember.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am sure.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: These numbers are not produced by the Minister.

An Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They are verified, as I said, by professional public officers in the Ministry of Finance and reviewed by the Auditor General.

Sometimes we don't agree with the Auditor General. But at the end of the day, as the Member, Mr. Campbell, we realise that at the end of the day they come to us and talk to us. I am sure that the former Minister met with them many times. We agree. We disagree on certain things. But they have to sign off.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They have to sign off. So all the information that they wrote on page 21 is absolutely incorrect.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It is absolutely incorrect. And the Honourable Members on that side, the Honourable Member Vance Campbell, knows this.

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

Another Hon. Member: Wow!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I had to call you because you and I are in the same profession.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: You are in the same profession as myself. And so, my point is, it is untrue. And how would you allow . . . I am not sure whether you all read this before or if it was the first time you heard it like we did. But I am sure many of you have had to have asked that question. Where did you get \$50 million off-balance sheet spending? I will be willing to sit down if you are willing to stand up and tell us.

An Hon. Member: Where is DeCouto?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Oh, he is going to tell us.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, he is telling us the Auditor General that we trust is wrong.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That is what you are telling us. Is that what you are going to tell us? That the Auditor who we have trusted for umpteen years is incorrect and the Honourable Member DeCouto—

An Hon. Member: Who has left the Chamber.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Who has left the Chambers—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —is right.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Gross debt has not . . . the Honourable Member is coming now. Gross debt has not significantly changed in the period he referenced, from 2023 to 2025.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of information, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you yield?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Do you yield for a point of information?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No. No, I don't. No. No.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, no.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, no he just . . . Honourable Members. He can point of order—

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Point of information—

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, just speak to me. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, what did change was the balance in the Sinking Fund. That is what we are referring to. Which affected net debt and that is a normal, expected part of public finance.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Sinking Fund came from excess borrowing. Anybody who is not aware of that, it is a reserve fund primarily to repay debt. That is how it is done.

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Pay it back. As a matter of fact, I was in this Honourable House in a certain Cabinet when the Honourable Dr. David Saul said, *We are going to set aside . . .* I think it was 2.5 per cent.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, it came to Parliament. I know you weren't here. That's right. I think it was 2.5 per cent . . . I think it was 2.5 per cent that was set aside to put in the Sinking Fund. The great Curtis Dickinson recognised . . . *Why would you go out when you have got no money, you are going to borrow the money and put it in a Sinking Fund for? Why?* Because the purpose was to pay off debt coming in the future. That was the purpose of the Sinking Fund, setting money aside. This was in 1994, I think was, 1995.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: [It was] 1994.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It think David Saul was Minister of Finance way back then.

But the Honourable Member Curtis Dickinson recognised *why would go out and just borrow money and put it in a fund?* And increase the debt again. Does that make sense, fellows? Ladies? So, we appreciate what the Honourable Member Curtis Dickinson did at that time.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to provide a breakdown for the Members of this House as of 31 March 2023 the Government's Sinking Fund was valued at \$223 million. As of 31 March 2025, it is projected to be valued at \$35 million. So, what happened in between?

This would be a change of approximately \$188 million. So, the primary reason for the transfer from the Sinking Fund was what? Madam Deputy Speaker, \$50 million was to reduce the debt. Do we all agree? Yes.

Madam Deputy Speaker, \$45 million was transferred to Government account for interest expense. It was accounted for in the Government's books, by the way, as interest expense. [There was] \$30 million transferred to the MRF (mutual reinsurance fund) because in 2024 (I think it was 2024) this

House passed . . . it allowed the Minister of Finance . . . let me get it right.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Investments were made under . . . as a matter of fact, you can take some of that money and put it in investment, investment under subsection (1B). Offset future years' deficit or transfer money to other public funds. And that what was being done. The MRF . . . said, \$30 million was transferred to MRF, Mutual Reinsurance Fund, in 2024 and 2025.

And, [Madam Deputy] Speaker, the Government has recognised shortfalls in the GHI last year, and \$30 million was transferred to that. And the other part was \$29 million in 2023/24 which offset the Sinking Fund. Tell me, where was the around-the-corner, back-in-slide-type, under-the-cover, putting-money-somewhere-else-off-the-balance-sheet?

This Honourable House, this Honourable House—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of information, Madam—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, no, no.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you accept a point of information?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No. If he said a point of order, I would . . . but a point of information I am not willing to because he has already misled us with information. I am not going to set him up again and let him give more misinformation. That's not on the table.

An Hon. Member: Well done.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, in March—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —as I mentioned, in 2024 we made some changes to the Government Loans Amendment Act which introduced significant changes to the utilisation of excess funds. And I kind of spelled out the changes between 2023 and [20]25. So, this is not financial trickery. It is responsible fiscal management.

Some Hon. Members: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The surplus plus is legitimate and when the Auditor General audits the account they will tell us whether it is \$19 million, or it is \$18 million or it may end up being \$20 million. But they will tell us. And if you want to take it up and discuss the Auditor's report, so be it. This Honourable

House has the right to do it. We laid it down; you want to take it up and debate it, so be it.

So, talk about reliance on international business. So, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I mentioned earlier, let the numbers speak for themselves. The OBA always speaks about leadership. Well, let's look at the leadership under the OBA and the PLP since 2012.

Some Hon. Members: Oh-oh!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: [Madam Deputy] Speaker, one thing for sure, we have a record. We can't hide. Every one of us has a record. And when we stand before the great day, hallelujah.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We have a record.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We will have a record. Anyway, we will get to that right now.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, total net debt of Sinking Fund. In 2013, who was the Government?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Sorry. I thought everybody was wondering.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Total net debt of Sinking Fund was \$1.4 billion. In 2024, it went up to \$1.7 [billion]. In 2015, it up to \$2.0 [billion].

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Sorry, what years was that? What years was your Government in place?

An Hon. Member: They borrowed some more.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Oh, sorry. In 2016, it went up further to \$2.2 [billion]. And in 2017, guess what it went up? [It went up to] \$2.3 [billion].

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Here we go. We will get a point or order now—for sure.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It kind of stayed stable until 2020. Now we all know what happened in 2020. We would rather help out our people instead of letting

them suffer. We helped out with financial assistance. There were a whole bunch of things. And Ministers who were around at that time can speak on it. But it was around that time we borrowed the money—\$600 million, by the way. We borrowed another \$187 million the year after. I'm sorry. What were we paying off? Oh, sorry. Morgan's Point. I'm sorry.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Sorry. Morgan's Point. I knew it was something that affected [you]. These are numbers. And the Honourable Members were responsible for that.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me also speak about this. In 2013, who was the Government?

An Hon. Member: Still them.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I'm sorry—\$299 million in deficit. In 2014, the deficit was \$265 million. It went up . . . he did a pretty good job in 2015. It was only \$160 million.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: In 2016, I'm sorry. He must have made a mistake. It went back down to \$182 million. Deficit! Under your Government! The Honourable Member Craig Cannonier—because none of you were in the room. We became Government in 2017. So, listen, Madam Deputy Speaker, the deficit was \$182 million under them in 2016. What was the deficit under the Progressive Labour Party in 2017? Just one year later. [It was] \$70 million.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: In one year we were able to improve things. In those years we cut taxes for the people significantly.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes. I know. I know I am an accountant. That's why I was able to tell you.

[Madam Deputy] Speaker, 2017, [the] \$77 million went to \$32 million in 2019. Of course, we had a huge deficit in 2020 because we all know what happened. But then we climbed back up. The deficit went to \$56 [million] to \$34 [million], \$29 [million] and a whopping \$19 million in surplus in 2024/25. Let the numbers speak for themselves. And we are projecting \$48 . . . \$43 million in 2025/26. Madam Deputy Speaker, I can tell you right now, looking at the history and how the expenses work within Government, we probably could come up even more. But we are going to be conservative in our approach.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We are going to be conservative in our approach. Now, I understand. Yes, we put aside (I think) \$187 billion in CIT. But there is no secret. The experts out there have been projecting \$750 million in CIT. But we are saying, *No, no. We are only going to look at \$187 [million]*. That is the conservative approach in counting revenue. You are telling me you would not take anything. Well, first of all, I don't believe you.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And the people—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

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

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Member is unintentionally misleading the House. I believe we outlaid specifically the things we would take out of it. Not that we would not take anything out of it. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: He is probably seeking—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: —more clarification on it. He hadn't seen it clearly yet.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Honourable Member said these words:

An Hon. Member: These words. And I quote.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And I quote.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: CIT. It says something about two or three years they would not take any funds out of that account. Did I get it right?

An Hon. Member: Yes, he said it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I know I was sleeping around that time—

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —when the Honourable Member spoke these words. But Mr. Speaker, the

Honourable Member said something about two or three years that they would not take the funds.

An Hon. Member: He said it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Oh, here it is. “The One Bermuda Alliance would take a more moderate, transparent, and realistic approach. First, we would craft a budget that works without including” (now, that’s English to me) “the CIT for at least the next two to three years.”

Some Hon. Members: Oh-oh! That’s what he said.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Do you have an apology coming to me?

An Hon. Member: What’s that? A point of apology?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: You said you wouldn’t take it.

An Hon. Member: Keep reading.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, you read it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: But, Madam Deputy Speaker . . . Madam Speaker, sorry. Mr. Speaker . . . sorry. I’m sorry. I’m so busy—

The Speaker: I knew you would get it right.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I’m too busy looking at the ladies out there earlier. So, look at this, Mr. Speaker, I said, let the numbers speak for themselves. So, payroll tax policy under the Progressive Labour Party reduced payroll taxes for local businesses and exempted specific groups (for example: farmers and fisherman) and helped the disabled between 2017 and 2025. Under the One Bermuda Alliance, from 2012 to 2017, they increased payroll tax from 14.5 per cent to 15.5 per cent and rolled back sector concessions and introduced tiered employer rates.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: This is the One Bermuda Alliance that wants to come out and take . . . take . . . take charge.

[Mr. Speaker], I mentioned earlier that the Honourable Member Bob Richards in 2017, I think . . . not think. The PLP was charging 10 cents per litre for the fuel adjustment. The Honourable Member Smith may know this. The next year he increased to 15 cents. The next year he increased it to 20 cents. We are now going down to 4 cents. So, the Honourable Member would have left that figure . . . he would have left that figure.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, it’s true. You can check the data out. That’s the truth. You were a Government that taxed the people over and over again. You did not care about the people.

An Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Hence why you lost the election in 2017. And the people did not trust you again in 2020 and they didn’t trust you again in 2025. You are not to be trusted.

[Inaudible interjection]

An Hon. Member: No confidence.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They have no confidence in a party that keeps on talking and the Honourable Member lays out the facts of what they will do in the future. They won’t vote for you again.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That’s why I said, he doesn’t represent the Honourable Member Ann Cartwright.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, I’m not.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Standing Order 19, Rules of Debate]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: It is behaviour unbecoming a Member of this House, Mr. Speaker. And I would request—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —that this gentleman, that the Member—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —I would request that the Member retract his statement out of respect for the former Deputy Premier and Minister of this country. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Deputy Speaker *[sic]*—

The Speaker: Hold on, Members.

The only reason I didn't call him myself on it was because he didn't say anything negative about her.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That's right.

The Speaker: He said that . . . just . . . again, he clarified that you were not her. If he had said anything negative about her, I definitely would have called him on it. But—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: But . . . but, having said that . . . having said that . . . having said that I am going to be sensitive to the fact that it is your mother. And ask the Member to be more sensitive in your comments towards his mother. Okay? Particularly this being Mother's Day weekend.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I accept . . . I have no problem with that. But the Honourable Member was a Member of Parliament. And we can quote exactly some of the things that the Honourable Member said. The Honourable Member . . . I'm not sure if the Honourable Member realises it that the Honourable Member left the United Bermuda Party and became an Independent candidate.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: These are factual things. But these are factual things. I am just saying things that are factual. Right? I left the United Bermuda Party too.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I did. That's factual. That's factual. I have no problem . . . I have no problem with that. But these are the facts. Right? The information . . . I had been sitting in the room. Minister . . . let me go quiet. Let me go quiet with that one.

Okay, Mr. Speaker, new business. One year payroll tax holiday for new local businesses was in 2018 to the present. No formal payroll tax holiday was given by the One Bermuda Alliance.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: New hire relief exempted employers from additional payroll tax from 2018 to 2026. If I think . . . I am corrected . . . Members. But no specific employer payroll tax by the One Bermuda Alliance. The PLP launched . . . BEDC grants, et cetera, et cetera. But nothing done by the One Bermuda Alliance. It may eliminate payroll tax for self-

employed, but nothing done by the One Bermuda Alliance. These are facts, Mr. Speaker. That is why I said, let the numbers speak for themselves. And this is even after we were still fighting . . . a period when it was tough when it came to COVID-19. And we had to get through that. We worked the numbers out and made it and we kept on going. We reduced, I think, 86 per cent . . . I think that is the number there.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, 86 per cent for those who were under a certain number.

An Hon. Member: Get it right.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will get it right—86 per cent. I will. But it is the truth.

Honourable Member Vance Campbell, but what has your party done?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: What has your party done? They have done absolutely zero!

The Speaker: Direct your comments this way.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They have done absolutely zero!

The Speaker: Don't get caught up and sidetracked.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They did absolutely zero before and the Honourable Member, the way he speaks now, will do absolutely zero business in the future.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Madam . . . Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: I think you like that yellow dress she has.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I do. I like—

The Speaker: You must have been attracted to that yellow dress. That's all.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am going to put the Member up there again.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, taxi drivers.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Under the One Bermuda Alliance they were paying roughly \$2,500 per year for

their licence. The taxi driver, under the Progressive Labour Party, they are paying \$600 yearly.

An Hon. Member: And they are still angry at you.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: They aren't angry with me anymore.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I can tell you right now, I catch a taxi a lot.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: He has a problem catching taxies. Right? He has problems catching taxies. But not Wayne Furbert. I can tell you right now.

So, Mr. Speaker, let the facts and numbers speak for themselves. We have had two consecutive budget surpluses—\$19.7 [million] for 2024/25. For 2025/26, \$43.3 million. Revenue growth—\$1.43 billion. There was a 16 per cent increase over 2024/25.

Mr. Speaker, the largest increase in projected capital expenditure was \$149.8 million. The largest investment since 2008. These are facts.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Capital expenditure.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Capital expenditure. Capital expenditure, Mr. Speaker.

This year, Mr. Speaker, we are reducing the material custom duties as low as 10 per cent on some of our buildings.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am referring to some of the information. I thought I . . . I don't know what he is talking about.

So, we were reducing to at least 10 per cent. And the base rate is going from [\$]300 to [\$]150. These are . . . these are . . . and even after all those tax reductions which you do not support—

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —which you do not . . . because the Honourable Member said it. He said he wouldn't do it. He said something else. He said he would give sugar tax removal. And he will do . . . well, he got my whole nut chocolate down; I have no problem with that one.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: And that is all he will do, Mr. Speaker. There was nothing in that Budget Reply that we can put our hands on and clap and applaud at what the Honourable Member has said. There is nothing. Cumulative payroll tax savings from 2017 to 2025 was about \$9,480 per worker. These are facts. And you are saying that we don't care. We do care. And even as we said, after all those tax reductions, after all these increases in expenditure, et cetera, et cetera, we are still pushing for . . . looking . . . projecting for a surplus.

And as I mentioned earlier about the fuel duty. And the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier supported the 20 cents per litre charged on the people at that time. And wondered why the tax for our fuel . . . and wondered why our electricity costs went up. The Honourable Member Craig Cannonier, as a matter of fact, I think he was Leader at the time when that took place, supported it—20 cents per litre. And I want everybody in the public to hear this.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Twenty cents per litre that was put through by the One Bermuda Alliance under the leadership of Craig Cannonier.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We have gotten rid of him.

[Laughter]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We reduced it to six point . . . six point . . . 8 per cent last year. And now we are reducing it to 4 cents. It is not the when. You guys wouldn't do it at all. That is the issue. You would not have done it because you don't think that way. You don't think—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: You don't think progressive when it comes to taxes. You don't.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: You don't think that way. Because you talk about . . . the Honourable Member is talking about that he won't touch it. Where will he get his money from? Where?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We say . . . it's in our budget. We laid out where we are getting the money. We have laid it out. And some of it is CIT. Yes, it is.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, it is, some of it. But you said you wouldn't touch it. And if you are not going to touch it, where would you get it from? Another deficit.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: You have to stand up and tell the public if you want to gain some support and try to win the next election, at least tell them how you will spend the money, or how you will raise the money.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of information, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, no. No point of information.

The Speaker: Point of information. He doesn't have to take it.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, I am . . . no.

And we are talking about the future as far as removing . . . the elimination of payroll taxes for employers who retain Bermudian employees for employers . . . by the way, that includes small businesses, that includes retail and a lot of them, as you know, keep their people for several years working in retail. And the Honourable Member said that we are not doing anything for them for small businesses in retail. The Honourable Member . . . some of you who have particular workers, you will not pay payroll tax for those who are over the age of 65. That is positive. That is positive!

So, as I said, Mr. Speaker, we have continuously reduced payroll tax for 86 per cent of the Bermuda workforce, expanded child care allowance, eliminated custom duties on essential goods, cut energy taxes by 60 per cent, reduced private car licence fees . . . will be reduced, abolish land tax for charities and nursing homes, and froze local fuel prices during global price surge. These are positive things that the Progressive Labour Party has done and will continue to do.

I am sure the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier does not want to hear all this.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I do.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, under the PLP they emphasised social equity, increased funding to education scholarships which you [the OBA] never did. Health, housing and public pensions, funded capital works like road paving. New ferries . . . on its way. October, I believe it is coming in. Digital government and public health upgrades. What did the OBA do? Investments slowed under austerity, social and capital spending were more constrained.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, it was. And you still had a \$299 million deficit.

An Hon. Member: I remember.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: We came in the next year and had a deficit of \$70 million.

Mr. Speaker, as we move to conclude, I would like to thank the Honourable Member DeCouto for his contribution, although I didn't hear all of it. In my closing I will address the final points raised and reiterate why I remain confident that the course we are on is the correct one. Above all I will return to the core theme: Let the numbers speak for themselves.

And, Mr. Speaker, the numbers we have been discussing speak volumes about Bermuda's progress. Mr. Speaker, there is no complacency on the Government's benches. We are prudent, not pompous. Every statistic of success we cite is taken with humility and a resolve to do even better. In other words, Mr. Speaker, the work has just begun. We are not finished. And as time goes on, as most Cabinet Ministers realise, there could be some changes that come place. As you know, we are projecting certain tax reductions as of April. If things get better, then we can improve . . . I am sure the Minister may even be bringing it ahead further.

Looking at . . . as the Honourable Member said cash flow. We can improve some things on [it.] But we will see. So, I wasn't . . . I know the numbers. I think will speak volumes or be even better. Members may even bring it even further up. Instead of doing it April 1. The significance of achieving consecutive budget surpluses after so long is not lost on this House and the public itself. We understand it as a mandate to continue responsible management. Likewise, record employment and low unemployment are blessings that we must work to safeguard through training our people and nurturing key industries.

We fully agree with the Opposition that these positive trends must be maintained and not squandered. However, where we diverge from the Opposition's narrative is in the level of confidence we have in Bermuda's direction.

I heard caution from the Honourable Member. Caution. Which is healthy. But I also hear reluctance to give full credit where it is due. I doubt any Members, understand . . . I will say a few things that are positive. They may change their minds now that I am saying it.

So let me state clearly for the people listening. Bermuda's economic recovery is real. It is robust. And it was achieved by design and not by accident. It was not by accident. The Honourable Ministers around this table know the pressure that we all come under and how we fight for certain things and get certain things and blah, blah, blah.

It has been a partnership between a government that provides sound policy and a populace and business community that preserves and innovates. We in Government do not claim sole credit. We cannot. What we claim is that we created the condition for our people and industries to succeed. And you cannot deny that we have created an environment for international businesses to thrive. We just for the last week, or last . . . yes, this week, we have had industries here. No one believed the industry at the time that the Premier at the time was speaking about. No one believed him.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Not even I . . . I was struggling trying to figure out how to work the machine. But even then, even I after . . . well, one day. But it is the future that we are living in. But most Members, as a matter of fact, if we go back in history, you will probably find Honourable Members on that side speaking against it. But it is happening. It is happening. For us who are moving off the scene, times will change. Nobody had . . . we had record players. We had . . . remember those record players?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Remember the record players? Times have changed.

Let me re-emphasise those outcomes one last time, Mr. Speaker. Because they bear repeating. Our gross domestic product has grown strongly four years in a row putting us ahead of many developed economies in growth rate. We have more Bermudians working, particularly in high paying sectors, than ever before. Our unemployment rate is at 1.6 per cent. It is the lowest in over half a century. Something that would have been unimaginable in the dark days of 2020. Not many of us would have believed that we would have met those numbers.

We have brought Government's finances from a deficit to a surplus position. And not just on paper, Mr. Speaker. That surplus would be used to reduce our debt. We know it is 3.3 . . . 3.23 . . . or 3.25 or whatever it is. And we will use those numbers to reduce our debt. And we can say it without being apologetic. Those numbers will help. And for the . . . what? Another four years, five years. And I can't wait for . . . now, I may not be here, but whatever happens in the next five years, I am hoping that some of you Members are here when we could probably celebrating and say, *It's down to zero*. Under the Progressive Labour Party Government. A government that when I was in another place would not, did not have the fortitude and the ability to do what they are doing now. In other words, there was a certain group, which they have now become the One Bermuda Alliance, did not believe . . . the people did not believe that we could do it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That is what I am saying. But we have proven without a shadow of a doubt that we are able to do what we said we could do. They are walking back. They are walking back. One thing about it, you read my book when I talk about that other group.

But my point, Mr. Speaker, is that we have done it, and we can do it again. These are tangible benefits and people's lives are not abstract numbers. The Opposition asked what . . . will these good numbers last? Mr. Speaker, with wise management I believe that they will not only last but improve. We are not merely resting on the current figures, we are actively planning and working to keep the momentum. Now, every Member on this side and particularly the Ministers, understand that. Honourable Member Jason Hayward was away this week at RIMS. He didn't just go there to say hi, and you know, drink some ginger ale. But he went there to improve the business so that we get more IB business here.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, but the Honourable Member complains about IB business growing. He did.

Our fiscal prudence will ensure that even if growth moderates, we will not slip backwards into crisis. Our commitment to diversification and education will ensure that if one sector slows, others can pick up slack. We are building a Bermuda that is resilient. The Economic Development Strategy mentioned earlier is a roadmap for the next several years. It is not a document for a shelf. It is a working plan being executed daily. And Honourable Member Jason Hayward is responsible for the Economic Development Strategy.

We are moderating our infrastructure, investing in our workforce, attracting new investors and improving Government efficiency. All to underpin sustained growth and should global economic weather worsen, and it is possible, we have contingency plans and the buffers I spoke of to navigate that as well. So, in other words, anything that happens, that 46 may go down to 10. But we have a buffer in place to make some things happen.

Mr. Speaker, it has been said that success has many fathers. And failure is an orphan. Maybe you didn't hear that. In this case, Bermuda's recent successes have many contributors, and I am pleased that in this debate we have all in our own way taken ownership of the success and also of the on-going responsibility to maintain it.

The Opposition rightly wants to ensure that the Government does not veer off course. The Government is determined to stay on course. If there is a take-away for the public, it is this: Bermuda is on sound footing today. We have come through the worst

and emerged stronger. That is cause for optimism—cautious optimism, yes. But optimism nevertheless. We are optimistic. And I believe the Honourable Members on that side are optimistic. Because you are under the Progressive Labour Party Government. The phrase, *Let the numbers speak for themselves*, was my theme. Let the numbers speak for themselves. And I have laid out clearly some of the numbers from the period under the One Bermuda Alliance Government and under us.

We hear a lot of numbers given out today. To conclude, I would like to translate those numbers back into what they really mean for people. Strong GDP growth, budget surplus, better opportunities for Bermudians, more jobs, potentially higher wages as employers compete for talent. And that is the truth. That is the truth! And Honourable Member DeCouto can speak to that as they compete for the talent in Bermuda. And more ability for the Government to invest in education, health care and social programmes.

Lower unemployment means dignity of work and self-sufficiency for our citizens. Parents providing for their families, young graduates finding their first jobs at home in Bermuda, and seniors (perhaps) able to work if they wish without penalizing taxes. And that is by lowering the taxes or reducing taxes for 65. That reduction remains a significant burden on the future generations. We must remove that debt.

These outcomes are why we govern. The honourable Opposition has expressed hope that in five years we will look back at 2025 as a stepping stone. And I hope you do. That you look back on this period of time and realise that this was a stepping stone. Last year we budgeted \$210,000 and this year we are budgeting \$46 million. So, it is not a peak. I share that hope and more than that, I have confidence it will be so. Because this Government will continue to be guided by the principles that got us here. Fiscal prudence. Investment in our people. And we have done it. Fairness in how we distribute the gains. If we stick to that, Bermuda's numbers will continue to speak, and they will speak at a prosperous, fair, and secure nation.

Mr. Speaker, I reiterate, let the numbers speak for themselves. The numbers tell me, Mr. Speaker, that Bermuda is going in the right direction. Mr. Speaker, I know I have two minutes left. With the foundation we have laid, and the vigilance we will maintain, I am confident that when the numbers speak next year, and the year after, and the year after [that], it will be an even more impressive story for this Government to give the country.

Mr. Speaker, may we continue to work together for the good of Bermudian people. The numbers have spoken, and they speak to a brighter future for Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

[Desk thumping]

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

The Opposition Leader—let me reset the clock.

Opposition Leader, you have the floor.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: And it is a 30-minute clock now.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will endeavour to get your title right during my contribution.

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Mr. Speaker, I want to first start by congratulating the Honourable Shadow Finance Minister on his first Reply to the Budget. The Honourable Member from constituency 25, as you are well aware, is new to the House after successfully contesting the last general election and has subsequently joined and covered himself in competence and esteem and I am very thankful he comes here to continue to uplift the work of the Honourable House.

I would further like to reiterate, if I may read a portion of his contribution. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I do believe he has entirely provided ample evidence that shows just how hollow the Government's claims of fairness really are as businesses and Bermudians in the local economy continue to struggle and the cost of living outstrips whatever small pay increases people are getting.

I would also like to follow along the Honourable Member from constituency 6 contribution to this debate wherein he outlined that times have changed and I couldn't agree more with him on that specific point. Something has gone horribly wrong in Bermuda. I don't . . . I mean, maybe they were canvassing different houses than I was, but I did not see a lot of happy people when I was wandering around out there.

Something that has also gone horribly wrong in Bermuda is . . . and I know that my colleagues will never, ever do this. And I am warning everyone now that we will never speak about another Honourable Member's mother in passing or in jest. Something has gone horribly wrong.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. I was . . . I was . . . go ahead.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House and the people of this country. Right? No one . . . you even ruled, Mr. Speaker, that the Honourable Member Furbert was not talking about any Honourable Member's mother in a derogatory way.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: In fact, he did. He highlighted her accomplishments.

The Speaker: I really want to decide how I am going to weigh in on this. Because your mother was actually one of those ladies I liked when she got on her feet. She was a real firebrand. And there are some Members when they get up you want to leave because they will put you to sleep. Your momma did not do that. She handled herself—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: No, no. No, no. No, no, no, no. She handled herself extremely well on her feet. And you would sit there and want to engage when she was doing it. So, I see her contribution on the floor as a positive. And I think . . . I did not take any offence to the Member's comment as being negative toward your momma. Because I sat there when your momma was there. I saw your momma perform and I knew what your momma brought to the debates. And I was thinking, you know, he was being credible to your mother, actually. So, if I missed something, I missed something. But I thought your momma brought a very positive contribution to the floor.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Okay?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, may I say a . . . may I make a comment?

The Speaker: Okay. Make your comment.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I just want to say I am grateful for those kind words of my mother. And I also know that when people have to start talking about your family rather than the substance of your topic, you are probably doing pretty well.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Well, rest assured that if any Member spoke negative toward another Member's mother or

family, I would definitely pull him on that, but I did not see that. And I was sincere when I said that your mother was one of those . . . she was a firebrand. She definitely was.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: And to that end, of some of the other things that are happening which are discouraging to Bermuda and Bermudians at this moment, as I said, we have all been recently wandering around, specifically canvassing after the last general election, and we are getting many, many complaints on the doorsteps. And this budget is part of that problem. It is a budget that is built on an illusion.

Mr. Speaker, I can use the example of the CIT, corporate income tax. Insofar as the working papers that this Government is using to say that \$187 million will be coming in, this Honourable House has not had the benefit of such materials and research and is in fact entirely reliant on the Cabinet to simply state a number, and for us to go, Yes. Because we have seen nothing that allows us to interrogate, scrutinise, evaluate, assess and give feedback on the accuracy of that number. So, we are entirely reliant on someone else telling us that this is in fact going to happen, when and how.

I take a note, Mr. Speaker, that if . . . I feel as if I went into a board meeting, and I said that we are going to see a 20 per cent increase in revenue off of an unidentified line item that has not previously existed before, I feel like members of the board would stop me and ask me to justify such a statement and to explain it in detail because that is an incredible amount of money and on it relies a great deal of Government's hopes. More specifically, their claim towards a surplus which is going to happen in the future is based entirely on whether or not the CIT comes through. And so, without the benefit of the working papers, in fact, without the benefit of anything whatsoever, other than their Statement, it is not entirely unreasonable that Members of the Opposition, in fact any one in Bermuda, would have a question about the reliability of such a statement.

To that end, Mr. Speaker, my point is that this budget is entirely built on an illusion and a hope. And I 100 per cent agree with my honourable colleagues from constituency 25 that when it comes to preparing for the future, illusions are no basis for progress.

Mr. Speaker, we are speaking further to the circumstances in which we find ourselves in Bermuda. Obviously, all of us are living through the state of the roads. We are living through the state of the cost of living. The price of food going up by a quarter, according to the Chamber of Commerce. Energy bills going up. Medications going up. Every single one of us is living in *that* reality. And I believe that is the reality that the Honourable Shadow Finance Minister was alluding to when he was talking about the local economy.

He was speaking about the lived experiences of many, many people as we make our way through-

out Bermuda. And the lived experience indicates that things are not getting fairer. That things are not getting easier. But that things are getting harder. So much so that multiples of our countrymen, our brothers, our sisters, our cousins, our mothers, our parents, are in fact leaving Bermuda to head for greener pastures elsewhere.

This recovery is in fact not being felt by Bermudians. But I believe my honourable colleague has made that point and I simply wish to reiterate that is what he is talking about. I would be quite impressed to hear how my honourable colleagues who have been out canvassing and out speaking are getting different feedback that Bermuda and Bermudians are in fact falling in love with the current economic state and think that everything is heading in the right direction.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry? Yes.

So, to that end, Mr. Speaker, we were talking earlier about international business. I just want to clarify something that the Honourable Member from constituency 6 was speaking to. Absolutely no one in the Opposition has a problem with international business growing, has a problem with international business being here, participating. Its relevance and role, not just to our economy but to our entire social fabric is key. Of the 35,000 employees, workers in Bermuda, some 5,000 are employed in international business. And yet the majority of our payroll tax receipts come from that very small group.

International business is that place where people can work toward and have and have risen their standard of living by working in that area. But also, international business is that place where we get to meet new people to the Island, welcome them into our community, show them the things that make Bermuda indeed the best place in the world, and invite them into our community and culture. And that is definitely taking place.

I remember the first time I went to Cup Match and I saw a reinsurance broker's sign up on the bleachers and it was . . . I couldn't figure out why they were advertising there, but . . . it is because they are buying into Bermuda. And so, when I am talking here on this specific point, when we say *international business is up*, we are in no way, shape or form complaining about that. What we are saying is that the Bermudian job numbers are down.

The growth in international business is effectively covering up the damages that are happening in other places in the economy and that is our point. Not that that growth is bad, simply that it is warping the total picture of what is happening within our economy. Household spending is stagnant, and retail is weak. Those are realities.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Member is continuously misleading the House. The economic data shows that the agricultural, forestry and fishing sector is above 2019 levels. The electricity, water supply and waste sector is above 2019 levels. Wholesale and retail trade is above 2019 levels.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Information and communication is above 2019 levels. Financial and insurance activities, which is domestic, is above 2019 levels. Real estate activities are above 2019 levels. Professional, scientific and technical [are] above 2019 levels. And I can go on and on and on.

They are creating this narrative that it is not factual as it pertains to the performance of the other sectors within our economy. And I would ask them to look at the detailed breakdown of GDP, real GDP by industry, and look at the performance of the pre-pandemic activity in 2019 to the current performance now and you will see that there is growth in a number of sectors outside of international business.

The Speaker: [No audio]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I am looking forward . . . that very glowing and optimistic clarification [from] the Honourable Member from constituency 17. I am looking forward to him accompanying me after the House when I go grocery shopping.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I will take the point of order. Go ahead. No? Okay. You can come grocery shopping with me too, you know.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Thank you.

So, some of the solutions that the Honourable Shadow Minister had brought up was dealing with stemming the contributing factors leading to our increase cost of living. And I just used the example of groceries, but it is quite clear.

In fact, the Honourable Shadow Minister spoke before about how the tax burden would be split if there were more people on Island. We would simply each be paying less because there are more people to pay into the kitty, and those sorts of ideas. Now these aren't terribly complicated ideas, Mr. Speaker. Indeed, one of our economic working group's chairperson—

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. He has said multiple times that the Government has nothing to help reduce the cost of living and he uses the grocery store as an example. This Government has reduced duty costs and duty amounts on fresh fruits and vegetables, on water and other grocery items which have not been passed on to the consumer. And so therefore the Government has done its part but the corporate entities that are at bay have not done theirs.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. I thank c—which one are you? I thank the Honourable Member from constituency 24. I think he heard something that I might have . . . I don't think I said that the Government didn't do anything about the cost of living. I said they are welcome to join me at my grocery shopping.

So . . . where was I? I was moving on. Oh, yes. We were talking about the population, Mr. Speaker, because it is a fairly easy thing to understand that the more people we have, the less pressure, cost pressures we are going to face. And to that end, that is why we have been raising that as a constant issue. And in this budget, we were hoping to see some reforms in that direction, some allocations in that direction.

A good example, Mr. Speaker, of a policy idea that gets funded in the budget is of course universal health care which sees some \$50-plus million being allocated to it. So, the policy idea of immigration reform being funded is not unexpected here. But we don't see it. So, therefore, we know that that issue is still being left unaddressed while more and more people continue to—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I have come to this House on multiple occasions and spoke about the initiatives that we are doing to increase our working population. I have put out reports that speak to the goals that we have set out to accomplish as it pertains to us increasing our working population.

There was a member that just chirped as it pertains to *how's it going?* But what I want to say is

that between 2021 and 2024 our working population has increased by over 2,000 individuals. Persons may not be happy with the rate of progress, but progress is being made in the right direction, and we continue to increase our working population since we are recovering from the pandemic.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Continue on.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I thank the Honourable Member from constituency 17 for speaking because it helps remind us that the target he set was 8,000 in five years. And I think we have run out of those five years. Or are we almost there yet? I can't remember. But 2,000 is certainly better than zero. So, we credit you with 2,000.

Yes, but he raises a good point, the Honourable Member from constituency 17, relating to the working population as a number. It is our supposition, Mr. Speaker, that the population increase would benefit from those who also are not working, like children. As we are well aware, the enrolment . . . and we will be talking about that during the budget process. School enrolments are down, and the Honourable Minister of Education has had a number of things to say about that . . . Sorry, the Honourable former Minister of Education had a number of things to say about that during the Reply to the Throne Speech. So, this is a great example because children eat too. So that is how that would impact the economy.

But, Mr. Speaker, let me just go on about some of the circumstances that we are concerned about, that we would like this budget to have addressed, and we have provided some ideas mostly around the food energy, and housing, inflation which has outpaced wage growth. And that is obviously a problem, that disparity is not going to make life any easier. Or to borrow a word from the Government, any *fairer*.

Earlier our recommendation to drop the sugar tax and reduce the foreign currency purchase tax met with widespread laughter, as I am assuming the position was that it would not affect anything or its arbitrary or too small. As it stands right now, we are well aware of the success of the sugar tax. Its use, or certainly its primary use and how it has not achieved that. And we are all well aware of that, so we still agree that we can be rid of yet another reason to drive up the cost of groceries.

Now, Mr. Speaker, while I am on my feet I would like to talk a little bit about tourism. Our statistics indicate that we are lagging behind in the region and falling behind further from the region every year. As it stands, our 2024 air arrivals are still some 27 per cent below the 2019 numbers whilst our regional peers have recovered fully, or surpassed, pre-COVID-19 levels. So, even though we are moving in the right direction, we are moving at a glacial pace. And the

question is: Will the pace be able to compensate or will we be able to actually realise enough gains in a timely enough fashion to save these struggling areas?

Mr. Speaker, whilst I am on my feet talking about tourism, I was reminded by a constituent that I canvassed that the structure of our tourism industry is also not conducive to small businesses, specifically around the maritime water trade tours. There are a number of regulations governing that space, including profit sharing, which reduces the amount of money that the Bermudian tour operator actually gets. And it goes instead toward those very large and fancy international corporations pulling up and dropping off tens of thousands of tourists. And that is a bit disappointing because those guys out there are working incredibly hard. And our Dockyard marine tour sector has typically been a key attraction and the more that we squeeze them the fewer there are. That means the fewer amenities there are in Dockyard. And that is just causing a problem altogether.

And it goes to my main point on tourism, Mr. Speaker. It is quite clear that the Bermuda Tourism Authority has been politicised to this point. And at this point now we watch it with the fascination of an episode of *The Young and the Restless*. As it stands right now, we . . . every other week we feel like you open the paper, and someone has either come or gone. Every other week you open the paper, and you hear about a board member having said something or not said something.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is sitting here trying to paint a narrative that his version of what he says, politicisation of the Bermuda Tourism Authority [BTA], is what is hindering growth in the tourism sector when it is actually the fact that we don't have enough hotel rooms, which they spoke against when we brought the Southampton Princess Bill to the House of Assembly. And when Southampton Princess comes on you will see an increase in air arrivals because more seats will become available, more airlines will put on more flights, thus increasing our tourism numbers. And so therefore he cannot sit here and try to paint a picture that it is the BTA and what they are characterising as politicisation when it is actually just our infrastructure.

And keep in mind that it was the UBP that hindered hotel development which is where their . . . which is the ideology which they continue to push forward to today.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Honourable Member from constituency 27 . . . I think it was.

An Hon. Member: Constituency 24.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Constituency 24.

Yes, so I was fascinated to learn that the title "parliament" comes from old French which is *to speak*. So, I would disagree with the Honourable Member from constituency 24. I can come on here and say quite a lot of things and paint the . . . and make a compelling argument about circumstances that I see. And he is free to disagree with it. But I will speak because I am allowed to speak. This is Parliament. And I will not be stopped.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the Honourable Member from constituency 24 for pointing out that I was trying to hinder . . . paint how hindering growth in tourism is entirely the fault of the BTA and that the Opposition is against adding hotel beds. I mean, that's a new one. I think that it's . . . it's certainly a creative approach to tourism. I don't think we are that creative though, to just simply throw away hotel beds.

Mr. Speaker, so as much as I thank the Members for their consideration, certainly their interruptions are allowing us to point out just how much of a threat we pose when we speak these matters.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: And I look forward to continuing. So, I am happy to take another seat for another point of order if anyone . . . I hear a lot of people interpolating. I am happy to take a seat and let you talk.

No?

Okay. Because you see when I say that, and I invite someone to talk, I actually sit down. I accept the invitation on a point of clarification.

[Inaudible interjections]

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: International business. Madam Deputy Speaker, we already spoke a little bit about the international business and its success in our industries. I think the Honourable Shadow Minister of Finance spoke to the proposition of the Sovereign Wealth Fund and how it is effectively not going to

work out well for us in Bermuda. It is one of these things that you see, Madam Deputy Speaker, on CNN a lot. And then you have someone like the expert, that is the Shadow Minister, who then points out just how feeble such an idea would be.

If I may, Madam Deputy Speaker, may I read?

[No audible comment]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member says he will sit down for a point of order. I just wanted to . . . and I can direct you to their Budget Reply on page 27, the very last paragraph. Regarding concessions—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: He asked for it; he is going to get it.

An Hon. Member: What's your point of order?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The point of order is this: The Honourable Member said that if you can show where we do not support Southampton Princess concessions, "although we were not supportive of the scope of the concessions and guarantees given to Fairmont Southampton," in their words, in their Budget Reply.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Member, continue please.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.
Which [constituency], Honourable Deputy Premier? Which?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Constituency 29. I thank the Member from constituency 29. I think it goes to show just how when people are talking, we can each hear something different. Because my point was . . . I was speaking about hotel beds, show where we don't agree with adding hotel beds. I didn't bring up the proper name for the hotel or the concessions. But that is my point. I mean, when I talk about the failure of Bermuda and how we are falling down, we can't even agree to—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Member is now intentionally misleading the House when he refers to the failure of Bermuda. Bermuda is not a failed state. Bermuda is not a failed country. You cannot say that Bermuda has failed in any way. And so, I do not understand how he can continue to use that term when the facts don't support it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes. Thank you. I thank the Honourable Member from constituency 17. Yes, the difference between a failed state and the circumstances of Bermuda are definitely evident most especially because we are not a failed state. We are not Somalia. We don't have the problems of Haiti. So, I definitely would never say that we are in fact a failed state.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I would say that there are *failures* taking place in Bermuda. Which is very difficult from the entire state.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: So, you want me take my seat? You guys want to point-of-order again?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Speak to the Chair please.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sorry Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I apologise. It is easy to get distracted.

As I was saying, the Honourable Shadow Finance Minister made a number of points about why the Sovereign Wealth Fund would not be a good idea, including having to use the CIT funds as a revenue stability fund. This was a fascinating point for me, realising the volatility of profits in property and casualty lines in insurance, which is our primary bread and butter in reinsurance. It means that we effectively have to save up money for bad days, for bad years. So, when we get this money in from the CIT, it is not as if it is

free for spending. There are going to be years when that won't happen. And we are in fact going to have to compensate others.

So, I mean, that's a great point for the Shadow Finance Minister to bring up and say, a Sovereign Wealth Fund in fact differs from our circumstances and so therefore we should not attempt to treat them the same way. Bermuda is certainly not a failed state when we are having conversations about hundreds of millions of dollars.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we were also speaking earlier about our public services. It goes without saying that all of us are looking forward towards increased public services. Now, before anyone jumps up and says that I hate civil servants, nothing would be further from the truth. I believe that the overwhelming vast majority are incredible public servants and due us a great service. And so, before anyone says that I hate civil servants, let's just get that off the table.

Service lines though are incredible. I mean, so . . . again, in my experiences one of the things that really separate a company is its ability to serve its clients better than anyone else. It is one of the things that we constantly emphasise in private sector. Indeed, when client emails come in, I am expected to reply to them on a same-day basis. We have many stories currently where such public services are not getting the same levels of responsiveness.

And I bring that up because we are looking for that increase in public services, in the quality of public services because the people who hire a lot of the Bermudians, we were talking before about the 5,000 Bermudians in international business, the 35[,000] in the working population, the people who are in fact creating those jobs, they rely on government. I mean, government is absolutely crucial to the success of the economy. And that success especially starts with reliable services, clarity around the interpretation of regulations.

Indeed, we know that the uplift companies that started as innovative companies that went through the incubation period with the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, so quite legitimate, found themselves on the wrong side of a new regulatory interpretation. Now you can only imagine the extent of money that was involved in bringing that enterprise to fruition and the number of jobs that have been lost subsequent to that change in regulation. And that lack of certainty and stability is what is causing the issues when we look at the domestic economy.

So, I see my time is just running out. I thank you for your time. I thank you . . . I thank the honourable colleagues for the many points-of-order that were raised.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I was . . . for the many points-of-order that were raised. I believe my point

ending is that there is a better version of Bermuda. I know that we are all working toward it. But absolutely at no point will we get there if we spend all of our time thinking that each other is the evil person in the room.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

Any other Members who wish to speak?

[Pause]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I am going to put the gavel down and the debate will end. So, if somebody needs to speak, they better get up now.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member from constituency 8. Hold on, Member, before you start.

Okay. Now you may start. Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, thank you so much—

The Deputy Speaker: Right.

Mr. Ben Smith: —for this opportunity.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, the budget obviously is filled with numbers but when the population listens the thing that impacts them is usually not those numbers. That is not the one . . . that is not what they pay attention to. They pay attention to how those numbers turn into services that they deal with. How that impacts their lives.

And the issue is that when you see the growth that is being discussed in the budget, if that is coming from a specific sector, that is coming from international business, then most of our population who is not part of that industry might not feel the same way about that growth.

So, what we are saying is, we agree. There has been growth in international business. We are happy that there is growth in international business. But understand that that growth in international business . . . because when you look at the payroll tax numbers, the Government tells everybody that they have lowered the payroll for most of the population but the numbers that they are receiving are actually getting quite a bit of revenue. That revenue is coming from mostly that sector.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, more expectation from that sector. We are not saying that the other

sector has not had anything happen to it. But we are saying that there has to be more focus on it.

Because the international business side is already paying. Not just with the taxes that they are paying now. In the future they are going to be looking at CIT tax. But they are also the ones who have been propping up our charities, propping up our sports. And the more that we seem to have an issue where we are needing more charity, more support for our sport clubs, because the Government has not always been able to give those resources, we are expecting more from that sector as we are moving into a CIT tax, a tax that can be a huge benefit for our country. But there is a cost. Because as you are expecting more from that sector at some point the golden goose wants to know, *What am I receiving?* Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, they are also driving on these roads. They also have to deal with the long waits at our hospital. They also see that we have issues with education. That are—

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: That Honourable Member is misleading the House. He is making . . . for the person who is listening on the radio and if they had just turned in, [we] would [understand] if they misunderstood . . . if they had the understanding that the CIT tax is a PLP initiative. This is us actually complying with a global directive. This is not a PLP platform that we came up with where we are finding ways to make more money. This is something of making sure that we can be a first-world jurisdiction and not be put on any blacklist, greylist, or any other colour list.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The issue is not that the PLP has come up with this initiative. It is that this tax is going to be layered on top of the demand that already exists. That is where the issue comes. But understand something: We as a country have to realise that the same way they could pay that tax in a different jurisdiction, they could also move to another jurisdiction. They are still here today.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: It's only fearmongering.

Mr. Ben Smith: But this is the issue. And it is not about fearmongering.

An Hon. Member: It is.

Mr. Ben Smith: It is about the reality—

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Ben Smith: So—

The Deputy Speaker: Speak to the Chair.

Mr. Ben Smith: I will continue to speak . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Speak to the Chair.

Mr. Ben Smith: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is interesting that the Honourable Labour Minister is one of the people who is chirping right now.

An Hon. Member: Correct.

Mr. Ben Smith: Because one of the issues is this: The slow movement of immigration is one of the things that has actually been impacting this sector. And what you have to understand is that slow movement means that many times they are placing those jobs in other jurisdictions because their . . . because the immigration process is taking too long. So, while he is slowing it down—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: So, the issue is because the Government likes to talk about the low unemployment rate, but they can't tell us how many people have emigrated. We know that because it came up earlier today and we do not have those figures. We can't even talk about it because we don't know.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Minister.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Member is misleading the House in a number of areas.

Number one, he is stating that companies are making decisions to move employees overseas after I just articulated that the number of employees in international business has increased, is at record levels. We have more numbers in international business now than at any period of time under the OBA's tenure.

Year over year we have had job growth in international business as well. When you look at the annual work permits that are actually being produced, we are increasing the number of work permits that the

Department of Immigration is actually putting out on an annual basis. And so, it is incorrect to somehow say that the processing times in immigration is leading to a decline in the workforce in that particular area.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Ben Smith: Madam Deputy Speaker, it is not a decline. We are saying we need growth. The Minister talked about 8,000 more jobs. If you are slowing down the process and are putting the jobs overseas, those are jobs that we could have had. Correct? That's the growth. So, he can talk about that message, but let's be clear. Under the One Bermuda Alliance Government the turnaround time was 20 days. Can he get back to that number? Can he work to that number?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order. Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Minister.

POINT OF ORDER *[Misleading]*

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member would need to withdraw that statement. Because if the OBA were turning over—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The OBA were not turning over work permits in 20 days on a consistent basis. They were not. They might have done one fast-track or two fast-tracks, but I can assure you they were not. And I can speak to that through experience. I have several companies under the OBA that waited an extensive time for permits to be renewed.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Point of clarification.

The Deputy Speaker: Do you accept?
Okay.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

When the One Bermuda Alliance first came into Government in 2013, it was quite correct to say that work permits were not being turned around in 20 working days. After some period of time of a reform, we in fact hired consultants through KPMG to help process the permits and we did in fact get it down to 20 working days for a period of time.

An Hon. Member: Oh! Oh!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: That's the point. All right. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker *[sic]*—

The Deputy Speaker: Madam Speaker.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker—

The Deputy Speaker: Acting Speaker.

POINT OF ORDER *[Misleading]*

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Members are misleading the House. There has always been inconsistency in terms of processing work permits within the Department of Immigration. Even after the reform exercise took place, they were able to get the permits done for a short period of time and then you went through peaks and valleys again where permits were being processed outside the 20 days.

I can highlight during this current administration where permits are being processed under 20 days. But there are some occasions where permits are not being processed within that 20-day period. When I looked at the turnaround times, consistently it is more consistently related to 30 days than 20 days.

But the fact remains that that particular OBA Administration was unable to consistently put out permits in a 20-day turnaround period.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Member. Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: You are just under 20 minutes so you . . .

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, I will continue on the immigration tact because going along with that . . . and the reason that this becomes a major subject is that almost everything that we are pointing to tells us that we have a population problem. And it is an emergency because the statistics that were brought to the House earlier today showed us birth rate/death rate.

We are not moving in the correct direction. We have to grow the population. The health care needs us to have more young, healthy, vibrant people

in our community in order to spread the cost of a growing, ageing population. This is where we are, and many other jurisdictions are. So, I am not . . . all I am saying to the Minister and to the public is that we need to make sure that as we are putting more burden on a group to pay our bills, we need to make sure that we are being as effective and as efficient as possible because other jurisdictions are moving at the speed of business. So, we need to make sure that we are moving at the speed of business. Because we have to grow.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. *[sic]*

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, *[sic]*—

An Hon. Member: Madam Deputy Speaker.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam [Deputy] Speaker, the Department of Labour has put out the information regarding our ageing population. That is where he gets it from. The Department of Labour has put out a paper regarding how we retain our local workforce. And so, he knows that there are plans to be made. I have come to this House on numerous occasions and talked about the digitisation process that is currently underway. I eluded in a Statement that I made a couple of weeks ago in the House as it pertains to the work that is being done, how we had selection of vendor, how we went overseas to explore the software for implementation in Bermuda. So, it is highly misleading to suggest that we are not doing what is necessary.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.
Once again, this is the reality that we are living in. I understand that the comments are because it is uncomfortable when somebody tells you that you have got to move faster than you are moving right now. And it is really about we have to grow. Because at the moment, Madam Deputy Speaker, we believe that the Government is doing a lot of great work building a safety net for the community.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: One thousand per cent.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Stop on that note.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: But guess what, Madam Deputy Speaker, the middle class is falling into that net. More and more of our community is falling into that net. That is why the 65-year-olds, who might not have chosen to continue to work, must work. That is why more of our people are getting on the plane to never return. That is what is actually happening.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: So, it is interesting that the Government likes to point out that certain taxes were put in place under the One Bermuda Alliance, but they sure continue to collect those taxes up until recently.

An Hon. Member: Whoa!

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Ben Smith: That's where they were getting that money from. And now they are looking at the CIT to bail them out.

An Hon. Member: That can't be true. No. No.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Madam Deputy Speaker, construction. We are happy to see that they are lowering those taxes in order to increase that. But once again, the issue is this: It is the processing of Planning that is holding it up, that is causing the cost to go up because the construction industry is at a halt. Those are the issues. You can put the best plans down but if you are not actually implementing the plans, and moving forward with those plans, they are just plans. And that is the issue.

So, the answer is this: Yes. We do have a crane on Front Street and all of us are excited to see that crane on Front Street.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

[Desk thumping and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: But one crane is not a construction boon. Most of those buildings that are being torn down—

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker *[sic]*. Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member misleading the House. I actually work for a hotel down in the East End and I can see three cranes in the air just from my office.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: It is amazing that he can see that from way down there because I said the crane was on Front Street.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Honourable Member is making it seem as though the only construction that is happening in the Island is on Front Street. There are hotels that are expanding themselves and growing. There are hotels that are building new wings, hotels that are building new conference areas. And that does not happen just on front street. So therefore, the Honourable Member either needs to be better educated on what is going on in the country or speak to the facts.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Ben Smith: Madam Deputy Speaker, once again, on Front Street—crane. We can see it. And I was saying that we are happy about that. But Madam Deputy Speaker, how many buildings that are being torn down in Hamilton are being replaced with parking lots? Think that through.

Some Hon. Members: How many?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: If everything is booming, they would be building office buildings, apartment buildings, and instead they are building parking lots. That tells you where the actual situation is. That is the part that they do not want to talk about. And we are not saying that nothing is happening. But every day that more of our citizens are deciding to opt-out, that is happening because we need to be growing faster.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. He is saying that we are returning old derelict buildings into parking spaces, but yet he conveniently is leaving out the fact that they spoke against the PLP Government allowing for a change in the height restrictions to buildings which has sort of inspired—

An Hon. Member: No, no.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: —the building which he is speaking to.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I'm afraid the Honourable Member is misleading the House. When the proposal came for this high building on Front Street where the crane is, we were delighted to be supportive of that. And it is incorrect to say we were contrary. I myself spoke. I know Michael Dunkley spoke about how it was nice to see buildings being built and to welcome Brookfield with open arms on both sides of this Honourable House.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Continue, Member Smith.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you. And I will. Thank you, Minister.

Because growing is what needs to happen, with urgency. Because the issue is this: The Budget tells you all the things that the Government is going to do. But many of these things . . . we have been patient. The country has been waiting for them. This is not the first year that we have had to increase police. This has been a situation that has been going on forever. In a time that we have higher need for what

happens with our police force because the crime has changed. Times have changed in Bermuda.

Everybody is dealing with the potholes. The Minister got up and told us that things are going to change with that. We have heard that more than once.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. It makes it seem as though the Government controls the police. The police answer to the Governor, not the Government. The Government only provides funding.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Continue.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you. I'm glad he said that because not giving the funding is how we got into the position in the first place.

So, the issue is this: You can tell by a budget what your focus is. We are saying that you have to look to grow our economy so that more of our people can be part of it. So that our young people when they go away to get educated, look at Bermuda as an option. Bermudians have always left after school and decided to work overseas. But that number is increasing. The problem is the parents are following them. Their grandparents are following them. That's the part that we cannot have. Because as that number continues to go down while the senior population increases the burden is on a smaller group of people. And all we keep hearing is, *We are going to ask more from this small group of people in international business. We want them to pay more and we want them to be patient because we do not want to give them anything.* But guess what? Could they give us more money for the hospital?

[Desk thumping and crosstalk]

Mr. Ben Smith: *Can you give us more money for the hospital? Can you help? Can you help there too? Can you help with our charities? Can you increase our safety net for us? Can you do all of those things? And we are going to have to increase your taxes with the CIT.*

That's where we are.

And we have to understand that all of the things that we want as a community . . . remember the IB people can pay for the \$23 broccoli. They don't even think about it. But when Mr. and Mrs. Smith go to that same store, maybe they can't have broccoli.

Maybe they can't have the healthy food that they need. So once again, *Let's increase our safety net. Let's make sure that what we are doing is more seniors are having to rely on social assistance because they can't survive in the Bermuda that has been created.*

The ones who reach the critical point say *I am going to leave.* So, my statement is based off of if you are a senior who has an opportunity to move to another jurisdiction where your health insurance is low enough for you to be able to survive, your pension number goes far enough for you to be able to survive, that is the decision that they are making. Choose a jurisdiction. Because they are going everywhere.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: So, once again, it is very interesting that we can talk about facts. When what is being provided is based off of incomplete data, we do not even know what the emigration number is. So, we are here today without the correct data. You think about this, Madam Deputy Speaker, yes, there hasn't been a census since 2016.

An Hon. Member: Who left?

Mr. Ben Smith: But since that point there was a pandemic, and we know that parts of our population have decided to opt-out. Don't you think it would have been kind of a good thing for us to make sure that our numbers were right when we were making the decisions that we have to make for the future of this country? But no. We will wait until 2026 and that is when we will figure out whether what we have put forward is actually real, whether it is going to work for our population. And that is why when you knock on doors people are not happy.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So why do voters vote?

Mr. Ben Smith: That's an interesting one because most people did not vote.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Ben Smith: So, the issue is this, Madam Deputy Speaker. They have the mandate. They have the Government. They want to talk about what the OBA did not do, but it is eight years. It is your record that is on the line. It is you who has to put the things in place. You are the ones who have to make sure that that education reform is happening, that we have enough police, that you are lowering the Crime, that we actually have a hospital that works, that our people are not in the hallway. That is your responsibility. So, you need to stand up and make sure that that is what is actually happening. And if what we need to do is grow our population, you need to make sure it is working

efficiently enough at the speed of business so that we can increase. That is what actually has to happen. We have to grow the pie instead of dividing the pie that is left into smaller pieces.

[Inaudible interjections and desk thumping]

Mr. Ben Smith: The only pie that seems to be growing is the one that the Labour Minister sees. That is the only pie.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

Mr. Ben Smith: And it is a pie in the sky!

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Jason Hayward: They might not like the facts. The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

The economy is growing. That is a fact. And so, when you start to talk about the economic pie in Bermuda, the economic pie is actually expanding and getting bigger. When that economic pie expands, it creates more opportunities. When those opportunities arise, we see job growth. If you look at the numbers, you see an expanding economy, you see job growth, you see one of our lowest unemployment rates ever. There are more opportunities in Bermuda for Bermudians.

And so, it is important that when we stand here and we are speaking to the public that we ensure that they are informed with the accuracies. Can the Honourable Member stand to his feet and explain when he talks about a shrinking pie, what does he mean by the numbers?

Mr. Ben Smith: Madam Deputy Speaker, with the rest of my time I am going to continue on with the fact—

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Ben Smith: Oh, yes. Okay, Labour Minister. Because guess what—

The Deputy Speaker: Members—

Mr. Ben Smith: —you are going to have an opportunity.

[Gavel]

The Deputy Speaker: Speak to the Chair.

Mr. Ben Smith: The Labour Minister will have his opportunity to get up and tell everybody—

The Deputy Speaker: Are you speaking to the Chair?

Mr. Ben Smith: Correct. He is going to have his opportunity to talk about why all of these people are going out and becoming “belongers,” because they don’t get the same safety net that they are looking for. He can tell us what those numbers are. He can tell us how many of those processes he is getting at Immigration. He can talk about that. The same group that I am telling you is the golden goose.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: But don’t pluck all the feathers of that goose. Because they can go to other places. And what we are saying is, make sure that you understand that. And we will continue to push for the economy to grow. Grow for everybody. Because when you walk around this city, right in front of us, how many of those restaurants are actually booming? How many of those retail shops are actually booming? Because this Government . . . this is the Government that has been competing against retail. Don’t forget, that failed job where they, *Oh, we are going to make sure that you can import through us.* So, compete against local retail that has to pay all of our taxes, our health insurance, our electricity bills. And hire Bermudians only. And don’t forget, in this budget let’s make sure that people can travel overseas and have less duty to pay when they come in—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order. Point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Ben Smith: —to compete.

The Deputy Speaker: Point of order, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, can you allow me to quote from the daily?

The Deputy Speaker: You may.

Some Hon. Members: What’s your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Member is misleading the House as it pertains to the economic performance in terms of the performance of construction and I just want to use an additional source to clarify that matter.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: I have given you permission to read the daily.

Hon. Jason Hayward: ³“Building boom in Hamilton!” is the headline. [The lead is] “Commercial and tourism developments keeping builders busy.” And they go into the numbers of developments that have taken place.

Why would the business section of the *RG* use those terms if it was not a reality?

Secondly, when we start to talk about wholesale and retail, I articulated that the wholesale and retail sector has expanded beyond 2019 levels. Explain to me the contraction of wholesale and retail that he is talking about versus the statistics which show that economic output in that particular sector is going up.

An Hon. Member: That’s a valid challenge.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Continue. I want to remind you that you just have under two minutes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, so with the rest of my time I am actually going to focus on Bermuda and the Bermudians who are living in the actual economy not whatever the Labour Minister would like for me to discuss. But he will have his opportunity to do so.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Economy and Labour.

Mr. Ben Smith: We have to grow. Those are the facts. He talks about 8,000 jobs but he doesn’t want to talk about 8,000 people. I got it. Because it is not helpful for him to say 8,000 people. I got that. But without the extra people going around this community, those are the ones who fill the restaurants and then have a young person say, *Well, I can be an entrepreneur and open something*. That’s how we actually grow. You have to have more people here paying into this system. That is how it is going to happen. You cannot rely on IB to continue to bail you out because if, five years from now, that is not there we need to have built a sustainable plan here with people. That is how this is going to happen.

So, one more time. Grow the pie. That is what we have to be about. Focus on it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Ben Smith: Become more efficient. Actually do the work. Don’t put the numbers down and say, *This is the plan*. Implement the plan. Make sure you are getting it done and stop worrying about what happened seven, eight years ago and worry about what you are doing right now and how you are going to move for-

ward. Because the record of building an airport and building hotels . . . I haven’t seen your hotel yet. I am waiting for it. That is the actual reality.

So, as we move forward I want the population to know we can be a better country moving forward. We can grow. But we have to be focused on you and your children so that you can come back and thrive in this community. Not [on] whatever is going to be left after this Government is done.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I don’t understand that.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to speak otherwise . . .

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. There being none, this . . . Okay.

I recognise the Member from constituency 10.

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. I haven’t seen anybody else on their feet. So, I guess this debate has ended.

[Crosstalk]

[Gavel]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. All right.

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Where does that take us on the Order of the Day?

[Crosstalk]

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

The Speaker: Members, just for clarification, I take it that no Member rose to their feet just now.

An Hon. Member: Correct.

The Speaker: That’s correct. Okay. And the Deputy Speaker gave plenty of opportunity. I heard her call

³ [*The Royal Gazette*, 30 April 2025](#)

numerous times for someone to rise to their feet. No one rose to their feet, and she ably hit the gavel.

An Hon. Member: Correct.

The Speaker: Which means that the long-anticipated debate this evening is now over.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

The Speaker: And I thank you for that.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

The Speaker: Now, the Premier has a right to reply because he opened it.

Does the Premier wish to reply?

An Hon. Member: The Premier is not in here.

The Speaker: Deputy [Premier] do you want to reply on his behalf?

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Oh, no! Don't give him the last word.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Deputy, I am going to give you the curtesy . . . because the Premier is not here, I am going to give you the curtesy of replying. You have your 30 minutes to reply and then we will all go home.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: There is your audition.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Well, Mr. Speaker, let's say this. I have been in this House now almost 20 years, and I have never seen where you have a Budget Reply and the party that produced the Budget Reply failed to get up and speak to their Reply in support of their leader.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, Mr. Speaker, I must say what a surprise it has been.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, let me just rearrange my notes. I did not expect to be talking this early.

The Speaker: You have 30 minutes, but you do not have to use all of your 30 minutes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, and I probably will, Mr. Speaker. I probably will.

What I did not appreciate was the last speaker that spoke, the Honourable Member Ben Smith.

An Hon. Member: Did not appreciate it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I did not appreciate it at all because if you listen to the Honourable Member speak, you would have thought that Bermuda was on its way down the drain. Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Honourable, Minister Jason Hayward, will take joy in presenting and debating his budget in the weeks to come. And I am sure that when the people of the country hear what the Honourable Minister Jason Hayward has to say, they will feel a lot more confident about the country.

But, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member Ben Smith said that we need to grow the country, and we need to grow it quickly. If you listen to his speech, Mr. Speaker, as I said, you would have thought the country was going down the drain. And I think Members on both sides talked about Brookfield Re being here and building their large building on Front Street extending to Reid Street, Mr. Speaker. If Bermuda was doing so badly and things were so bad and things were so expensive that people would not want to be here . . . We have another company, one of the biggest in the world, that has just signed a very long lease, as you know Mr. Speaker, by the name of Google. Mr. Speaker, Gencom has invested tens of millions of dollars in Rosewood [on] Tucker's Point Drive. They are investing up to half a billion dollars into Fairmont Southampton.

An Hon. Member: Elbow Beach

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And I will declare my interest when I talk about Gencom.

Elbow Beach has just been purchased by another gentleman and company that have super confidence in Bermuda, Mr. Stephen King and his group. They developed the Loren hotel, built homes there, built villas there, and because Bermuda is such a great place to invest in—unlike Mr. Ben Smith talked about for 20–30 minutes, Mr. Speaker—they decided they are going to invest in Elbow Beach.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, Washington Mall announced recently that they had never had their offices this full since they opened.

An Hon. Member: Correct.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Washington Mall, Mr. Speaker. They are absolutely 100 per cent full here as we speak. But then, if you listen to Ben Smith, you would have thought that the Island was going down the drain.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, and I will declare my interest again, my company demolished a building on Pitts Bay Road recently, [the] Belvedere. Guess what they are doing there. Building up another office block, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Not a parking lot.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Not a parking lot.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It is an office block.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, the Greens have invested hundreds of millions of dollars in the Hamilton Princess hotel [and] not because they do not have confidence in Bermuda and think that we are going down the drain. They are doing it because they have confidence that their investments will do well in this country.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this country rejected the OBA Government for seven straight years. We had a lot of talk over there today about how the PLP are not running this country, not handling the economy, and not handling the finances of this country well. Let me assure you, Mr. Speaker. If that were the case, we would not have had two landslide victories and one earth-shattering victory over the last seven years, which we have had—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —because the people of this country—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —the people of this country decided that they had the confidence in this Progressive Labour Party Government to continue governing the country for the people of this country.

An Hon. Member: They do.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, not only are we—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —have we shown that we are running the country and handling the finances really well, Mr. Speaker, but we have done that going through a pandemic, a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic. Many countries, Mr. Speaker, are still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 challenge that we had world-wide.

Mr. Speaker, it was said by Members opposite that we need to get this economy going. We need to get it flowing and quickly. Mr. Speaker, you have heard that we have the lowest unemployment rate in 50 years in this country. IB are at the highest levels they have been in a very, very long time—

An Hon. Member: Very long.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —Mr. Speaker, a very long time.

An Hon. Member: You said “very, very” was the right one.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member, the Opposition Leader, said several times that something has gone horribly wrong with this country. Maybe he was talking about the way they ran their election campaigns the last seven years because certainly the other thing he said was that the feedback he received on the doorstep . . . Well, Mr. Speaker, the feedback that Honourable Member received on the doorstep—remember where he lives, in Paget . . . See, the feedback that we receive in our constituencies from our people tells us exactly what they think, Mr. Speaker. We do not do everything perfectly, but they are happy enough for us to continue to be the Government of this country. And govern we will. So, Mr. Speaker, I do not know where that Honourable Member canvases, but I will tell you what.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I know where we canvas on this side of the House, and I know who we talk to. I know who we spend our time with, Mr. Speaker.

Now—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —Mr. Speaker, we are talking about the economy. This economy has shown under a Progressive Labour Party Government resilience and growth post pandemic. Our GDP has grown

for four consecutive years. Unemployment, as I said earlier, is at its lowest historical low of 1.6 per cent for 50 years. We achieved a \$19.7 million surplus in 2024–2025, our first surplus in 24 years. That is why the people of this country have confidence in this Progressive Labour Party Government.

Another key budget figure I think for us to take note of is our total revenue, which was \$1.43 billion, \$1.43 billion. Our debts serviced were \$127.5 million.

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Deputy Speaker, we have a projected surplus of \$43.3 million. For the first time in a very long time, we are going to have two consecutive years of surplus. And as the Honourable Member David Burt, our Premier, stated recently, the deficit days are over.

We are also, you will note . . . These things are important because if you listen to the OBA and you listen to their Reply . . . I want to concentrate on our budget [and] some of the things that we are doing. Someone said to me after we produced our budget, they said: *Wait a minute. The OBA said that you produced a budget before the election. It was an election budget.* Well, if you looked at our budget for this next fiscal year, some might say, *Are you expecting another election?* because of the number of things that we are going to do for our people. And some of those are customs duty on building materials. I am glad to see that the Opposition say that they think it should be reduced to zero. Well maybe it will. Maybe he has been listening to the Premier talk. Fuel tax on electricity has been reduced 80 per cent from 20 cents to 4 cents per litre. That is huge for people of this country. To say that we are not taking care of the people of this country is being a little economical with the truth to put it mildly. The land tax base rate is being cut to 50 per cent. Car licensing fees are going to be cut 10 per cent [and] the returning resident duty exemption raised to \$300.

The Honourable Member Ben Smith seemed to say: *Well, here you go again. You are hurting retailers.* Well, I tell you what. You tell our Bermudian people when they come back through customs that the first \$300 is duty free and see what they say.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, it is not.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They . . . The Honourable Member is chirping next to us saying, *Look, let the retailers go get your numbers down.* You know. And of course, he is saying it with a bit of a smile on his face as we do sometimes in this place. But I tell you what.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You have our PLP Government that has helped retailers more than the OBA did during their last tenure. I will say that—the concessions that we have constantly given all retailers in this country. They have got the opportunity to invest in their business and do well if they work hard.

[Inaudible interjection]

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

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Deputy Speaker, over the . . . Mr. Speaker, I just want to touch on the Budget Reply for just a moment if I can.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I quote page 23 [in] reference to the corporate income tax, “The One Bermuda Alliance would take a more moderate, transparent, and realistic approach. First, we would craft a budget that works without including the CIT for at least the next two to three years.” Now, Mr. Speaker, see? That is the difference between them and us; we intend on using that money for the infrastructure that they say . . . Honourable Member Opposition Leader, some of the things that you had talked about were the infrastructure, the roads. Yes. Well, what we plan on doing is using some of that CIT money for just that.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That is right. We will.

And Mr. Speaker, let me just touch on Fairmont Southampton for just a moment because we had an exchange about that earlier, and I did quote page 27 where the Opposition said “although we are not supportive of the” (they are not supportive) “. . . of the concessions and guarantees given to Fairmont Southampton . . .” Not only were they not supportive, but Honourable Member Criag Cannonier said at the time that it was criminal. He said it was actually criminal—the concessions that we gave to Fairmont Southampton.

An Hon. Member: He said that.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And I do not hear a point of order on that, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Because he said it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Because he did say it. The Honourable Member Craig Cannonier said in this House during the debate for the concessions for Fairmont Southampton that the concessions that we

gave were criminal. That does not sound like somebody supporting it to me.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That is what was said, and you cannot deny it.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I do not hear a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I do not hear a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, it is true. It is true, Mr. Speaker. And then they say at the same time—

An Hon. Member: What do they say?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They say . . . The Opposition—

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

An Hon. Member: That was easy.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order. Yeah, it is easy—

An Hon. Member: That was easy.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: If memory serves me correct, you know, he is saying that we did not agree with the concessions. We voted for the concessions, and we said in our general statements—just about every single person at that time—that we supported this here. But we were very much questioning the increase. It was the increase that we were very much concerned about, but we supported it because it had to be done.

And if you recall, Mr. Speaker, that was done in a one, two, and three session—in one day, rushed. And so, we agreed to do it and pass it.

But what I could also say as part of a clarification, Mr. Speaker (I am losing my voice, you know) [is] back in 2014, just to clarify all of this here, I can recall when the Premier spoke vehemently against the fact that he did not feel that the Greens should have got an extension on their concessions for \$11 million. He was arguing against the point—

[Crosstalk]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: —against the point.

It still went through, so you know, it is kind of contradictory for the Honourable Member Deputy [Premier] to get up. And that can be found in *The Royal Gazette* easily in 2013 and 2014 where the then Opposition Shadow Financial . . . Speaking against the Greens getting \$11 million in concessions . . .

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I will tell you what. I would ask the Honourable Member to produce that like [what] I produced here when I make a statement about what someone says in this House, I do not make that statement unless I have a Hansard or copy close by. And the Honourable Member knows that. Most Members in this House will know that.

Now, Mr. Speaker, just on that point—because I was in the House that day—I will tell you what did happen. Grant Gibbons, the Honourable former Member Grant Gibbons, was the Minister of Finance, and I will tell you what he did. He brought concessions to the House that the Greens did not agree with, and we were told that if the concessions were not fixed immediately the construction on it at the time would be shut down. And guess what happened on Monday, Mr. Speaker. All the construction was shut down. And guess what we did on Friday. You talk about doing something superfast. The Honourable Grant Gibbons was back in the House—

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —to give them a further \$11 million. That is what he is getting confused with, I think.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I certainly am not getting confused. On February 28, 2014, the Premier, well the Shadow then, now Premier . . . *Tax concessions cannot go on forever*. And it goes on to speak to the fact that he was against the \$11 million increase. There you go.

[Inaudible interjections and desk thumping]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay. I will give you that, but I . . . Just like you said, it was criminal for Fairmont Southampton to get concessions. I guess you and the Premier should have a chat.

[Laughter]

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order again, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Member is misleading the

House. The whole purpose behind the fact that we were saying that it was criminal [is] because we had already bailed them out. And why are we then going into concessions for them when we are bailing them out?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I beg your pardon? Bailing out Fairmont Southampton? Bailing out Fairmont Southampton?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Wow. That is on record.

An Hon. Member: That is on record because they . . . We . . . You remember that?

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Wow. I will gladly take my seat if you want to clarify that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I want to know how the people of this country bailed them out.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now you see, Mr. Speaker, that is a falsehood that the Opposition continued to say at the time, and it was absolutely wrong. The fact of the matter is that we felt on this side of the House that the people who were to get that \$11 million in compensation should get it sooner. So, it is not like we bailed them out—

An Hon. Member: Yes, you did!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —but we felt as a Government—

An Hon. Member: Say it!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —we felt as a Government—

An Hon. Member: You heard right.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. We felt as a Government, Mr. Speaker, that that was the right thing to do, to look after our people sooner than what they were going to get taken care of. So, it was not a thing about bailing them out.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the other thing I want to . . . It is interesting (right?) to hear the Opposition say that we did not have one session, we did not have two sessions, we did not have three sessions with regard to those concessions, but we did it very, very quickly.

One month they will say we are rushing things through. The next month they will say we are taking too long. The Honourable Member Ben Smith said we need to get this economy going quickly. He just said that.

An Hon. Member: I agree.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: When we bring things to this House so that we can progress construction, investment, and jobs for our people quickly, the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier is complaining.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think it is clear that I just showed that we were willing to work together for them to make something happen very quickly for Fairmont Southampton, which is why we did it so quickly, because we were willing to work with them to make it happen despite the fact that I might have thought at the time that it was criminal.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, so I guess that he does not think it is criminal anymore as he has had time to think about it.

So, Mr. Speaker—

[Laughter, inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I am glad he clarified that back then he made a mistake, Mr. Speaker. That is very interesting indeed.

But Mr. Speaker, the other thing I thought that I would point out is the . . . is the . . . Hang on. Let me get my notes, Mr. Speaker. The . . . One page 12 of the Opposition's Reply to the Throne, it stated—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will get to our budget—

An Hon. Member: You are running out of time.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —it states on page [12], and I will quote: "tourism has seen some improvements from 2023 to 2024, but remains far behind 2019," (Far behind 2019) "and continues to remain behind our competitors to the south. Tourism arrivals by air are 15% higher from 2023 to 2024, but are down 27% versus 2019." Now, Mr. Speaker, let's talk about that for just a moment.

Mr. Speaker, let's repeat that, "but we are down 27% versus 2019." Mr. Speaker, it was 29 per cent under the OBA in 2014, and we were 23 per cent under the OBA in 2015. So, [you] have to be careful how you produce these numbers. You have to look at the history of your own party.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as I close, Mr. Speaker, I thought it would be important to mention a few things of note since I am the last one to speak. Mr. Speaker, we are going to increase capital expenditures to \$150 million. And I note that is the most since 2008—\$150 million since 2008. Mr. Speaker, we are investing more in scholarships this year than any time in recent history. We will continue to spend millions of dollars on affordable housing in this country. We are increasing future care benefits for our seniors, Mr. Speaker, because Members Opposite said, *What are doing for our seniors?* We are not telling them that money grows on trees, Mr. Speaker. We are not.

Mr. Speaker, we will continue to have a surplus this year. We had a surplus last year, and the deficit time, as I said, is over.

Mr. Speaker, with regard to the budget and the Budget Reply, all I would advise the people of this country to do is read our Budget 2025–2026. It is full. It is full of benefits for the people of this country. The people of this country decided to vote us in for yet another term, and this Budget is a reflection of the care and love that we have for our people

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy Premier.
All the items are carried over.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Yes. Read the motion that the Premier used to open it. We will close it out.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker. I move that the House do now resolve in committee of supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

The Speaker: And Deputy, you need to take your chair while that is done.

[Pause]

House in Committee at 6:26 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Minister? Yes. You move.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Oh.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I now move Heads 37 Ministry of Justice Headquarters 03 Judicial Department, 04 Attorney General Chambers, 25 Department of Corrections, 74 Department of Court Services, and 75 Department of Public Prosecutions.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Okay. It has been moved that Head 87, Head 4, Head 3, Head 25, Head 74, and Head 75 be considered.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, I move that the Committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again Monday, 12 May 2025.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: It has been moved that the committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again on Monday, 12 May 2025.

Any objections?

No.

There being none, approved.

The Speaker will resume his seat.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress, and sought leave to sit again, Monday, 12 May 2025.]

House resumed at 6:28 pm

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

The Speaker: Members, all other orders on the paper will be carried over.

So, Deputy would you like to close the House out.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I ask that the House adjourn until Monday, 12 May 2025 at ten o'clock [am].

The Speaker: Any objections to that?

There are none.

MP Simmons, I see you standing. Are you standing because you are ready to leave?

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: No, sir. No, sir. I have got an early night, and I am all dressed up. I think I might as well say a few things.

The Speaker: Oh. Okay.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Let me . . . Let me just check the time and get us all . . . I packed up my things—

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, you know—

The Speaker: —ordinary little things—

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: —my motto is to hit quick, fast, and leave them wanting more. I am going to stick to that.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECH

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I am rising today because the two minutes during the congrats and obits were not enough for me to speak about two very important constituents of mine who passed. And Mr. Speaker, I am going to begin with your bride, Ms. Miranda Lister, who I cannot speak enough about how grateful I am for the support that she has given not just me and the constituency 33 branch but to be a wife and support a family—a father and son—in politics since 1989 and before that really when you have to put up with—when you were not the Speaker—the abuse, the hardship, [and] the sacrifice. I am grateful to her for that. But I am also grateful because when I was very young, she had a significant part in my life. And I do not think I have ever shared this with you. She was the person responsible for Youth Parliament—

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: —when I was a member of Youth Parliament. And Mr. Speaker, I can tell you I was a very sick little boy. I have wanted to be a Member of Parliament since I was eight years old, and from the time I was that age, I was reading everything about parliament, everything about elections, everything. And I was so grateful for the experience of Youth Parliament and the environment that she created for the children in that group because it was encouraging. It was compassionate. It was gentle. And we learned so much from that experience. I have never forgotten that and never, ever will be able to tell you how much I appreciate that.

And just for our team—always there, always supportive, always encouraging—I am thankful to her, and I am thankful to your family for everything. And I really hope your family is getting consoled at this time because I know that the loss that we feel can be incomparable to what you felt.

And Mr. Speaker, the other person I want to speak on is a very strong supporter of mine who passed recently, Mr. Charles Ratteray. And Charles, I can tell you, man. I do not think . . . If I had one supporter that was not my wife, it was Charles. Look, when I was unceremoniously removed from Tourism, Charles wanted to go to town and sort the Premier out.

And I said: *No, Charles.* And then he said, *Well I am going to put a motion of no confidence down because this has got to be fixed.*

And I said: *Charles, do not do that. Do not do that. Do not do that. This is part of the process.*

But I speak of him because Charles and your wife are the spectrum of support at the grassroots level that the Progressive Labour Party enjoys. And it is people like that who keep us humble, who keep us grounded, who keep us connected, who are not afraid to tell us when we are not doing a good job, and who will constantly advocate for the small man. And so that is really, really the core of this.

And that is why, Mr. Speaker, I am grateful because I think this is my first time speaking since the election in this Chamber. I am grateful to the people of constituency 33 and the people who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to help keep the Progressive Labour Party structured, growing, and accountable because we are nothing without them, Mr. Speaker. And so, I am grateful to those whom we have lost over the years. And we continue to lose many because the service record for a lot of these guys has been very long, decades long. But I am grateful for them because we would not be here.

We were talking upstairs recently, actually earlier this afternoon, about how when the Progressive Labour Party was founded, we had six seats the first time. And we are all now beneficiaries of the people who had the vision that got us the six seats, that struggled for 40 years and did not give up, did not re-brand, did not rename, did not change approach, [that] persevered, and worked, and worked. And those are the people that we serve, and we have to live up to. So, I am very grateful to the people who placed me back in office and to all the people who placed my colleagues back into office.

Mr. Speaker, we are about to go into Mother's Day on Sunday, and I would like to take the opportunity to wish all the mothers of Bermuda a happy Mother's Day.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you. I do not think I have ever been in the House and had the OBA applaud for me as well, so I feel—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: I know, right? But thank you.

No, but I think that we all . . . Look, we all can point to a mother or mother figure who shaped our lives. And we . . . I particularly am grateful to my mother for all she did and continues to do. And I am grateful to her for building a home with my father to keep us focused on the community, helping to raise us to become the people we are today, flaws and all.

I am thankful to my wife who [has] suffered through politics alongside me since the early 2000s,

and I am grateful to her and for the wonderful sons we have.

And Mr. Speaker, with that I would just like to again reiterate Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers of Bermuda. Thank you for all you do and continue to do.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.
MP Famous.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECH

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, as the Honourable Member from 33 said, three minutes is not enough for some persons. So, I want to start off. After your son got up, I figured, you know, it does not make sense me standing up.

Mr. Speaker, [in] 2018 you took me on my first trip overseas to represent Bermuda to the Cayman Islands. And it was not just you; your wife was with you. And we were fortunate. We got there Saturday, I think. Yes. We were fortunate the next day was Father's Day. So, I got to be your son for the day. All right? Because Russell and the other guys were not there. So, I was not just your son, I was your wife's son for the day. So, we drove all around [the] Cayman Islands to see what it is about, and, you know, we saw what we had to see.

But my point, Mr. Speaker, is during that trip she was not just there as your wife. She was the mother to the MPs that were there at the time, MP Tinee. And MP Jackson was there as well. So, it was a bipartisan trip. But the point is, that was my one week to spend with her as my mom.

What I saw on Sunday was a tribute to a woman who, as was written in *The Royal Gazette*—I do not know how true it is—I *was going to run, but I decided to let him run because he could not have babies*. So, it kind of alluded to [the idea] that she was the brains in the operation a little bit. Right? I say that in the sense that everyone who has passed through Youth Parliament was nurtured by her. Some of them have gone on to become politicians. Some of them have become leaders in other ways. So, again I want to just give my respect to a woman who was my mother for one week.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING CRISIS IN BERMUDA

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, I am going to move on to a topic that affects everybody in Bermuda. I am not going to be long. Mr. Speaker, it seems that sometimes when you read stuff from the Opposition and hear stuff from the Chamber of Commerce, it is like, *Whoa, they are almost saying the same thing*. And I am not saying it is the wrong thing just [that it seems they are] saying the same thing.

So, in this document today and other documents we keep hearing that we need to increase in

population. We need to increase in population. We need to increase in population. And there is some magical number bandied about that we need to get 70,000 people and blah, blah, blah. Okay, fine. Whatever. But the reality is where are we going to put these people? Right now, we have a housing crisis, [an] affordable housing crisis. Let me put it that way. So where are going to put another 5,000 people? Where are we going to put another 1,000 people?

The reality, Mr. Speaker, is someone like yourself who knows a little bit about real estate . . . The reality is it is a challenge. We do not have a lot of land. The banks are charging exorbitant prices for interest. Construction rates are extremely high. We have to be brutally honest. We do not have enough local construction talent. So, we have all these factors working against us as a country expanding our housing stock. Right?

There is a claim that I am still trying to figure out—so maybe later on they can tell me how it goes—that if term limits cause people to leave the country, that caused the housing crisis.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. If the—

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Standing Order 19, Rules of Debate]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. My understanding is this is not properly following the standing orders because we have already debated these topics.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: He is not debating. He is not taking on the budget debate. He is just making comments to some topic.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I appreciate your guidance.

The Speaker: Had he gone specifically back to a budget debate or something like that, a budget item, it would have been different.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, if the fish did not open his mouth.

Mr. Speaker, the reality is that no matter what the circumstances are, we are in an affordable housing crisis. There are reasons such as probate, property transfers taking too long, planning regulations taking too long, banks charging too much money, interest rates. There is a host of reasons. But we as a country have to be honest with ourselves versus the finger pointing and this, that, and the other.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Right?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Beg pardon?

An Hon. Member: Blame the Government.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes. Blame the Government. Right?

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: We have to be honest with ourselves. All right? And there are ways to not necessarily fix the problem but mitigate the issue that we have. The Housing Corporation is doing their part. We are providing affordable housing, but there is no way we could provide the amount of housing that is needed.

And if we do not fix the problem, Mr. Speaker, what is going to happen? We are going to have more people coming in to work no matter what spectrum they are working on, and our people are going to be forced out of housing. And what is the net result with that? That contributes to the part about people leaving the country.

So, my point to all in this House and all that are listening is, *What are you prepared to do to help the housing situation?* If you own a piece of property no matter how small or big it may be, go check a plan. Go check the bank. See if you can get a loan. Check an architect to see if you could build on because even if you cannot rent it out, even if you are not doing it to rent it out, you are going to need it for your own family sooner or later. If you do not have a skill, go learn a skill because you will never not need a . . . Trade persons are never not needed, Mr. Speaker. All right?

And those that do have influence with financial institutions need to have a conversation with them to say, *Listen, working class, middle class, upper middle-class Bermudians are having a challenge just borrowing money to build because your loan regulations are too stringent.*

So, I say that, you know, we are going to have an ongoing debate about housing because we have a Minister of Housing that is on point. We have a Shadow Minister of Housing that is trying to be on point, getting on point. Right? I will give him his credit.

It is a serious situation, Mr. Speaker, because knocking on doors . . . Any one of us have knocked on doors, and we have seen people that are looking for somewhere to live, not because they do not have the money, but some landlords are being extortionists. I went to a house in Devonshire, a middle-class neighbourhood. A young lady is paying \$6,300 for a three-bedroom house. And her landlord is telling her, *If you do not sign, you can leave next month, you know.* She is a young Bermudian who has got her degree, is a

professional, has herself a husband and three children. She cannot qualify for a loan because she is a civil servant so she cannot take her pension. So, she is in this catch-22 situation. She cannot save for a loan because she is paying . . . she cannot save for a downpayment because she is paying \$6,300—\$72,000 a year, Mr. Speaker. In five years, she will have paid \$350,000 in rent. This is what we are facing as a country.

You go on Facebook. There is a page called Home for Rent. People are now just begging to find a room to rent for \$1,500 per month—not a studio, not a one bedroom. They are looking for one room [and] willing to pay up to \$1,500 per month. That is where we are as a country, so it kind of begs to say, *Well, we cannot really be in a big population decline if housing is so scarce.* Right? So, I will just leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

As Honourable Jamahl said, Happy Mother's Day to all the mothers that have mothered us.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Hey! Whoa! Happy Mother's Day, Scott.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yeah. And, Mr. Speaker, I am your full son.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Famous.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution this evening? No other Member?

We will rise and call this day a conclusion, and we thank Members for their participation. We thank you even more for making it a shorter night than we expected. And we trust that you get some rest this weekend and come in on Monday expecting to put a lot of energy into the next three weeks as we go through the individual Heads. And just be mindful that, yes, it is Mother's Day. And love those mothers and those wives that you have around you. Some of us will only be able to do part of that this year. Have a good weekend.

[Gavel]

[At 6.44 pm the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Monday, 12 May 2025.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
HANSARD
12 MAY 2025
10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 6 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: [Good] morning, Members.
We will have the prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Somner, Clerk]

The Deputy Speaker: Members.

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 9 May 2025]

The Deputy Speaker: I trust everyone has had a chance to review them. Yes, minutes for May 9th.
Thank you.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Deputy Speaker: I just want to announce to the House that Member Bean, Member Dickinson and Deputy Premier De Silva have all sent their apologies.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: There are no messages coming from the Senate.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

CITY OF HAMILTON PLAN 2025

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam [Deputy] Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the City of Hamilton Plan 2025.
Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

PETITIONS

The Deputy Speaker: [There are none.]

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

CITY OF HAMILTON PLAN 2025

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam [Deputy] Speaker.

Madam [Deputy] Speaker, today I presented to this Honourable House for its consideration and approval the [City of Hamilton Plan 2025](#)—or simply, "the Plan." This forward-looking document, prepared by the Department of Planning, will guide all future development activity in the City of Hamilton excluding the North East Hamilton Local Plan 2022 area.

The Plan is accompanied by two important documents: the Tribunal Report, which outlines its findings and recommendations, and the City Survey Report 2024, providing the background data and research that shaped the policies contained in this Plan.

Once approved, the Plan will be published in the *Official Gazette*, representing a critical step forward in modernising the planning framework that guides development in the City. I invite all Honourable Members and members of the public to view the full documents online at planning.gov.bm, reflecting the Government's commitment to accessibility and transparency in public policy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Plan reflects not only policy but also a cultural shift in how we approach development in the City. For too long, outdated policies have limited good projects and prevented officers from using their judgment to achieve well-balanced results. That changes today.

The City of Hamilton Plan 2025 introduces a more flexible and holistic approach to planning that empowers technical officers to use their professional judgment more effectively while ensuring that every decision is grounded in design quality, sound evidence and community benefit.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Plan is built on the internationally recognised principle of *placemaking*. Development must contribute positively to the human experience of the city, not just in appearance, but in how people move, gather, and interact. By fo-

cusing on design, walkability, and mixed uses, we believe Hamilton can become more than a place of business—it can be a vibrant, safe, and inviting urban destination.

Placemaking is not merely a catchphrase; it serves as a framework that underpins every major element of this Plan—from transportation to green spaces, from housing to commercial revitalisation. We prioritise people, and where they choose to spend time, economic activity naturally follows.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we adopt this modern and responsive plan, I want to address a concern that I shared during the discussion with technical officers: building heights.

Let me be clear: this Plan does not open the door to 30-storey skyscrapers in Hamilton.

While the Plan eliminates rigid, city-wide height limits, it maintains control and common sense. Instead, it introduces a smarter, more responsive framework that considers height and massing based on a building's location, context, and design quality.

Madam Deputy Speaker, building heights will now be negotiated and assessed based on a project's location in the City and its contributions to the surrounding area. Any proposal will still be required to meet infrastructure standards, ensure design excellence and maintain compatibility with neighbouring properties. We have replaced arbitrary maximums with a more tailored and place-based approach.

So no, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not a green light for unchecked vertical growth. It is a call for thoughtful, contextual and community-minded development that works for Hamilton, not against it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Plan before us is the result of years of public engagement, consultation, and technical analysis. From the Consultative Draft in 2023 to the final Tribunal review in 2024, every step reflects a commitment to inclusion, evidence, and fairness. Stakeholders across sectors—from the Corporation of Hamilton to residents and businesses—have shaped this final product. This collaborative spirit will continue as we implement it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Bermuda's land is limited. Yet, within that limitation lies opportunity, particularly in Hamilton. The City already has the infrastructure, services, and transport connections. If we are to achieve compact, efficient and sustainable growth as an Island, it makes sense to maximise development in the one place already built for it.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government remains committed to a thriving, sustainable and inclusive City of Hamilton. The City of Hamilton Plan 2025 is key to achieving that vision. Together, they lay the foundation for responsible investment and smart growth that benefits all of Bermuda.

I want to conclude by thanking the Tribunal, led by Chairperson Ms. Jennifer Haworth, along with Mr. David Astwood and Ms. Vanessa Turner, and the Forward Planning team from the Department of Plan-

ning led by Director Victoria Cordeiro, for their professionalism and commitment to bringing this pivotal Plan to fruition.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: No Member indicated that they have questions, so there are no questions.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have three minutes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I know all too well, thank you very much.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I just rise this morning to offer congratulations to one of our own in this Chamber—the Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Arnold Allen, the founder and chief instructor of the Harto Dojo karate which was founded in 1982. And I would like to associate MP Lawrence Scott, who I know is well versed and in doing so . . . I will associate the whole House as well.

I had the great privilege of attending a prize presentation a couple of Sundays ago at the Warwick Academy. I was not able to stay long. I was going to my own teaching instructions, but I was impressed by the level of discipline I witnessed with those young people as his team put them through their charges and with brown belts, green belts, orange belts, purple belts, yellow belts being raised on that day with demonstrations which lasted quite some time. And it was impressive to say the least, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would go as far as to say that having attended another one of the prize presentations, which involved all of the disciplines in karate, I was impressed by the leadership that I witnessed on that occasion. And I could see from his own dojo where that emanated from because the precision and the detail that was enforced and emphasised is something that I picked up on—fundamentals being key to any sport and discipline.

I saw it being taught and being enforced with those who were teaching those young people. And I would go as far as to say that Mr. Arnold Allen, who represents us ably as Sergeant-at-Arms with his military background, has found a great way of teaching

young people how to learn great qualities of life—discipline being amongst the most important.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 1. Member Ming, you have the floor.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Thank you. Good morning, [Madam Deputy] Speaker.

First of all, I come on a sad note this morning giving thoughts and prayers to the family of Peggy Delpeche. For us in St. George's, that would be Peggy Paynter, Aunt Peggy Paynter—the nerve of me. She is no longer with us, but I would like for her family—a large St. George's stalwart family—to know that they are in our thoughts and prayers. I cannot believe I am not going to have any more phone calls from Aunt Peggy on anything that is happening in St. George's that she thought I needed to know about.

So, it will definitely be an adjustment for all of us in St. George's because whilst I may have thought I was special, Aunt Peggy called around to everybody to let you know either what was happening in St. George's, what needed to be repaired in St. George's, and who may have passed in St. George's. Her family is in our thoughts and prayers.

I would also like to be associated with the comments from Friday, Madam Deputy Speaker, with regard to Sinclair Williams.

And on a happier note, I would like to congratulate the Relay for Life organisers. I had the opportunity to participate this year with my 15 laps around the . . . I associate the whole House. The 15 laps around the thing. I did not take up spinning. It did not look like it was for me, but I kept to my walking.

And this one is a bit close to my heart, Madam Deputy Speaker. I would like to congratulate my hubby. He has retired after 38 years of service with the Bermuda Police Service. I do not know what he will do now, Madam Deputy Speaker. But I have a really long honey-do list that has not even been started. But I do believe . . . one thing I will say is that a policeman is a policeman forever. Right? Because he is always thinking in that way. And I guess after 38 years of service to his community and to his country, it is really hard to turn something like that off. But we wish him all the best in whatever it is he decides to do. And I think he still has a lot more to offer his country. So, I will just say: look out. Watch this space.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 15. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would just like to rise to my feet to give congratulations to the Bermuda Football Association [BFA]. One of our National Sports Governing Bodies that is supported by the Government of Bermuda. And this Saturday night, Madam Deputy Speaker, they had their annual end of year awards, and I would like to just take the time that I have left to actually go through the list of those awards. And I will finish with one that I am sure my honourable colleague from constituency 17 will be happy to hear.

But I will start with these ones. So, the top goal scorers and winners were:

- Premier Division: Diaje Hart
- First Division: Paul Simons
- Women's [Division]: Ms. Kalila Daley

The top defensive Player of the Year:

- Premier Division: Julian Carpenter
- First Division: Mr. Darius Cox
- Women's Division: Kalay Hollis (PHC)

The Goalkeeper of the Year:

- Premier Division: from North Village, the champions, Mr. Detre Bell
- First Division: Deaz Chambers
- Women's Division: Samantha Davis

The Fair Play award went to:

- Premier Division: North Village Community Club—and that is the team that has the least amount of infractions. So not only did they win the league, but they did so in a fair manner.
- First Division: Robin Hood
- Women's Division: Somerset Cricket Club and Dandy Stars

The Young Player of the Year:

- Premier Division: Mr. T'ysi Showers (PHC)
- First Division: Sami Carolo (Robin Hood)
- Women's Division: Koa Goodchild (Somerset Cricket Club)

The Order of Merit—this was a very momentous award given by the BFA:

- Mr. Kevin Grant for the work he has done in football over the years.
- Mr. Stuart Crockwell—everyone will know Mr. Crockwell as a former referee.
- And former colleague, former Minister of Sport, Mr. Dale Butler was recognised for his achievements in supporting sport while he was the Minister.

The Coach of the Year:

- Premier Division: This year, it went to the champions in the Premier Divi-

sion, Calvin "Patches" Dill, Jr. from North Village

- First Division: Troy Smith from Boulevard
- Women's Division: Danvers Seymour, Jr.

Referees of the Year:

- Youth Referee: Mr. [Rhys] Pedro
- Young Referee: Dash Bailey
- Senior Referee: Amaury Majors

The MVPs, Most Valuable Player for each division:

- Premier Division: Again, from the champions, Mr. Jonté Smith (North Village)
- First Division: Paul Simons (X-Roads)
- Women's Division: Jenay Edness-Gomez (Dandy Stars)

It was also lovely to have the president of CONCACAF, who was in attendance. That is a big deal for the Bermuda Football Association. As you will know that not only do we have the Gold Cup as we do often, but CONCACAF are the official host of the World Cup in 2026, and it was good to have him in our presence.

So, congratulations to all winners of the BFA Awards. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Just on time.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 28. Member, you have the floor.

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

I would like to associate my comments with the Minister of Sport in regard to the BFA Awards on Saturday night. I had initially planned to attend, but in preparation for today's budget I was not able to make it. But I would like to just for all those who represented Somerset Cricket Club, I would just like to send congratulations to them. And I declare my interest as a member of the management of Somerset Cricket Club. While it is good to see all of our clubs doing well, I do have to single out Somerset Cricket Club for the work that they have done.

Also just to make a correction to what the Minister said, it's T'ysi Showers, my cousin. So again, I want to say congratulations to my cousin T'ysi Showers for winning Young Player of the Year award and to all the other awardees: Well done on a good season and looking forward to again the . . . Somerset. Hopefully we can win more awards and be promoted next season. But well done to all of the awardees.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I am wondering why St. George's names were not called in that.

But are there any other Members who wish to speak? There being none.

Thank you, Member.

[Inaudible interjections]

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

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

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Deputy Speaker: That brings us to Orders of the Day and that would be the resumption in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

I call on the Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier. I did not mean to exclude you.

I call on the Member from constituency 24. Member.

House in Committee at 10:24 am

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Chairman: Good morning Honourable Members. We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures for the year 2025/26.

The heads that are going to be debated right now are Heads 87, 03, 04, 25, 74 and 75. I call on the Minister [*sic*] in charge to proceed—

The Clerk: Member.

The Chairman: Member—Junior Minister Lister, you now have the floor.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

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

I move the following heads:

- 87—Ministry of [Justice] Headquarters;
- 03—Judicial Department;
- 04—Attorney General's Chambers;
- 25—Department of Corrections;
- 74—Department of Court Services; and
- 75—Department of Public Prosecutions

be now taken under consideration.

It is my distinct honour to rise today on behalf of Attorney General, Senator the Honourable Kim Wilkerson, JP, to present the budget brief for the Ministry of Justice.

This Ministry stands as the cornerstone of our democracy, safeguarding the rule of law, ensuring access to justice and upholding the rights and freedoms of every citizen.

We remain committed to strengthening our justice system, advancing legal reform and providing critical support to agencies and services that uphold fairness, accountability and public safety across Bermuda.

HEAD 87—MINISTRY OF [JUSTICE] HEADQUARTERS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I will now present Head 87 Ministry of Justice headquarters, found on pages B-78 to B-82 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. The mission: To uphold the rule of law, to ensure justice for all and promote a community where every individual is respected, empowered and their interests safeguarded.

The total current expenditure is estimated to be \$57,740,000 for 2025/26 and represents an increase of \$2,857,000 or approximately 5 per cent higher than the budget of 2024/25. This change is due

primarily to an increase in salaries, legal and consultancy costs.

Revenue Overview

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The department under this Ministry's portfolios whose mandates directly entail generating revenue is the Judicial Department.

The Judicial Department's revenue stream is projected to yield a total of \$4,811,000. This amounts to \$423,000 or 10 per cent more than the 2024/25 original estimates. The observed increase is primarily attributable to the escalation of higher court fees and charges as well as the payment of parking fines and civil fees.

I will now present the budget for the Ministry of Justice Headquarters along with the business units under its purview. The budget for individual department heads within this Ministry will be covered separately in their respective budget briefs.

Expenditure Overview

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$6,755,000 has been allocated to the Ministry of Justice Headquarters, which represents a \$952,000 or 16 per cent increase from the previous year and constitutes 12 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. The adjustments will be reflected in each corresponding section.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Justice Headquarters is subdivided into eight fiscally identifiable programmes/business units as follows:

- 97000, Administration;
- 97010, Financial Intelligence Agency;
- 97030, Legal Aid Office;
- 97050, Parole Board;
- 97060, Treatment of Offenders Board;
- 97070, Justice Protection Programme;
- 97080, Financial Sanctions Implementation Unit; and
- 97100, Law Reform Commission.

I will proceed to address these business units individually as follows.

Current Expenditure: Administration, 97000

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimate 2024/25 of \$542,000; estimate for 2025/26: \$1,322,000, an increase of \$780,000. Percentage increase of 144 per cent.

This Administration business unit provides for the administrative and personnel costs associated with the daily operation of the Ministry Headquarters for which a total of \$1,322,000 has been allocated. This represents an increase of \$780,000 or 144 per cent compared to the original 2024/25 estimates, driven by higher expenditures for consultant services, legal fees, travel costs and increased grant allocation,

rental expenses and newly allocated funding for the Parole Board and the Treatment of Offenders Board, which fell under the Ministry of National Security in the last fiscal year.

Legal Aid Office, 97030

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$1,867,000. The estimate for 2025/26 [is] \$2,223,000, an increase of \$356,000 or 19 per cent.

The Legal Aid Office's purpose is to ensure that legal advice and representation is readily available to those who need it most, and who, because of limited financial means, would otherwise be unable to secure access to justice.

The Office's mission statement is *To provide high quality legal representation to those who qualify for assistance under the Legal Aid Act 1980*. The office fulfils this role by providing clients who qualify for the scheme with quality professional legal services in a timely and efficient manner. Mr. Chairman, the Legal Aid Scheme is administered by the Legal Aid Committee under the authority of the Legal Aid Act 1980.

For 2025/26, its budget allocation is \$2,223,000. This is a \$356,000 or 19 per cent increase from 2024/25 original estimate allocation. This increase is mainly due to legal services, consulting costs and rent.

Mr. Chairman, of the 2025/26 allocation, \$1,196,000, or 54 per cent, is allocated to salaries for administrative, managerial and legal aid staff. Mr. Chairman, \$700,000, or 31 per cent, covers external legal services, while the remaining \$327,000, or 15 per cent funds administrative expenses, including committee fees, professional indemnity insurance and Bar Association dues. This year, the Legal Aid Office will undergo a full review to develop a strategic plan aimed at improving efficiency and ensuring continued access to justice for all.

Mr. Chairman, the Legal Aid Office delivers two key services. The administrative team supports applicants in completing legal aid forms and conducts financial means assessments under the Legal Aid Act 1980 before submitting cases to the Legal Aid Committee. Once decisions are made, the team notifies applicants and counsel and issues certificates. The accounts officer then processes all legal and expert service invoices, ensuring they are reviewed, taxed and approved by the committee prior to payment.

The legal team, when at its current full complement, consists of:

- junior counsel,
- two legal aid counsels,
- a senior legal aid counsel
- and the legal aid paralegal.

Whenever possible, the Legal Aid Committee assigns in-house counsel to represent persons who were granted legal aid certificates by the committee.

The performance matches for the Legal Aid Office for 2024/25, where:

1. to process and grant legal aid certificates to qualified applicants within seven days of receiving their completed applications and supporting documents;
2. to process and grant legal certificates in urgent situations within three working days;
3. to assign 75 per cent of new cases to in-house Legal Aid counsel; and
4. to grant approximately 140 new Legal Aid certificates.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the Legal Aid Office met its performance goals for the fiscal year 2024/25. Applications for the new Legal Aid certificates were efficiently processed and placed before the Legal Aid Committee and most certificates were considered and granted within seven days of receiving completed applications and supporting documentation. Temporary urgent Legal Aid certificates were granted within 24 hours, which exceeded the goal set of three working days.

Mr. Chairman, a key performance goal for 2024/25 was to assign at least 75 per cent of new Legal Aid certificates to in-house counsel. The Office surpassed its target, achieving 80 per cent. With the recruitment and training of additional in-house counsel for 2025/26, this figure is expected to rise to approximately 90 per cent, leading to cost savings and broader public access to justice.

Mr. Chairman, the number of Legal Aid certificates granted each year fluctuates due to unpredictable socioeconomic and other factors. In 2024/25, while 228 applications were processed (slightly above the projected 225), only 113 applicants qualified and were granted certificates. Decisions on 23 applications remain pending further information.

Overall performance indicators show increases in applications processed and certificates granted compared to the previous year, along with a reduction in deferred applications.

Operating Expenses

Mr. Dennis Lister III: For the fiscal year, Mr. Chairman, expenses occurred, excluding salaries, were as follows:

- Legal fees for external counsel—\$970,000
- Telephone expenses—\$5,700
- No fees were paid out for consultants over the period under review
- \$13,800 was spent on board and committee fees
- \$97,000 was apportioned for electricity, rent and maintenance
- \$11,600 was allocated for cleaning

- \$18,700 was allocated for office supplies, printing, books and professional law periodicals

Legal Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, between the period of 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025, the Legal Aid Office processed a total of 228 new applications—140 criminal matters, 56 civil matters and 32 matrimonial matters. Out of the 228 new applications for funding, 113 matters were approved, 92 were declined and 23 were deferred.

The work of in-house Legal Aid counsel—individual client cases managed by in-house counsel over the period under review resulted in cost savings of approximately \$880,000 in legal fees, which would otherwise have been paid to external counsel.

Mr. Chairman, the Legal Aid Office represented clients with respect to a broad range of legal matters over the past year, including family court matters, civil claims such as employment and personal injury, human rights claims, constitutional applications and criminal trial and appeal matters. Cost savings were realised in many ways through the strategic use of Legal Aid counsel to assist individuals before the courts. The Legal Aid Office ensured all assisted people received quality representation and timely access to justice. In-house counsel appeared as duty counsel for individuals in many courts, thereby safeguarding the rights of individuals and ensuring that cases are dealt with fairly and expeditiously.

The Legal Aid Office provided counsel each week to assist individuals appearing in the Mental Health Treatment Court, Drug Treatment Court, DUI Court and the Juvenile Court. Effective counsel in these courts is critical to the success of individuals appearing before them. Individuals and the judiciary rely on counsel to provide legal and moral guidance as they work to address the underlying causes of their involvement in the criminal justice system.

The Legal Aid Office made counsel available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to advise and assist all persons arrested and detained by the police over the past year, including attending at the police station to assist adults and young people during police interviews and serious matters. The Legal Aid Office ensured that no one [who] appeared in the Plea Court was required to enter a plea or otherwise compromise their legal rights without the advice and assistance of legal counsel.

The Legal Aid Committee, Mr. Chairman, recognises that for some members of the community faced not only with financial challenges, but also with cognitive or mental health challenges, representation by in-house counsel is necessary to ensure their voices are heard. In these circumstances, Legal Aid certificates are granted at the discretion of the Committee, in the interest of justice.

In addition to clients charged with criminal offences, the Legal Aid Office continues to represent an increasing number of individuals who are before the Supreme Court and the Magistrates' Court in relation to child custody, access and maintenance disputes. There continue to be an increased demand for Legal Aid Counsel in the Juvenile Court to represent young people being tried for serious matters. Legal Aid counsel appear as duty counsel for the Juvenile Court every week and are most often assigned to represent young people who are granted Legal Aid certificates by the committee.

The implementation of child safeguarding provisions which protect the rights of children and ensure their voices are heard in all types of cases before the courts has resulted in Legal Aid counsel frequently being called upon to represent children who come before the courts as witnesses, victims and the subject of Family Court litigation regarding their care and custody.

Internally, Mr. Chairman, the Office continues to build a strong team as the administrative staff and counsel work together to meet their shared goal of providing excellent legal representation to the public. Together, they have developed effective solutions to all obstacles and challenges presented over the past year.

External Counsel

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, external legal fees remain the largest area of expenditure for the Legal Aid Office, except for salaries, and continue to be challenging to accurately predict.

Last year the legal fees paid to external counsel were higher than predicted for several reasons, including the following. There was an increase in the rate of murder and other serious violent crimes, as well as conspiracies to import firearms, ammunition and illegal drugs into Bermuda. Multiple defendants were charged and tried together in these serious cases.

Each defendant is entitled to independent counsel who is free from any potential conflict of interest in most cases. Therefore, in-house Legal Aid counsel is only able to represent one defendant, whilst the other two, three or more co-defendants, who often all qualified for Legal Aid have to be represented by external counsel. Very focused efforts and cooperation between the courts, the Department of Public Prosecutions [DPP], Legal Aid counsel and external counsel has continued to decrease the backlog of cases during the last fiscal period, which has necessarily increased the cost of external legal fees.

Although the Legal Aid Committee requires brief fee proposals from counsel to ensure fees are necessary and reasonable, it remains challenging to predict when trials will occur, and accounts will be submitted.

In the past fiscal year, external counsel submitted claims for serious trials and appeals that had been budgeted for and completed in prior years. Several Privy Council appeals and applications advanced during this period, resulting in significant decisions.

To manage costs, local and in-house counsel supported these matters. However, foreign counsel was also required to ensure the efficient progress of appeals in that jurisdiction. The past fiscal period included payment of substantial fees to external counsel for retrials. Costs to Legal Aid increased whenever the DPP determines it is in the public interest to try individuals for a second or third time for the same offences.

Training and Development

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Training and development, along with succession planning are some of the most important objectives of the Legal Aid Office as a number of experienced barristers who are willing and able to represent Legal Aid clients will begin to decrease over the next five years. It is imperative that we begin to train and develop the next generation of Bermudian barristers now to ensure that our courts continue to operate efficiently and that all persons, regardless of wealth have access to justice.

The Legal Aid Office is an ideal training ground for pupils and junior counsel, both due to the diversity of legal work and the opportunity to assist and learn from senior barristers engaged in complex matters before our courts. It is integral to facilitating the Ministry's goal to train and retrain competent and qualified Bermudians for the legal profession, especially for the Criminal Defence Bar.

Recruitment is underway currently to bring on board a second more senior barrister and a junior barrister immediately. Further development and growth is anticipated as we remain dedicated to access to justice for all Bermudians into the future.

The Legal Aid Office is actively seeking a larger, more suitable space for its team. While relocation has been more challenging than anticipated, the Office remains committed to finding a cost-effective solution that supports its mission, sustains its services and offers a strong training ground for promising Bermudian barristers. Supporting the development of future Bermudian barristers and judges, alongside providing quality legal representation, remains a top priority for both the Legal Aid Office and the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Chairman, we will begin over the coming fiscal year to make the crucial investment now in our Legal Aid plan, in our collective commitment to ensure equal access to justice for all and the preservation of high standards ([which] we now enjoy and expect in our justice system in the future) and the absolutely essential development and retention of first-rate Bermudian barristers.

Parole Board, 97050

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Parole Board, business unit 97050. The original 2024/25 estimate, zero. Estimate 2025/26, \$120,000, an increase of \$120,000, or zero per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Parole Board, which has recently been transferred to the Ministry of Justice, has been allocated a budget of \$120,000. The allocation under this business unit is designated for board fees and board training programmes as we seek to modernise our approach to parole. The Parole Board serves as an important role in facilitating the re-entry of offenders into society. The members of the board, which include experts in law, psychology and institutional aftercare, are charged with releasing men and women who are eligible by virtue of certain established criteria to serve the remainder of their sentence under community supervision. With careful thought and deliberation, the Parole Board implements conditions that will provide the highest likelihood of applicants becoming law abiding citizens and equipping them for successful reintegration.

On average, Mr. Chairman, the board meets three to four times per month and works collaboratively with other partner agencies of the justice system, including court services, corrections facilities, rehabilitation programme providers and aftercare professionals to identify appropriate ways to achieve goals by reducing recidivism, preventing crime and protecting society. In 2024, the board conducted a comprehensive review of cases.

Treatment of Offenders Board, 97060

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Treatment of Offenders Board, business unit 97060. The original estimate 2024/25, zero dollars. Estimate for 2025/26, \$98,000 an increase of \$98,000, zero per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Treatment of Offenders Board which has recently been transferred to the Ministry of Justice, has been allocated a total budget of \$98,000. Of this amount, \$68,000 is designated for the salary of an administrative assistant, while \$30,000 is allocated for board fees.

The Treatment of Offenders Board includes persons who possess expertise in medicine, psychology, law and/or education. The board meets in person twice per month, alternating between Westgate and the co-ed/farm Right Living House facilities. Every month, two members of the board attend roto visits at the facilities to engage with inmates and compile reports based on their findings.

The board acts as a fundamental cornerstone of our justice system ensuring inmates voices are heard and our correction systems remain focused on rehabilitative and restorative justice principles over mere detention.

Justice Protection Programme, 97070

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Justice Protection Programme, business unit 97070. The original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$275,000. The estimate for 2025/26 [is] \$320,000, an increase of \$45,000 or 16 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Justice Protection Programme has been allocated a budget of \$320,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26, which represents a \$45,000, or 16 per cent increase from the prior year. The Justice Protection Programme operates under the Justice Protection Act 2010, providing protection and relocation services to key prosecution witnesses who meet the statutory criteria. Details of the programme are strictly protected from public disclosure under both the Justice Protection Act 2010 and the Public Access to Information Act 2010.

Thus, Mr. Chairman, we proceed with great caution when representing figures and data which could be mosaiced together with other information, to unwittingly reveal the identity of participants in the Justice Protection Programme, which ultimately prejudices the effectiveness and security of the programme. There was one participant and one person being considered for entry to the programme at the start of the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Programme participants are for their protection, whilst they provide evidence in high profile or high-risk cases before the courts. Over the past 15 years, the Justice Protection Programme has supported 44 participants, representing a total of 62 individuals, some of whom were spouses, partners or children included for family unification. On average, participants remain in the programme for three years. During this period, 11 additional applications were reviewed but denied, as the excess risks were sufficiently mitigated by existing support available to those individuals.

Mr. Chairman, for example, payments under the programme are carefully vetted and structured to cover a participant's reasonable living expenses, including where appropriate those of accompanying family members. Financial assistance may also be provided for relocation settlement, employment support, education and health care. Additional support is offered to help participants achieve greater self-sufficiency and long-term stability. Over the past 15 years, participants in the Justice Protection Programme have testified in 34 trials, resulting in convictions in all but four, an 88.2 per cent conviction rate.

This underscores the programme's critical role in supporting the administration of justice, upholding the rule of law and enhancing public safety, particularly in gang related and violent crime cases. Its success rate exceeds that of comparable programmes in other jurisdictions offering strong evidence of both its effectiveness and value for money.

Mr. Chairman, looking ahead to fiscal year 2025/26, the budget increase is in anticipation of the

start of the Domestic Violence Programme and the potential for an increase in providing assistance to the victims of domestic violence specifically. Allowing for the introduction of the new programme and the continued gun crime in our community, the work of this programme will continue within its budget to protect the privacy and locations of the participant witnesses in the programme towards the successful prosecution of some of the most heinous crimes in our jurisdiction.

Financial Sanctions Implementation Unit, 97080

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Financial Sanctions Implementation, business unit 97080. Original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$353,000. Estimate for 2025/26 [is] \$376,000, an increase of \$23,000 or 7 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Financial Sanctions Implementation Unit [FSIU] plays a critical role in upholding Bermuda's reputation as a cooperative jurisdiction with a strong and effective sanctions regime. Its responsibilities include implementing and monitoring compliance with financial and trade sanctions to safeguard the integrity of Bermuda's financial system and protect national economic interests. The FSIU also advises the Minister of Justice on broader issues related to anti-money laundering, counter terrorist financing and counter proliferation.

For fiscal year 2025/26, the FSIU's budget allocation is \$376,000. This is an increase of \$23,000 or 7 per cent from the estimated allocation for the 2024/25 fiscal year. Mr. Chairman, 96 per cent of FSIU's budget is allocated for salaries. The remaining 4 per cent is allocated for training, office supplies, telephone expenses and membership fees for its two counsels.

Staff

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, the FSIU's compromise of two posts, the head of the FSIU and one legal counsel. The FSIU team is responsible for

- providing legal advice and technical support to the Ministry of Justice and carrying out functions delegated to the Minister from the Governor;
- implementing targeted financial sanctions, as well as trade sanctions, including bringing relevant sanctions, Overseas Territories Orders in Council into force in Bermuda;
- reviewing licence applications in respect of the various sanctions regimes and enforcing the same;
- maintaining a web-based repository of sanctions notices in effect in Bermuda;
- public outreach to industry supervisors and government agencies to enhance awareness on sanctions obligations, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;

- liaise with Government House and UK authorities on sanctions matters; and
- assisting Ministry of Justice headquarters with Bermudas AML/ATF global obligations.

Under the international sanctions framework, Mr. Chairman, His Excellency the Governor is Bermuda's competent authority and holds ultimate responsibility for sanctions implementation as outlined in the applicable Overseas Territories Orders under the International Sanctions Act 2003 and the International Sanctions Regulations 2013. Since September 2018, certain functions have been delegated to the Minister of Justice under the International Sanctions (Delegation of Governors [Functions]) Notice 2018.

Mr. Chairman, Bermuda's sanctions regime must be up to date, fully implemented and effective for the specific purposes of each financial sanction. As an Overseas Territory, Bermuda's sanctions regime mirrors those sanctions which are implemented in the United Kingdom. To meet international obligations, the FSU ensures that all applicable Overseas Territories Orders that detail new sanctions or amendments to existing sanction regimes are expeditiously brought into force in Bermuda. All updates to Bermuda's sanctions regimes are listed in Schedule 1 of the International Sanctions Regulations 2013.

Mr. Chairman, the FSU's role includes providing legal advice and technical support to the Minister of Justice in carrying out her delegated functions. For instance, under the Bermuda sanctions framework, the Minister of Justice has the power to

- obtain evidence and information by taking such steps as considered appropriate to cooperate with any international investigation relating to the funds, economic resources or financial transactions of a designated person;
- issue and revoke licences, with the consent of the Secretary of State, and may grant a licence authorising an activity that would otherwise be prohibited under the said Orders. An issued licence can be varied or revoked by the Minister at any time with the consent of the UK Secretary of State;
- serve as a reporting depository to whom a relevant institution reports or informs if it credits a frozen account pursuant to an Order;
- authorise persons with power to search and investigate suspected ships, aircrafts and vehicles; and
- specify by regulations in the currency of the territory the amount which is to be taken as equivalent to sums expressed in sterling in the relevant Order.

Output Measures

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Applications under the Russia (Sanctions) [(Overseas Territories) (Amendment) (No. 4) Order 2022] regime continues to be the prominent

regime for which licence applications are submitted to the FSU.

In 2024/25, the Minister of Justice issued three general licences, two general licences for legal fees which were issued under the Russia sanctions regime Bermuda General Licence 2004 and Bermuda General Licence 2024. Both general licences allowed for payment for the provision of legal services to a designated person under the Russia or Belarus regimes. As a result of the legal general licences, firms will not have to wait for a specific licence before they can receive payment from or on behalf of designated persons, provided that the terms of the general licence are met.

The first general licence, legal licence, was issued in June 2024 and the second general licence (GL) was issued in January 2025. And a general licence for GTLK companies and their subsidiaries under the Russia Sanctions regimes, Bermuda General Licence 2024 in respect of payments and activities associated with insolvency proceedings. The general licence allows payments and other permitted activities to take place in relation to insolvency proceedings associated with GTLK Europe and GTLK Capital and their subsidiaries.

Persons will not have to wait for a specific licence before they can carry out activities in relation to these proceedings, provided that the terms of the general licence are met. In addition, six specific licences were issued in 2024: five financial and one trade. The FSU continues to provide support to the Minister in processing sanctions licence applications. Moreover, the FSU continues to receive a number of compliance reporting forms from industry under the Russia Sanctions regime. To date, \$230,750,317.99 in frozen assets has been reported and logged to the FSU.

Outreach

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, the FSU continues to ensure that sanctions web page of the Government portal is updated within 24 hours of receiving updated notifications from the UK Government. These updates are required to notify the public of additions or de-listings to the various sanctions' regimes in force in Bermuda. Thus, upon notification from the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and His Majesty's Treasury Office of Financial Sanctions Implementation, the FSU updates the web page and notifies their supervisors to immediately advise their supervised entities of the changes.

Mr. Chairman, during the reporting period, the FSU has been diligently working to introduce a subscription service that enables entities to sign up online to receive sanction update notices. This project is nearing completion and is anticipated that the subscription service will be launched before the end of June 2025. The FSU will continue its outreach to

Government Ministry departments and industry to raise awareness of sanctions obligations.

During the reporting period, outreach was provided to the Customs Department. The FSIU is also developing a virtual tool to help entities better understand their obligations and regularly responds to queries from both industry stakeholders and government agencies seeking guidance.

The FSIU also continues to work closely with UK counterpart authorities, Overseas Territories counterparts and domestic operational partners to ensure a consistent approach is used in the effective implementation of targeted financial sanctions and trade sanctions in Bermuda.

Law Reform Commission, 97100

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Law Reform Commission, business unit 97100. Original estimate for 2024/25 \$164,000. Estimate for 2025/26, \$171,000, an increase of \$7,000 or 4 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Law Reform Commission has been allocated a budget disbursement of \$171,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26. This amount is a \$7,000, or 4 per cent increase, from the 2024/25 estimates. This increase is attributable to salary adjustment. There was no movement in the other current expenditures.

Law Reform Commission, Mr. Chairman, is an independent public body established by statute, namely the Law Reform Commission Act 2009. The functions of the Commission are to study and keep under review the laws of Bermuda, with a view to their systemic development and reform. Bermuda's first law reform commissioners were appointed in July 2019, and a new cohort is being presented for approval.

The Commission consists of a chairperson and between four and seven commissioners appointed by His Excellency the Governor, based on their qualifications, training and experience. Appointments are made on the nomination of any two of the following: the Attorney General, the Chief Justice, or the President of the Bar Council.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Justice is [the] sponsoring ministry for the Law Reform Commission. It is the sponsoring Ministry for the Law Reform Commission and has previously subsumed the Commission's costs from within its Headquarters' annual budget allocation.

Mr. Chairman, the fiscal year 2024/25 budget disbursement for the Law Reform Commission, established it as a new business unit. As we continue to devise operational savings within the overall budgetary restraints, the Ministry Headquarters continues its financial stewardship of the Commission. This is done by identifying synergies and resource sharing, which will continue into the next fiscal year.

As such, the statutory role of Director of Law Reform Commission, per section 9 of the Law Reform

Commission Act 2009, was designed and approved by the Public Service Commission to be a shared role with the Ministry Headquarters via the FT [full-time] post of law reform policy and strategy counsel—\$165,000 is allocated for the fiscal year 2025/26 for that FTE [full-time equivalent] salary.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission is transitioning to a hybrid model in which independent Commissioners are supported by a fully staffed Law Reform Office. This transition includes comprehensive training for both incoming Commissioners and support staff to ensure they are well-equipped for their roles. Oversight that will be provided by the current Law Reform Policy and Strategy Counsel, Mr. Keivon Simmons, alongside the permanent secretary for the Ministry of Justice. Every effort will be made within the budget allocation to support the Commission's mandate to modernise Bermuda's laws and institutions.

Mr. Chairman, for 2025/26 administrative and operational costs will continue to be supported through the shared services of a Ministry Headquarters administrator and careful use of Headquarters' budget allocations. While this arrangement is not ideal, steps will be taken to review and renew roles and responsibilities to maintain Bermuda's strong legal reputation and ensure our laws remain current and aligned with Commonwealth and global standards.

I will take a break, Mr. Chairman.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: And while you take a break Junior Minister Lister, the Chair would like to recognise the Minister, the [Honourable] Attorney General who is in the Chambers.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Ministry of Justice 2025/26 budget reflects more than arithmetic. It represents our shared commitment to fiscal responsibility and careful stewardship of public resources. Our dedicated public officers will continue to advance fair and equitable access to justice through legal services, policy and legislation that upholds the rule of law and supports social progress for the people of Bermuda.

I am confident that the Ministry will maintain high quality service delivery in 2025/26 driven by sustainable programmes and reforms that strengthen Bermuda's reputation for effective self-governance and respect for the rule of law.

Grants

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimate in 2024/25 [was] \$1,625,000. The estimate for 2025/26 is

\$2,125,000. This represents an increase of \$500,000 or 31 per cent. The budget allocation for grants for fiscal year 2025/26 is found at page C-17 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26 Budget Book. We highlight \$2,125,000 has been allocated. This represents an increase of \$500,000 or 31 per cent from the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, in line with the Government's commitment to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing, the Financial Intelligence Agency [FIA] was established under the Financial Intelligence Agency Act 2007. The FIA is an independent agency authorised to receive, store, analyse and disseminate financial intelligence relating to suspected money laundering and terrorist financing activities primarily received in the form of suspicious activity reports and suspicious transaction reports. The agency is empowered to share intelligence with the Bermuda Police Service, foreign intelligence counterparts and other relevant domestic authorities.

For the 2024/25 fiscal year, the FIA was allocated \$1,625,000 consistent with the previous year's budget. In accordance with its statutory obligations, the FIA submitted quarterly expenditure reports and its audited annual report to the Minister of Justice. The FIA remains steadfast in its effort to counter terrorist financing, money laundering and the financing of proliferation, working diligently to protect Bermuda's financial integrity and international reputation.

Training and Capacity Building

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, in 2024/25 the FIA continues to enhance its capabilities through targeted training. Staff participated in virtual webinars and courses on topics including sanctions, corruption, digital assets, cryptocurrency and proliferation financing hosted by leading institutions such as the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists, the International Compliance Association, the Association of Certified Financial Crime Specialists, the Financial Action Task Force, Caribbean Financial Action Task Force and the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence units. In addition, the FIA director and IT coordinator travel to Latvia to attend training by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime on the goAML platform used to collect SARs [suspicious activity reports] and STRs [suspicious transaction reports].

Highlights from 2024/25

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The FIA contributed significantly to domestic and international financial intelligence efforts. Key achievements included

- contributions to the national money laundering, terrorist financing, proliferation financing and legal persons and arrangements risk assessments;

- ongoing participation in national anti-money laundering committee, working groups and other cross-agency initiatives;
- attendance at the July 2024 Egmont [Group] Plenary and January 2025 working group sessions; and
- attendance at the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force Plenary and working group meetings in June 2024 and December 2024.

Statistics

Mr. Dennis Lister III: In 2024, the reporting entities continue to file suspicious activity reports and suspicious transaction reports to the FIA. This year, the agency received a total of 870 SAR and STR reports.

Throughout 2024, the FIA conducted analysis and issued disclosures to local law enforcement competent authorities and overseas financial intelligence units. In support of this work, the agency issued 56 information requests to Egmont Group FIUs [Financial Intelligence Units] and one to a local counterpart. Additionally, using its authority under section 16 of the Financial Intelligence Agency Act [2007], the FIA issued 143 requests to 10 different reporting entities.

As a result of these inquiries, the FIA has disclosed 215 reports to local law enforcement, local competent authorities and overseas financial intelligence units utilising 365 suspicious activity reports and suspicious transaction reports. This breaks down to 124 disclosures disseminated locally and 91 disclosures to foreign financial intelligence units.

Also, so far in 2025, the FIA received a total of 75 income requests for information—that is 56 from local counterparts and 19 from foreign financial intelligence units. Looking ahead for the 2025/26 fiscal year, the increased grant will be strategically used to strengthen the FIA's operational capacity and effectiveness. Key investments will include the recruitment of additional analysts and support staff, upgrades to the goAML platform and IT infrastructure and enhanced training both in person and virtual, focused on high-risk and emerging areas such as digital assets and AI.

The FIA will also establish a dedicated strategic analysis workflow to support policy reform and expand stakeholder engagement through public-private partnerships and targeted outreach to improve the quality and compliance of suspicious activity and transaction reports.

In conclusion, the FIA remains steadfast in delivering its mandate. The role that they play is invaluable as they continue to combat financial crimes and protect our community. I extend gratitude to the board and staff at the FIA for their tireless efforts.

The Chairman: And just to use that as a segue, the Honourable Member, Junior Minister Lister has just finished presenting on Head 87. He will be going on to

Head 3 under the Judicial Department. We do have in the Chamber the Attorney General and our supporting technical officers. And Junior Minister Lister, you have the floor.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am not yet moving with the next head. I will just give the subjective analysis of Head 87.

Subjective analysis

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis of current account estimates of the Ministry of Justice Headquarters 2025/26 is found on page B-80.

I will highlight the material object code increases and decreases. Salaries decrease by \$609,000 primarily due to salary adjustments offset by the transfer of eight positions to another Ministry. Advertising and promotion expenses have decreased by \$38,000 as these costs were previously associated with Consumer Affairs. With the transfer of Consumer Affairs to another Ministry, this expenditure is no longer required.

Professional services increased by \$890,000, largely driven by higher legal and consultancy fees. While rental expenses increased for Legal Aid, the net effect was a decrease of \$24,000 due to the transfer of Consumer Affairs rental obligations to another Ministry.

Other expenses rose by \$251,000 due to the introduction of funding for two new boards and additional support for an existing board. Finally, there was a \$500,000 increase in grant funding provided.

Capital Expenditure

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for capital expenditure is found at page C-10, of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

The Ministry of Justice Headquarters has been allocated a total of \$29,000 for fiscal year 2025/26. This funding will be utilised to acquire new office furniture as the existing items are fully depreciated and have no remaining residual value.

Manpower, business unit 97000. Administration has four staff which will consist of an executive assistant, administrative assistant, policy analyst and a comptroller.

Business unit 97030, Legal Aid has 10 staff, which will consist of a senior legal aid counsel, two Legal Aid counsels, administrative assistant, paralegal, executive assistant, administrative assistant, accounts officer and two pupils.

Business unit 97060, Treatment of Offenders Board has one staff which will consist of an administrative assistant.

Business unit 97080, Financial Sanctions Implementation Unit has two staff which consists of a head of financial sanctions and a legal counsel.

Business unit 97100, Law Reform Commission has one staff which consists of a law reform policy and strategy counsel.

Mr. Chairman, this budget reflects a targeted investment in strengthening justice delivery and upholding the rule of law in Bermuda. It is aligned with national priorities and through this allocation, the Ministry will continue to drive accountability by delivering measurable and impactful performance outcome.

This ends my presentation on Head 87, Ministry of Justice.

HEAD 3—JUDICIAL DEPARTMENT

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I will now move on to Head 3, the Judicial Department, which can be found on pages B-83 to B-90 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Judiciary is established by the Constitution as a separate and independent branch of government. Its task is to adjudicate charges of criminal conduct, resolve disputes, uphold the rights and freedoms of the individual, and preserve the rule of law.

The mandate of the Judiciary is *To administer justice through the effective management of the courts of Bermuda*. The mandate of the administrative arm of the Judiciary, the Judiciary Department, is *To provide the services and support necessary to enable the judiciary to achieve its mission*.

Manpower

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The judicial system is comprised of three levels of court: the Magistrates' Court (consisting of Criminal, Civil and Family Courts), the Supreme Court (consisting of Criminal, Civil and Commercial, Appellant, Family, Matrimonial and Probate jurisdictions), and the Court of Appeal. Ancillary services offered under the umbrella of judicial system include Bailiff services. The Honourable Chief Justice is the head of the Judiciary. The Registrar is the head of the Judicial Department.

Collectively, the Judiciary and the Judicial Department have a staffing complement of 70 officers, two of whom require a work permit (Puisne Judges), 55 (or 79 per cent) of posts are filled substantively, seven (or 10 per cent) are filled by temporary relief employees, and eight (or 11 per cent) are currently vacant.

Expenditure Overview: Capital Expenditure

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The capital expenditure estimates for 2025/26 are found on page C-10 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue Expenditure Budget Book. The Judicial Department has been allocated a total of \$1 million for fiscal year 2025/26 for the replacement of its outdated case management system, JEMS. With the procurement process well underway,

the department is hopeful that the implementation of a new case management system will be imminent.

The implementation of this system is expected to catapult the Judiciary into the 21st century, affording both the Judiciary and the department the ability to deliver more efficient, modernised services. In addition, \$18,000 has been allocated for computer equipment. Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$800,000 and the estimates for 2025/26, again, \$800,000.

Current Account Expenditure

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The current account estimates for Head 3, the Judicial Department begin on page B-84 of the Budget Book.

A total of \$10,334,000 has been allocated to Head 3 within the Ministry of Legal Affairs and Constitutional Reform. This amount represents a \$783,000 or 8 per cent increase from the 2024/25 fiscal year. Additional funding that has been allocated to the department primarily reflects salary increases following negotiations with the BPSU. These salary increases account for a total of \$729,000 of the additional funding allocated to the department. Additional funding has been allocated to cover fees payable for legal services. This includes fees payable to the Assistant Justices who have been appointed to hear matters in the Supreme Court, and fees payable to local law firms who have been instructed to represent members of the judiciary.

Lastly, additional funding has been allocated to cover increased fees for services that the department is legislatively mandated to cover. This includes the cost for autopsy reports and the fees for transcription services.

Original estimates [for] 2024/25 [was] \$9,551,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$10,334,000, an increase of \$783,000 or 8 per cent.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to provide an analysis by business unit of the budget estimates for the Judicial Department for the fiscal year 2025/26 compared to 2024/25.

The Supreme Court, 13000 Criminal Injuries Compensation

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$208,000. Estimates for 2025/26, zero dollars, a decrease of \$208,000 or 100 [per cent]. This funding has now been allocated elsewhere within the Ministry and is no longer accounted for in the Judicial Department's cost centre.

Supreme Court, 13010

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$1,024,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is]

\$1,184,000, an increase of \$160,000 or 16 per cent. This cost centre provides for the salaries and operational expenses for the administration of the Supreme Court Registry, for which there are 10 posts, including the assistant registrar, Supreme Court manager, accounts personnel and administrative officers.

The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries and the cost of literary subscriptions required for the Judiciary to perform their judicial functions.

Court Rooms and Chambers, 13015

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimate [for] 2024/25 [was] \$2,722,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$3,231,000, an increase of \$509,000, or 19 per cent. This cost centre provides for the salaries and operational expenses for the courtrooms and chambers of the Supreme Court (Criminal, Civil and Commercial, and Families/Matrimonial divisions). There are 20 posts accounted for in this cost centre, including the members of the Judiciary, the Chief Justice, Puisne Judges and the Registrar.

When the performance measures were submitted in December 2024 for the upcoming fiscal year, the statistics for the Supreme Court's Criminal Jurisdiction and Appellate Jurisdiction were not available. The department can now report that in 2024/25, a total of 39 matters were commenced in the Criminal Jurisdiction and a total of 35 actions were commenced in the Appellate Jurisdiction. In the Civil and Commercial Jurisdiction, a total of 420 actions were commenced, 1,000 orders were made and 80 judgments and rulings were published. In the Family/Matrimonial Jurisdiction, a total of 160 divorce petitions were filed with 90 conditional orders for divorce, and 100 certificates making conditional orders final issue. In the Probate Jurisdiction, 140 applications were filed and 120 grants were issued.

The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries and also the fees payable to Assistant Justices and to local law firms. Due to Bermuda's small size, occasionally it is the case that the Judiciary's current complement of judges are conflicted from hearing certain matters that are commenced in the Supreme Court.

When these cases arise, the Governor in consultation with the Chief Justice will appoint an Assistant Justice to have conduct of the matter. Given that there has been an increase in cases that have been filed in the Supreme Court, the Judiciary has had to utilise Assistant Justices on a more frequent basis.

Additionally, there have been cases where litigants have commenced Supreme Court and Court of Appeal proceedings against Magistrates, Judges and the Registrar in their judicial capacity. These cases must be contested, and costs will be sought against the litigants who commence each action. Regrettably, the Attorney General's Chambers is conflicted in being

able to represent members of the Judiciary, and as such there must be funding in place to retain private counsel.

Court Technology Office, 13025

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$472,000. Estimates for [2025/26] [is] \$510,000, an increase of \$38,000, or 8 per cent.

This cost centre provides salaries for the Information Technology Section. There are three posts: the IT manager, IT assistant and a data entry clerk. This funding also includes the cost for transcription services and maintenance fees for the court's court reporting system, CourtSmart. The court's IT equipment and software applications must be maintained, kept up to date, and will ultimately have to be replaced when necessary.

The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries and the fees for transcription services. Due to an increase in the number of criminal matters proceeding to the Court of Appeal, the department requires additional funding to cover the increased cost of preparing transcripts of the Supreme Court proceedings. It is to be noted that the Supreme Court Registry provides transcripts for the Court of Appeal as a result of a legislative mandate.

The Court of Appeal, 13020

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates [for] 2024/25 [was] \$1,002,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$1,016,000, an increase of \$14,000 or 1 per cent.

This cost centre provides the sitting and retainer fees of the President of the Court of Appeal, five Justices of Appeal and the salaries of two posts: the administrative officer Court of Appeal and an administrative assistant. The Court of Appeal meets three times a year. Each session is three weeks long. The increase in funding to this cost centre primarily reflects salaries with a nominal increase in costs to cover courier services.

The Magistrates' Court, 13040 Adjudication

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$1,061,000. Estimates for [2025/26] [is] \$1,087,000, an increase of \$26,000 or 2 per cent. This cost centre provides funding for the Senior Magistrate, four Magistrates and Acting Appointments where necessary.

The Magistrates' Court is presided over by the Worshipful Senior Magistrate Maxanne J. Anderson, the Worshipful Tyrone Chin, the Worshipful C. Craig Attridge, the Worshipful Maria Sofianos and the Worshipful Aura Lee Cassidy, all of whom bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to the Magistracy. In addition, the Senior Magistrate has an active Magis-

trate roster so as to give opportunities to those in the legal profession to acquire judicial experience and skills, which will put them in a position to elevate to the bench.

The Magistrates' Court is multijurisdictional, having conduct of civil, criminal, traffic and family matters. There are also the Treatment Courts such as the Mental Health Treatment Court, the Drug Treatment Court and the Driving Under the Influence (DUI) Court which continue to reduce recidivism by addressing the drug, alcohol and mental health challenges of offenders. The Case Management Court which is conducted once a week is designed to resolve all disclosure, evidential and procedural issues before a matter proceeds to trial.

As a result, instances where a trial would not have proceeded because of such issues have been significantly reduced from previous years. The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries.

Civil Records, 13050

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$261,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$273,000, an increase of \$12,000, or 5 per cent. This cost centre provides for the administrative arm of the Magistrates' Court Civil Section. The Civil Section is overseen by the office manager, who has under their remit one senior court associate and two court associates.

The Civil Section provides case management and court services for the resolution of civil claims up to \$25,000 and landlord/tenant matters under the Landlord and Tenant Act 1974 and the Rent Increases (Domestic Premises) Control Act 1978. The Civil Court continued to accept filings of all proceedings, including evictions and the recovery of rent arrears. Proceedings were initiated by various entities, which include, but are not limited to, law firms, litigants and persons and credit agencies. The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries.

Family and Child Support, 13060

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates [for] 2024/25 [was] \$511,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$531,000, an increase of \$20,000, or 4 per cent. This cost centre provides for the salaries and operational expenses for the Family and Child Support Section of the Magistrates' Court. There are six posts including the family support officer, enforcement officer, an administrative assistant and three court associates. The Family Court is a special court which was created to handle the specific needs of children (whether born within or outside of marriage) and matters arising in respect of their custody, care, maintenance and violations against the law juvenile offenders.

There are two Family Courts. Each Family Court proceeding is presided over by a Magistrate and two special panel members, one male and female

pursuant to the Magistrates Act 1948. In 2024, the number of persons serving on the special court panel totalled 44. The panel members assist the Magistrates in decision-making and their value to the Family Court and its continued success is immeasurable. The overall number of new cases filed in the Family Court in 2024/25 totalled 135. The overall number of new cases filed in the Family Court in 2023/24, totalled 135. There was a nominal decrease in 2024/25 which saw 132 new cases filed in the Family Court. Notably, there was a rise in the number of domestic violence orders adjudicated in the Magistrates' Court of 59 per cent in 2024/25 when compared to 2023/24.

In 2024/25, a total of 155 domestic violence orders were issued, compared to a total of 92 DVOs [domestic violence orders] issued in 2023/24. Domestic violence remains a prevalent issue within our community that needs to be addressed. The anticipated establishment of a Domestic Violence Court represents a significant advancement in our judicial approach, allowing us to address the underlying issues therapeutically and provide comprehensive support to victims.

The total number of child support payments received in 2023/24 was \$2,790,050. There was a decrease in the amount of child support payments received in 2024/25 which totalled \$2,690,249. The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries.

Administration, 13070

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates [for 2024/25 was] \$1,279,000, estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$1,330,000, an increase of \$51,000 or 4 per cent. This cost centre provides for the salaries and operational expenses for the administration of the Magistrates' Court, for which there are six posts, including the court manager, office manager, accounting officer and administrative public officers. In 2024/25, the cashier's office collected a total of \$5,656,981 in fees and fines, which is a decrease of \$458,624 when compared to 2023/24, when a total of \$6,115,605 was collected.

As it did in previous years, the Magistrates' Court still takes into consideration the financial circumstances of individuals who have been fined and, accordingly, the Magistrates' Court have allowed prices to pay off the fines in instalments. Additionally, Magistrates are making community service orders in lieu of the imposition of fines so that persons who are not able to pay fines can give back to society through charity work. Due to the increased inability of persons unable to pay their fines, the number of community service orders has drastically increased over the past year. The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries and the cost to cover autopsy reports.

Criminal and Traffic Records, 13080

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$464,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$595,000, an increase of \$131,000 or 28 per cent. The Criminal/Traffic Records Sections falls under the remit of the office manager and is supervised by the records supervisor. There are two court associates designated to this section who provide case management and court services related to the resolution of criminal traffic and parking ticket cases, as well as manage all record requests.

Additionally, the court associates provide clerking support to the Magistrates and the solely responsible for inputting demerit points into the Transport Control Department's drivers' vehicle registration system and the Court's current case management system, JEMS. The number of new criminal cases filed in Magistrates' Court increased from 537 in 2023/24 to 538 in 2024/25. This was not the case as it relates to the number of new traffic matters filed, which saw a slight decline from 4,510 in 2023/24 to 3,986 and 2024/25.

Additionally, the number of parking cases filed increased in 2024/25 to 29,219 when compared to 2023/24, which had 28,451 matters filed. In 2024/25, the Criminal Traffic Record Section processed a total of 2,660 record requests which is an increase when compared to 2023/24 of 2,500. The requests come from various sources which include, but are not limited to, private citizens, local and overseas employment agencies, private companies, Canadian immigration, the US Consulate, et cetera. As stated in prior briefs, it remains the department's intention to increase the fee for a record request from the Magistrates' Court.

The current fee remains disproportionately low at \$10 per application, when a similar report from the Bermuda Police Service is \$100. It is anticipated that this fee will be increased during the course of this upcoming fiscal year. It is to be noted that the fees payable in respect of filings and services offered in the Magistrates' Court increased generally pursuant to the Court Fees and Expenses Amendment Act and Validation Rules 2024, which came into effect on 1 August 2024. Prior to this increase the fees charged in the Magistrates' Court had not increased in almost 60 years. The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries.

Bailiffs Office, 13090

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$547,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$577,000, an increase of \$30,000 or 5 per cent. This cost centre provides for the salaries, service and execution of court papers inclusive of Civil, Family, Supreme Court and Foreign Service. There is one Head Bailiff, a Deputy Provost, Marshal General, one administrative assistant and four bailiffs who travel throughout the Island serving court processes.

During the 2024/25 fiscal year, the bailiffs served a total of 370 summons, 128 DVOs and executed 52 evictions. The increase in funding to this cost centre reflects salaries.

Revenue Overview

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, the revenue estimates for 2025/26 are found on page B-5 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure Budget Book. Revenues are projected at \$4,811,000, or an increase of 11 per cent from 2024/25. Total revenue for 2024/25—original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$4,329,000. Estimate for 2025/26 [is] 4,811,000, an increase of \$482,000 or 11 per cent.

Filing Fees for the Supreme Court

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Historically, fees payable to the Supreme Court Registry in respect of documents filed in new and active proceedings is a source of revenue that has not been recorded as the majority of these fees are paid by way of revenue stamps that counsel and litigants purchase through the Accountant General.

In 2025, the department began recording the fees paid in respect of filings in the Supreme Court's Civil and Commercial Jurisdiction. During the period 1 January 2025 to 31 March 2025, the Supreme Court Registry recorded a total of \$136,473 in revenue for Civil and Commercial matters. It is to be noted that with effect from 31 March 2024, the fees payable to the Supreme Court Registry increased pursuant to the rules of the Supreme Court Amendment Rules 2024 and the Civil Appeal Amendment Rules 2024.

The new fee structure brought the fees charged by the Supreme Court Registry in line with other similar jurisdictions such as the Cayman Islands and has provided an increased revenue stream for the Government of Bermuda.

Fees for Overseas Registered Associates and Court Fees and Charges

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The Supreme Court Registry also processes applications submitted by local law firms to register their locally and overseas-based attorneys/associates to practice law. In 2024/25, the revenue received for overseas registered associate applications decreased from \$36,000 collected in the prior year to \$25,000. There was however a significant increase in the revenue received for court fees and charges. This revenue includes the fees charged to conduct hearings in the Civil/Commercial Courts for obtaining copies of court records, swearing of affidavits and certifications.

The department recorded a total of \$213,124 in revenue for court fees and charges in 2024/25, which is an increase of \$160,517 from the previous

year which saw a total of \$50,607. This increase is largely due to the department making a concerted effort to enforce the payment of hearing fees in respect of civil and commercial matters in accordance with the new fee structure.

Stamp Duty on Deceased Estates.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Lastly, the Supreme Court Registry Probate Jurisdiction processes applications to probate the estates of deceased individuals. A tax assessment is made on the net estate value of a deceased estate. The net estate value is a calculation of the total value of the deceased gross estate less the value of statutory deductions and exemptions, including the value of property designated as a primary family homestead and spousal benefit. The total revenue receipts for deceased estates in 2024/25 is \$1,649,000, an increase from the previous year which saw a total of \$747,600. Total stamp duty assessed for grants issued for 2024/25 is \$1,717,000 whereas the previous year was \$1,183,000.

Magistrates' Court: Traffic, Parking and Criminal Fines

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The major components of revenue in the Magistrates' Court are traffic, parking and criminal fines. The total amount recorded for traffic fines in 2024/25 was \$1,646,772, a decrease from \$1,841,077 in 2023/24. The total amount recorded for parking fines in 2024/25 was \$461,450, a decrease from \$643,250. The total amount recorded for criminal fines in 2024/25 was \$137,684, an increase from \$115,623 in 2023/24.

It should be noted that there remains a concern that the Magistrates' Court Cashier Section provides all of the resources to collect parking ticket fines on behalf of the Corporation of Hamilton. These resources are funded by the Bermuda Government. There is no financial reimbursement by the Corporation of Hamilton to recover the cost of collecting their fines, as 100 per cent of fines are transferred directly to the Corporation of Hamilton.

This results in a loss of revenue to the Bermuda Government. The department has recently engaged in discussions with the Corporation of Hamilton to address this and it is hoped that the department and the Corporation of Hamilton can come to an agreement that would be a benefit to both the Government and the Corporation of Hamilton.

Court Fees

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The revenue received for civil fees in 2024/25 was \$138,615, which is a significant increase when compared to the revenue received for civil fees in 2023/24 of \$88,675. This increase in rev-

enue is largely attributed to the new fee structure that went into effect in August 2020.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, in addition to the implementation of a new case management system, funding for which has been allocated in the upcoming fiscal year, the department has received support from the Attorney General to restructure the organisation by redefining now defunct positions. The most significant and anticipated change to the department's organisational structure includes the addition of a second assistant registrar and an administrative officer supervisor for the Supreme Court's Matrimonial and Probate jurisdictions.

The assistant officer for Matrimony and Probate will have oversight over the Matrimonial and Probate divisions of the Supreme Court, while the assistant registrar will lend additional administrative and quasi-judicial support to the registrar and department as a whole. The scope of responsibilities falling within the registrar remit is extensive. Not only does the registrar have quasi-judicial functions and is required to preside over applications within the Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal the registrar is also the Head of Department.

As Head of Department, the registrar is responsible for strategic planning and developing and maintaining the department's budget, human resource management, facilities and operations management and procurement. Additionally, the registrar has administrative duties that are set out in statute, which include scheduling all court proceedings and maintaining the courts records. With an increase in the number of complex matters being filed at all levels of the Court, additional support at the level of administrative registrar is required.

As to the creation of an administrative officer Matrimonial/Probate post, it has been noted that there are currently administrative officers over the Criminal and Civil and Commercial jurisdictions of the Supreme Court, but no such position exists in the Matrimonial or Probate jurisdictions. The creation of a second assistant registrar and an administrative officer Matrimonial/Probate will fill significant service gaps and greatly improve the department's ability to deliver prompt and efficient services. It is also anticipated that final preparations will be made to commence renovations to the Dame Lois Browne-Evans Building to create additional fit-for-purpose court and administrative space.

With the department now fully vacated from Sessions House, the Judiciary is suffering from a lack of physical infrastructure. This can have the undesirable effect of negatively impacting the timely disposal of Court proceedings. The department is looking forward to continuing its work with the Department of Public Land and Buildings this fiscal year to progress the renovation project.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation on Head 3, the Judicial review.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you, Junior Minister. For those in the listening audience, we have just finished Head 3 under the Judicial review. We are now in our second hour of five hours for the Heads 87, 3, 4, 25, 74 and 75.

Junior Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 4—ATTORNEY GENERAL'S CHAMBERS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I will now begin the brief on Head 4, Attorney General's Chambers. Mr. Chairman, the mission statement, department objectives and current account estimates for the Attorney General's Chambers Head 4 begin on page B-91 of the Estimates Book.

The Mission Statement

Mr. Dennis Lister III: As legal advisors to Government, the Attorney General's Chambers is committed to provide high-quality legal advice and litigation services and to drafting sound legislation ever mindful of the need to protect the public interest and to safeguard and preserve the fundamental rights and freedoms enshrined in our Constitution.

In doing so, we also pledge to uphold the traditions of equity, fairness and justice inherent in the legal profession, whilst simultaneously remaining on the cutting edge of legal trends and technologies to ensure that we are abreast of and in accord with global trends.

Expenditure

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimate for 2024/25 [was] \$5,702,000. The estimate for 2025/26 is \$7,052,000, an increase of \$1,350,000, or 24 per cent. A total of \$7,052,000 has been allocated for Chambers. This represented an increase of \$1,350,000, or 24 per cent from 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the Attorney General's Chambers' objectives are

1. to provide quality legal services to the Government of Bermuda;
2. to advise all Government ministries, departments and entities on the law applicable to their operational requirements;
3. to draft legislation as required to implement the Government's legislative agenda to maintain Bermuda's legislative database and to support law reform;
4. to draft contracts, international instruments for mutual tax information exchange, conveyances and other documents required for public purposes and to provide advice on private Bills;

5. to conduct litigation in the Civil Courts of Bermuda on behalf of the Government of Bermuda; and
6. to process mutual legal assistance requests on behalf of international jurisdictions.

Mr. Chairman, the Attorney General's Chambers is functionally divided into six programmes accounted for below as follows.

Administration, 14010

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$435,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$444,000 an increase of \$9,000, or 2 per cent. Administration provides administrative support to the Attorney General, Solicitor General, Deputy Solicitor General, Senior Crown Counsel and Crown Counsel. This cost centre provides salaries for an office manager, a customer service representative, a records management administrator and an accounts officer. It also supports the purchasing of office supplies that are common to all sections of the department. The modest increase is due to the salary increase received by the public servants. In addition to the salaries provided for in this cost centre, it also provides \$46,000 for repair and cleaning services, \$25,000 for office supplies, \$20,000 for telephone services, \$12,000 for drinking water, \$31,000 for repair and maintenance of office equipment and \$4,000 for hospitality expenses.

Advisory, 14020

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$2,440,000. Estimates for 2025/26 [is] \$2,673,000, an increase of \$233,000 or 10 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Advisory Section is responsible for providing quality legal advice to all Government departments and conducting litigation matters brought by or against the Government. Additionally, Advisory is responsible for recovering debts owed to the Government and processing mutual legal assistance requests. This cost centre provides salaries for one Solicitor General, two Deputy Solicitor Generals, two Senior Crown Counsels, six Crown Counsels, two administrative assistants, one paralegal to the Solicitor General and one pupil.

The increase is due to legal services, funding for the Deputy Solicitor General post for the full year and the salary increase received by public servants. In addition to the salaries provided for in this cost centre, it also provides \$166,000 for consulting services, \$150,000 for legal services, \$20,000 for software maintenance, \$15,000 for membership fees, \$11,000 for books and subscriptions and \$11,000 for office supplies.

Legislative Drafting, 14030

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$2,097,000. Estimate for 2025/26 [is] \$2,842,000, an increase of \$745,000 or 36 per cent.

The Legislative Drafting Section advises regarding proposals to introduce or amend legislation, drafts primary and subordinate legislation for all Government departments and provides advice and support to Ministers in the House of Assembly and Senate as their respective legislation progresses.

This section also provides advice to Ministers and the Governor on legal and constitutional issues and on matters of parliamentary procedure. The salaries provided for in this cost centre include those of the Chief Parliamentary Counsel, Deputy Chief Parliamentary Counsel, six Parliamentary Counsel, two Assistant Parliamentary Counsel, one Legislative Database Manager, one Legislative Editor, one Legislative Administrator and one Legislative Database Administrator.

The year over year budgetary increase is due to budgeting for payments to drafting consultants, the temporary additional Parliamentary Counsel and the salary increase received by public servants. In addition to the salaries provided for this cost centre, it also provides \$3,000 for local training, \$10,000 for overseas training, \$8,000 for membership fees, \$20,000 for office supplies and \$517,000 for local consulting fees.

Revised Laws of Bermuda, 14040

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimates for 2024/25 [was] \$244,000. Estimates 2025/26 [is] \$369,000, an increase of \$125,000 or 51 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, this cost centre supports the consolidation, periodic revision and publication of the laws of Bermuda. It is responsible for providing Members of both Houses of the Legislature, businesses, lawyers and the general public with access to the revised statutes and regulations of Bermuda. It also supports the ongoing consolidation of primary and subordinate legislation. The budgetary increase is due to a pricing increase relating to the LIMS software to enable better system support and an upgrade in security to the online legal database.

Debt Collection, 14050

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimates [for] 2024/25 [was] \$338,000. Estimate for 2025/26 [is] \$534,000 which represents an increase of \$196,000, or 58 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Debt Enforcement Unit within the Attorney General's Chambers was established by the Government to assist the Department of Social Insurance and the Office of the Tax Commissioner in the recovery of unpaid social insurance contributions, payroll tax, land tax and other taxes owed to the Government. The cost centre provides salaries

for one Crown Counsel, one Junior Crown Counsel, and one Administrator. The increase is due to the addition of a Junior Crown Counsel and a temporary additional Junior Crown Counsel. The addition of these posts will ensure and assist with the training of Bermudian Junior Attorneys that wish to enter the public service.

Law Library, 14060

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Original estimate 2024/25 [was] \$148,000. Estimate for 2025/26 [is] \$190,000, an increase of \$42,000 or 28 per cent. This programme provides for the cost of maintaining the Law Library and the Attorney General's Chambers which includes the purchase of books, periodicals and the provision of access to leading online legal information sources such as Lexis/Nexis, vLex, Practical Law and Westlaw UK. The increase is due to the Law Library moving from primarily hard copy subscriptions to almost entirely digital subscriptions which have now incorporated the use of AI.

Capital Acquisitions

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimates 2024/25 was \$10,000. Estimates for 2025/26, is \$10,000, which represents zero or nil, or zero per cent change.

The budget allocation for capital expenditures is found at page C-10 of the Budget Book. The Attorney General's Chambers has been allocated a capital amount of \$10,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26. Funding for this amount will be used to purchase office equipment.

Performance Measures

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, during the 2024 calendar year, 43 Acts were enacted and 133 Statutory Instruments were made. In addition to the annual budget legislation, there were a number of new and amending Acts to give effect to the Government's legislative agenda.

The Bermuda Laws website, which contains all of Bermuda's current laws and subordinate legislation, is updated in real time from within Chambers and will continue to make improvements to the site. Updating the *eGazette* from within Chambers allows Regulations to be published and take effect immediately. Over the past budget year, we received eight mutual Legal Assistance requests, which obligations arise out of various international arrangements. The Advisory Section also acts as attorneys for the Enforcement Authority under the Proceeds of Crime Act 1997.

Over the past budget year, there was one civil recovery proceeding resulting in \$100,000 being confiscated. We also completed three section 51 of the

Proceeds of Crime Act 1997 cases, which resulted in \$59,000 being confiscated.

Staffing—Civil Advisory

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, there are currently five vacant posts within the Civil Advisory and Litigation section of the Attorney General's Chambers. Two Deputy Solicitor Generals, one Crown Counsel, one Junior Crown Counsel and one administrative assistant.

Recruitment for the vacant Deputy Solicitor General post has begun and interviews are due to take place shortly. The remainder of the posts are in the process of having the job descriptions reviewed. The current staffing levels of the Civil Advisory section are: one Solicitor General, two Senior Crown Counsels, six Crown Counsels, one Junior Crown Counsel, one administrative assistant, one temporary relief administrative assistant and one paralegal to the Solicitor General.

In December 2024, Shayla Hassell joined the Civil Advisory Section as a Junior Crown Counsel, which demonstrates the commitment to hire young Bermudian counsel.

Staffing—Legislative Drafting

Mr. Dennis Lister III: In the Drafting Section of Chambers, there are five vacancies: Deputy Chief Parliamentary Counsel, one Parliamentary Counsel, one Assistant Parliamentary Counsel, and two temporary additional Parliamentary Counsel. The vacancy in the Parliamentary Council position arose with the resignation of Ms. Lauren Francis in February 2025, who completed 13 years of service in Chambers. We thank Ms. Francis for her dedicated work and commitment to Chambers and we wish her well in her endeavours.

Recruitment for the five vacant positions has begun and interviews are due to take place shortly. We will be seeking permission to create three additional posts: one Deputy Chief Parliamentary Counsel, two Senior Parliamentary Counsel to support professional and leadership progression and to convert one temporary additional post to an established post so that a Bermudian Assistant Parliamentary Counsel can be promoted during this fiscal year.

The current staffing levels in the legislative Drafting Section are: one Chief Parliamentary Counsel, three Parliamentary Counsels, one temporary additional Parliamentary Counsel, one Assistant Parliamentary Counsel, one temporary relief Parliamentary Counsel and three consultants.

In addition to these dedicated lawyers who are responsible for drafting all government Bills and statutory instruments, the section is fortunate to have an excellent administrative team comprising of four posts: Legislative Database Manager, Legislative Editor, Legislative Administrator, and Legislative Adminis-

trator Database, each of whom plays a critical part in the timely production, publication, and consolidation of legislation.

Training and Development

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, the Attorney General's Chambers includes within its mandate the development of its professional and administrative staff. In December 2024, the Acting Senior Crown Counsel and a Crown Counsel attended a virtual training session for anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism.

Additionally, to encourage collaboration and a healthy work environment, members of the Civil Advisory Section participated in two team building exercises held in September 2024 and March 2025. This formed part of the development of staff initiative. During the course of the 2024/25 budget year, the Solicitor General coordinated the Pupillage Programme of the Ministry of Justice, where one Crown Counsel serves as pupil master for one pupil, Ms. Denzelle Swan, who commenced her pupillage on the 1 October 2024.

The Pupillage Programme provides each pupil with a unique and enriched training experience within various departments in the Ministry of Justice, which includes the Department of Public Prosecutions, the Legal Aid Office and the Drafting and Advisory Sections of the Attorney General's Chambers. In September 2025, Assistant Parliamentary Counsel, Ms. Lorendae Symonds will complete her online studies at Athabasca University for a graduate diploma in Legislative Drafting, and we wish her continued success in completing her training.

Members of the Drafting Section attended various training and development webinars and online training sessions on topics including developments in legislative drafting, FinTech, personal information protection, health and safety, leadership and well-being. The Attorney General's Chambers Civil Advisory and Legislative Drafting conducted a continuing legal education seminar with members of the Bermuda Bar Council in November of 2024. Members of the Drafting Section conducted policy-to-law training in February 2025 at the Department of Employee and Organisational Development. Staff participated in a team building and wellness retreat in October 2024.

Initiatives for the Forthcoming Year—Advisory

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, a principal focus will continue to be on the development of Bermudian Crown Counsel and pupils. Emphasis will be given to using Senior Crown Counsel and Crown Counsel to assist Junior Crown Counsel and pupils on advisory and litigation matters. The Advisory Section intends to fill the vacant post of Deputy Solicitor General, Junior

Crown Counsel and administrative assistant in the forthcoming fiscal year.

Chambers is in the process of revising one job description for Crown Counsel into a dedicated specialist post with expertise in land law, conveyancing and planning law. It is worth noting that this initiative will not increase the number of posts within Chambers. Additionally, Chambers seeks to improve its case management system to reduce our demand for paper resources through the increased utilisation of the ProLaw software and other electronic filing systems.

Legislative Drafting—Staffing and Training

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The principal focus is to fill all vacancies in the section and chart a succession plan to develop Bermudian Parliamentary Counsel. An organisational restructuring of the section to bolster succession planning and support professional and leadership development is forthcoming.

Legislative Information Management System—LIMS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The legislation is produced quickly and accurately using LIMS which is customised to our Bermuda drafting style. This, combined with the important role of the legislative editor, has kept the number of errors and inconsistencies found in legislation during House and Senate debates to a minimum, thereby expediting the legislative process. The maintenance of LIMS is through a Canadian vendor who provides timely professional assistance and technical support whenever necessary and regularly updates our software with the latest version.

It is intended to continue to improve our database and to post new laws within a week of enactment on the Bermuda Laws Online website www.bermudalaws.bm, which is hosted locally by One Communications Limited.

Consolidation, which is the incorporation of amendments into existing laws, is more time-consuming since the amendments are checked by the Drafter as well as the Legislative Database Manager. The goal is to continue to complete the process within one month of the enactment of the amending legislation which was achieved in the last few years. To date, we have reached the intended outcome of 95 per cent of enactments.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes that brief.

The Chairman: And for the listening audience, we have just concluded Head 4 under the Ministry of Justice, which is being delivered by Junior Minister Lister. We are now in hour number two of five and we are approaching 20 . . . or just about 20 minutes prior to going to lunch.

Junior Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 74—DEPARTMENT OF COURT SERVICES

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Next, I will continue on with Head 74 Department of Court Services found on pages B-98 to B-101 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 74, the Department of Court Services. The mission statement is *to reduce recidivism by delivering risk reduction programmes and strategies to protect the community*. The mandate of the Department of Court Services is to be responsible for the assessment, rehabilitation, treatment, supervision and case management of offenders in the community who are subject to statutory orders.

The department also delivers comprehensive assessments, makes referrals to treatment agencies for substance abusers via the Bermuda Assessment and Referral Centre (BARC) and furthermore conducts drug and alcohol screenings. Additionally, the department supervises and monitors clients, many of them high-risk sexual offenders, violent offenders on probation and/or supervision orders or those serving life sentences who are on licence.

Expenditure Review

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This department has been, and continues to be, impacted by an increasing number of clients who are victims of unresolved childhood and adult traumas which negatively affect their lives, culminating with their involvement in our criminal justice system. These issues seriously affect their ability to function in society, which ultimately leads to addiction, criminal thinking and deviant behaviour.

These clients who manifest multidimensional needs and varied degrees of risk to themselves and/or the community, need a flexible, multi-pronged approach to meet their diverse needs. They require not only monitoring and supervision, but assistance with requiring social and living skills. All of this requires complex, intensive and sustained clinical and social interventions. These interventions are seriously compounded by the myriad number of issues which negatively affect our clients' lives such as economic hardships, lack of affordable housing and insufficient positive community support to assist in parenting and development.

Some of the continuing pervasive issues negatively affecting our client population are unemployment, mental health issues, misuse and abuse of substances, parenting struggles, anger control issues, gang affiliations, cognitive and brain injury deficits, negative peer and familial influences and educational deficiencies.

Mr. Chairman, a total of \$4,888,000 has been estimated for this fiscal year. This is an increase of \$491,000 over the previous year. This increase is solely due to incremental salary increases and the

filling of previously vacant posts. No additional operating expenses have been requested for Head 74. This constitutes 8.5 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. Budget savings over the fiscal year were realised by freezing posts as well as staggering the filling of vacant posts.

Subjective Analysis

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The subjective analysis of current account estimates of the Department of Court Services are found on page B-98. I would highlight the material object code increases and decreases.

Head 74—Department of Court Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The expenditure for the fiscal year 2024/25 was \$4,397,000, while the estimate for the fiscal year is \$4,888,000. This is an increase of \$491,000 over the previous year, or 11 per cent, and as noted above, contains the salary uplift for staff as well as filling of vacant and frozen posts. This salary increase is 14 per cent.

Case Management Unit Probation Services, 84010

Mr. Dennis Lister III: In 2025/26, the estimated expansion for this team is \$439,000. This is a \$7,000, or 2 per cent increase over last year, the increase [is] due to salary uplifts and post fillings.

Parole Services, 84020

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This team had an original expenditure in 2024/25 of \$424,000. In 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, \$463,000 has been requested and this would be an increase of 9 per cent, or \$39,000—again to cover staff uplifts and vacant posts being filled.

Drug Treatment Court Programme, 84080

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This Treatment Court Programme had an original expenditure of \$471,000 in 2024/25. The request for 2025/26 is \$621,000, which would be a 32 per cent increase, or \$150,000. The total expenditure for the Case Management Unit is \$1,523,000 which is 15 per cent, or \$196,000, over last year's amount.

Administration—7402 Court Services Administration, 84070

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This business unit has the Management Team salaries as well as the IT post and the operational funds for the department.

This business unit in the 2024/25 fiscal year had an expenditure of \$1,262,000. The 2025/26 fiscal year estimated expenditure is \$1,328,000. This is an

increase of \$66,000, or 5 per cent. This increase is due to ensure salary monies are available as the management posts which were frozen in prior budgets are accounted for as hiring takes place.

Assessment and Treatment Unit—7403
Aftercare and Community Offenders, 84030

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The expenditure for this team was \$174,000 in the 2024/25 fiscal year. The 2025/26 expenditure estimate is \$423,000. This is an increase of 143 per cent. This fiscal year will be the first year that the department has two Forensic Psychologists, and with the recruitment process well underway, the Specialist Probation Officer post on this team should also be filled. Hence the \$249,000 increase over the last year. This should be offset by a decrease in spending to contracted private clinicians for interventions and assessments for our clients.

Community Offenders, 84040

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This team's estimated expenditure of \$509,000 is an increase of \$46,000, or 10 per cent over the 2024/25 year.

Assessments, 84060

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This unit comprises three teams: Report Writing Team, the BARC Team and the Mental Health Treatment Team, whose 2024/25 expenditure was \$1,171,000. The expenditure estimate of \$1,105,000 for the 2025/26 year is a decrease of \$66,000, or 6 per cent.

This brings the 2025/26 expenditure for this unit to \$2,037,000. This is an increase of 13 per cent or \$229,000 over the 2024/25 expenditure total.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2024/25 were achieved as listed below in each cost centre.

Business Unit 7401, Case Management

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This business unit is responsible for three teams which carry out the functions of probation, parole and the Drug Treatment Court.

Probation Team: The Probation Team monitors and supervises clients who are on probation, orders which have been ordered by the Courts. Conditions in probation orders are designed utilising the results of assessment tools that determine the areas of our clients lives which need interventions as well as the risk to and in the community. These interventions, from probation officers as well as clinical staff, are designed to support the client in making positive

changes to their behaviour, friends and lifestyle, as well as assisting and reducing the criminal thought patterns. These interventions are strengthened by officers making job and home visits to get a holistic synopsis of the clients functioning in the community.

Performance Measures

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Two of the performance measures, which were forecast at 75 per cent, were actioned and completed at 100 per cent. All clients who screened positive for drug or alcohol use were actioned within one week. This would mean that one or more interventions based on client behaviour, history and/or response to said interventions would be utilised to minimise a reoccurrence of the issue. Clients who were prolific or repeat offenders were case managed within one month of beginning their new order.

This would be an internal case conference with the prior supervising officer, Treatment Court staff and/or clinical/treatment staff to get as complete a behavioural or clinical package as needed to facilitate their supervision. The target for administering clients a final risk assessment was 75 per cent. The final total was 79 per cent.

The number of persons completing probation was 85 per cent of the total number of admissions at 73. This means that 50 out of the 59 discharged were assessed. The remaining nine will be those who were breached and were sentenced to incarceration, fined or had their sentence extended forward.

The Parole Team

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Individuals released from the Department of Corrections on early conditional release to serve the remainder of their sentences in the community by the Parole Board are supervised for the remainder of the sentences under the supervision of an officer from the Parole Team.

This means that in addition to finite sentences, persons serving life sentences are supervised by the department for parole for the rest of their natural life. At present, there are 22 offenders under supervision for the remainder of their lives, referred to as "lifers." During the year, six additional persons were given the licence by the Parole Board. Additionally, there were five clients whose sentence and parole concluded. Two persons were breached and returned to Corrections due to failing to adhere to the conditions of licence. This was one less than what the target number for the calendar year was forecast at three. These statistics point out the effectiveness of criminal justice programmes and this number is amongst the lowest worldwide.

The Chairman: Junior Minister, we have reached the two-hour mark right now. We started at 10:24. Lunch is in about six minutes. Whenever you want to find a

good place to sort of stop and then we can resume after lunch.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I will do one more page and then we can stop.

Performance Measures for the Drug Treatment Court Team

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The Drug Treatment Court Programme remains the principal model for a Magistrate-led team approach to offender treatment and supervision, being the progenitor of all other Treatment Courts. There were eight new referrals in the Drug Treatment Court Programme during the year in addition to those observing for potential admittance into the programme. The number of participants at the end of 2024 stood at 17. The makeup of the Court in terms of substances used is 80 per cent use cocaine and 20 per cent use heroin.

An adjusted stream for offenders convicted of driving under the influence offences is now a full-fledged programme—DUI programme meetings facilitated by the focused Treatment Care Centre and this department for once-a-week sessions. There were eight new referrals in the DUI stream. Numbers at the end of 2024 stood at 21. Of these, 98 per cent are for alcohol use. In the drug use stream, 90 per cent of participants are male, while in the DUI stream 80 per cent are male. Both streams require the office to engage in intensive case management to ensure that the treatment needs as well as social, medical and mental needs are also met.

With that Mr. Chairman, I will pause before I continue any further reading.

The Chairman: Thank you for that Junior Minister, and I will call on Minister Furbert just to move the motion to take us to lunch.

You just move—

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you. I move that we adjourn for lunch.

The Chairman: Any objections?

So, we are going for lunch until 2:00 . . . to resume at 2:00 pm.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:26 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:00 pm

[Mrs. Renee Ming, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR FISCAL YEAR 2025/26

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon.

Some Hon. Members: Good afternoon.

The Chairman: We are now in session.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: We are now in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure [for fiscal year 2025/26.]

Please be seated, Members.

[Pause]

The Chairman: I call on the Junior Minister for Legal Affairs to continue with his presentation. Can you please just remind me and the listening public where you completed before lunch today? Thank you.

MINISTRY OF JUSTICE

HEAD 74—DEPARTMENT OF COURT SERVICES

[Continuing]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I stopped off on Head 74, Department of Court Services and I am on page 17 on my brief.

When you are ready, I can start.

The Chairman: Begin. Thank you.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Okay. You are welcome.

To the listening audience . . . excuse me, Madam Chairman, how much time do I have left?

The Chairman: You have approximately three hours remaining for your presentation.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I will try and leave enough time for the Opposition to ask some questions.

Madam Chairman, I left off on stating the performance measures under Head 74 and I will continue. The department is actively working to lessen the number of persons who test positive during their participation in the programme, and I'll just reflect back, this is the Drug Treatment Court Team. Intensive work has gone on with an added emphasis on assisting plans to give—

The Chairman: Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Yes.

The Chairman: Can I just stop you for one minute?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mm-hmm.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITORS

The Chairman: I would just like to acknowledge the presence of the Attorney General, Senator Kim Wilkerson in the Chamber with us today. She also has her permanent secretary . . . secretaries, sorry.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Thank you very much. Please continue.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: You are welcome.

Intensive work has gone on with an added emphasis on assisting clients to deal with their trauma issues. The measurement forecast was at 7 per cent for both the DTC [Drug Treatment Court] and DUI [Driving Under the Influence] streams. The actual percentage was 10 per cent. Of that percentage most clients tested positive early on in their treatment with the number declining with the amount of time persons were in the programme. The percentage of clients reoffending while in the programme was at 3 per cent and these additional offences were mainly at the beginning of their entry into the programme.

Additionally, the percentage of clients who were referred to other therapeutic programmes after the completion of the DTC Court Programme was forecast to be 10 per cent. That percentage for the year came in at only 36 per cent. This was mainly individuals who were recommended for a lower level of service who were subsequently referred to a higher level when they were unable to support their sobriety for at least three months after discharge.

The Assessment and Treatment Unit

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This unit includes community service orders and the Mental Health Treatment Court programme along with the Report Writing Team and the Community Offenders Programme and the Bermuda Assessment and Referral Centre.

Community Service Orders

Mr. Dennis Lister III: During the past year, individuals were sentenced to 3,802 hours of community service by the courts. This is down 10 per cent from the previous year. Generally, the number of hours ordered by the courts fluctuates with the economy where more hours are ordered in difficult financial environs as individuals are less able to pay court order fines. Of these, 2,593 hours or 68 per cent were completed within the year. This departmental function has also been carried out by one probation officer or case manager who has done a sterling job of arranging regular reviews for uncooperative clients as well as

securing more placement opportunities for our clients engaged in paying back the community.

Mental Health Court

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The Mental Health Court Programme is a valuable option for individuals who come into the criminal justice systems with diagnosed and treatable mental health issues that were significant contributors to their offending. A major challenge for this team that continues year to year is the inability for these clients to access the relevant residential treatment services and housing opportunities. This is critical for them to receive the necessary treatment and social stability which they require for their self-actualisation and motivation to change. It is an inherent barrier to positive development if society cannot supply the basic means to support their actualisation.

The situation is especially prevalent with individuals dually diagnosed with a mental illness and a substance addiction. In several cases many of the individuals are not ill enough to be hospitalised but too ill for residential placement. This places an added burden on the case managers who are trying to facilitate clinical, medical and addiction interventions for these individuals while simultaneously negotiating through the homeless situation of the clients. Additionally, because of the multitude of varied needs these individuals present with, their case management and treatment needs are time and energy intensive.

Community-based Programmes

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The Community-based Programme Team delivers accredited and certified interventions by specially trained senior probation officers for high-risk offenders such as sex and violent offenders under the guidance of a forensic psychologist. Unfortunately, we lost our dedicated sex and violent offender staff member, and we are actively searching for another. As a result, we were not able to offer groups which meant a substantial rise in the number of individual clients seen by the team; however, clients did not miss out on clinical interventions. Instead, the team utilised one-to-one intervention. However, we now have restarted client group meetings as this is the first full year of the department having a full-time in-residence forensic psychologist again.

As a result, outsource expenses have decreased and various trainings have taken place to better equip officers to work with our clientele. Future training will aid in the staff's further development and application of accredited service standards. The second forensic psychologist has arrived on the Island and has been working in this last quarter. This will increase our ability to meet more of the needs and more of our clients quicker. The Assessment and Treatment Team consisting of the Report Writing and the Bermuda Assessment and Referral Centre com-

piled timely, comprehensive and succinct reports and assessments. These both aid in referrals and guide the dispensation of cases in the courts as well as informing decisions made by the Parole Board.

Report Writing Team

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The Report Writing Team had a total of 294 reports for the calendar year. This was up 86 from the previous year. Madam Chairman, 95 per cent of reports were completed on time. The target for this objective was 100 per cent; however, being unable to contact offenders due to incomplete or incorrect contact information or the client misses several scheduled appointments for assessments or home visits are difficult to schedule are causative factors in not being able to reach 100 per cent. Reports include 45 Prison Rules 1980, 166 reports to the Parole Board. While the remaining 249 were court-ordered SIRs (or social inquiry reports). Out of the 249 court reports, 12 were from the Supreme Court; 217 were from Magistrates' Court; and 65 being from the Family Court specifically for reports on juvenile offenders.

Bermuda Assessment and Treatment Centre

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The BARC [Bermuda Assessment and Referral Centre] Team completed a total of 153 reports in the last year. This was five more than the previous year. During the year there were 53 recommendations for intensive outpatient treatment, while there were 23 referred for inpatient retreatment—I take that back—while there were 23 referred for *outpatient* treatment. Madam Chairman, 47 were referred for residential treatment and ongoing issues with the length of time some clients have to wait to enter treatment, especially residential, remains a challenge for the department. Notwithstanding we continue to seek resolutions for addressing this. The Ministry is exploring options for public-private partnerships with providers with the relevant expertise.

The delivery of BARC reports is overseen by the team's clinical supervisor who possesses the IADC, International Alcohol and Drug Counsellor designation and is currently studying to obtain the certified Clinical Supervisor designation for those persons working with drug-involved persons. In turn this supervisor assists with and promotes the development of our team members.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, as we continue to develop our staff developmental opportunities to keep abreast of trends in the field, numerous training and acting opportunities have been made available. Additionally, an Acting Unit Manager as well as a Probation Officer Case Manager attended the American Probation and Parole Association [APPA] confer-

ence where they were able to return with up-to-date knowledge on programmes, therapies and procedures to assist this department, along with other government departments, in the further development of additional treatment courts.

Our Clinical Supervisor was also able to attend several of the conference's workshops remotely. This knowledge has proven invaluable and will assist the department in conducting assessments, analysing results and conducting treatment planning for the forthcoming Domestic Violence Court as well as continued readiness to assist those with gambling addiction in addition to the current work. In relation to the Domestic Violence Court our newest forensic psychologist has been directed to provide clinical support to the agencies involved as well as to assess and recommend training for our officers to supervise and monitor domestic violence perpetrators in a treatment court setting.

We are also scheduled to be a pilot agency later this year testing new state-of-the-art domestic violence electronic monitoring devices which can be used not only to determine where a perpetrator is at at any given moment, it will [also] allow a participating victim to know that the perpetrator is in their immediate vicinity.

This department remains an active participant on the Interdepartmental Gang Enforcement Team as well as the Offender Risk Management Team for high-risk sexual and violent offenders. Additionally, the department is represented on the Mental Health Clients in Corrections and the High-Risk Intervention Committee. The department is also represented on the Child Safeguarding Committee looking at ways to protect the children in our community. These collaborations will continue as we try to ensure the safest possible Island community.

During this upcoming year, the team will increase clinical interventions as required to further assist sex and violent offenders, continue with training to obtain additional certification in working with persons with a gambling addiction, and increase the number of treatment groups as well as one-on-one interventions to provide a more intensive clinical response for more clients.

The budget year 2025/26 initiatives include

- continuing with training officers in the entire department to administer various assessment tools to better facilitate cross-training and movement amongst teams (or reassignments) within the department to optimise skills and resources;
- pursuing options for more specialised training in addiction assessments, gambling assessments and treatment;
- as well as domestic violence interventions and supervision.

Madam Chairman, the department's overall focus in the coming year is to utilise its funding to optimise its effectiveness and efficiencies. Staggered recruitment drives have created some shortfalls which resulted in salary underspends. This was intensified by contracts being offered for positions that were later turned down due to better offerings in the private sector. Madam Chairman, 98 per cent of all of the department's job descriptions have been completed and signed off on. An intensive recruitment to fill previously frozen or vacant posts is ongoing. The majority of posts should be filled by this summer.

Madam Chairman, the department's treatment, assessment, enforcement and rehabilitation regimes continue its aim to lessen the effects of offending and the impact of associated risk on the community. Department officers conduct curfew checks, visit homes and employment sites. They also attend high-profile events in the community to monitor clients more vigorously. They also use electronic means to strengthen and support supervision tactics.

These responsibilities present safety risks yet officers are dedicated in their efforts to transform the lives of our clients and their families and associates by deterring further offending or relapse through various strategies and interventions deployed. We note, Madam Chairman, that some offenders prefer to forego supervision and elect to serve their entire sentence as they view the department's activities as being onerous, intrusive and disruptive to their life pursuits.

The department's Client-Facing Officers as well as the supervisors and support staff continue to work in dangerous conditions conducting curfew checks in the early hours of the morning, especially on weekends and major holidays, is inherently risky, especially in today's environment where firearms, knives, and other weapons are increasingly available and utilised. These job functions put these officers at risk for harm yet they persevere and do what is needed to ensure the continued safety of the community. The department will also continue to utilise therapeutic and supervision regimes to minimise this threat and prepare the event offender to be a viable entity in today's community.

Madam Chairman, notwithstanding the department has and will continue to embrace partnerships and strategies as well with other government departments, community organisations, and NGOs to meet the department's objective of protecting the community. Expenditure requests for this year have not increased and recruitment drives for recently vacated posts or unfrozen posts are almost completed. And while a couple had been frozen for the entire year, the department will do its best and rely on whatever support may become available through creative means throughout the upcoming year to accomplish its goals. We enthusiastically acknowledge the relentless work of the department and its officers and staff and continue to keep the community safe. Through

data-driven programming and collaborative partnerships, the Department of Court Services will continue to support the courts, reduce recidivism, and improve long-term outcomes for Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, this ends the presentation on Head 74, the Department of Court Services and highlights the operational use of its expenditures.

HEAD 75—DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC PROSECUTIONS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, I will now continue with Head 75 Department of Public Prosecutions. The Department of Public Prosecutions [DPP] is found on pages B-102 to B-105 of the Budget Book.

Department Overview

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The mission statement for the Department of Public Prosecutions is, *To provide Bermuda with independent, efficient and effective criminal prosecution service without fear or favour based on the rule of law.* The following are the objectives of the Department of Public Prosecutions:

1. Promote the fair, transparent and efficient prosecution of criminal offences consistent with lawful authority and subject to established guidelines to safeguard the actuality and the perception of prosecutorial independence.
2. Promote high standards and principles in the administration of criminal justice including procedures to guard against or address miscarriages of justice in support of the rule of law.
3. Carry out prosecutorial functions impartially, assisting the court to arrive at the truth and to do justice between the community, the victim, and the accused according to law and the dictates of fairness.
4. Promote good relations between individual prosecutors, policing and other agencies within the criminal justice system to facilitate the exchange and dissemination among them of information, expertise and experience, and to that end, to encourage the use of information technology.
5. Maintain a team of highly competent and administrative professionals to carefully handle the day-to-day responsibilities of the department with great detail and confidentiality, which is a critical and essential element in helping prosecutors fulfil their mandate.

Madam Chairman, the complications of modern society are such that there can never be an absolute end to crime. All we have at our disposal are the different components of the criminal justice system to provide access to justice for our people. And yet this

Ministry amounts to less than 3 per cent of the overall budget.

In 2024/25, the Department of Public Prosecutions had the smallest budget in the Ministry. Notwithstanding, Madam Chairman, DPP has worked hard to ensure that the Department of Public Prosecutions is a properly empowered and publicly respected prosecuting authority.

Madam Chairman, 88 per cent of the department's 2024/25 budget was spent on salaries and allowances. The remaining 12 per cent of the allocated budget was spent as follows:

- 43 per cent was spent on consultants to support the department in specific cases where legal conflict arose;
- 7 per cent was spent on office supplies and printing;
- 6 per cent was spent to pay interns to scan the department's files into the case management system in an effort to become a paperless office;
- 10 per cent was spent on training;
- 3 per cent was spent on storage costs;
- 7 per cent was spent on professional and membership costs; and
- the remaining 24 per cent was spent on communications and security costs.

Current Account Expenditure

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimate for 2024/25 was \$3,703,000. The estimate for 2025/26 is \$4,001,000, an increase of \$298,000 or 8 per cent. The current account expenditure estimates for Head 75, the Department of Public Prosecutions, begins on page B-102 of the Budget Book. A total of \$4,001,000 has been allocated to the Department of Public Prosecutions which includes its Witness Care Unit. This represents a \$298,000 or 8 per cent increase from the 2024/25 original estimates.

Public Prosecutions

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The original estimate for 2024/25 was \$3,537,000. The estimate for 2025/26 is \$3,828,000 an increase of \$291,000 or 8 per cent.

Madam Chairman, \$3,828,000 has been allocated to the Department of Public Prosecutions on its own. This represents an increase of \$291,000 or 8 per cent from fiscal year 2024/25. Like last year, the majority of the budget for the department relates to salaries and allowances. Money has again been allocated to the department to fund consultants to support the department in specific cases where legal conflict may arise or where the department is sued and the Attorney General's Chambers cannot represent them or to fund Privy Council cases.

Witness Care Unit

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, \$170,000 has been allocated to the Witness Care Unit. This represents an increase of \$7,000 or 4 per cent from fiscal year 2024/25. The Witness Care Unit was implemented in December 2008 with the aim of improving the experiences of civilians by offering support to them within the criminal justice system. This assisted in increasing the number of civilian witnesses who attended court to give evidence and also aided in reducing the number of trials which had to be forfeited by the prosecution due to non-attendance by civilian witnesses at trials.

The Witness Care Unit consists of two dedicated Witness Care officers who act as the sole intermediary contact between civilian witnesses and the prosecutors. The officers arrange pretrial meetings between witnesses and prosecutors, identify any peculiar circumstances that the prosecutor might not be aware of, offer ongoing support to witnesses, and keep them updated on the progress of the matter that they are involved in.

Since the implementation of the Witness Care Unit there has been a vast improvement in the number of civilian witnesses who have attended either Magistrates' or Supreme Court to give evidence in criminal trials. Upward of 18,000 witnesses have received the benefit of this service and the impact that this has had both on the criminal justice system and the community at large is immeasurable. The officers continue to receive positive feedback from civilians they have assisted in criminal trials.

Performance Measures

Mr. Dennis Lister III: During the fiscal year 2024/25, the Department of Public Prosecutions handled approximately 950 criminal cases in the Magistrates' Court. There were also approximately 7,000 traffic cases completed during the financial year. Multiple defendant trials in the Supreme Court have increased and a total of 20 indictments have been disposed of.

Staffing

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, under the direction of the Director of Public Prosecutions there is a complement of 14 counsel. However, currently there are two vacant posts, one of which is well into the recruitment process. All counsel are engaged in the prosecution of offences and appear when appropriate in the Magistrates' Criminal Courts, Family Court, Treatment Courts, (which includes Drug Treatment Court and the Driving Under the Influence track, and Mental Health Treatment Court). Counsel also appear in the Supreme Court, the Bermuda Court of Appeal and, when necessary, the Privy Council. Soon prosecutors will appear in the Domestic Abuse Court. The prosecutors also provide legal advice to the police,

government ministries and departments on matters relating to offences.

The organisational chart provides for additional staff including one office manager, one litigation manager, five administrative assistants and one customer service representative. The department is currently recruiting for a customer service representative and an administrative assistant. In addition, the department employs the two Witness Care officers as previously mentioned.

Madam Chairman, during the past financial year, Madam DPP led a team of her prosecutors to the International Association of Prosecutors 29th Annual Conference. The main theme of the conference was "The Role of the Prosecutor in Upholding the Rule of Law." Madam DPP chaired the closing plenary. Mr. Adley Duncan, presented at a workshop and Mr. Matthew Frick chaired a workshop session. The team ensured that the Bermuda Department of Public Prosecutions was recognised on the international stage as a team of highly competent prosecutors.

The Department of Public Prosecutions continues to work toward advancing the criminal justice system. In 2024/25, the department sponsored a visit by Madam DPP, the Senior Magistrate, Ms. Maxanne Anderson; Acting Senior Crown Counsel, Shaunte Simons-Fox; Senior Probation Officer Noel Hayward; and Witness Care Officer Deanna Binns to the Westminster Magistrates' Courts, Domestic Violence Court. All who attended were inspired to return home to Bermuda to implement our own Domestic Violence Court.

The Department of Public Prosecutions continues to uphold its mandate to train Bermudian prosecutors as successors for all positions. The department was able to hold two training sessions during the past year with the March 20th session being attended virtually by prosecutors from Anguilla.

In 2025/26, the DPP intends to host two major training sessions for both counsel and administrative staff. The themes of the training sessions will fit into the established strategic vision of the department. This will promote a more positive impact on the community through the department's role in the justice system.

Working with Other Agencies

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the DPP works with other departments and entities such as the Bench, the Defence Bar, Legal Aid, Court Services and of course the Bermuda Police Service. Their co-operation throughout the past and into the upcoming year is vital for the proper functioning of the criminal justice system.

Madam DPP's intention is to continue the work undertaken since her appointment to develop all members of the department so that the Department of Public Prosecutions continues to offer an excellent

service to the people of Bermuda. The Director of Public Prosecutions has shared her strategic vision for the department. The way forward for the department in the upcoming budget year is as follows:

1. To ensure quality assurance and where possible standardise prosecution processes to achieve a consistent and high standard of trial preparation and appearances, particularly for financial crime and vulnerable persons crimes including domestic violence matters, taking advantage of information technology to achieve effective and efficient outcomes. In doing so, the DPP plans to quality-assure and where possible standardise prosecution processes to achieve consistent and high standard of trial preparation and appearances.
2. To be responsive to victims and witnesses in the prosecution process. The DPP plans to strengthen accountability and transparency by developing and communicating the department's complaint processes.
3. To influence and implement policy, procedure and law reform by monitoring the outcomes of trials and appeal hearings, and where appropriate develop submissions, policies or projects that identify issues for law reform. The DPP plans to liaise with the Ministry, the Judiciary and other relevant stakeholders in order to advocate for change and improvements in the criminal justice system.
4. To deliver legal services within a framework that supports strong governance, professional capability and staff well-being. The DPP plans to review and implement changes to optimise flexibility, efficiency and capability of the department and their service delivery. In keeping with the public service initiative for staff well-being, the DPP plans to further develop and implement staff well-being and resilience programmes and activities.

In short, Madam Chairman, the DPP plans to continue to develop the department through recruitment, training and succession planning.

Madam Chairman, Madam DPP is almost six months into the final year of her current contract which is due to expire in December 2025. She is the first Bermudian woman to hold her post and I congratulate her on the achievements in her department and thank all of the staff of this department as they unwaveringly uphold their duties.

This ends my budget brief for Head 75. I will now continue onto Head 25 Department of Corrections.

The Chairman: Before you start that can you just give us the page number?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The page number in the Budget Book . . . and I do apologise.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Page B-94.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Page B-94. Thank you, MP Pearman—

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —for paying attention. That's good.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, can I continue, or . . . Okay.

HEAD 25—DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, it is my pleasure to present fiscal [year] 2025/26 estimates of expenditure for Head 25, the Department of Corrections, which are found on pages B-94 through B-96 of the Budget Book.

The Department of Correction's mission is, *To protect the public and provide rehabilitative services.* The department objectives are to

- strive to maintain high standards of security as this is essential to the safe operation of our facilities;
- provide a humane but demanding regime aimed at reducing re-offending by presenting inmates with a range of opportunities in which reward is linked to effort, incentives and earned privileges to prepare for life after release; and
- aim to have robust and disciplined regimes and systems in place in order to achieve operation efficiency at all levels.

The department carries out its objectives by providing rehabilitative services across its three inmate facilities, [employing] a high level of security to ensure the safety of its staff, inmates and the community.

Madam Chairman, the current account estimates for Head 25 begin on page B-94. A total of \$24,710,000 has been allocated for Head 25 for fiscal year 2025/26. This represents a decrease of \$1,017,000 or 4 per cent over the original budget for fiscal year 2024/25.

Madam Chairman, at present there are 172 full-time staff. The estimated numbers of full-time employees for 2025/26 is 224 who will be funded in the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, fiscal year 2024/25 saw the commencement of the recruitment process for the basic officers to fill vacant posts. Seven officers were successfully recruited during this fiscal year. In addition to basic officer recruitment, the department recruited and hired two nursing officers and one administrative assistant. In addition to these, there were five

staff recruited for the Right Living House therapeutic community, one programme manager, one aftercare coordinator, two addiction counsellors, and one junior addiction counsellor.

The Department of Corrections continues to maintain a high level of security at its facilities. In fiscal year 2024/25, the department completed upgrades to the CCTV systems at the Farm, Westgate and Co-Educational [Co-Ed] Facilities with funding from capital acquisitions. Razor wire was installed and repaired at Westgate, the Farm and Co-Ed Facilities.

There were some operational efficiencies created in fiscal year 2024/25. The Animal and Garden programme at the Farm and Co-Ed facility produced eggs and vegetables for consumption by the inmate population in the respective facilities resulting in a reduction in food purchases.

Madam Chairman, the facilities are occupied by the Department of Ageing and require significant maintenance and repair. The department continues to prioritise finding solutions to address the repairs required as a state of our facilities not only impact staff but those who are remanded in the custody of Corrections.

Physical Plant Upgrades

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Physical plant upgrades over the 2024/25 fiscal year included a continuation of refurbishment and repairs to one of the inmate housing units at the Westgate Facility. Repairs and replacements have also been made to the air-conditioning units at Westgate. [Additionally, there were] partial replacements of the kitchen equipment in the main kitchen at Westgate and there were some software upgrades made to the main generator uninterrupted power supply unit also at Westgate.

Current Account Estimates

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I would now like to draw your attention to page B-94 of the Budget Book which sets out the current account estimates for the 2025/26 [fiscal year.] Here, under the General Summary, you will note that there are 12 business units within the Department of Corrections. Those business units with variances from fiscal [year] 2024/25 will be addressed in turn. (I will take one second, Madam Chairman.)

Headquarters and OTS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35000, Headquarters and OTS, is \$17,915,000 a decrease of \$1,842,000 or 9 per cent over the 2024/25 budget allocation. This business unit is 72 per cent of the department's budget allocation. The allocation will fund salaries for staff including custody staff and operating expenses for Corrections Headquarters. The Department of Corrections staff

training regime is designed to provide learning that is aligned with the department's core values. Staff training programmes focus on equipping staff with the necessary skills to maintain security, enforce policies and legal statutes, and to force the rehabilitation of incarcerated persons.

In fiscal year 2024/25 the Department of Corrections engaged in a very aggressive training programme both locally and overseas. Madam Chairman, in the fiscal year 2024/25 the following training was provided for staff: 37 staff [members] successfully completed the management and leadership training programme through Bermuda College, APACE [Athora Professional & Career Education]; 25 CPR/First Aid/AED training plus recertification; 19 leadership and influence stream; 7 mental health First Aid training; 5 critical incident management; 3 Use of Force revalidation instructors' course; 2 recertifications of professional licences forensic psychologist; and 10 [attended the] Presentation Advantage course.

Farm Facility

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35020 Farm Facility is \$446,000. This represents a \$5,000 or 1 per cent increase when compared to the 2024/25 fiscal budget. The Farm Facility is an adult male minimum security facility with a capacity to house 90 inmates. For inmates to be housed at this facility they must have completed their core sentence plan requirements and are classified as a minimum- to low-risk inmates.

Eligible inmates at the Farm Facility are considered for work release and charity programmes. Unescorted charities that allow inmates to independently contribute to [various programmes] such as rest homes and STAR-such programmes foster societal reconnection and the enhancement of the inmate's sense of self-worth.

During the fiscal year 2024/25, the Farm Facility's gardens managed to produce a variety of vegetables including corn, beans, pumpkin, butternut squash, lettuce, mustard greens, onions, beets, spinach, Swiss chard, sweet potatoes and turnips. The Animal Programme which includes chickens successfully produced nearly 2,114 eggs for consumption which equates to a savings of approximately \$1,585. During the [2025/26] fiscal year, we are looking to increase the number of chickens with the aim of supplying all facilities with eggs.

The facility also houses goats which are part of a robust animal husbandry therapeutic programme aimed at teaching inmates a beneficial skill which may be utilised upon release.

Madam Chairman, in fiscal year 2024/25, the Work Release Programme continued with 10 inmates participating. Two inmates who participated completed their sentence, were released and secured gainful employment. The diverse employment placements

showcase the success of the Work Release Programme in connecting individuals to various employment opportunities.

During the fiscal year 2024/25, a new work release initiative "Step Up Work Readiness" started with the aim of providing inmates with significant opportunities to develop the social skills, work ethic, and gain valuable experience outside of the facility compound. This programme also reinforces in inmates a sense of confidence, purpose, responsibility and ultimately contributes to reducing their chances of reoffending upon release from custody. Through this programme they have assisted with the removal of invasive trees from Coney Island and at various spots around the Island and have assisted with the clearing of foliage which encroaches on roads and main thoroughfares.

Madam Chairman, recently the Mechanics Programme at the Farm Facility was reintroduced after a lengthy absence. The main garage at the Farm Facility is the location of this programme and the intent is to engage inmates with instruction in motor mechanics, teaching them viable skills which can be utilised upon reintegration into the wider community. It is also intended that the garage operations will reduce overall costs associated with the servicing of the department's fleet of vehicles.

Co-Educational Facility

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35030 Co-educational Facility is \$306,000. This represents an increase of \$1,000 when compared to the 2024/25 fiscal budget. This facility with a capacity of 56 cells has separate and distinct provisions to house 40 females (adult and juvenile); six young male offenders between the ages of 16 and 21; and 18 adult males participated in the residential Substance Abuse Treatment programme therapeutic community. Educational and vocational programmes are offered based on the needs and classification of the inmates and trainees and are identified through the case management process.

Madam Chairman, the following programmes are offered at the Co-Ed [Facility] to support the rehabilitation of incarcerated persons.

- Ongoing training and development programmes are provided to help prevent reoffending.
- Assistance with housing and job placement is offered to ensure those in custody have the best possible start as they transition back into the community upon release.
- Young offenders without a General Education Diploma [GED] are enrolled in educational programmes to help them achieve this goal and provide a foundation for greater self-achievement.

- Religious programmes to support inmates' spiritual needs.
- Alcoholics Anonymous support groups are available to offer support during incarceration and help facilitate continued support upon release.
- A chicken programme has been established at the Co-Ed Facility offering therapeutic benefits as inmates care for the chickens.
- Carpentry classes for both male and female inmates or trainees.
- A mentorship programme is available and designed to support the spiritual and social development of inmates and young offenders. Through this programme experienced mentors guide mentees in navigating personal challenges, fostering emotional growth and building stronger social skills.
- The Cisco [Networking Academy] computer programme course continued allowing inmates to engage in computer-based programming in a variety of disciplines and provides the opportunity to obtain certified courses and diplomas.

Westgate Correctional Facility

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35060 Westgate Correctional Facility is \$1,188,000. This represents an increase of \$52,000 or 5 per cent when compared to the 2024/25 budget. Westgate Correctional Facility is an adult male establishment with the capacity to house 220 inmates classified as maximum, medium, and minimum security as well as males remanded by the courts. Most of the assessment and treatment programs for male inmates take place at this facility. Westgate presently houses over 20 inmates who are serving life and over 15 inmates who are serving 15 years or more.

Madam Chairman, in fiscal year 2024/25, Westgate Facility continued to have infrastructure challenges such as plumbing, electrical and roofing defects because of an ageing physical plant which has been in existence since 1994.

Madam Chairman, during fiscal year 2024/25 whilst undertaking of the refurbishment of one of the medium classification housing units, the department entered a pilot programme with the Department of Works and Engineering to enlist nine inmates to supplement the refurbishment work in the unit. The inmates (who were remunerated) were selected based on their skills and some based on their willingness to learn a new skill. This initiative was a six-week project that ended in the successful completion of sanding and repainting of the unit with results exceeding expectations.

Madam Chairman, the implementation of a computer lab instructor continues to bolster supervised access of the computer lab, allowing inmates to

utilise programming to online educational and technological programmes. This access also benefits inmates who require additional learning support or may require alternative learning styles. Inmates who are seeking employment as part of their discharge planning can now be given a monitored personal email address allowing them to communicate with potential employers. Vocational and enrichment classes such as art, music, culinary arts, and small engine repairs continue to be offered for enrichment and prove popular with the inmate population.

Therapeutic Community Centre

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35090 Therapeutic Community Centre is \$653,000 which represents a decrease of \$132,000 or 17 per cent when compared to the budget allocation for the fiscal year 2024/25. This reduction is related to the programme being transitioned to the management of the Department of Corrections resulting in a reduction in operational costs.

Madam Chairman, the Therapeutic Community Centre, also known as the Right Living House [RLH], is located at the Co-Educational Facility. During the 2024/25 fiscal year, the RLH programme was successfully transitioned from the GO Group to the Department of Corrections on 1 July 2024. The Right Living House is a substance abuse rehabilitation programme that is segregated from the remaining prison population. The programme has the capacity to house 18 adult male offenders with a history of substance abuse and associated criminality. The programme aims to transition residents to the broader community with an increased potential for a life free of drug abuse and criminal activity through providing tools and opportunities for change. The budget allocation funds staffing, operational costs and the inmate programmes associated with the Right Living House.

Madam Chairman, over the past year 15 inmates enrolled in the Right Living House programme. The residents transitioned through three phases of the programme with increased privileges such as day passes, spiritual passes, and work release. Four residents in phase three have participated in work release as they transition back into the community while continuing to engage in therapeutic groups and classes during evenings and weekends. Additionally, six individuals participated in the Aftercare programme with two graduating in September 2024 during recovery month. The programme also accommodates individuals serving shorter sentences with community supervision to follow, particularly those who referred through the Drug Treatment Court.

Psychological Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35105 Psychological Services is

\$354,000. This represents an increase of \$10,000 or 3 per cent when compared to the [2024/25] fiscal budget. Psychological services have evolved throughout the fiscal year of 2024/25 and are provided across all three facilities. The services provided by the Psychology Department include clinical interventions on a one-to-one basis and within a group setting. The individual interventions are person-centred and aim to meet the specific needs of the clients. To enhance the services provided, psychologists have engaged in continuous professional development and have now introduced eye movement desensitisation and reprocessing [EMDR], an intervention to address trauma which has been delivered on a one-to-one basis.

During this fiscal year the group intervention Life Minus Violence—Enhanced [LMV-E] was delivered for violent offenders. The service has also been involved in conducting psychological risk assessments for the purposes of pre-sentence planning for the courts of Bermuda and for the Parole Board. It must be noted that support from contracted psychologists is needed to complete some of these requests.

Madam Chairman, it should also be noted that while psychological services are primarily provided for the incarcerated, the department psychologists also provide consistent support and consultation for staff in times of crisis. Psychological provision within Corrections extends to risk focus and well-being interventions which include, but are not limited to, individual therapies like cognitive behaviour therapy, including trauma-focused therapy, management of deliberate self-injurious behaviours, and eye movement desensitisation reprocessing. The breadth of psychological services provision through Corrections is much broader than can be fit into this brief.

Madam Chairman, areas of focus for the upcoming fiscal year 2025/26 will be the implementation of individualised programming to treat those incarcerated for both violent and sexual offences issued. A collaborative working relationship between psychological services, health services, and the department leadership team ensures that our clients psychological needs are being met. In addition, staff support sessions through reflective practice can assist staff across all three facilities on a consistent basis.

Social Services and Case Management

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The estimate for business unit 35106 Social Services and Case Management is \$959,000. This represents an increase of \$380,000 or 66 per cent when compared to fiscal budget 2024/25. This budget increase is due to additional staffing consisting of one social worker, three treatment facilitators, and various independent service providers. The department's social worker is a member of the department's Multi-Disciplinary Team and assists inmates and trainees with offence-specific associated problems to address behavioural, social and financial

problems. The Social Work Team provides a variety of services to the inmates and trainees.

During fiscal year 2024/25, Social Services facilitated the Grief Recovery Programme for inmates, participated in mental health clients in Corrections meetings with other agencies to ensure continuity of services being between the agencies. Additionally, Social Services coordinated the Fathers and Children Together, Father's Day event on 22 June 2024. Nine fathers participated in the event and 17 children attended. The second Fathers and Children Together event took place during the Christmas period with the Prison Fellowship Angel Tree Programme donating 62 gifts to the children and grocery vouchers to families. This was an excellent opportunity for dads and their children to spend quality time together. The second annual Family and Friends Get Together party was held at the Co-Ed Facility for the adult females and trainees. The event gave the participants an opportunity to bond with family members and friends. The Thinking for a Change Programme, which addresses cognitive dissonance intervention, commenced in February 2024 and eight participants completed the programme.

The social worker also assists inmates in securing employment and housing prior to their release. Additionally, the social worker facilitates family support and intervention meetings.

Madam Chairman, four case managers or assessment officers provide assessment and classification for the inmate population. They are responsible for the development of case plans which drives the rehabilitation process for all inmates, assisting them in developing risk reduction as well as critical thinking tools to address criminogenic thoughts and behaviours.

During the 2024/25 fiscal year, case managers conducted various assessments, provided parole reports, made referrals (both internally and externally), processed inmate applications, and held multi-disciplinary case conferences

Health Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35107 Health Services is \$1,744,000. This represents a \$181,000 or 12 per cent increase when compared to 2024/25 fiscal budget. This increase is related to the number of inmates requiring health care services. This budget allocation will provide funding for nursing staff and health care services for inmates. Health Services is managed by a senior nurse and five registered nurses responsible for providing services to the inmate population at all facilities.

Educational Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35108 Educational Services is \$389,000. This represents an \$89,000 or 30 per cent increase. This is due to an increase in the cost of new courses and associated materials. During the fiscal year 2024/25, a total of 55 clients were actively engaged in various educational courses or classes offered both internally and in conjunction with partner agencies. Twenty students, during fiscal year 2024/25 were actively enrolled in the GED Penn Foster High School equivalency programmes. A total of six students sat the GED exam. One successfully passed the GED, whilst the remainder had various portions to successfully complete their GED. There were also two students enrolled in Penn Foster. One student successfully graduated in custody, while the other was successful after release from custody. There are currently 15 remaining students pursuing their high school equivalency degree.

Nineteen students participated in various Bermuda College PACE courses which were offered online. Through a partnership with the department and the Bermuda Technical Institute Association, 15 students were enrolled in a variety of Cisco Certified courses ranging from cybersecurity to entrepreneurship. During the summer programme other classes were offered. These classes included toastmaster speech craft, music sound engineering, drumming and African studies. A total of 25 students participated in these offerings. Ten students also participated in the FinTech programme which was cosponsored by the Economic Development Department. Five students successfully graduated and were personally congratulated via recorded message by the Premier, the Honourable David Burt.

Six students were enrolled in foreign language classes, architecture, graphic design, law studies and individualised remedial learning. One student was accepted into the London School of Design in marketing and has commenced studies which will culminate in a Bachelor of Arts [degree] in Marketing. Sixteen students attended a virtual conference held by the Alliance of Higher Education in Prison. This conference highlighted the important role of education in the journey of rehabilitation and reduction of recidivism.

Vocational Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35109, Vocational Services, is \$352,000. This represents an increase of \$228,000 or 54 per cent. This increase in funding will provide for continued development of an inmate cooperative programme (a Throne Speech initiative), resumption of the National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER) training and trade courses. The Department of Corrections prison population has access to a variety of vocational programmes. The De-

partment of Corrections offered the following vocational programmes during the 2024/25 budget year.

- Academic studies, classes in person and computer based.
- APACE courses, computer based at Bermuda College
- Art classes
- Carpentry
- First Aid/CPR/AED
- Horticulture classes
- Motor mechanics
- Sewing

In addition, Vocational Services also provide hobby work experiences for inmates. These opportunities not only provide a creative outlet, but in addition, inmates can sell wares such as cedar plaques, jewellery boxes and fabric items such as bags, caps and articles of clothing. These programmes will continue to be offered during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Recreational Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, the estimate for business unit 35110, Recreational Services, is \$60,000. This represents an increase of \$11,000, or 22 per cent. The increase is due to the increase of materials.

Subjective Analysis of the Current Account Estimates

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, I would like to draw your attention to [page] B-95 of the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure Book. Salaries have decreased by \$1,461,000, or 7 per cent. This decrease is a result of the forecasted retirement of senior officers and planned recruitment of new officers at the introductory pay rate.

Professional Services has increased by \$178,000, or 10 per cent. This increase can be contributed to the increased number of contractors required to provide services to the department.

Materials and Supplies has increased by \$56,000, or 3 per cent. This increase represents materials and supplies that will be needed to effect minor throughout the facilities due to ageing.

Performance Measures

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, I would now like to draw your attention to [page] B-97 which outlines the performance measures of the Department of Corrections. The forecast for 2025/26 is as follows.

1. The average daily inmate population is currently at 152 with 47 of the admissions estimated to be first-time offenders who receive custodial services.
2. The number of inmates projected to be released through parole is four. In fiscal year 2024/25, Madam Chairman, 40 per cent of el-

igible inmates enrolled in development and treatment programmes aimed to address the offending behaviours, address educational and vocational needs and improve skills development. This department has a target enrolment of 50 per cent for 2025/26.

The Department of Corrections calculates its recidivism rates according to internationally accepted practices. Based on these standards the rates include persons who have a conviction for a new offence within three years of their release. The actual outcome for 2024/25 was 20.0 per cent. For international comparison, the recidivism rate at three years is 36.0 per cent in Australia, 31.0 per cent in Austria, 17.5 in France, 33.0 per cent in Germany, 44.0 per cent in New Zealand, 25.2 per cent in the UK and 45.0 per cent in the United States.

Capital Acquisition and Development

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, I will now move to [page] C-10 of the Budget Book and Capital Acquisitions. The estimate for 2025/26 is \$402,000. This allocation will be used for main kitchen equipment upgrades, the purchase of security equipment and air-conditioning equipment. [Page] C-4 shows the 2025/26 estimate for Capital Development is at \$600,000. The department has commenced the procurement of the Black Creek Integrated security system which is Phase 2 of the required upgrade of the existing security system, Black Creek.

The original system was installed when Westgate on 9 September 1994. The existing system (which is obsolete) will be upgraded to current operating standards. Although procurement has begun in fiscal year 2024/25, the bulk of the work will be completed during the 2025/26 fiscal year. Also, during the 2024/25 fiscal year in conjunction with the Ministry of Public Works, the plumbing and electrical retrofit procurement process began. The remaining work will be completed during the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Madam Chairman, during the 2024/25 fiscal year, the procurement for a new intercom paging system for the Co-Ed facility began. The original system is scheduled for replacement or upgrade with coverage throughout the entire facility. This new intercom system will replace an older antiquated system and provide for two-way communication between inmates and staff should inmates require emergency assistance or are incapacitated whilst in their cells. Also, three ageing vehicles were replaced.

The capital developments plans for 2025/26 include

- Security equipment which would improve security measures;
- Replacement of the Farm Facility generator and hut to house it. This will ensure continuity of services during power outages, particularly during hurricane season.

- Replacement of ageing vehicles; and
- Minor works funding for small infrastructure projects and unforeseen emergencies.

2025/26 Plans

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, staffing at the facility continues to be a critical challenge and is a major part of ensuring the safety and security at the facility. We must operate at the highest security standard thus ensuring Corrections staff, service providers, inmates and visitors are safe within the facility.

Staffing has posed a significant challenge in fulfilling our mission as the Department of Corrections endeavours to provide assessment, treatment, intervention, skills training, development, family support and community reintegration for each inmate prior to their return to the community. Despite our challenges with manpower, which requires that staff work long hours and sometimes double shifts, we are committed to ensure that the highest level of security is met and maintained. We continue our efforts in the interdiction and eradication of contraband items from the facility. This is done through intelligence gathering and sharing with our partner agencies and the utilisation of our canine units for the general searching of the facility and continue the targeting and searching of high-risk offenders and gang members within the facility.

Priorities

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, I will briefly set out some of the priorities of the Department of Corrections for fiscal year 2025/26. The department will continue with recruitment to fill various vacant posts which are mainly custodial staff. Recruitment of custodial staff has been a challenge during this fiscal year. However, we recognise that staff are our greatest asset to the fulfilment of our mission and are vigorously recruiting to bolster our existing staffing levels. The department is currently undertaking a three-pronged recruitment drive in Bermuda, the Caribbean and the UK to fill custodial staff posts. At this stage, 32 applicants have reached the final stage of assessments and interviews. Bermudians take hiring priority and remaining posts will be filled after offers have been provided to local applicants.

Department promotions in the senior ranks are scheduled to fill vacant senior management posts. The department will work with the Ministry headquarters and other uniformed services to introduce the Uniformed Services training programme which is a Throne Speech initiative to recruit suitably qualified candidates and fill the needed vacancies.

As a health and safety priority, the department will work with the Ministry of Public Works to effect repairs and replacements of ageing facility structures and equipment. The department will partner with the Ministry of Public Works to provide work placements

for inmates on [the] facility's minor work projects. As part of a plan to engage the community, the department will partner with community stakeholders to support the successful reintegration of inmates into the community. The Department of Corrections will also work with community partners to develop projects that can benefit both the inmates and the wider community.

Finally, the department will continue to work with other government agencies on criminal justice-related initiatives, updated policy initiatives, amendments to antiquated legislation to reflect modern day best practices in Corrections and that align with the mission of the department.

Madam Chairman, I would like to thank the Commissioner, Ms. Joell-Benjamin, and her staff who throughout many challenges beyond her control provided exemplary service and delivered on the mission to protect the public and provide rehabilitative services.

Madam Chairman, this concludes my remarks on Head 25, but before I finish, I just want to make some acknowledgements. I would like to take this moment to acknowledge and sincerely thank the dedicated officers within the Ministry who worked diligently to prepare this budget brief. Their expertise and unwavering commitment have been invaluable in shaping the priorities and strategic direction presented here today. I would like to name Attorney General and Senator, the Honourable Kim Wilkerson, JP; Permanent Secretary Mr. David Roberts; outgoing Permanent Secretary Ms. Marva Jean O'Brien; Comptroller Ms. Onika Mendes; Solicitor General Shakira Dill-Francois; Chief Parliamentary Counsel Ms. Nalini Salick; Director of Public Prosecutions Ms. Cindy Clarke; Commissioner of Corrections, Ms. Keeva Joell-Benjamin; Director of Court Services, Mr. Derek Flood; Acting Registrar of the Judicial Department, Ms. Cratonía Thompson; Director of Financial Sanctions Implementation Unit, Ms. Renée Foggo; Director of Financial Intelligence Agency, Ms. Christal Hanna; and Legal Crown Counsel Legal Reform, Mr. Keivon Simons.

With that, Madam Chairman, I conclude my presentation on the Ministry of Justice.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister Lister. I will give you a minute to just sort yourself and get ready for any questions.

I just want to take this opportunity to update the listening public that we are in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. We are currently doing the Ministry of Justice, and that would be Heads 81, 3, 4, 74, 75, and 25.

I welcome anyone who would like to speak at this time.

The Chair recognises the Member for constituency 22, Mr. Scott Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and good afternoon to you and to the listening public. Let me start by thanking the Honourable Junior Minister for his presentation. And, in particular, let me thank him for his speed reading, because he has very kindly left me with considerably more time than I have ever experienced, I think, in Legal Affairs to date and I am extremely grateful. Unfortunately, we did add an hour to the debate on this one, so I do apologise in advance.

Let me also acknowledge the presence in the Chamber of the Honourable and Learned Attorney General, Senator Kim Wilkerson, who I see is here with her staff, including the new PS, Mr. Roberts, and the old PS Ms. O'Brien. I apologise, there is another member of the Ministry here, whose name I do not know, but hello and welcome and thank you for being here today.

The—

The Chairman: Member, before you get into it, let me just remind the public that we actually have one hour and 45 minutes more at this time. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Okay. Excellent. Oh, and I am being offered a podium for the [Budget] Book.

Madam Chairman, I will try my very best to assist both the Honourable Junior Minister and the members of the Ministry by maintaining each of the heads and trying to put all of my questions on a particular head and also to go through the heads in the same order that the Honourable Junior Minister did. I noted that order actually differed from the order in the Budget Book, but I will adopt his speaking order rather than the order that is in the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: And the first head, the Ministry of Justice Headquarters, as a whole appears (for those who are following along in their Budget Books) at page B-78. And that is where we have the overview of the budget for the Ministry of Justice including all of the heads and all of the departments. And, again, for the benefit of the listening public, this Ministry has changed substantially since last year in that one of the departments, namely the National Drug Control Department, is no longer in this Ministry. So, we have lost that department to another Ministry. But we have also picked one up, and that is the Department of Corrections.

So, I mention that for the benefit of the listening public, but also because the Department of Corrections is something entirely new to me. It has never been in my Shadow portfolio for these last eight years. So, I apologise in advance, when we get to Corrections, if any of my questions are patently obvious or silly questions. But this is my first time dealing with Corrections. So, it is certainly a complicated and in-

teresting area of government and one that is very important, not only to this Chamber, but to the Government as a whole and to the population as a whole.

But starting first, Madam Chairman, with the headquarters. The overarching point is that the budget, which is again at page B-78, is just under one million [dollars] more than it was last year. So, there will be anticipated expenditure in this Ministry and, as we have heard from the Junior Minister, most of the anticipated increases in expenditure do appear to be salary increases here or there. The one exception in the Ministry as a whole is Corrections, where rather than the numbers going up, we see for Corrections the numbers are going down, in particular against 2023 actuals, the numbers for Corrections are going to go down about \$2 million. And we will come to that when we get to that particular head.

But, leaving Corrections firmly to one side, the theme of expenditure (and this is a budget debate) for the Ministry of Justice is that generally things are ticking up and they are ticking up generally because of salary increases. And that was something that the Honourable Junior Minister made clear on a number of occasions while presenting his brief.

The specific headquarters increases, if one turns to page B-80, are largely, again, in the administration section. We see \$780,000 increases to the 2025 estimate, that's against the original 2024, but considerably up for most of the 2023 actuals. And I am looking here at page B-80 under line item 97000, which is the Administration line item for the Justice Headquarters. The personnel increase. There was not a great deal of specificity as to what roles were being increased. There was an expressed reference in the brief by the Honourable Junior Minister to the staff at the Parole Board being increased. And I noted that.

But my first question out of the gate is, given that there is a considerable salary increase and numbers increase and employees increase could the Honourable Junior Minister and the Ministry help to elaborate a little bit about what new roles one can expect given the considerable increase of some \$780,000 there which, as I understand is mostly linked to salaries?

Madam Chairman, I am happy to be guided by you, but from prior experience sometimes the answers are slower than the questions. And so, I won't trip into the next head, but I am certainly happy to set out my questions on this head and let the answers trickle in. And I will take my seat whenever the Honourable Junior Minister wishes to provide the answers. So, if that is okay with you, and okay with the Honourable Junior Minister that is how I will know that's acceptable.

The Chairman: Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: MP Pearman, do you know how many questions you anticipate for this head? You can

ask all of the questions on this head and then I can answer them.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I will be very happy . . . I don't have them numbered, I just have them in my notes. But I will certainly pause at the end of this head and welcome any responses coming my way, if that's okay with you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: I am fine with that. But that also, on that particular head, if anyone else wishes to ask any questions—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Of course.

The Chairman: —let's take all of the questions on one head first, and then allow the Honourable Junior Minister to respond.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes.

The Chairman: That will make it easier, even for the listening audience.

Mr. Scott Pearman: And I know in respect of certain heads that there are colleagues on my side who do have additional questions. I am certainly not the only speaker on this side. And particularly so given that we have been told that we have about an hour and 45 minutes for questions.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Proceed.

Mr. Scott Pearman: So, that is a little bit more flesh on the bones, if we could, about the personnel increases and the cost increases for salaries.

The second topic, still on this head, and this arises on page B-80, line item 97100, and this is in relation to the Financial Intelligence Unit. Excuse me, that is the wrong line item, it is about the Law Reform Commission.

In his brief, the Honourable Junior Minister indicated that most of those law reform commissions were made back in July 2019. And he indicated that those appointments are mostly, if not all, coming to an end and that a new slate will be appointed. For the benefit of those less familiar, the Law Reform Commission is a group of people, probably lawyers (I'm not sure if they are all lawyers, but certainly most of them will be lawyers) who assist the Government with proposals as to how to improve our laws. So, it does what it says on that tin the "Law Reform Commission."

So, what I would like to know in relation not only to the new slate that we anticipate is coming, or we are told is coming, but in relation to the old slate who are now stepping aside after six years of diligent hard work, firstly, what is the Ministry's focus on law reform? What are the priority areas of law reform for this Ministry and this new Attorney General? Where

would she like to see our laws improve in the immediate one-, two-year period?

Secondly, in the same vein, are we inviting the outgoing commissioners to express their views? They have had six years in the proverbial saddle, as it were. Are we going to invite their views as to what they advocate should happen in terms of law reform. The reason I say this is that we who sit in this Chamber often think that the changes to the law are those which the Government or sometimes the Opposition say they should be. And sometimes we ignore those who use the law, and who deal with it every day, and do our shouting and screaming about the areas of the law that require reform that sometimes do not get the attention that they should from us legislators. So, it seems to me that if someone has spent a good six years working hard, and probably without pay, as a law commissioner, leaving aside the director, I know is a paid role, but the others, I suspect, are not paid roles. It would be very meaningful and probably helpful to invite their five or ten points as to how we could enhance Bermuda's legislative roadmap.

As to the director of the Law Reform Commission, the Honourable Junior Minister, mentioned a curious situation where he, and I believe it is Keivon Simons, I think (let me look at my notes) . . . where Mr. Simons, who, I know at one time was a lawyer at Carey Olson, is performing a dual role in that he is performing the statutory requirement of being the Director of the Law Reform Commission, whilst at the same time performing the role of being effectively the (I don't know the precise expression) policy and strategy councillor, or words to that effect. And I just wonder what plans, if any, the Ministry has to separate out those two roles. And no disrespect to Mr. Simons, I am sure he is performing both roles competently at the same time. But is the Attorney General and her Ministry intending to separate out those roles, as one can see why they would be free-standing and self-sufficient and differential roles that may not normally be provided by one person wearing both hats as it were. So, if I can ask that as my fourth sort of overarching question.

At page C-10, we see the acquisitions of the department. And this is still in relation to headquarters. I note that we had an acquisition of some \$200,000. This is at page C-10 in relation to the Ministry of Justice, under the Justice Headquarters and it's line item 76853, Case Management System. And we note that in relation to the case management system, some \$200,000 has been spent. If we look to the right, the revised estimate is then zero, and next year's, this year's, as it were, estimate is zero.

So, my question in relation to the case management system for HQ is, Is that now complete? Is all the work done? And, if so, how is it all working? And if all of the work is not done, [I am just curious why] there is a zero-budget item. Has it been post-

poned or delayed? So, that question arises in relation to the line item at page C-10.

And then going back in the Budget Book to page B-78, which is overarching page for the Ministry of Justice, under Capital Expenditure, under Acquisitions, we see an estimated acquisition number \$1.47 million (that's in the greyed-out column, Madam Chairman, to the right of "acquisitions" under the 2025/26 estimate). Looking at that, I am just wondering if we can assist with what is happening in relation to that. Because if one goes back to page C-10, which we were just looking at, we see there, I think the largest line item, which is Judicial, and we will come back to it, but CJS framework. So, if I may flag that I would be interested to hear the progress made in relation to that noting that there has been \$800,000 of expenditure, and \$1 million of anticipated expenditure in relation to that.

In the back of the [Budget] Book, turning then to the page on Grants, which is C (for Charlie) 17, one of the considerable items of increased expenditure in the Grant heading under Ministry of Justice at [page] C-17 is the FIA grant, the Financial Intelligence Agency grant, which is increasing fairly markedly. And I know that the Honourable Junior Minister did touch on the Financial Intelligence Agency in his brief. But I did not quite catch the reason for the considerable increase in expenditure. So, if I could just start with a headline question of, Why is that? And again, if we could just have a little more meat on the bones about the increased expenditure going up to \$2.125 million, as you can see on page C-17.

In terms of Legal Aid, which the Honourable Junior Minister in his brief said was one of the largest costs and one of the largest costs within Legal Aid, the Honourable Junior Minister referenced external counsel. And he said that the costs in relation to those was (and I quote) "more than expected." One of the—

The Chairman: Member, just so I am following with you, are you now on page B-81?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Exactly. I am back to the Headquarters page.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: And I am dealing with the issue of Legal Aid. And I was dealing with the statement made by the Honourable Junior Minister in his brief that in relation to Legal Aid one of the largest costs to the Government in Legal Aid was external counsel. And he had said that that was more than expected.

Now, the plan in relation to Legal Aid was to in-house counsel. And that has been a plan that has

been developing over the last few years. And the idea . . . and I understand the idea. You bring your in-house lawyers in. You have your lawyers in house. And if you look at page B-82, we see there in the middle box of business units . . . So, this is performance measures at B (for Bravo) 82. And in the middle box we see Legal Aid 97030. And this is the business unit. And we see the percentage of new cases (this is the third item down, percentage of new cases) assigned to in-house legal counsel. And reading across, you see the actual of 68 per cent back in 2023. Projections last year, 75 per cent, revised 75 per cent. And next year we are projecting 90 per cent.

Now, I just observe that that is an ambitious projection of 90 per cent. And I would invite the Ministry to explain their rationale behind that 90 per cent prediction, not least given the number, I think 43 per cent, of conflicts that were identified as being the reason to pass internal in-house cases out to external counsel, and 43 [per cent] may be wrong, but it was forty-something. I am grateful to the Honourable Member behind me, but it was in the 40s.

So, to sort of try and put that in simple terms, if we are experiencing such a problem with conflict with our in-house team that we have to outsource to external counsel, is the 90 per cent figure on [page] B-82 realistic? Is it improbable? And more important than that, how does the Ministry anticipate achieving that to get this plan working, which is to take these things in-house? So, I would be very grateful for some elaboration on the thought behind that and the apparent contradiction between the 90 per cent target outcome at page B-82 and the conflict number [shared with us] by the Honourable Junior Minister during his brief?

Moving from in-house counsel in Legal Aid to the sort of larger question, Is the Ministry satisfied with the pace of trial progress? I note that some of the statistics that have been shared with us today, specifically in the upper courts, were less positive perhaps that in the Magistrates' Courts. And one might say that the Magistrates' Court figures were more positive in terms of progression of trials. I am fully cognisant—in fact, we all will be fully cognisant and those using the legal system will be cognisant—of the fact that we had a huge backlog coming out of COVID-19. And that is some years past now. But nonetheless, a bit of sense of a health check from the Minister and the Ministry. Where are we with the pace of trial progress? And are we satisfied with it, or are there things that could be done to improve it or to speed it up?

On the issue of provision of legal services, one of the things that is a passion of mine and I have called for previously both inside of this House and out, is the notion that the Bar, the lawyers in Bermuda, can do more to engage with the Bermudian community and do more from a *pro bono* perspective, which is obviously Latin for free, for good, *pro bono*. And one of the ideas that has been bubbling around, percolat-

ing around is this idea of a walk-in legal clinic which would be staffed by the Bar Council and by barristers and lawyers and attorneys giving their free time *pro bono* to provide at least the more necessary services.

And I obviously appreciate I am not in the criminal sector here. I am talking more in the civil sector. More specifically, I am talking more about landlord and tenant, family law issues, employment law issues, you know, the kind of thing where just a little bit of knowledge from a lawyer as to how the law works in that area can be so very helpful to people who are not legally qualified and just want to know what their rights are. And I would put this marker down, that if the new Attorney General would like to try to develop that idea of a legal clinic, it seems to me that there are ample number of lawyers on this Island. Some would say far too many. We should all be doing—

Yes, I see the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier has put his finger up to say, *Too many*.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I see the Honourable Member Michael Fahy, who is a lawyer, say, *Never*. But there we are.

But the reality is that there are a number of lawyers on this Island, probably more statistically and percentagewise than in some other jurisdictions, given that we are an international financial centre. And I will put it in the bucket of *Wouldn't it be nice?* But would it not be nice if we could try to harness some of us and guilt us and shame us into providing those services?

I think we are not far off. What I would respectfully suggest to the Attorney General and her Honourable Junior Minister would be the possibility of identifying some space. And we heard from an answer to Parliamentary Questions from the Honourable Craig Cannonier the other day about how many government properties there are still on the books where a full-time or part-time clinic could be staffed by volunteer lawyers to share that advice with the public.

Now, I appreciate that that might not be open seven days a week, 24 hours a day, but maybe could be open three days a week, you know, six hours a day or something like that. So, I just put a marker down that, in the spirit of bipartisanship and welcoming the new Attorney General, that would be something wonderful to try to work toward. And it would make a meaningful impact, I suggest, to those who really would benefit from it.

So, I guess the question is this: In principle, would the Minister and the Ministry be prepared to find some space for a walk-in location? And would they be prepared to work toward persuading the Bar Council that this is just an eminently sensible and helpful idea for the community at large?

Turning to what is probably the most interesting announcement in the Legal Affairs space for those of us who have been following it or participating in it

for some time is the Domestic Violence Court and also the Domestic Violence Programme. The question I have about the Domestic Violence Programme is at page B (for Bravo) 80 under the General Summary. And my understanding is that programme, which is currently operational, is folded into line item 97070, which is the Justice Protection Programme. Now, I may have misunderstood that. But I think it is commingled within there.

That programme, the Justice Protection Programme, has been given an estimated budget of \$320,000. And if I am right that that is commingled with the Domestic Violence Programme. And I may not be, but if I am right that they are commingled, could perhaps I have a breakdown of how the \$320[,000] breaks out between the JPP (the Justice Protection Programme) and the Domestic Violence Programme?

And the other question, as long as we are on this page, is the line item immediately below deals with the Sanctions Unit. And this has been a particularly active area of late for a number of reasons. One because as an international financial centre, Bermuda is at the forefront of regulatory obligations and requirements. And we need to make sure that we are not only meeting the grade, but exceeding the grade, which we do, I hasten to add. And I thank those involved.

And the other reason why this is busy territory is of course the wars that are going on, and particularly the war in the Ukraine and the sanctions regime that is being applied to Russians and other citizens in relation to that. And so, my question there . . . and I do appreciate that the Honourable Junior Minister in his brief spoke a little bit about the FSIU [Financial Sanctions Implementation Unit], but I would invite a little more clarification about how we are engaging with the sanctions regime in a practical way. Again, I note also that in the brief there was a discussion of the Governor's powers to give relief from sanctions, or licensed sanctions . . . excuse me, that is not the right phraseology . . . to give licence in relation to them.

But I would like to know how it is going on, and in particular what is the impact of the war and the sanctions regime upon our registries? This was a hot topic only a few years ago in relation to our shipping registry, our aircraft registry. And I would welcome just a little bit of information or view from the learned Attorney General or her Ministry as to how that is going and perhaps where we see that going. So, Madam Chairman, those are my questions in relation to [page] B-80.

While we are on [page] B-80, there is also in the box below, which is Expenditure, a line item for Professional Services. Now, I declare my interest as a lawyer. I like lawyers, and therefore I recognise that when lawyers hire lawyers, things get very expensive.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Yes, they do.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. I heard the Whip from the other side supporting me on that one.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: But Professional Services. So, the actuals were \$1.28 million in 2023. They are going up. They are going up quite considerably, \$1.9 [million] is the estimate, \$1.94 million in the grey box there for Professional Services at [page] B-80. That is almost \$1 million up. And so, I guess the question I have is, Why is it that such a considerable increase is expected against last year's original budget or indeed the actuals of 2023? Is there something looming that requires particular additional expert legal advice to the Attorney General's Chambers, or indeed to the Ministry of Justice? Is there a particular reason that number is going up so much? Or is it just that things go up? So, I would be grateful for an answer to that question.

At [page] B-82, which is over the page, two pages, this is the box that deals with Performance Measures in the Ministry of Justice Headquarters. This is a very small point. But the box above for Consumer Affairs indicates that the number of vacation rental inspections and licences was 105 in 2023/24. And notwithstanding that we are now dealing with 2025/26, I note that 2024/25, the middle year still says *to be determined*. And I am just curious why there is not an actually a number there. And if there is a number, could that number be shared with us?

Whilst I am on the Performance Measures and with a finger staying here at [page] B-82 and turning back to [page] B-80, I had asked a question about the Justice Protection Programme. If we go back to [page] B-82, I note that there is no performance measure at all for that programme in line item 97070, which is the Justice Performance Programme, which is the third from the bottom at [page] B-80. And it does strike us as a bit odd that there are no performance measures. The Junior Minister did state an 88 per cent conviction rate, and that is excellent, because of the programme. And clearly this is a life-saving measure. But it is odd that there are no performance measures. And I suppose the question is, How do you determine how best to allocate the limited resources that this Ministry has if you do not have performance measures linked to that?

Likewise, if we go back to [page] B-81 where we see the Employee box, I do not see any staff linked to the Justice Protection Programme 97070. It may be there are no staff. But that seemed odd too, that that did not have an employee number linked to it.

And, Madam Chairman, those are my questions in relation to Head 87, the first of the six heads that we are going to cover under this Ministry. And if that is a convenient moment for me to take my seat and allow the Junior Minister to address some of those questions, I will sit down.

The Chairman: Let me first ask if any other Member would like to speak on Head 87?

No.

Junior Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I will try and answer in the order that they were asked.

The first question asked by MP Pearman was in regard to the personnel salary and employment numbers in HQ. Just to make a point of clarification, the number of members on the Parole Board and the budget have not increased. But the Parole Board has been moved under the Ministry of Justice for the first time. I would just make a point in regard to your question.

Your second question, What is the Ministry's or the Attorney General's focus and priority, and are we inviting outgoing commissioners to express their views? The Attorney General is interested in hearing from both the outgoing and incoming commissioners on their perspective, as well as hearing from members of the Judiciary and other relevant stakeholders. It is only by collaboration and consultation that fundamental and important reforms to our legal system can take place in an effective and comprehensive manner. And of particular interest to the Attorney General are updates to the domestic abuse laws to bring Bermuda in line with modern approaches to protection and prosecution.

Updates to restructuring and insolvency law, reform to the Jurist Act to ensure that criminal cases are appropriately juried to allow for the swift and fair application of justice. Reform of civil jury panel as recommended by the Judiciary and updates to the Prisons Act and Prison Rules and all laws that impact access to justice. And just while I wait, the last is that the Attorney General is also having ongoing discussions with the Governor regarding his views on commissioners.

Next question in regard to the case management system, How is it working, and if not, has the budget been postponed or delayed? The funds allocated in the Ministry's budget were earmarked for the case management. At this point, no funds have been extended toward the case management system. There is a request for proposal which was issued on 6 January 2025, and the submission deadline was initially set for 17 February, but was extended at the request of proponents to 3 March 2025. And the Judicial Department is now engaged in the evaluation stage of the procurement process. And capital funds for the case management system have been allocated in the Judicial Department's budget.

While I do wait for some answers, I will go into another question [the Honourable Member] asked in regard to Legal Aid staffing. There is no conflict number in the budget brief, and we are unclear . . . I will ask. We are unclear where that 40 per cent came from if you can clarify that for us, MP Scott Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Okay.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: In regard to your question, Is the Domestic Violence Court Programme commingled with the Justice Protection budget? The answer is no, they are not commingled. But the Justice Protection will be available to witnesses and victims in that programme. And we can confirm no additional budget was required from our department for the Domestic Violence Court.

Then in regard to the Justice Protection Programme Performance Measurements, no, there are no performance measurements made public. The information from that programme is statutorily required to be top secret and confidential. The persons who staff the programme are full-time public servants who hold full-time posts within the Ministry, and they receive no additional salary.

And in regard to the question about the dual role of Mr. Keivon Simons, there has been a service management review that established roles to support Legal Aid pending a new law reform office.

I am hoping I am able to answer your questions correctly, MP Pearman.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Junior Minister, do you need some additional time? Because Mr. Pearman is on his feet.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Yes. He can sit up while . . .

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes. Let me just clarify one—

The Chairman: I recognise the Member from constituency 22.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Sorry. Let me just clarify one point, and I apologise. I think the note was in error. The 43 per cent was in relation to the DPP [Department of Public Prosecutions] conflict and not in relation to the HQ Legal Affairs. So, apologies for my misstatement there. The 43 per cent, Madam [Chairman], was in relation to the DPP conflict, not in the Attorney General's Chambers. So, I do apologise for that confusion.

Nonetheless, the question still stands. Is 90 per cent an ambitious target for next year, notwithstanding the 43 per cent is unrelated?

Yes. So, would the Honourable Junior Minister prefer me to move on to the next head, or do you have further answers to give?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: We can move on to the next head.

The Chairman: Junior Minister, you have to wait to be acknowledged.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Oh. Right.

The Chairman: Yes. You can get up and provide some guidance.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Yes. MP Pearman, you can continue on to the next head.

The Chairman: And just for the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply in the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. We are doing the Ministry of Justice, and we have one hour and seven minutes remaining.

Thank you, Member from constituency 22.

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

The next of our six heads, the second of our six heads, is the Judicial Department. And that commences on page B-84 for those following along in the Budget Book. And if we keep sort of a finger at [page] B-84, we turn back to the overarching page for the Ministry of Justice at [page] B-78. In relation to this head, Head 3, Judicial Department, the second head, we can see by the expenditures going up just over three-quarters of a million. Now, I think again, as per the last head, my understanding is that the increase is largely due to salary increases rather than other specific amounts. And I appreciate of course in the Judicial Department we do have all of the judiciary itself, and then other members of courtrooms and chambers, which is a significant number of employees. As set out at [page] B-86 it is about 20 or so [according to] the estimate for next year.

My questions in relation to the Judicial Department are really at a high level. To begin with, in terms of firstly the civil and commercial judges, where do we see those appointments going? We currently have the Chief Justice. We have, as I understand it, two full-time civil commercial judges. And we have one, I do not want to say part-time, but effectively on a fixed-term temporary position as a judge of the Commercial Court. Is that temporary judge likely to be renewed or substituted for by a full-time judge?

Turning from the commercial court to the family court, could the Attorney General in the Ministry kindly provide us, again very high-level, not specifics, an update on the Family Matrimonial Court appointments and where we see that going, taking into account the Domestic Violence Court that is coming online or is partly online? And how do you see the number of judges who are populating those courts?

In the Criminal Court, my understanding is that we have a new judge, one new criminal judge. Again, do you see expansion or contraction in the Criminal Court in relation to the number of judges that we have?

Turning from those sitting on the bench to those before the benches, one of the matters that was

emphasised at the opening of the judicial year where judges are given an opportunity to speak slightly more freely on their views of how the court system can be improved, enhanced, addressed, et cetera, was a very detailed presentation in relation to traffic offences. And that was made by the Senior Magistrate, who set out a number of issues as perceived by the bench and how some of those might be addressed. One in particular that stood out in my mind was the . . . "plea" might be putting it a bit hard, a bit high, but the observation that some of the fines that we have for our traffic offences have not been updated in some considerable time. And questioning whether or not they do amount to a sufficient deterrent.

For example, if you are speeding, it is only a \$500 fine. There are some people to whom that might not be a great deal of money who would be less inclined to worry about how fast they are driving.

Anyway, the Senior Magistrate made what I thought was a very good case for a review of our traffic offences and what we might do in relation to them. I think we can all agree that our roads are a cause for concern. It has gone beyond mere safety concerns, but you know, we have people dying on our roads more than we should. And again, it is not a political point; it is just an observation.

And I think where our Senior Magistrate rightly calls for an overhaul of our traffic laws, hopefully this will be something that can be picked up with relative ease and in a bipartisan way and pushed through this House with the speed that the matter deserves.

Also on the judges. I would be grateful if we could have an update on the status of Assistant Justice Forde. I know that he last sat on the bench in this Island in November of 2023. And it has been some time since. So, I am just wondering about the status of that. And more specifically, is there any reason of which the Ministry may be aware why the public is still awaiting his judgment in that rather prominent case before the courts?

When canvassing in the election, I know that I am not alone in this Chamber when I announced that I was the Shadow of Legal Affairs, if asked. The number-one legal issue that was lamented to me was our probate. I see members in the Chamber nodding around the Chambers. There was a deep frustration with probate at the moment and the delay and difficulty with which regular, ordinary, everyday Bermudians are experiencing problems in progressing probate. And I am pleased to note that amongst those nodding I see even the Attorney General herself is nodding. Again, this is not a criticism. It is an identification of an area. It is an ask for some clarity as to how best we together can work to solve that.

I note that the Honourable Junior Minister indicated that there were 140 applications filed, and 120 grants issued. Those are not bad numbers. But I think what number is missing is the backlog before that.

I think when the Honourable and Learned Attorney General and I both had the pleasure of attending the opening ceremony of the court this year, this was a point that was acknowledged directly by the Chief Justice. But what might assist would be a dedicated probate judge. I know we are getting a dedicated probate . . . assistant registrar, I believe will be the title (I may have the title wrong), but someone effectively to push the cases along.

But is there a judicial issue there? I ask it as a question, not as an assertion. But probate is something that I think desperately needs our attention as best we can.

Still under the Judicial Department, one of the suggestions that we had seen increased of late is to greater security and independence of the judiciary by allowing a ring-fenced judicial budget. It is an idea that I greatly support. It is an idea that I would welcome the new Attorney General maybe clarifying the Ministry's views [on]. Is it something that you are looking into? Is it dead in the water? Is it something that might happen or hopefully will happen? And if it is something that will happen, what sort of timeframe and what is envisaged? Again, the question is placed at a very high level, but it would be useful to know.

Still under the head, Madam Chairman, on the Judicial Department, the question arises from the box at B-84. And that is the line item 1300, Criminal Injuries, which I believe is a reference to the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board, appears to have disappeared in that the budget is no longer there for next year. Now, either that is a typo, or more probably Criminal Injuries has moved out of this Judicial Department into another department or indeed into another Ministry. However, doing the best I could (and I appreciate the Budget Book is not small), I could not locate where the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board or Criminal Injuries as a headline or indeed line item 1300 has moved. So, I would be grateful for clarification where it has moved.

On that subject, if one turns to B-87 two pages over, this is the Performance Measures box. And the first box in relation to that matter, the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board or indeed criminal injuries that we've just been discussing, the entries in relation to this line item all say (or at least my copy says) "With the Ministry." I do not know if your copy says that, Madam Chairman. But in relation to all of the indicators, it just says "With the Ministry." So I would invite the Ministry to share those figures with this Honourable House, whether by way of the B-87 addenda page or whatever is the most convenient way, not on my feet and not right now. I appreciate that perhaps this page could be updated with those figures.

And whilst I am there, I did not quite understand, if you look down to business unit 13015 Courtrooms and Chambers, and then Criminal Division, Number of new indictments, Number of Indictments Carried Over, et cetera, all of those were just at zero.

And if over the page, B-88, likewise Civil and Criminal Appeals from Magistrate's Court is in the top box, and then Court of Appeal, all of those were zero. It may be I have missed the point, and they are meant to be at zero. But if they are not meant to be at zero, I would be grateful for clarification as to why that is and what it is supposed to mean.

Still under Head 3, Judicial Department, if we could turn to page C-10, which is the Capital Acquisition page for the Ministry of Justice. And in relation to Judicial, I pre-flagged this in relation to CJIS [Criminal Justice Information Services] framework. Now, the Honourable Junior Minister did address the point on the case management system [mentioned previously] in relation to the Justice Headquarters. And my understanding of his answer is effectively that is now on hold pending an RFP [Request for Proposal] in relation to the \$200,000 that was spent last year. But on the CJIS framework, it would be useful just to have an update on that point as well.

In terms of the justice/judicial . . . I am going to take us back, if I may, to page B-85. The Judicial Department is, in addition to being an expense sector, it is also a revenue sector because it takes in the fines and penalties of court fees and such like. One of the suggestions that I have been banging on about ever since I was elected to this Honourable House in 2018 (and probably boring each Attorney General in succession) is a way in which we can better harness our Commercial Court so that it helps to pay for our underfunded Family Court. And it is not a novel idea; it is not my idea. Indeed, it is one that has been used by the UK by more than a decade if not possibly two decades.

And that is that the court fee for a Commercial Court claim is linked, is tiered to the value of the claim. So, if the claim is \$500,000, the fee is (I do not know) \$500. But if the claim is \$1 million, then the fee is maybe \$5,000. It goes up sequentially. In the UK they use three tiers, beginning, middle and the high one. It goes without saying that because Bermuda is such a sophisticated offshore financial jurisdiction, the litigation that comes through our Commercial Court is usually, if not invariably, of a vast amount. And it would be very useful, I suggest, to our court system if we, given the effort that our court staff . . . and the acting Registrar was in the Chamber earlier today. But the effort that our court staff give, 110 per cent, 24/7, to some of these mammoth commercial cases that make their way through the system, it would be appropriate and fair and reasonable for the fees to be tiered so that the larger commercial cases that demand people's attention charge higher fees and that those court fees generate greater revenue for the court and that that revenue can support our Family Court, our Family and Matrimonial Court.

It is a matter I raised with the previous Attorney General and indeed the Attorney General before that. And I raise it today with this Attorney General in

the hopes that that very small tweak could be used to increase the revenue in our courts and to better support our perhaps underfunded Family and Matrimonial Court.

As to revenues, there is a projected increase of some of \$482,000 in revenue since last year. And that is doubtless because of the introduction of the court fees that came through this Honourable House, I want to say last year but maybe it was two years ago, but in the recent history. And I will just make the point that with the tiered system that I have just outlined we could really do so much better in terms of our revenue. So, I invite the learned Attorney General to consider that opportunity and to take a look at how the UK does it. It is not complicated, and it really could greatly assist.

The Domestic Violence Court I think strictly falls in this head, although I did ask some questions under the previous head. But I would be grateful just to hear a little bit more as to the Domestic Violence Court and how that is progressing and when we feel that that will be ready and all of the bells and whistles going full steam ahead.

Madam Chairman, I think those are the questions I have under this head, the second head of the Judicial Department, [Head] 3. And I will sit for any other questions that anyone else may have.

The Chairman: Does any other Member wish to speak to Head 3, Judicial Department?

No.

Junior Minister, are you ready to answer the questions asked by MP Pearman?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I will just go back to answer a few questions from the previous head. One was the reason behind the increase in the expenditure for the Financial Intelligence Agency. There is an employment of a new analyst who will assist with preparation for upcoming mutual evaluation assessments within the next two years. And then the other question was, Is the Minister of Justice satisfied with the pace of trial progress? The Ministry understands that for our clients, the pace will never be fast enough. But we acknowledge that challenges exist and continue to work toward addressing them. And then a question in regard to Legal Aid staffing. We do anticipate meeting the goal of assigning 90 per cent of Legal Aid cases to internal counsel, subject to exceptional circumstances.

And then with that, I will go on to [the Honourable Member's] questions under Head 3. In regard to the Commercial Courts, there were two assistant justices contracted with the Judicial Department who have conduct of matters in the civil and commercial jurisdiction of the Supreme Court. There is Assistant Justice D. Hugh Southey, I believe, and Justice Nicholas Segal. And assistant justices will continue having

conduct of matters in the Civil and Commercial Courts on a case-by-case basis.

Your question regarding the Family and Matrimonial Court appointments . . . the Domestic Violence Court will be under the Senior Magistrate, and Family Court matters will still be subject to Family Court panels.

And your question with regard to traffic fines and consequences, I will just state before I provide an answer, as a former Road Safety Chairman, the response is, fines across the board will be subject to review as by the Law Reform Project. And I would say that that is much needed under my former head.

In regard to your question on the judgment awaiting Mr. Forde, the Chief Justice has been in consistent communication with Mr. Forde concerning the receipt of his ruling. And we are informed that Mr. Forde suffered a medical issue which had delayed provision of the rulings. And we are awaiting response to the Chief Justice in the most recent communication with Mr. Forde on the timing of that ruling.

And I am going to try to give this answer in regard to the probate backlog. The Probate Division has issued two circulars that provide an update on the probate backlog. The first was issued on August 21, 2024. The second was issued on February 21, 2025. The Judicial Department has met the goals set out in in the circular issued in February 2025, which indicated that all 2023 probate applications were to be actioned by the end of April 2025. We are now processing 2024 applications, and the aim is to have actioned all 2024 applications by the end of July 2025. The department would then be well placed to address applications filed in 2025 and thereafter. And there will be an update provided by way of a circular in May of 2025.

Additionally, the Judicial Department is seeking to restructure its organisational structure to introduce a second assistant registrar and an administrative officer for the Matrimonial and Probate Divisions. The assistant registrar has the authority to review applications and issue grants of probate. With the addition of these key roles, the Judicial Department will be in a position to provide increased attention to the applications filed in the Probate Division. And currently, there are two staff members dedicated to the Probate Division.

In regard to your question about Criminal Injuries, it has been moved to Ministry Headquarters under business unit 9700[0] under a separate heading.

And then in regard to the intentions of independence of the Judicial Department, the independence of the Judicial Department is critical, and a proposal from the Chief Justice is currently under consideration. However, no timeframe has been announced at this time.

I will take any further questions . . . hold on. And with regard to the Commercial Court fees, it is using a tiered system. The Attorney General has indi-

cated that this is interesting and is worth taking your proposal under consideration. Any way that we can make money is a plus. However, a vast number of commercial cases are resolved by our arbitration.

In regard to the zero value on pages B-87 and B-88, the zero is an automated calculation error, as it multiplies the previous zero in the budget. But it should in fact be an increase. So that will stand to be corrected on that one.

In regard to the Domestic Violence Court, a new Domestic Abuse Task Force has been assembled. It [comprises] the Attorney General; the Ministry staff; Senior Magistrate responsible for the Court, Maxanne Anderson; and senior staff members in the Department of Court Services, including the staff psychologist; Department of Child and Family Services; and the police. The task force will be meeting this coming Thursday, and the Ministry will be provided with a full update. The task force will continue to meet as the court progresses and will provide feedback for ongoing, comprehensive domestic abuse reform.

An RFP was issued earlier this year for a service provider with experience specifically in rehabilitation for domestic abuse offenders. An announcement message of the chosen provider will be [released] in the coming weeks.

I will sit for any further questions.

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes. Good afternoon.

The Chair recognises MP Scott Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the Junior Minister and to the Attorney General for those fulsome answers. Just three quick follow-ups from the answers given.

One in relation to the probate. My understanding of the answer is that we have caught up 2025. We are now going back to 2024. I do not know if that means 2023 is outstanding or complete. But I would be grateful for clarity. That is on probate.

Secondly, the Junior Minister clarified that there is in fact an error here with the Budget Book. I think that error is pages B-87 and B-88. And I would be grateful for an addenda at some future point in time, not today.

And thirdly, just arising from that, the answer in relation to where the Criminal Injuries Compensation Board 1300 has gone, I think was that it is now under Headquarters, B-80, under line item 9700[0] Administration if I understood the answer correctly. (Is that right?) Yes. I am told by the Honourable Junior Minister that it has been rolled into Administration. All right. So, thank you for those answers.

Turning now to questions on the third head of the six heads identified. And I know that on this head

some of my colleagues have some additional questions, and I yield to them . . . No, I'm sorry, not on this one.

Mr. Scott Pearman: So, the third head is Attorney General's Chambers, Head 4. And I would be grateful, Mr. Chairman. I think I have got about 30–35 minutes left in the debate. Does that sound about right? Or is it a little bit longer?

The Chairman: You have approximately 40 minutes left.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Forty minutes, excellent. Thank you.

The Chairman: Four-zero.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Great.

So, in relation to Head 4, this is the Attorney General's Chambers, again this sort of headline issue based upon page B-78, which is the overview of the entire department. If you just look there in relation to the Attorney General's Chambers, it is going up \$1.35 million versus last year, and it is going up about \$2 million versus the 2023/24 actuals. And again, as before, we have five of these ministries going up and the one in relation to Corrections going down about \$2 million. And my understanding in relation to the Attorney General's Chambers is again the reason for the \$2 million circa increase from 2023—\$1.35 million versus last year—is largely driven by salary increases. But I would be grateful for clarification on that if I am mistaken.

And my question in relation to the Attorney General's Chambers is, Are there any unfilled senior counsel posts? I know that the unfilled senior counsel posts were an issue over the last year or two. And I am just wondering if those posts (plural) are now sufficiently filled? Whilst I am there, I note that the Honourable Junior Minister thanked the new Solicitor General, Shakira Dill-Francois. Let me do the same. I think she was acting. And I think probably toward the summer or perhaps it was the fall, she became the formal Solicitor General. So at least let me congratulate her on her confirmation in her role from [before] (I believe, although she had been acting for some time). But let me offer my formal congratulations on the floor of the House to Ms. Dill-Francois.

In terms of the vacancies, the Honourable Junior Minister very candidly admitted that there are, I believe he said five vacancies in the legal drafting team. And if I invite the Ministry and the Attorney General and the Junior Minister and indeed the Chair to turn to page B-93, which shows us the business unit for Legislative Drafting, 14030, we see in the first item the number of Bills drafted and passed by the Legislature to give effect to the Government's legislative agenda. And the actual number of Bills was a

staggering 29 in 2023, forecast to be 35 last year, but was down to 30. Again, we have a target outcome of 30.

So, I am just asking . . . and again it is not a criticism; it is a question. But if we are seeking a more, or at least as ambitious, legislative agenda as we had in the past, if a slightly more ambitious in the sense of one Bill greater, but you still have five vacancies of drafting counsel. What is the plan? And I say the next comment not necessarily for those who are in the Ministry, but for the benefit of the listening public. There are lawyers, we were talking about them earlier. But those who are parliamentary draftsmen and draftswomen, or drafters, are a relatively rare breed and are very hard to come by. They are also very hard to come by to get the good ones. Because the good ones go off to the jurisdictions that pay more than we do and always will pay more than we do, frankly.

So, given that that is the position, what plans are afoot not only to hire, but really to try to deal with the risk that the Attorney General's Chambers becomes a kind of bottleneck to the progression of the important legislation that this Chamber needs to deal with? And again, I make the point that it is not a criticism on my part. It is merely a question of the pragmatic reality that appears to be faced here.

Mr. Chairman, those are my few questions on the Attorney General's Chambers. And I think if this is a convenient moment, I will take my seat in case anyone else has questions on the Attorney General's Chambers or indeed the Junior Minister has some answers. Thank you.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening public, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are debating the Ministry of Justice.

Do we have anyone else who wishes to ask any questions?

The Chair recognises Honourable Member Smith from constituency 31.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just had one additional question with respect to the reply that has been given. The Criminal Injury Compensation which is now not its own line item, but is part of the HQ budget, it was allocated previously \$200,000. Is that still the case, or do we know what that is? Thank you.

The Chairman: The Chair recognises the Honourable Member Scott Pearman from constituency 22.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I am afraid that I sat down a little too quickly. I had one last question on the Attorney General's Chambers, which I failed to put.

And that is at page B-91 under General Summary and in relation to the topic of Debt Collection, which was 14050. And we see that there is going to be an increased amount for the debt collection by the internal team. Debt Collection was of course outsourced by the Government with some consideration debate around that. And I am not going to go there. But regardless of the debate and the company and the registration and all of that, I think one thing that could be fairly said about it is that the debt collection agency (or non-agency) was rather successful in getting money. So, I guess my question is this: Are there plans to outsource again or not? Or is the debt collection going to be left to this department?

Appreciating that there are specific priorities of this debt collection department in relation to taxation, the tax commissioner, land tax, et cetera. So that was my final question on this Head 4, Attorney General's Chambers. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

The Chair recognises Junior Minister Dennis Lister III.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to go back just to clarify the response on regard to the probate. You did ask [about] 2023. So as of now, all of 2023 probates have been actioned. And as I said, we are now working on processing 2024 applications, hopefully to have them all actioned by July of this year. And then going forward, we will be up to date and working on 2025 applications.

Under Head 4, question: Are there any other unfilled senior counsel posts? Yes. There are two deputy solicitor posts in the Civil Advisory section of Chambers, but they will be filled shortly as we are currently at the interview stage.

The question [from] MP Smith in regard to Criminal Injuries Compensation: Is the figure the same? No, it has increased to \$250 an hour.

And question regarding the vacancies of drafting counsel and a plan to hire and mitigate bottlenecks, the Attorney General says a recruitment drive for talented staff is underway for Bermudian overseas applicants. Sixty persons have applied for five posts: Deputy CPC, parliamentary counsel, temporary additional parliamentary counsel and assistant parliamentary counsel from 20 Commonwealth jurisdictions. And the recruitment process is underway.

And in regard to debt collection, there were no plans to outsource debt collection. As indicated, there are plans to hire two additional juniors to this unit.

And those are all of the responses for the questions that I had.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister.

The Chair recognises Honourable Member Scott Pearman.

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

One question following up from that that was asked by my colleague to my right, just in terms of the post, the parliamentary draftsmen then post the five vacancies. I was not sure if any of those was Chief Parliamentary Draftsman. I do not think so. No. I see a shake of the head from the Attorney General. So, no, none of them was the Chief Parliamentary Draftsman. No doubt MP Fahy was considering his options.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: But there we go.

Yes. So the next head of six is Court Services, which is . . . Excuse me, one second.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening public, we are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are debating the Ministry of Justice. The Honourable Member Scott Pearman is leading a robust debate.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: If only. If only.

One of my colleagues has asked in relation to the answer given for debt collection in the previous head, Head 4, whether there is an idea of how much debt in total we are seeking to collect. And I pass that question on on his behalf since I am on my feet already.

Whilst that is being considered, I was moving on to Court Services, which is Head 74. For those looking in the bundles, page B-98, (B as in Bravo) 98. The headline here again looking back to the page that gives the overview of the entire Ministry, at page B-78, the headline for this line item, the Department of Court Services, is effectively that this spending is going up about half a million versus last year's budget, and up \$1.25 million versus the 2023/24 actuals. Again, my understanding is that this is largely driven by salary increases. Again, if I am wrong in that understanding, I would be grateful for clarification as to where any non-salary-related extra spending is anticipated to be applied. But it is my understanding is that it is mostly on salaries, given the brief presented by the Junior Minister.

At page B-99, which is under this head, we see employee numbers. And an area that is near and dear is that of Probation Services at 84010 in a box at the bottom of page B-99. And I see there that the five posts are now anticipated to reduce to four. Firstly, I guess the question is, Were the five filled? Is the fourth going to be filled or are the four going to be filled? But second and more relevant, I think, is in terms of the performance measures for that unit,

which can be seen over to page B-100, we see under Probation Services, business unit 84010 at the top of the page there, that the first performance measure is percentage of cases receiving a final risk assessment during the final month of supervision.

Now, the actual outcome percentage-wise was 75 per cent in 2023/24. But the target outcome on the righthand-side box is more ambitious. It is 85 per cent for the coming fiscal year. It was 75 per cent last year. So, we are setting ourselves a more ambitious target outcome in relation to what Probation Services will achieve in terms of risk assessments at the very least, whilst at the same time the posts are being decreased, or at least if those posts are in fact staffed and filled, they appear to be being decreased. So that seems a little bit of a contradiction, and I welcome some clarification on that.

Again, back to the Domestic Violence Court, which is probably the showpiece of the current Attorney General and this Ministry in terms of where things are going. There was discussion in the brief by the Honourable Junior Minister of a pilot agency regarding electronic monitoring devices. Now with my apologies, this is the first I have heard of this. I had not picked up on this pilot scheme prior to today's brief. And if I should have done, I do apologise, but I had not seen that referenced anywhere. And given that I had not clocked that before, I would just like to ask a few very high-level questions about the Junior Minister's description of the fact that those who are accused or found guilty of domestic violence will be wearing a monitoring device, I assume, because we are told that the victim will be told when that person, the abuser, is in the (quote) "immediate vicinity" (unquote).

So, I would like a little bit more information from the Honourable Junior Minister and the Ministry about that. How is that intended to work? I mean, we live on a very small island. So, I guess my first question would be, what does "immediate vicinity" mean? Or if it does not have a specific meaning yet, what is it likely to mean? How close would this person be before alarm bells go off?

And is there . . . how do I put this? Is there an anticipated threshold where an abuser is obliged to wear this versus an abuser who is not obliged to wear this? And if there is a threshold for abusers who do wear the monitoring devices and abusers who do not, how is that threshold going to be adjudicated? Is that something for the Domestic Violence Court to determine? Would that be in the discretion of the judge or the magistrate? I think it is going to be under the magistrate. How is that going to work? But I would be very grateful for a little bit of answering around that.

And as indicated previously, I have another colleague, and I will yield to MP King on the area of Court Services. Thank you.

The Chairman: Good afternoon.

The Chair recognises MP King of constituency 10, Smith's North.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you.

I might be able to offer some assistance regarding the requirement for electronic monitoring as it relates to domestic violence.

The Chairman: MP King, you are asking questions. You are not—

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no. It is okay, it is okay. Do not worry, I will get myself together.

Regarding the Senior Probation Officer who used to deliver the sex offender programme of violent offender, he is right here. So, when I came into this House, that is why they were one person less.

So, regarding the Department of Court Services, I have a question as relates to how many persons are currently under probation, parole, and in the Drug Treatment Court and Mental Health Treatment Court who are being serviced by the 38 officers at the department.

The Chairman: Any other questions, MP King?

Mr. Robert King: I do. Would you prefer I put all of the questions?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Okay, cool. I will go ahead and do that.

In terms of business unit 84040, Percentage of individuals who have been sent an appliance, receiving individual versus group, we do not actually have a number of the clients who are in groups or a receiving individual. I am wondering if you have access to that. That would be B-101.

This is a general question as it relates to intimate partner violence [IPV] and services and treatment for that population. What data have been used to support IPV treatment at the Department of Court Services in terms of numbers of persons, types of IPV to include stalking other otherwise? Because as it is right now, I am not seeing specific numbers in order to make an assessment.

I am looking at [business unit] 84060, percentage of reports utilising risk assessments. What is interesting about this is the reports that are being requested—social inquiry reports, BARC reports, Bermuda successful and referral reports, and other reports—they are all assessment reports. And the social inquiry report as well. All of the reports are presentence and/or substance use disorder and/or violence and sexual risk assessment reports. So essentially, all of the reports that come from Court Services when they are requested are risk assessments 100 per cent of the time. It is not one or the other.

Page B-101, Drug Treatment Court 84080. How many clients are actually in the Drug Treatment Court programme?

[In regard to] 84040, do you have a number of clients who actually completed treatment and reoffended? The percentage of suitably referred clients in treatment is a bit of an ambiguous category. And I am wondering if you can provide some clarification on that?

Probation, 84010, percentage of clients who committed new offences whilst in programme. In terms of the 20 per cent target, I am wondering how this target was arrived at in terms of, was it an arbitrary percentage or was it based on best practice? I am just wondering how that was arrived at?

Electronic Monitoring Devices, 84070, percentage utilised, 80 per cent. Do you have a number in terms of the actual number of electronic monitoring devices that are currently being used? And two, what is the correlation between the use of the devices and reducing recidivism? In other words, we are using a technology with the express purpose of preventing a re-offence. How does that connect?

Page B-101, Court Services. Report writing, 294 for the year. That essentially works out at five reports per week in total for the team. So, at first blush it does not appear to be a good use of resources. That is why I would ask, What is the total number of clients under supervision? Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP King.

Does anyone else have any questions for the Junior Minister?

No.

For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are debating the Ministry of Justice.

MP King has given a barrage of questions, and the Junior Minister shall reply.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you again, Mr. Chairman.

I do just want to jump back to Head 4 just to further answer the question in regard to debt collection and how much are we seeking to collect? The forecasted amount will be based on the cases referred to the office by Finance. It is difficult to provide an amount at this stage.

Now on Head 74, the question is, What non-cellular expenses can we expect? None because this is because of the cuts in salary from last year. In essence, we are filling substantive posts that remained unfilled.

The question in regard to the Domestic Violence Pilot Scheme, How will it work? The victim will have updates coming to their mobile device. Thresholds are under consideration, and the devices will be launched in conjunction with the Domestic Violence

Court programme. And the vicinity will be determined based on the contact limitations and any protection order or bail condition.

In regard to how many devices, there are a total of 32 devices and four spares. And in regard to how many are being used right now, I will have to get that answer to you.

While I wait for further answers, if there are any other questions, I will open up to any other questions.

The Chairman: The Chair recognises MP Scott Pearman, Shadow Minister of the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. So, we are waiting on some of the answers in relation to Court Services, including my question in the Probation Services and the number of questions by MP King.

While we do, I think we have got about 20 minutes or so to run. So, I will move on to the fifth of the six heads, namely, the Department of Public Prosecutions.

The Honourable Junior Minister said in his brief that the term of the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] is due to come up in December 2025. I had not appreciated that it was coming up that soon. Time runs away with us.

But let me take the opportunity to commend her. I do not know what the situation will be in December 2025 in relation to the DPP. But I know that she has certainly put in some vigorous effort in difficult circumstances since her appointment some time ago, obviously.

In terms of the DPP, again this sort of overarching view going back to page B-78 and the page that gives the Ministry of Justice overview. For the Department of Public Prosecutions, what we see is that spending is going up over a quarter-million versus last year (last year's budgeted figure anyway) and approximately \$1.1 million versus the 2023/24 actuals. Again, my understanding is that is mostly expenditure on salaries, and again if I am wrong and not understanding, no doubt the Junior Minister or the Ministry will kindly point out where other expenditure is anticipated to be allocated.

Just a point of clarification, the Junior Minister when he was giving his brief—and forgive me. Let me just grab my note of it. But he said that the Ministry amounts to less than 3.0 per cent of the overall budget. I think that might be an old sentence left over from a prior budget speech in years past. Because if one looks at page C-39 of the Budget Book, it is at 4.2 per cent; if you look at page B-78 it is actually expressed as 5.0 per cent at the bottom there, in Expenditure at the bottom. So I would be grateful for clarification. I anticipate that the number at page C-39, which is 4.2 per cent, is the correct figure, not less than three. But anyway, perhaps it is neither here nor there.

Also, and this was the 43 per cent number that we raised previously. And I appreciate that this department is under the DPP and only under the Ministry in a titular way. But one of the things that did raise eyebrows when it was presented was the point I made earlier about 43 per cent was spent on consultants to support the department in specific cases where legal conflict arose. So, I guess that is probably 43 per cent of *budget* rather than 43 per cent of cases where there is conflict. But I would be grateful if the Junior Minister is in a position to clarify that. Just because 43 per cent of conflict in all cases sounds awfully high. So anyway, maybe the Junior Minister is in a position to clarify why that is. And it may well not be as well.

At page B-105, this is under the performance measures for the Department of Public Prosecutions, a question arose as to (at the very bottom under Witness Care Unit) number of victim impact statements, was only at 60 in 2023. And it is now anticipated to decrease this year. Just curious why that would be if we do not see a downward trend in the number of cases coming through the system. Or indeed perhaps it is indicative that we do see a downward trend in the number of cases coming through the system. But I would just pose those questions in relation to the Department of Public Prosecutions, Head 75, appreciating that some of those answers may well be in the hand of the DPP herself and not in the hand of the Honourable and Learned Attorney General in the Chamber today.

Mr. Chairman, I propose to sit down, perhaps hear the answers for Head 74. And if need be, I can go on to questions that I have in relation to the final head, Corrections, Head 25.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.
Honourable Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Before I answer those, I just do want to go back to Head 3 just to provide a response to one of the questions from MP Pearman in relation to the expansion or contractions of the number of judges in Criminal Court. There are two judges appointed to the Criminal Court, Justice Juan Wolffe and Justice Alan Richards. And the court historically has had two judges appointed to the courts, and there are no plans to expand the appointment of judges to the Criminal Court at this time.

And then just as a follow-up under Head 74, in regard to the electronic monitoring devices, as I said there are 32 with four spares. All 32 are being utilised at this time, actually all 36 including the four spares. And the question follow-up was, What is the correlation in use of devices in reducing recidivism? Devices are not necessarily used for the purposes of reducing recidivism, but to monitor a parolee's adherence to their parole conditions.

And then under Head 75, in regard to your point of clarification on the *less than 3 per cent of the budget*, we can agree it is an error. And the 43 per cent of conflict, 43 per cent of the *remaining* 12 per cent of our budget that is not spent on salaries. So, it not the cases; it is on budget.

And in regard to the performance measures, the question, Why will impact statements decrease? It reflects the downward trend in victims' wishing to participate in the sentencing portion of cases. There is an increase in the number of cases where the prosecutor provides a victim impact statement as is allowed in the Criminal Code.

And I will take a seat and let you get in a few more questions for the last head.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister.

The Chair recognises Honourable Scott Simmons *[sic]* with his last few questions for the Ministry of Justice—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Pearman. Pearman.

The Chairman: Sorry.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Just checking to make sure you are awake.

Mr. Scott Pearman: We are, barely.

The Chairman: This debate is due to end in the next 12 minutes.

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

Mr. Chairman, I am now moving on to the final head of the six heads presented under this Ministry or at least in this debate today, namely, Head 25 involving the Department of Corrections.

And, Mr. Chairman, before you took your chair, when Madam Chairman was in the Chair, I had explained that the one head is completely new to me. So, I may have some questions that are a little more blindingly obvious than they should be. But let me pose them, nonetheless.

The Chairman: Where is this found? Page?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Page B-94, ninety-four. Head 25.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Scott Pearman: So, the headline here, again by reference to the overarching page for the Ministry, which is B-78, is that we have 26077 revised and 26787 actuals in 2023/24. So, against the actuals, it is about a \$2 million decline.

And I guess my question here is really a bit of a philosophical one. Why does the Ministry believe that some \$2 million, at least against 2023, is able to be saved in Corrections given what the actuals were? Is this a bit of a hope and a prayer? Or really will it be achieved? And if it is not a hope and a prayer, if it is going to be achieved, where are the \$2 million in budget cuts in Corrections actually going to come from? And I would just like to point out that at pages B-94 and B-95, if we look at the Salaries box on the right-hand side at page B-95, there are savings of \$1.4 million. So that is not a small number in salaries savings. I appreciate that.

Then there a whole series of numbers which pretty much eat away at that because they are all increases. So, the net savings down from \$1.4 [million] is approximately a million dollars of savings in that box on page B-95. But if you look over at the other page, we are projecting \$1.84 [million], or just [under] \$2 million, against actuals. So, there is a considerable discrepancy between the million at the bottom of the box on page B-95 and the [\$]1.8 million, [\$]2-plus million [on] page B-94. So, in this particular instance, I do ask for further clarity as to how this is going to be achieved, because it is clearly not all salaries as we saw with many of the other ministries. So that is one overarching question in relation to Corrections.

The other overarching question is, I would be interested to hear the Ministry's or the Minister's or the Attorney General's or indeed the Junior Minister's rationale as to why Corrections is being moved out of National Security in the first place and is being moved over to the Attorney General's Chambers. I think that there would be some who would question the logic behind that. I anticipate that there are some points that might be made in favour of such a move. But I anticipate there are some points that might be made against such a move. And I am just asking what the particular rationale or rationales (plural) are for the move in the first place.

Turning to a slightly more specific issue, if we go to Capital Acquisitions at page C-10, there is reference here under the Corrections to a not-inexpensive security system. And almost three-quarters of a million has been spent on a security system. We can see that in the middle—it is down at the bottom of the page. It is under 76643, the fourth line item up from the bottom of page C-10. So, \$698,000, almost three-quarters of a million, on the security system, which has been revised down by more than two-thirds to only \$223 million in the revision. So again, these are the numbers. But originally someone was going to spend three-quarters of a million-ish, \$700,000-odd. And now they are only going to spend \$223[,000]. And then this year coming, if we look to the right, it is zero.

So, I guess my question is, Could someone please explain this a little bit better? Did the security system get severely curtailed over at the Department of Corrections? Or was there a reason why the in-

tended allocation became such a lesser amount? Is it completed, which is why we have gone to zero? Or was it a budgetary constraint that has driven us to zero? And we will now see the next step with more spending at a later stage? I do note in passing that there is a reference in the line item above to [\$]235,000 in relation to the CCTV. And I guess my question again—forgive me for very obvious questions—How was the security system (about which we have very little information, or I have very little information) different from the CCTV system? And additionally, there was reference in the brief by the Honourable Junior Minister to an audio system . . . I am not using the correct word, but it was an audio system or it was some sort of—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Okay. Well, I am grateful to know the Junior Minister does not remember the precise word either, so I am okay on that one for a minute. But it was some sort of audio system to monitor each cell as I understood it.

So those are three overarching questions that I have about Corrections. The first one, where are the cuts coming from, in addition to the salary cuts? Two, why are we moving it? And three, what is going on with the security system?

I am mindful of the time, and I would love to get the answers, so let me just quickly point out two or three more questions I have. In terms of refurbishment in Corrections, if we quickly turn to page C-4 we see, right in the middle of the page under Ministry of Justice Corrections, 75227, Prisons Refurbishment, we see an initial \$3.0 million. But of that, it looks like there is still \$1.75 million to spend that has not been spent. And the zeroes to the right of that suggest that it will not be spent. Likewise, there was a \$650,000 allocation for plumbing, and it seems like only \$250,000 of that has been spent, suggesting that \$400,000, again because of the zeroes, will not be spent. So my fourth question in relation to Corrections, given the time available, would be if some clarity can be given?

And by the way, the word I was trying to come up with is *intercom*. And I am grateful that the Junior Minister has come up with it at the same time as me.

So, I will take my seat. I do have further questions, but we may not have sufficient time.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Scott Pearman.

Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In my short few minutes left, I will try to catch as many answers as possible. But I do want to go back to in regard to Domestic Violence and the data being used to assess numbers of persons. Because of how persons are charged, not all domestic violence

situations are charged as such. Those numbers will need to be determined before we invest in Domestic Violence Units.

Getting to questions under this head, What is the rationale for moving Corrections from National Security to the Ministry of Justice? The rationale is strategic focus on restorative justice, which is more suitably aligned to the Ministry of Justice. Security system has been reduced to zero. The system is being upgraded using a phased approach to effectively manage resources. The security system was started in 2024/25, Black Creek. The remaining balance for Black Creek will be carried forward to 2025/26 as the project will be completed in the current fiscal year. And there was not a request in 2025/26. Funding was to be carried forward in the 2025/26 budget for the completion of the Black Creek project.

How is the security system different from CCTV? The Black Creek system was first installed in 1994 when Westgate opened. It has undergone various small upgrades but has required a substantive upgrade for some time and for the current upgrade.

And CCTV is specifically a camera and video recording system that tie into the Black Creek system.

And in regard to why does the Ministry of Justice think \$2 million can be saved in Corrections? The majority of savings comes from salaries, understanding that through natural attrition of resignations and retirements of higher-level staff. The new staff being hired will be at a lower entry rate. So that is where the savings can be made in regard to hiring at a lower staff rate pay scale. As I try to answer one final question in my time, back to the electronic monitoring devices, 10 of those units are also being used to provide 24-hour monitoring of clients who are at high risk.

And before the time is up, I would like to ask if there are any more questions.

The Chairman: There is no more time for questions.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Okay, no more question time.

Mr. Scott Pearman: We have a minute and a half.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: With your leave, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: I will be generous today.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That's very kind.

I had a number of questions about the educational programme for prisoners. I will not pose those questions. What I will do instead is simply say, would the Ministry be prepared to extend an invitation to Members of the Opposition to visit those programmes and learn a bit more about them?

The Chairman: You want to visit Westgate?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay. All right.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I will leave the answer to that question up to the Attorney General. But with the remaining time, or as the time has expired, I would first like to thank all of the staff of the Ministry of Justice, those present here and those who are at their offices for all of the work they have done. I want to thank the listening public for taking the time to listen to the budget being presented from the Ministry of Justice by myself on behalf of the Attorney General.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, we have just concluded the budget debate on the Ministry of Justice. Junior Minister Dennis Lister III has given stalworth answers and he is now going to move his heads.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Yes, cannot forget that part.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to move that Heads 87, 3, 4, 25, 74 and 75 be approved as printed. Thank you.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 87, 3, 4, 25, 74 and 75 be approved.

Are there any objections to that motion?

No objections.

Agreed to. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Justice, Heads, 87, 3, 4, 25, 74 and 74 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26 and I call upon the Minister of Home Affairs to proceed.

Minister Alexa Lightbourne, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

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

I move that the following heads, Head 93, Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters; Head 89, Energy; and Head 97, Land Title Registration, be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: You may proceed.

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

It is my privilege to present the 2025/26 Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Ministry of Home Affairs. These estimates cover Head 93, Ministry Headquarters; Head 89, Department of Energy; and Head 97, the Land Title Registration Office. I will speak to each head in turn.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is charged with key responsibilities impacting those living and working in Bermuda and in presenting these estimates I reaffirm our commitments to delivering inclusive people-centred policies, advancing legislative reform, and ensuring transparent sustainable governance across all sectors under our remit.

HEAD 93—MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS HEAD-QUARTERS

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Head 93, the Ministry Headquarters, Mr. Chairman, leads the strategic direction policy development and coordination of activities across the departments under the Ministry's remit. For the 2025/26 fiscal year our priorities reflect the Government's broader objectives of affordability, modernisation and regional engagement. These include strengthening consumer protection, modernising key legislation, reducing the cost of living, supporting energy reform, advancing consultation to advance policy development, particularly with CARICOM membership for this upcoming year.

The Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 93, Ministry of Home Affairs, can be found on pages B-308 to B-312; C-8, C-16 and C-22 of the 2025/26 Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, Head 94 encompasses two business units, Administration and Consumer Affairs. Notably, Consumer Affairs now has been integrated into the Ministry of Home Affairs headquarters supporting a unified approach to consumer-focused policy in alignment with regulatory oversight. The mission of the Ministry headquarters is: *To develop consumer-focused policies and legislation addressing affordability, consumer protection, and sustainability through transparent, fair and effective regulation.*

To fulfil its mission the Ministry Headquarters has defined the following strategic objectives: Direct, coordinate and enhance the performance of departments and sections under the Ministry's remit to ensure streamline operations and the impactful results; provide comprehensive support across legislative policy, administrative financial and logistical areas to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Ministry Headquarters and its affiliated departments; ensure equity in the rental relationship by reforming the Landlord and Tenant Act and domestic properties Rent Increases (Domestic Premises) [Control] Act [1978; to introduce clear regulatory policies that promote fair treatment of both landlord and tenants; strengthen consumer protection through enhanced public educa-

tion and the development of fair and enforceable legislation that safeguards consumer rights; complete public consultation and stakeholder engagement on CARICOM membership, followed by a delivery of a Green Paper for Cabinet's consideration ensuring that Bermuda's progress aligns with all of the interests of the relative stakeholders; [and] promote transparency, consistency and fairness within regulatory sectors through continued collaboration with the Regulatory Authority.

To deliver effectively on these national priorities, the Ministry Headquarters will implement a defined framework that is informed by the 2025 Throne Speech, the 2025 Budget Statement and the Government's commitment to [digitise] 93 per cent of eligible public services by 2026.

There are five pillars which have formed the strategic developments which include policy development. The Ministry will lead integrated cross-sectoral policies to promote affordability, access equity across regulated and unregulated markets, with key focus areas including electricity policy to advance grid modernisation, expand renewable energy integration and ensure fair, sustainable cost structures, broadcasting policies to modernise licensing and content standards to reflect the evolving media consumption, electronic communications policy to ensure equitable access to telecommunication and digital services, consumer protection policy to strengthen enforcement, legislative reform, and public education to uphold consumer rights, fuel policies to improve pricing transparency, supply chain resilience and energy security.

Additionally, policies specifically to address the cost of living will include reforms targeting affordability and fairness in everyday life. This includes the Landlord and Tenant Act and Domestic Premises Act, which will amend rent control ensuring equitable treatment of tenants and landlords and improved dispute resolution frameworks.

The Electricity Act revisions will support renewable technology adoption while securing equitable cost sharing for residential and commercial users. Consumer protection policies and laws will be developed to combat unfair pricing, deceptive trade practices and predatory behaviours.

The Ministry Headquarters will enhance consumer safety and market integration through the following actions: Product investigations and enforcement measures. Product investigations will assess safety and quality standards of goods and services and enforcement measures will seek to review the provisions under the Consumer Protection Act 1999 and related laws to issue alerts and initiate legal action for non-compliance.

Additionally, through targeted oversight of unregulated sectors, policy reforms and efforts will focus on supporting vulnerable consumers subject to unfavourable terms. This includes online retail platforms,

used vehicles sales with a view to closing policy and enforcement gaps.

Bermuda's progression towards full CARICOM membership will proceed via a phased consultative process. To date, the Government has conducted preliminary stakeholder engagement and awaits a reply from the secretariat regarding the draft membership agreement.

During the fiscal year 2025/26, we will further engage with the secretariat and confirm any associated costs. We will launch public education and consultation process and additionally assess any feasibility that needs to be confirmed. Following, we will prepare a comprehensive Green Paper for further consideration by the Cabinet and the public.

In collaboration with the Regulatory Authority, the Ministry will advance legislative amendments to the Regulatory Authority Act 2011 to enhance adjudication, expand enforcement capabilities and clarify the Authority's jurisdiction committed to in the 2025 Throne Speech. This will permit transparent, accountable and fair market conduct across regulated sectors including electricity, fuels, telecommunications and broadcasting.

In support of the Government's goal to digitise 93 per cent of eligible services by 2026 the Ministry will prioritise transformation of key platforms including a Consumer Affairs portal for digital submissions and the Land Title Registry system enhancements integrating AI to improve land title application processing. These reforms are expected to reduce processing times, improve transparency and efficiency, and enhance overall user experience.

All platforms will adhere strictly to Bermuda's cybersecurity data protection standards in coordination with the Department of Information and Digital Technologies. This reflects our commitment to modernisation, fairness and service excellence. Through oversight and consumer protections, the Ministry Headquarters will continue to deliver its part in the promise of a fairer Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, as outlined on page B-310 of the 2025/26 Current Account Estimates, the Ministry Headquarters has been allocated \$3,584,000 for this fiscal year. This allocation represents a significant change due to our operational landscape by integrating the Consumer Affairs section into the Ministry's Headquarters. This further aligns to the overarching mandate of lowering the cost of living as informed by both the Throne Speech and ministerial appointments. This repositioning recognises that consumer rights, regulatory coherence and affordability must be coordinated uniformly. This alignment therefore enables the Ministry to respond more effectively to the pressures facing everyday Bermudians, particularly those related to cost of living, market fairness and public protection.

The integration of Consumer Affairs has increased our staffing and public-facing responsibilities.

This equips the Ministry Headquarters to lead with greater impact in reform, modernisation and digital transformation.

Mr. Chairman, subjective analysis of the 2025/26 Current Account Estimates can be found on page B-310 and represents our resource needs aligned to our strategic uses. Line 8, Professional Services, an increase of approximately \$806,000 has been allocated under Professional Services. This item will support specialised technical expertise critical to the Ministry's wide ranging priorities and are essential to meeting the commitments outlined in the 2025 Throne Speech.

Specifically, they will support advisory services including the Landlord and Tenant and Domestic Premises (Rent Control) Act reforms, the Regulatory Authority and Electricity Act reforms, in addition to strengthening consumer protection legislation to address unfair pricing, deceptive practices and emerging risks in both regulated and unregulated markets. These services will also support specialised CARICOM membership advisory through exploring both the legal and economic impacts as Bermuda's phased approach towards full CARICOM membership. These services will also support energy affordability frameworks putting into practices cost of living strategies and energy pricing mechanisms that prioritise household stability and commercial sustainability.

Additionally, this allocation supports any digital transformation consultancy to improve internal systems, integrate data analytics and modernise consumer complaint portals, reducing processing times for licensing investigations and public outreach. A separate additional \$77,000 is allocated under consultants, line 8, to retain specialised legal expertise in international trade sectors specific telecommunications and energy regulations and the legal interpretation of any further CARICOM obligations. These consultations will be commissioned on an as-needed basis to address any impact or high-risk areas related to advancement.

It is important to note, Mr. Chairman, that these amounts are separate from the operational expenditures associated with Consumer Affairs as the operational costs for delivering these extended services are captured under two primary categories: Consumer Affairs Operational Expenses, which supports the licensing administration, complaint resolution, public education and field investigations, and the core Ministry Headquarter costs which include executive policy development, legislative drafting, stakeholder engagement and licensing reform administration.

Line 1, Salaries. The salaries allocation has been increased by 102 per cent equivalent to \$874,000. This increase accounts for the BPS [Bermuda Police Service] new negotiated salary adjustments and the transfer of eight Consumer Affairs staff into the Ministry's Headquarters payroll structure.

The creation of new posts also has been set to meet regulatory demands including the business liaison officer [fees] under the Ministry Headquarters Consumer Affairs business unit.

Line 15, Grants and Contributions: Members will note a decrease of \$80,000 in grants and contributions reflected in this year's budget following the transfer of environmental programme funding to the newly formed Ministry of Public Works and Environment.

Across lines 7, 9, 10, 11 and 12, Operational Cost, an increase of \$128,000 across operating lines represent a 175 per cent increase. These increases cover rent and facilities costs stemming from the relocation of the Consumer Affairs section to the [D.] Rego building, utilities and telecom services to support both new and existing staff, enhance administrative resources to manage growing volumes of public interface and inter-ministerial coordination. These operational investments ensure that the Ministry Headquarters can perform efficiently, delivering timely services, and maintain compliance with the evolving public sector standards.

Mr. Chairman, this budget as presented positions the Ministry Headquarters to deliver more equitable landlord/tenant relationships, protect the public from unfair pricing and exploitive practices, modernise licensing and enforcement across key sectors and accelerate digital services to improve everyday experience of the people that we serve.

Revenue: Mr. Chairman, the revenue summary is located on page B-311 of the 2025/26 Current Account Estimates. For the upcoming fiscal year, the Ministry Headquarters projects a revenue generation of \$4,000. This revenue is derived solely from the licensing of two debt collection agencies, each of which is subject to a licensing fee of \$2,000 under the oversight of Consumer Affairs. The Consumer Affairs section which supports the debt collection licensing is designed to protect families, workers and tenants from unfair and unsafe products, misleading practices and unregulated exploitation. In the upcoming fiscal year Consumer Affairs will continue to execute a strong, visible enforcement mandate, one that directly supports the Government's broader priorities of cost-of-living relief, affordability and modernisation.

For 2025/26, Consumer Affairs aims to conduct approximately 2,000 product investigations across the local marketplace. And while this ambitious but necessary target reflects the enhanced enforcement capabilities, following its formal integration to the Ministry Headquarters it will also be supported by its personnel whose purpose is to intercept unsafe, substandard, deceptive or illegally traded goods before they reach the consumers. The investigation programme is underpinned by three operational pillars.

The Chairman: Please hold, Honourable Minister.

For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now in Committee of Supply for further considera-

tion of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Heads 93, 89 and 97 are being read off by Minister Alexa Lightbourne.

Please proceed, Minister.

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

The investigation programme is underpinned by three key operational pillars, risk-based targeting and sectoral prioritisation by which Consumer Affairs will use risk-based enforcement methodology to focus resources on product categories most likely to pose health, safety and financial risk to the public. This includes electrical appliances, children's goods and toys, personal care items, and over-the-counter health and wellness products.

This targeted approach ensures that the Ministry is focused not only on compliance but on the prevention of harm. Investigations will be supported by proactive market inspection that includes retail inspection and audits of labelling practices, warranty and disclosures, and return refund policies. These tools will help identify trends and inform evidence-based interventions.

Consumer protection and legal support as part of the Ministry renewed focus will seek to safeguard the rights of consumers and provide legal mechanisms that underpin the consumer protection regime. This section of Consumer Affairs continues to serve as the frontline agency for consumer oversight empowered by key legislations to investigate and intervene where necessary.

With enhanced awareness, it is important to note that under the Consumer Protection Act 1999 the officers are authorised to conduct investigations into premises and seize unsafe goods or documentation and carry out tests for other purchases. Importantly section 21 makes it an offence to offer or supply products that fail to meet general safety standards, while sections 23 and 24 allow for the issuance of orders to prohibit the sale or distribution of unsafe goods.

This Act also addresses unfair business practices within section 12, making deceptive, misleading or exploitative conduct a punishable offence. Through the Sale of Goods Act 1978 consumers are further protected by the requirement that the goods be of merchantable quality, fit for purchase and as described. When those standards are not met consumers have a legal right to refund, repairs or replacements.

To enhance transparency and accountability the department will issue product recall notices, publish monthly bulletins on active investigations and an expand access to secure anonymous complaint submission portals. These measures work in tandem to increase public confidence and deter bad actors across these sectors. In this fiscal year we are committed to enhance enforcement to ensure fair trade, safe and informed marketplace for all Bermudian residents.

Mr. Chairman, the outputs of these include issuance of public advisories and safety alerts, product review recalls, and penalties for violations. These outcomes protect not only the consumers but legitimate businesses that operate within the law and uphold ethical trade practices. It is also important to emphasise that this work contributes directly to the Government's national priorities of affordability and cost relief, public health and safety, market regulation, consumer education and empowerment. This governance empowers those both living and working in Bermuda to protect themselves.

For the upcoming 2025/26 fiscal year Consumer Affairs will ensure that these outcomes will result in public advisories and that the enforcement actions will not only promote compliance but support education and ensure trading confidence in these practices. The manpower estimates, Mr. Chairman, for the Ministry Headquarters as outlined on page B-311 reflect a total of 16 full-time posts for the 2025/26 fiscal year. This represents an increase of eight positions following the recent integration of the Consumer Affairs and these positions have been aligned with the core objectives to advance legislative reform, digital service delivery, and expanding consumer education.

Under Capital Expenditure, Mr. Chairman, as outlined on pages C-8 and C-16 the Ministry Headquarters does not anticipate any capital assets purchased during 2025/26 fiscal year.

Under Grants and Contributions, Mr. Chairman, there are no formal grants or contributions allocated under the Ministry Headquarters for this reporting period.

Mr. Chairman, the department's performance measures are outlined on page B-312 for 2025/26 fiscal year. Headquarters is targeting 100 per cent completion of the initiatives assigned under the 2025 Throne Speech. These deliverables form a critical part of the Government's broader reform and modernisation agenda. Key output targets include legislative and regulatory reforms; introduction of the amendments to the Landlord and Tenant Act [and] Electricity Act to enhance energy affordability and reliability; amendments to the Regulatory Authority Act to clarify the mandate and improve sectoral governance; development of the CARICOM membership Green Paper; and implementation of cost-of-living mitigation strategies.

In tandem with these initiatives the Ministry is advancing digital transformation projects aligned at modernising the delivery of services within Consumer Affairs. As part of the Ministry's Headquarters commitment to strengthening public protection and regulatory transparency, I am pleased to report that the development is actively underway for a dedicated digital platform for Consumer Affairs. This initiative aligns with the Government's broader digitisation agenda and is being implemented as a standalone purpose-built system in support of the digital transformation priority for the Ministry.

The platform is being developed in collaboration with the Department of Information and Digital Technologies and is designed to deliver end-to-end service integration for both the public and internal regulatory teams. The platform objectives are designed to significantly modernise and centralise Consumer Affairs service deliveries and upon launch it will support key functions including electronic submission of consumer complaints, licensing applications, product investigation requests, and case management and resolution tracking. This approach reflects our commitment to financial prudence and technology agility. This platform is intended to be integrated by the end of the fiscal period.

Once operational it will yield significant operational gains and public service enhancements including reduction of processing times for complaints and investigations, allow for task prioritisation and streamlined review of these processes, improved work-flow transparency and real-time case status updates for both internal officers and members of the public, and will provide centralised records and case histories supporting faster resolution and improved continuity across complex or repeat complaints. This would be in full compliance with the centralised IT infrastructure, cybersecurity and data protection, Personal Information Protection Acts, cyber risk management protocols and data encryption standards.

The public can be confident to know that their information will be treated with the highest standard of care and will provide analysis of complaint categories and consumer pain points, identification of repeat offenders and trend analysis across licensing volumes, enforcement activity, and resolution timeframes.

The Ministry of Home Affairs, Mr. Chairman, remains steadfast in its commitment to strategic policy service delivery, enhancing regulatory capacity and directly addressing the public's priorities with the particular focus on the rising cost of living. As outlined in the 2025 Throne Speech, the Ministry has developed a multi-tiered approach to cost of living mitigation targeting regulatory oversight and key sectors such as fuel, energy and telecommunications. The Ministry is working closely with the Cost of Living Commission and industry stakeholders to explore and expand the regulatory frameworks resulting in lower costs.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Home Affairs is placing a renewed emphasis on public engagement and consumer empowerment through the expansion of its education outreach and regulatory oversight functions as aligned with the 2025 Speech from the Throne which prioritises consumer protection and market transparency. Consumer Affairs will spearhead public communication strategies targeting all sectors. To facilitate this, the Ministry will appoint an Education Officer to lead targeted public awareness campaigns, develop educational materials and increase the visibility of consumer rights and responsibilities throughout the community.

A central component of the strategy would be the proactive regulation of high-risk sectors, which pose particular risk to customers and consumers. These include informal and unlicensed debt collections agencies, unregulated used car sales and other deceptive practices. These reforms aim to provide consumers with clear, accessible pathways to foster greater accountabilities across businesses and ensure that the public remains both informed and protected in an increasingly complex marketplace.

Mr. Chairman, the major achievements from the 2024/25 fiscal year under the Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters include several key milestones in alignment with the Government's modernisation efforts. The Ministry advanced the implementation of Bermuda's National Space Strategy, positioning the jurisdiction as an emerging global hub in the rapidly expanding space and satellite communications industry. Achievements included the development of a regulatory framework to ensure safe and transparent sector operations, formalisation of stakeholder partnerships with industry leaders and international bodies, and the establishment of licencing protocols to attract foreign investments and produce sector growth.

The Ministry successfully also led legislative amendments to the Electricity Act [2016], resulting in expanded kilowatt hour allowances for residential customers. This change directly addressed energy affordability concerns and the promotion of more equitable access to essential electricity services across households.

For the upcoming year, Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Home Affairs remains steadfast in its commitment to address systematic cost drivers such as housing, energy and the price of essential goods and services. In the upcoming fiscal year, the Ministry will continue to advance reforms to deliver meaningful relief to Bermuda's residents. To support this, the Ministry will implement an electronic register of goods, review the list of essential services to determine best areas for reform, review new trade agreements to reduce the cost of living through strategic importation savings, and in the area of housing, the Ministry will finalise these amendments to the Landlord Tenant Act aimed to foster equitable rental relationships and ensure protection for both landlords and tenants to streamline adjudication.

In the energy sector, further amendments to the Electricity Act [2016] will be introduced to advance fair pricing methodologies and incentivise investments in renewable energy. As part of this strategy, work is progressing to develop frameworks for community solar, designed to incentivise local participation in clean energy generation and improve energy equity.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry also intends to amend the Regulatory Authority Act 2011 to streamline internal operations and strengthen enforcement capabilities. These amendments will address current

operational gaps and reinforce the Authority's ability to fulfil its statutory oversight and responsibilities effectively. We are also preparing for the launch of a Cost of Living Summit in the coming months. This event will feature a comprehensive report on both past and present initiatives designed to alleviate financial pressures on Bermudian households.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry's legislative agenda for the year include

- the Landlord Tenant Act—repeals the 1997 [Act] and establishes a modern framework for residential relationships;
- amendments to the Electricity Act to ensure affordability and sustainability in energy pricing;
- amendments to the Electronic Communication Act; and
- enhancements to the Regulatory Authority Act 2011, in consultation with the Regulatory Authority.

Mr. Chairman, in direct response to one of the most pressing issues facing the people of Bermuda, the rising cost of living, the Ministry has taken decisive steps to strengthen coordination, deepen analysis and deliver meaningful, measurable outcomes. To support the Ministry's cost-of-living efforts, it has convened a non-statutory strategy team working in tandem with the newly formalised Cost of Living Commission to develop a coordinated multi-sectoral action plan.

The Cross Functional Team is convened by the Ministry Headquarters with volunteers to ensure focused leadership and coordination on strategic cost-of-living priorities. It operates with engaging industry experts across sectors to drive implementation of actionable policies and regulatory reforms. While previous jurisdictional reviews and internal reports have offered important insights, many recommendations were left unrealised due to fragmented ownership and resource constraints. The strategy team now supports a coordinated multi-sectoral action plan focused on affordability, pricing, fairness and structural market reform.

The Cost of Living Commission gazetted on 7 May 2025, formally established its mandate to provide evidence-based independent advice to the Minister and the Government on monitoring price trends and cost drivers across essential goods and services, recommending fair pricing practices to ensure equitable treatment of consumers and suppliers, and advising on appropriate policy and regulatory interventions, particularly where market conditions create hardship for systematic inequities.

The Commission will work closely with both the Ministry and the strategy team to align analysis with execution, ensuring strategic coherence and accountability. To support this work, the Ministry has launched two national public surveys (one for residents and one for businesses) and has hosted a focus group. These surveys closed on 30 April 2025 with

impressive participation. Approximately 1,500 responses from residents and 250 from businesses across sectors. This strong level of engagement demonstrates that the public is eager to be part of the solution and will enable Government to design responses, grounded in lived experiences. The findings from the Summit will be shared upon completion of their analysis and will be tabled in the House thereafter.

Mr. Chairman, planning is well advanced for this inaugural Cost of Living Summit, which will convene these key stakeholders to tackle immediate affordability challenges and long-term relief. The Summit will aim to deliver the short-term immediate actionable items, particularly within the food and essential goods supply chain, and also to develop a road map for sustainable affordability in the long-term to address the cost pressures. A comprehensive stakeholder list is being finalised and will include representation from grocery retailers and wholesalers, shipping and logistics providers, labour unions, business associations, non-governmental organisations and consumer advocacy groups.

Recognising the importance that this topic has to members of the public, the Ministry is developing a phased communication strategy to promote transparency and manage expectations. This includes a dedicated website providing regular updates and reports, as well as media engagements and newsletters to keep the public equally informed of the progress and any relative policy changes. The strategy team supporting the Ministry Headquarters will review pricing practices in unregulated sectors, study market concentration in key sectors, explore competition tools and also advance research to further inform consumer behaviours, pricing markups and supply chain dynamics. These initiatives are designed to ensure that the proposals align and are evidence-based, responsive to market conditions and capable of delivering lasting relief to Bermudians across income levels.

Mr. Chairman, the Government made a promise to the people of Bermuda to tackle the cost of living in action. And through the upcoming Cost of Living Summit, the Ministry is translating that promise into action. We seek to advance these reforms that ensure that families can afford basic necessities, businesses can compete fairly and transparently and that no one is forced to choose between dignity and survival. We look forward to reporting back on the concrete outcomes and policy interventions emerging from this work in the months ahead.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the dedicated public officers of the Ministry Headquarters and to their continued work in the success of the Ministry's mission and objectives.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now on the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures for the year 2025/26. The Ministry of Home Affairs, Heads 93, 89 and 97 were presented by the Honourable Minister Alexa Lightbourne. The Chair now invites the Shadow Minister, Michael Faye.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Actually, I have two additional heads.

The Chairman: Oh, sorry.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: No problem.

HEAD 89—DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am pleased to present the budget for Head 89, the Department of Energy, as detailed on pages B-313 [through] B-315 and C-16 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Energy is to develop and advocate for policies, legislation and regulatory frameworks that enhance sustainability, stabilise pricing, ensure affordability and build a resilient future for Bermuda's energy, telecommunications, space and satellite industries.

To accomplish this mission, the department proceeds the following broad objectives:

- to reduce reliance on fossil fuel imports while balancing the security, sustainability, and affordability of energy in Bermuda;
- to provide education, advice and guidance on policy and regulation for the energy and telecommunications sectors;
- to facilitate the growth of industry and businesses in Bermuda through supporting the development and maintenance of robust space, satellite and telecommunications, and energy infrastructure; and
- to meet these objectives, the department, operates through a single business unit detailed on page B-313 and is supported by four officers under the heading of Administration.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Energy's total budget allocation for the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$526,000. This allocation is largely consistent with previous year's estimates, reflecting a slight decrease of 4 per cent compared to the 2024/25 budget. Notably, there is a modest increase in the salaries line to accommodate expenditure relating to acting pay and necessary salary adjustments. The Director's post is a statutory position, which necessitates the appointment of an Acting Director whenever the substantive post holder is on leave. As a result, an additional \$5,000 has been allocated to this line, representing a 60 per cent increase.

In terms of operational expenses, cost-saving measures have been implemented to improve efficiency. The budget for overseas call and data lines have been eliminated, resulting in a reduction of 25 per cent, contributing an additional savings within the department's operational expenditure.

Revenue

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Energy's estimated revenue for the 2025/26 fiscal year as outlined on page B-314 is projected at \$15,385,000. These revenues are made-up of

- telecommunications fees of \$5,981,000;
- Integrated Communications Operating Licence (ICOL) and spectrum band fees of \$9,091,000;
- broadcasting fees of \$30,000;
- electricity fees of \$177,000; and
- aircraft and marine licencing fees of \$106,000.

This represents a decrease of \$1,964,000 or approximately 11 per cent compared to the original revenue estimates of 2024/25. The primary reason for this decline is a projected reduction in telecommunications revenue following the Government's decision to lower monthly tax on mobile phones by 50 per cent, from \$12 to \$6 effective 1 July 2025. This policy change was a key initiative announced in the 2025/26 Throne Speech and reflects the Government's ongoing commitment to ease financial burdens on residents by reducing government-imposed fees.

Staffing

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Energy Staffing details are provided on page B-314 of the Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure.

The department is comprised of four full-time positions of which all are held by Bermudians. At present, one of these positions is vacant. However, the department is actively recruiting with the goal of fulfilling the vacancy before the end of the current fiscal year. The full staffing complement includes the Director and Energy Policy Analyst, a Research and Development Officer and a Telecommunications Officer. The total salary allocation for these positions is \$514,000, which accounts for 98 per cent of the department's overall budget.

Performance Measures

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: The Department of Energy's performance measures are outlined on page B-315 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

These updated metrics reflect the Government's commitment to public service reform and are closely aligned with the department's core functions. Essential priority for the department continues to be the provision of technical and project management support across Government, alongside its leadership

role in collaborating with the Regulatory Authority to advance critical policy and legislative initiatives across the energy, fuel and electronic communications sectors.

In the upcoming fiscal year, the department will play a pivotal role in supporting the Government's initiative to modernise Bermuda's regulatory framework. The current enforcement and adjudication process employed by the Regulatory Authority have been deemed outdated, insufficient and unnecessarily complex. These processes often involve lengthy formal hearings and administrative steps which no longer meet the needs of a modern regulatory environment. To address this, the Government is implementing a more streamlined regulatory model. This updated approach will introduce clear procedures for issuing warnings, making final decisions, and publicly disclosing enforcement outcomes where appropriate. It will also strengthen the enforcement capabilities of the Regulatory Authority by enabling it to impose suitable penalties, amend or revoke licences and take other necessary actions to ensure compliance.

To address this, the Government is seeking to implement a more streamlined and transparent regulatory model and this updated approach will introduce clear procedures to strengthen all enforcement. Additionally, the consultation process with stakeholders will be improved. The current three-step process required for most cases with the option to revert to the original format for complex or sensitive matters when necessary. The enhancements aim to make Bermuda's regulatory regime more responsive, efficient and aligned with international best practice. The Department of Energy remains committed to supporting these reforms and ensuring that the sectors under the Regulatory Authority's oversight operate with a modern, effective and transparent framework.

Mr. Chairman, a major milestone that was achieved in the previous fiscal year through the Green Overseas (GO) programme, which is the EU-funded initiative executed by Expertise France is an initiative funded by the European Union and implemented to provide international technical cooperation. This was launched in August of 2020 with the budget of €17.8 million over 68 months. The programme aims to support sustainable development and climate resilience in overseas countries and territories, including Bermuda. The programme operates through two main mechanisms: the GO facility, which allows for individual territories to request specific national level activities within a set financial range and GO Communities which fosters regional and interregional collaboration among multiple territories.

In Bermuda, the GO programme assisted in updating the Island's building codes for both commercial and residential structures, focusing on enhancing energy efficiency and resilience to extreme weather events linked to climate change. This support included expert consultations and stakeholder engagements to

ensure that the revised codes effectively address the unique environmental challenges faced by the islands, including rising sea levels, and increased hurricane activity. The programme has significantly advanced Bermuda's sustainable development.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Just a point of clarification, if I could.

The Chairman: Point of clarification or point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Michael Fahy: Well, I suppose a point of order. I am just trying to understand what line item the Minister is on with this particular point. I am not following it in the [Budget] Book, I am afraid. That's a question, I suppose.

The Chairman: Minister Lightbourne, could you clarify for MP Fahy?

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: As consistent with the other ministerial briefs, this relates to the achievements of the previous year—under the Department of Energy.

The Chairman: Is that clear enough for you, MP Fahy?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sadly not. I am just not following. We are on Head 89. The Minister is giving a presentation on last year's performance outputs. But from what I gathered that was to do with Planning. That does not seem to fall within this particular budget head anymore. I am not . . . I just want some clarification because otherwise I will ask questions on it from last year. But it does not appear in this . . . in these heads. Sorry, but I need some clarification.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: I will reread a sentence from my ministerial brief, so this achievement was a result of strong partnership between the Department of Energy and the Department of Planning.

Hon. Michael Fahy: That is clear. Thank you.

The Chairman: Clear as mud, now?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.
Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: The Department of Energy provided technical leadership to ensure that all recommendations were tailored to Bermuda's unique climate and socioeconomic context, while the Depart-

ment of Planning led the drafting and integration of these recommendations into the updated building code.

Mr. Chairman, the technical modelling and analysis conducted under the GO facility produced several key insights. It was determined that many Bermudian residents already exhibited relatively high energy efficiency due to the Island's moderate temperature range. As a result, traditional efficiency upgrades such as wall installation and high-performance glazing offered limited cost-effectiveness and longer payback periods. Instead, the study found that passive design strategies such as extended porches, roof overhangs, and natural shading from trees delivered a far greater impact.

This collaboration also identified two high impact scalable technologies: heat pump water heaters and balcony solar systems. Water heaters can reduce the residential electricity consumption by 30 per cent if made widely accessible and the balcony solar system small plug-in solar units that do not require Planning permission capable of meeting most daytime electricity demands and approximately 17 megawatts of decentralised solar capacity.

Collectively these efforts have laid a foundation for more affordable energy resilient-built environments and the revised building code reflects both ambition and pragmatism, accounting for Bermuda's specific development challenges while moving the Island closer to its sustainability and climate resilience goals.

Mr. Chairman, it is also important to highlight the department's oversight for Bermuda's subsea telecommunications infrastructure, which plays a crucial role in the Island's digital and economic resilience. The Bermuda Submarine Communications Cable Act [2020] provides legal framework for licencing and managing the landing and operation of submarine cables in Bermuda's terrestrial waters. With exponential growth of global data flows and increasing strategic value of data connectivity, submarine cables have emerged as vital infrastructure underpinning financial services, community and data scrutiny. The department continues to monitor the sector developments and will lead in efforts to align Bermuda's legislative and regulatory regime with international best practices to ensure that the jurisdiction remains attractive for future cable landings and investments. In the upcoming fiscal year, the department will also assess how this sector can be integrated more broadly into Bermuda's long-term telecommunications and digital economy strategies, identifying opportunities to support innovation, sector evolution and new business development aligned with Bermuda's role as a digitally connected hub in the Atlantic.

Mr. Chairman during the most recent fiscal year, the government passed the Electricity Amendment Act 2024, introducing a new Bulk Generation Sole Use Installation Licence ("BGSUI" Licence) as

part of its ongoing efforts to modernise Bermuda's regulatory framework and accelerate the Island's energy transition. This legislative change directly supports the objectives outlined in the 2019 Integrated Resource Plan, which calls for 85 per cent reduction in fossil fuel use for electricity generation by 2035 and promotes greater adoption of distributed renewable energy. The new Bulk Generation Sole Use Installation Licence permits Bermuda's registered companies, Government departments and statutory authorities to install renewable energy systems exceeding 500 kilowatts for self-use, while allowing them to distribute up to 30 per cent of their total monthly generation to the transmission, distribution and retail licensee.

Importantly, the Regulatory Authority must assess and approve each installation to ensure grid stability and safeguards ratepayers from potential cost impacts. This amendment resolves a long-standing challenge faced by developers who were previously required to sell all of their generated electricity at low feed-in tariffs and repurchase it significantly higher retail rates. The updated framework creates a more commercially viable and equitable pathway for large scale renewable investments by private and public sector entities alike. Furthermore, it aligns with broad public support for clean, affordable energy and responds to stakeholder calls for more flexible future-ready energy legislation. By removing structural barriers and promoting responsible development, this reform reinforces the IRPs [Integrated Resource Plan] road map, while advancing Bermuda's national sustainability and energy affordability goals.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Energy remains a key partner in supporting interministerial initiatives and driving national progress towards zero emissions mobility. Mr. Chairman, the Department of Energy remains a crucial partner in advancing Bermuda's national objective for sustainable transportation. In the upcoming year, the department will continue to provide technical and project management support for the development and implementation of two landmark policy frameworks. In collaboration with the Ministry of Transport the national policy of zero emissions vehicles, also known as EVolve.

This framework forms the foundation of Bermuda's long-term strategy to transition from inter-combustion engines to clean electric mobility. The national policy on zero emissions vehicles, sets ambitious but achievable targets to phase out the importation of fossil fuel powered vehicles across all classes. Key masters include banning the importation of gas-powered motorcycles by 2028, public service vehicles by 2032, passenger cars by 2035, light and intermediate trucks by 2036, and heavy trucks by 2040. The policy also promotes EV-ready building codes and a workforce training to support this transition. The department will continue to lead stakeholder engagement, scenario planning and legislative alignment efforts to ensure timely implementation of these targets.

In direct support of these national goals, the department has also expanded its collaboration with the Ministry of Tourism, Transport, Culture and Sport, which is embarking on its own sector-specific clean transport transition. As part of this support, the department has reassigned one officer to provide targeted guidance on vehicle electrification infrastructure requirements and policy alignment to facilitate the Ministry's goal of modernising transport services within the tourism economy. This officer's role has been adjusted accordingly in the department's staffing plan, reinforcing the department's agile and interministerial approach to advancing national sustainability targets.

Mr. Chairman, the Government continues to lead by example. Several ministries have already initiated the conversion of their fleets to electric vehicles, demonstrating a firm commitment to decarbonisation of Bermuda's transport sector. Notable actions include the introduction of electric motorcycles within the Bermuda Post Office, the deployment of electric vehicles within the Ministry of Health and the ongoing electrification of vehicles for the Ministry of Public Works and Environment. Furthermore, the electrification of Bermuda's public bus system represents a transformative shift with 70 electric buses now operating across the Island. This initiative has significantly reduced emissions from one of Bermuda's largest vehicle fleets, while generating cost savings through lower fuel and maintenance expenses.

Mr. Chairman, marine transportation is also a key focus. The Government is currently piloting the use of electric ferries to assess feasibility, operational efficiency and environmental benefits of electrifying Bermuda's ferry system. This project supports the long-term aim of modernising Bermuda's maritime infrastructure in a manner that is both climate resilient and cost-effective. From electric buses to inter-ministry fleet conversions and the expectation of electric ferries, the department will continue to support projects that reduce emissions, expand EV infrastructure and stimulate the clean energy economy. These initiatives reflect Bermuda's commitment to building a modern, efficient and climate resilient transport system that benefits all sectors of society.

Mr. Chairman, the Government's early adoption of electricity mobility serves two strategic purposes. First, it demonstrates leadership and builds public confidence, encouraging wider adoption of electric vehicles in the public and private sectors, and it secondly supports the expansion of electric vehicle market, which will result in increased electricity demands and kilowatt hours. This growth economically is significant. By increasing energy consumption, fixed generation and distribution costs can be spread across a larger volume, potentially reducing the per kilowatt hour cost of electricity and improving affordability and long-term sector sustainability.

Mr. Chairman, the Government continues to advance its clean energy agenda through strategic

partnerships and targeted programmes that accelerate the transition to renewable energy. Central to this effort is the Government's solar programme, which is facilitating the development of solar systems across 35 government-owned buildings. This initiative is designed to reduce the Government's overall electricity consumption, lower operational costs and set a strong example of environmental stewardship across the public sector. The Department of Energy is coordinating this effort by identifying suitable sites, establishing procurement frameworks and guiding implementation to ensure efficiency, cost-effectiveness and long-term performance.

Let me just take a break.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates and Revenue Expenditures for the year 2025/26, Ministry of Home Affairs. Honourable Alexa Lightbourne is presenting Heads 93, 89 and 97.

Please proceed, Minister.

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

This programme further strengthens through a strategic partnership with the Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) a globally recognised energy innovation and implementation partner. RMI has provided technical assistance, policy guidance and energy modelling expertise that support Bermuda's broader integrated resource plan and energy resilience objectives. Their involvement ensures the Government's efforts are aligned with global best practices and grounded in sound, economic and environmental analysis. Together, the deployment of solar infrastructure across Government buildings and the partnership with the Rocky Mountain Institute exemplify a whole of Government approach to reducing fossil fuel dependence, cutting emissions, and fostering a more sustainable and self-reliant energy future. These actions not only contribute to Bermuda's national climate goals but also demonstrate the Government's leadership and commitment to driving the Island's energy transition forward.

Mr. Chairman, in alignment with the Government's commitment to transparency and the reduction of cost-of-living pressures, the Ministry will strengthen oversight of regulated sectors by issuing directives to the Regulatory Authority, regarding governance and transparency, capacity building, electric sector review, consumer protection and oversight. This in support of the Regulatory's remit to ensure high quality affordable services and its internal priorities to reinforce its role in driving innovation, competition and responsible investments across regulated sectors in the year ahead.

Mr. Chairman, turning to communications and broadcasting policy, the department recognises the rapidly evolving landscape of broadcasting, driven by

digital conversions and new media consumption habits. Bermudians are increasingly accessing content through online platforms, mobile applications and Internet-based streaming services challenging the relevance of traditional regulatory frameworks. To address this, the Government has introduced a new draft broadcasting policy entitled the Converged Policy for Electric Communication and this forward-looking framework seeks to unify the regulation of traditional broadcasting and Internet-based audiovisual media services under a single modern infrastructure. The policy aims to ensure regulation keeps pace with technological advancements while upholding public service obligations, quality standards and accessibility.

Mr. Chairman, a central element of the new policy is the promotion of local content. Proposed measures include financial incentives to support local media content creators, content requirements to maintain visibility of Bermudian stories and the establishment of a national broadcaster dedicated to local programming. These initiatives will protect Bermuda's cultural identity and support vibrant, sustainable local media industry. Affordability and public access remain high priorities. The policy contemplates the introduction of a universal service package, ensuring all residents have access to basic range of television and radio services at regulated fare prices. The Government will also engage stakeholders to consider infrastructure sharing among broadcasters and Internet service providers to reduce duplication, enhance efficiency and lower consumer cost.

To uphold content standards, the department will establish a content review panel under the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Board responsible for setting content guidelines, reviewing programming and address public concerns. This panel will ensure content across all platforms remains accurate, appropriate and aligns with Bermuda social and cultural values.

Mr. Chairman, in support of these objectives, the licencing regime will be modernised to include new categories for Internet-based broadcasters and other emerging digital media platforms. These licences will require compliance with local content obligations, technical standards and adhere to public interest principles, ensuring fair and consistent oversight and pricing.

Mr. Chairman, collectively, these broadcasting reforms represent a bold and forward-thinking strategy, modernising outdated legislation, empowering local voices, ensuring public access to quality content and creating a more responsive and inclusive media ecosystem that serves all Bermudians affordably.

Mr. Chairman, the Energy Policy Steering Committee remains a key advisory body to the Ministry, strategically positioned to guide Bermuda's transition towards a more sustainable and resilient energy future. The committee's ongoing mandate includes the

development and refinement of both electricity policy and the fuels policy, with the sharp focus on three core priorities: reducing Bermuda's dependence on fossil fuels, addressing the high cost of electricity and ensuring grid stability as the adoption of renewable energy continues to grow.

Through meaningful stakeholder engagement, international benchmarking and scenario-based planning, the committee is aligning its policy with practical forward-looking solutions. These efforts will support the Ministry in advancing its policies to ensure that they respond to today's challenges while shaping a secure, affordable and sustainable energy system for the future.

Mr. Chairman, as highlighted in the recent Throne Speech, the Government is advancing targeted amendments to the Regulatory Authority Act to streamline its adjudication process. These changes are designed to create a more agile, responsive regulatory framework, one that is better equipped to address the complexities of Bermuda's rapidly evolving sectors. The proposed revisions will enhance the Regulatory Authority's ability to uphold compliance, resolve disputes sufficiently and enforce clear, consistent standards. By empowering the Regulatory Authority to act decisively, these reforms will promote greater accountability and reinforce public trust in the governance of Bermuda's regulated industries.

Mr. Chairman, in response to the department's expanding mandate, a strategic restructuring is underway to better align its organisational structure with its evolving responsibilities. The existing title "Department of Energy" no longer fully captures the scope of its work, particularly with the integration of electronic communications and emerging regulatory obligations surrounding space and satellite operations. The department is transitioning into a multidisciplinary policy department and is tasked with managing the complex intersections of terrestrial and extraterrestrial infrastructure, spectrum allocation and data governance.

At this time, it is leading efforts to promote energy efficiency across Government operations and to accelerate the public sector shift towards renewable energy ensuring that the Government sets the standard in emissions reduction and optimisation. This restructuring represents a timely and necessary step in modernising Bermuda's institutional capacity and ensuring that it remains fit for purpose in an increasingly digital and interconnected world, while aligning with the long-term sustainability objectives of the Island.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I extend my sincere appreciation to the dedicated team within the Department of Energy, now led by newly confirmed director, Mr. Adrian Dill. Their efforts continue to strengthen Bermuda's reputation as a clean, innovative and forward-thinking jurisdiction across the fields of energy, telecommunications, satellite and emerging technologies.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

For the benefit of the listening public, we are now in Committee of Supply for the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Home Affairs Minister Alexa Lightbourne has completed Head 89, the Department of Energy. She shall move on to Head 97, Land Title and Registration [Department].

Please proceed, Minister.

HEAD 97—LAND TITLE AND REGISTRATION DEPARTMENT

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

I am pleased to present the budget estimates for Head 97, the Land Title and Registration Office [LTRO], which may be found on pages B-316 through B-318 and C-16 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Land Title Registration Office is *to maintain a secure, transparent and accessible register of land ownership and interest that reinforces public trust, supports legal certainty and contributes to sustainable land management in Bermuda*. The Land Title Registration Office is a cornerstone institution of property governance, playing a vital role in both the modernisation of land administration and the economic development of our jurisdiction.

Mr. Chairman, the Land Title Registry Office is tasked with administering Bermuda's transition from a deeds-based system of property transfer to a title-based registration model, an approach that offers greater legal certainty, facilitates efficient property transactions and reduces land disputes. At the heart of this system lies a centralised and authoritative land register which records and guarantees ownership and legal interest in land under the protection of Government. The key objective and responsibilities of the Land Title Registry Office include:

1. Land title registration and maintenance—processing fresh registration, as well as applications for property transfer leases, mortgages and easements ensuring the Land Title Register remains current, accurate and reliable by promptly reflecting any change in ownership or registered interests, supporting the formalisation of ownership in areas with historically undocumented land occupation or fragmented title records.
2. Land title index map and boundary management—in maintaining the land title index map, which identifies the boundaries, parcels, extents, and unique title references of all registered land, this register underpins the legal recognition of boundaries and is integral to

surveyors, legal practitioners and land owners.

3. Dispute resolution and adjudication—offering adjudication and administrative pathways for resolving disputes related to ownership, boundary alignment or foreshore claims, strengthening public confidence by providing clarity and legal remedies for competing land interest.
4. Dual registration oversight, title register and deed registry—while advancing title registration, the Land Title Registry Office continues to manage the Deeds Registry, ensuring that transfer notices for transactions falling outside of title triggers are properly logged and maintained. This dual registry model preserves both historical records and ensures continuity as Bermuda fully transitions to a title-based system.

Facilitating public and professional access to land information is also facilitated by the Land Title Registry Office, including official searches, inquiries and certified registry extracts, responding to increased public demand for clarity, especially in relation to family land, inherited property and mortgage parcels.

Digital transformation and AI integration is supporting the department in advancing the modernisation of land administration through the rollout of electronic systems, digitised maps and AI assisted document processing. These tools are intended to reduce backlogs, expedite decision-making and improve data accuracy.

Mr. Chairman, the LTRO's operational efforts in the upcoming fiscal years will focus on five priorities:

1. completion of priority registrations;
2. implementation of legislative triggers;
3. expansion of public awareness;
4. safeguarding historical records; and
5. supporting economic development and investment.

The LTRO will advance completion of priority registers through mortgages and secured transaction processing which are essential to supporting Bermuda's credit system and lender confidence.

1. Registrations in unregistered areas with the particular focus on resolving historically undocumented parcels.
2. Implementation of legislative triggers with improved system efficiency through AI and digitisation, the Ministry will review and potentially activate additional legislative triggers under the Land Title Registration Act [2011], broadening the pool of properties subject to title registration.
3. Expansion of public awareness. The Office remains committed to stakeholder education through guidance materials for the public, training for attorneys and surveyors, commu-

nity outreach to demystify title registration and reduced public apprehension. This is particularly important for resolving land issues rooted in intergenerational family land, where the absence of documentation often deters formal registration.

The department aims to safeguard historical records by maintaining the Deeds Registry and through the LTRO will provide archival quality, preservation of Bermuda's historical land instruments, a robust public search service to assist researchers, legal professionals and historians and safely net during the transition from deeds to title systems, especially where registrations are pending.

The department will also support economic development and investment through a modern legally sound land title system that facilitates secure land-based investments, enables more efficient land valuation and taxation, reduces transaction costs, and increases Bermuda's competitiveness in real estate, construction and international finance sectors. The ability to confirm ownership quickly and confidentially is vital to developers, lenders and residents alike.

I will just take a quick break, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Ministry of Home Affairs. Minister Alexa Lightbourne is presenting.

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

The LTRO's ongoing investment in technology and innovation reflects the broader Government-wide commitment to digitising public services and reducing administrative burdens. Planned IT initiatives include full integration of the Land Registry and Case Management system, integrating the cadastral mapping tools, development of public-facing search portal and strengthening data security and encryption and compliance with the Personal Information Protection Act [2016].

Mr. Chairman, the Land Title Registration Office stands at the intersection of legal certainty, economic growth and public service reform. This is fundamental to public trust, investor confidence and everyday lives of Bermudians who depend on the clear, reliable and accessible record of their most valuable asset—land. In the year ahead, the LTRO will continue to expand their coverage of title registration, improve these turnaround times through digital reform, educate the public on their rights and responsibilities, preserve Bermuda's historical deeds and promote fairness, transparency and certainty in every land transaction. This budget supports not only the modernisation of land records, but the modernisation of how we protect what matters most.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to rise and present the expenditure estimates and strategic priorities for Head 97 for the LTRO Office 2025/26. This vital office continues to play an increasingly central role in modernising the land administration, recognising the importance of digital transformation for Government.

The LTRO are dedicated to ensuring accountability to individuals whose losses due to errors or omissions in the Land Title Registry will have avenues to seek compensation. Through collaboration in the development of innovative land information systems within Bermuda, we aim to enhance accessibility and efficiency. Finally, the LTRO provides expert advice to the Minister of Home Affairs in all land-related matters, and diligently prepares reports highlighting the achievements of the activities of the Office.

Head 97, the Land Title and Registration Office as outlined on pages B-316 through B-318 of the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure and page C-16 of the Capital Estimates. The total allocation for the Land Title Registry Office for the fiscal year 2025/26 is \$1,657,000, representing a 5 per cent increase or \$82,000 compared to the original estimates for 2024/25. This allocation supports strengthened staff, will continue to support software and systems implementation, improved public access to land information, dispute resolution, accurate mapping, lease and operational maintenance, and professional services to address legal and technical complexities in land title registration.

A detailed breakdown of the current account estimates is found on page B-317 as follows:

- Salaries on line 1, which is the largest budgetary line item and reflects human resources required to manage increasingly complex and high volume applications. The \$142,000 increase covers an additional two temporary staff posts: one to support administrative processing and one mapping officer to respond to the increased application flow and accelerate digitisation efforts.
- Line 7 Professional Services covers the cost of an engaging a consultant with deep expertise in title examination and application authorisation whose role is pivotal to maintaining processing standards and quality assurance while mentoring junior officers. This consultant will continue to support the LTRO until April 2026.
- Line 8 rentals covers the annual lease of the LTRO's premises at Milner Place, ensuring continued accessibility and proper housing of technological systems.
- Line 9 repairs and maintenance—\$62,000 includes the cleaning contract of \$15,000, office equipment maintenance at \$1,000, software

licencing and maintenance of the Landfolio system, \$47,000 which ensures the continuity and operability of the core electric land registration system.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, the estimated revenue for the LTRO in financial year 2025/26 is \$412,000. As noted on page B-317 an increase of \$10,000 over 2024/25 projections. This increase reflects activity in the property market, particularly in single family homes and mortgage registrations. Revenue is derived primarily from fresh registrations and title conversion fees. Official search fees, certified document fees, voluntary title registration, transaction-related filings for mortgage leases and conveyances. The LTRO will continue to balance accessibility and affordability, with cost recovery, ensuring that land information remains accessible while the system is sustainable.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, the LTRO's capital allocation appears on [page] C-16 and totals \$500,000, which has been earmarked for the acquisition of a proof of concept to modernise the Land Management and Title Registration system. This initiative forms part of the Government's broader digitisation efforts and is focused on replacing or significantly enhanced the Landfolio system supporting its integration with the artificial intelligence tools, improving customer interface, reducing bottlenecks and advancing application turnaround time. Proposals for the proof of concept have been solicited from FluentData, Medici Land and Innola Solutions, with implementation anticipated in the upcoming year.

Mr. Chairman, the expected outcomes for the Land Title Registry Office are listed as follows:

- Secure and transparent land ownership to ensure that owners' rights are clearly documented, protected by law and publicly accessible, fostering trust and legal certainty in property transactions.
- Efficient land administration to improve the speed and accuracy of land registration processes through digital systems and standardised processes, enhancing timely service and delivery.
- Reduce land disputes to minimise conflicts through reliable records and accessible dispute resolution mechanisms, including adjudication services, increased voluntary registration, encourage property owners to register their land under the title system, increase the proportion of land based under secure registration.

- Enhance public access to land information, provide the public and professionals with fast, easy and accessible access to land information and services.
- Support for sustainable land use and development to enable better planning and land management through accurate records and infrastructure developments.

Staffing

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, staffing details for the Land Title Registry Office are outlined on page B-317. The Land Title Registry Office is currently staffed by nine full time employees and has four vacancies: Office Manager, temporary Administrative Officer, temporary Junior Mapping Officer and Land Title Officer.

Additionally, the long vacant Land Title Legal Officer training post has been filled by a member of staff who has supported the department since 2007. The LTRO also plans to create a new senior Land Title Officer role which will handle quality control and authorisation duties, thus reducing the reliance on consultants.

These staffing initiatives reflect the Ministry's commitment to growing internal capacity, nurturing institutional knowledge and aligning skill sets with technology. Additionally, a new Office Manager position has been introduced to support financial accountability and payment tracking. Recruitment is also underway for a temporary Administrative Officer to receive applications and assist with scanning documents for the AI initiative and a temporary Junior Mapping Officer to assist with the additional mapping demands generated because of faster application turnover.

The AI mapping initiative will not only increase the speed in which land parcels are digitised and the remaining process will rely heavily on the Mapping Officer. In addition, there are currently five Land Title Officers and only one Mapping Officer. These temporary posts are for a period of nine months and will prove critical to meeting operational targets and delivering quality public service.

Performance Measures

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, the department's performance indicators are detailed on page B-318 and reflects both public value and operational accountability. Highlights include

- Land Title Registry adoption—90 per cent of all incoming applications are now processed through the Land Title Registry system, demonstrating the momentum in transitioning from the Deeds Registry.
- Application acknowledgement—100 per cent of all first registration applications are acknowledged and received within five work-

ing days of submission. Triggers include sale of conveyances, long-term leases, mortgages and court-ordered conveyances. Voluntary registrations are also accepted.

- Customer service—100 per cent of registered information queries are responded to within a 48-hour time frame. Maintaining high service standards within the department.
- Dispute resolutions—95 per cent of land disputes are resolved within the statutory time-lines exceeding the target of 90 per cent, which reaffirms the LTRO's commitment to fair and efficient adjudication.

The LTRO continues to prioritise innovation, including the application of artificial intelligence and the resolution of legacy backlogs. Backlogs were experienced largely in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the department continues to seek ways to strengthen the security of its systems by exploring migration of the Office's database to a cloud-based service.

Major Achievements

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, some of the LTRO's achievements for the previous year show that 90 per cent of applications are now processed to the system and will continue to do so and be acknowledged within five days of submission.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Mr. Chairman, the department will complete phase one of the AI partnership and the LTRO is launching phase two, focused on the mapping automation. The LTRO has already commenced phase two of its mapping initiative, which involves the automated process of scanning survey plans. As previously mentioned, it is anticipated that the digitisation of scanned survey plans will be reduced to 5 to 10 minutes per application. The final output will be reviewed and validated by a qualified Land Title Mapping Officer to ensure accuracy and integrity.

DocDash will provide the LTRO with a fast, efficient method of extracting data from the documents and populate it into the registry. However, this does not complete the registration process. The LTRO still requires officers to quality control the data extracted and populated before sending the application to the next workflow queues that involve mapping and final authorisation. The LTRO will still require a full complement of staff; however their roles under the new AI system are subject to change pending review of those workflows.

In short, the DocDash platform AI is used to read and extract data from property documents, pre-populate fields in Landfolio within 5 to 10 minutes per application. Routine applications for human verifica-

tion, mapping and final authorisation will still be required. This blended approach combining AI-driven efficiency with professional oversight will significantly expand the LTRO's capacity to digitise mapping data, accelerate modernisation and enhance service delivery for the public. As a result, the LTRO's capacity to manage growing volumes will improve significantly.

In the upcoming year they will complete the POC for registration systems and modernisation, launch phase 2 of the mapping, advance training new staff to reduce dependency on consultants and explore cloud migration to ensure data integrity, business continuity and enhanced systems security.

Mr. Chairman, the LTRO continues to support other Government departments through data collaboration, including Land Valuation Department for appraisals and tax law development; Office of the Tax Commissioner for the land tax collection; Department of Land and Surveys for public property registration; the Bermuda Monetary Authority for housing market monitoring; and the Cabinet Office for multi-agency research and infrastructure planning.

These partnerships demonstrate the LTRO's growing value as a national data asset, supporting both physical operations and long-range policy-making. Currently the LTRO is proceeding with the final quality control and testing for integration between its systems before going live.

In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the Land Title Registration Office continues to transform not only how we manage land but how we deliver certainty, security and service to the people of Bermuda. The LTRO team has risen to meet the increased demand, and under the leadership Ms. Debbie Reid while embracing innovation across its remit. This budget supports the work of the office and protects our past but secures our present and prepares our land governance systems for a more transparent, equitable and digital future. I extend my sincere appreciation to all of the members and staff at the Land Title Registry Office. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[Mrs. Renee Ming, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister Lightbourne, for your delivery.

At this time we welcome any Member to reply. I see Minister. . . I'm sorry, MP Fahy, from constituency 20.

And just so you know, we have one hour and 30 minutes remaining.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Chairman. You were confused maybe a little bit because once upon a time I was a Minister of Home Affairs, but this is a very different Ministry compared to what it was 10 years ago. Very different indeed. As you can see certainly from the brief, it is largely a policy-making Ministry.

If I can begin . . . and thank you to the Minister for her brief and giving time today for questions and debate. Like my colleague, MP Pearman, I am going to do my best to follow each Head through almost, I hope, in the order of the Honourable Minister's brief. So, we have got Head 93, Head 89, and then the final head, Head 97.

Madam Chairman, let me begin, if I may, with page B-309 which are the department's objectives. Bear with me because I have to keep switching glasses here unfortunately. [There are] a number of objectives within that Ministry but I am going to begin, I think, with objective number five. Which one of the roles of the roles of the Ministry's headquarters is to complete a comprehensive consultation on CARICOM membership, engage stakeholders in the public and deliver a White Paper for decision.

Now, I think, based on the brief that the Minister read, she made reference in the brief to a Green Paper. So, I am going to make the assumption that in fact it is a misprint in the actual Budget Book. And I think the Honourable Minister is recognising that that should say Green Paper. And the reason that is important is because that then will align with the performance measures on page B-312 where the target is to complete a CARICOM process and Green Paper. So, that makes a little bit more sense to me. For the listening public, the usual process, if I may, Madam Chairman, is to begin with the Green Paper and then move on to White Paper with the anticipation of legislation thereafter.

That brings me to an important point based on the brief that we heard this evening. And that is that if . . . obviously, there is the anticipation of the Bermuda Government going for a Green Paper on CARICOM membership. There are a number of things that I quickly wrote down as the Honourable Minister spoke and that is that there is already (and I can stand to be corrected on a point of clarification if I didn't get this correct) a draft membership agreement in place or has at least been exchanged as between the Bermuda Government and CARICOM. Which would certainly suggest that a Green Paper is kind of a *fait accompli* in terms of what the Government's desires are. A Green Paper is to get opinions to get input but if in fact there is already a draft membership agreement for CARICOM, it seems a bit strange. Nevertheless, I presume there would be an agreement for associate membership and if there is a draft agreement that would be for full membership. So maybe we can get some clarification on that.

(Just give me one second.)

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael Fahy: One second, Madam Chairman. Just a technical point here.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Take your time.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

The Chairman: You are fine now?

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'm good now, yes, thank you.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I was just pausing to get my computer plugged in with my notes.

So, in relation to CARICOM specifically, that is a question in respect of any CARICOM draft agreements or thereabouts. And if there were, when were those drafts exchanged? I think the people of Bermuda would like to know that.

The performance measures, again sticking with the issue of CARICOM, if you look at page B-312, Madam Chairman, it says *complete CARICOM process and Green Paper*. Perhaps the Minister could shed light on what it means by *CARICOM process*. Is that negotiations? Is that preparation of the Green Paper? Maybe we can have some light shed on that.

In terms of a timeline for the publication of a Green Paper, it would be useful to know as to the specific timeline of the publication of the Green Paper. Normally again, Madam Chairman, for the listening public, Green Papers do involve public consultation. And perhaps the Minister could give some further details on what the specific public consultation will look like if given the fact that the target outcome is 100 per cent for the completion of the Green Paper which means that it would be done and completed presumably by or before 31 March 2026. And as well, in terms of that I don't see any specific line item necessarily for the costs that would be involved in both the Green Paper and eventual White Paper procedures. Again, that does not necessarily come cheaply.

Madam Chairman, in terms of staffing relating to the Ministry of Home Affairs HQ. Again, this is on page B-311. We have eight members of staff and administration and then we have eight members that come within the line item 103010 for Consumer Affairs. But for administration when you are looking at 103000, I would like to know if there are any staff within the number of eight who are dedicated to pushing forward the CARICOM agenda that appears to be part of the objectives within the Ministry.

In relation to the next piece, when we have a look, again continuing with CARICOM, the Home Affairs travel budget, if you look at page B-310, is \$109,000 and the other session, I think the most recent session, the Minister had given a presentation about, I think, CREF [Caribbean Renewable Energy Forum]. And what I am more interested in with this particular line item, travel, CARICOM obviously requires a lot of travel. Are all line items related to travel, is this about CARICOM, specifically? Because certain-

ly other Heads where travel is zero or close to zero, so one has to presume that the Minister has the responsibility for CARICOM affairs and will be attending CARICOM events.

Assuming that that is at least a good portion of the travel budget, perhaps the Minister can outline for the listening public the number of trips that she intends to take to attend CARICOM affairs from within that budget line item. Assuming that given the portfolio of CARICOM affairs now comes under the Ministry of Home Affairs, one has to presume that the Minister will be responsible for traveling to various CARICOM events and acting on behalf of the people of Bermuda, presumably instead of the Premier (or perhaps both). Again, let's just get some clarification on that.

Madam Chairman, in terms of the overall staff in the Ministry, we have in total, I have calculated between the various departments, I think we have 33 staff. And again, it is a little bit across the various departments, but I am not quite following the way in which the staffing has panned out here.

During the Minister's brief, we again see a number of increases. But what I am not quite following is in relation to Consumer Affairs. It would appear that on that line item which came from another Ministry, I think it was Legal Affairs one year and another year it was another Ministry. But I believe in the last Budget Book there were seven members of staff. So, let's just make that clear. It looks to be an increase of one in that department overall from where it laid in a previous Budget Book. And maybe the Minister can confirm that.

So, we have eight for admin in Home Affairs and eight for Consumer Affairs, four in Energy and thirteen in Land Registry. So, I will get to that in due course about the Land Registry. What I would like to know in respect of the Ministry of Home Affairs HQ, and again forgive me if I missed it because the Minister had a comprehensive brief, is how those eight staff in the HQ are broken down by PS code. So, we can understand the tasks that are really being assigned to each person within that HQ.

So, for example, given that within the Ministry HQ we see under the department objectives that, and if I can read, Madam Chairman, *to ensure that landlords and tenants receive fair and equitable treatment through reform the Landlord and Tenant [Act 1974] and the [Rent Increases] (Domestic Premises) [Control] Act [1978] transparent policies and effective regulation* one has to presume that there are dedicated staff within the Ministry HQ who deal with some of these objectives exclusively. Or is it split down across individuals? Because these obviously are very important areas and they are all policy-making areas, for the most part. So, again, one would presume that there are policy individuals within the headquarters dealing with those comprehensive objectives.

One of the items generally that I . . . there wasn't a lot about. And I will get to that under the head

of Energy. [It] is the issue of expanding the satellite business. There was some mention but certainly not within, from what I could tell, the realms of the plan that was put out in 2020. That was a five-year plan in respect of trying to boost Bermuda's satellite technology. And I will get to that and try to align the objectives within that plan as to whether they have been successful in the Ministry and the department in dealing with that particular portion.

Madam Chairman, in terms of specifically lowering the cost for Bermudians which is one of the main budget items. Again, it would be useful to know how many staff are working on that particular project. Are there individual staff members dealing with, for example, price controls (which was mentioned in the Throne Speech).

Under page B-312, Madam Chairman, I just want to have a look at some of the performance measures and then bring those back to the objectives and the sums of monies that appear within the Ministry itself. The Minister made mention specifically if we look at page B-312 under business unit 103010, Consumer Affairs, it says the number of valid complaints investigations is a targeted outcome of 2,000. Now, the Minister said, *Look. Now this is something that we can do and there will be investigations, et cetera.*

Now looking at the performance measures from the previous year they do not appear in this particular chart because the Department of Consumer Affairs, or the head of Consumer Affairs came under another Ministry. But last time, or last year, there were 428 investigations under that particular line item of performance outcomes with seven staff. There are now going to be eight staff, and we are jumping to 2,000. I just don't see how that is physically possible. And if it is, then I would like to understand how many investigations each member of staff is going to be responsible for and how those output measures match up. I think it is a pie-in-the-sky figure, frankly. I just don't see how investigations of 2,000 can be reached with eight staff members. And of those eight staff members, I do not believe that all of them are investigators. So, maybe the Minister might clarify how that number was actually reached.

And, Madam Chairman, again, if you look within the performance measures the number of rent inspections is listed as 2,500 for the course of the year. That . . . listen, if we have investigators who are that efficient, I would be absolutely thrilled. But 2,500 seems like an unachievable number. If we can get there, brilliant. I would be the first to praise the department and to praise the Minister, but 2,500 just . . . I don't know. Maybe there is a different terminology that is being used for the number of rent inspections. If you just break it out, how many rent officers are there conducting inspections? Maybe the Honourable Minister could share that with us and then we can at least have an opportunity to break down how many rent inspections each rent inspector is required to do

through the course of 365 days, less holidays, sick time and the like. So again, it sounds good. I am just not sure in any way that that number is achievable.

Again, the number of rent commission appeals that number of a target outcome for 2025/26 is three. That . . . I can't believe it is that low. Maybe it is. Is that concluded appeals? Started appeals? Dismissed appeals? The reason that is important . . . if you are having 2,500 rent inspections that means a determination is being made by someone within the department as to what a relative rent is, and I am presuming that is under the Landlord [and] Tenant [Act 1974] and the [Rent Increases (Domestic Premises) Control Act 1978] for rent control. Maybe there can be light shed on that. Is it just related to rent control, those inspections? I think it must be. Again, with the adjudications there are only three appeals? Sorry, again, I find that sum difficult to really come to terms with.

Again, when we look at the number of product recalls removed from sale. We say there is going to be 20 products. Again, I would like to know how these numbers are calculated. Especially given that the Minister's brief certainly made it known that there is going to be enforcement powers and investigations taken against products and presumably sellers of products and we have 20 items removed . . . sorry, 20 product recalls removed from sales. Again, maybe that number can be clarified in some way.

Let me just turn, if I may, to some of the notes that I had taken from the Minister's brief. Ah yes, in terms of the consultants in respect of the professional services, and this is page B-310, professional services. It represents \$1,420,000. I just note that that is getting fairly close in terms of numbers to salaries of the individuals within that department. And that to me suggests that the department obviously does not have the requisite expertise to take on all of the projects that this Ministry has been given in terms of policy. It is now having to spend a significant amount of money on professional services. It has jumped from \$590,000 (and the Minister said it in her brief) to \$1,420,000.

Perhaps the Minister can share some further details on whether that money is made up of specific projects with particular consultancy companies and if so which ones. Or is it staff who are sitting within the Ministry acting as consultants. And if so, from where? And what are the tasks that they have been allocated to in respect of the Ministry Headquarters departmental objections? Again, is it to deal with the Landlord [and] Tenant Act? Is it to deal with consumer protection? Is it to deal with CARICOM? Or is it to deal with increasing the transparency of the Regulatory Authority? (Bear with me for one moment, if you will, Madam Chairman.)

Ah yes, in terms again of the consumer protection, I was interested to hear that there apparently must be major concerns with food labelling and the

like within Bermuda given that there appears to be some requirements for further investigations. And what I am interested in is if there is any data that the Minister can share and if she has it, it would be interesting for her to share it as to how many complaints have been received in the last fiscal year as to the number of items that were made reference to in her brief. So, she made specific reference to looking at issues to do with electrical appliances, toys, [and] second-hand cars.

I certainly was not aware that this had become a major problem in Bermuda that enforcement needed to be done with labels. I am making an assumption that labelling must relate to perhaps locally produced goods because obviously if we are importing most of what we utilise in Bermuda from overseas where they have very stringent labelling requirements, are they somehow different here that the Department of Consumer Affairs needs to get involved? Or is this something that maybe we are overthinking?

So again, just for clarity, if the Minister would give some information as to why it is seen as necessary with electrical appliances and toys and second-hand cars that there is this major requirement for inspections and inspections on goods and on labelling. And in respect of the number of investigations that the Department of Consumer Affairs intends to carry out in the forthcoming fiscal year would also be helpful.

I noted that much has been put on the Ministry of Home Affairs HQ and across the entire Ministry to do with digitisation which presumably increases efficiency. And that there is going to be a new purpose-built digital platform built for Consumer Affairs delivery by March 2026. Given that it is internal, I am not sure where we would find that on the line items as to the overall costs. Maybe the Minister could give some details. Maybe it falls within the budget of the IT Department.

I will take a moment here and maybe pause and allow the Minister to answer those questions and then I can . . . I may nip back but I will then spend some other times on those other heads, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister, before I ask you Minister, does anybody else wish to speak to Head 93?

Minister, you can respond.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I am still waiting for a few technical responses, but I will get through the Honourable Member's questions as best as I can.

Relating to Head 93 and the CARICOM, not any performance measures, but also the consultation process. In the first instance, yes it is an error, so to formally clarify that it will be a Green Paper with a view to solicit the information from the CARICOM secretariat which is now still outstanding but will also in-

clude the draft membership agreement which is a standardised document that the CARICOM secretariat provides to all who intend to seek CARICOM membership. Additionally, the performance measure that you also noted on page B-312, it should say *complete CARICOM consultation process and Green Paper*. So, I thank the Honourable Member for that clarification.

In terms of the timeline, we are actually at the behest of the secretariat and while we have made best efforts to engage with the office of the secretariat and express our desire to have better understanding of both the cost and the associated provisions that will be required of membership. We have not yet received that and so it is our intention to continue to seek the secretariat for a response. Also noting that they have substantive member states that they are currently servicing and the CARICOM head rotates every six months, that is currently a priority for them and so we are seeking to get that information from them as best we can and at which time it will form the further consultation and the Green Paper thereafter.

Relating to the dedicated staff of the section of Consumer Affairs, the Honourable Member noted that there was an increase from seven to eight of the Consumer Affairs staff and that correctly relates to the Education Officer who has been . . . was noted in my brief will . . . business liaison officer who will support education and community-related engagements, promoting awareness and overall consumer protection practices.

Regarding the dedicated staff member who would be associated with any CARICOM-related consultation and Green Paper, there is one dedicated staff member and will also be supporting any public consultation and public awareness efforts relating to membership with the Honourable Attorney General's Chambers.

Regarding the Ministry Headquarters' PS grades. They range from PS14 to [PS] 39 for the eight persons currently retained at the Ministry Headquarters. And relating to the satellite business strategy, the progress of the satellite and space strategy was initially developed in 2020. And due to the COVID-19 pandemic it has significantly impacted the momentum and implementation of the strategy at this time. However, the Ministry has since which renewed its focus and is actively advancing this initiative as part of our current efforts and in process of establishing the space advisory panel which is currently comprised of key stakeholders and experts. The panel will be focused and tasked with supporting business development opportunities in this sector and contributing to the finalisation of the earth station regulations, which will be essentially crucial to enabling the growth and attracting investment in Bermuda's space economy.

Relating to the Consumer Affairs digital platform, this will be handled internally by the IDT department. It will not incur additional costs, and it will

not be reflected in the line items in our subsequent budget pages.

Regarding the professional services from Headquarters, I think the Shadow Minister does rightly note that there is a change of remit of the Ministry of Home Affairs to focus on both consumer protection, cost of living measures, and at present we have engaged with . . . or we are seeking to engage with persons to support any sort of legal or legislative reform efforts following the Cost of Living Summit and the findings that result there[from]. To be able to both generate and implement these cost-saving measures swiftly, recognising that there are a number of other conflicting projects that are also underway with other substantive ministries and Attorney General's Chambers, we would seek to have support from those who have expertise to streamline and advance these reform efforts.

Additionally, the professional services breakdown includes local consultants, overseas consultants, legal consultants, government membership fees, board and committee fees. So, it is not just personnel alone but it actually supports this array of consultant and professional services.

The Honourable Member also asked [about] the number of trips that are intended. At present there is no known travel schedule, but this allotment is to support any technical support or further persons who would need to support these travels and it does not relate specifically to CARICOM membership. It also ranges across the other areas and most notably . . . you rightfully noted my most recent trip to, CREF [Caribbean Renewable Energy Forum]. And so, I don't have a number of intended trips to allot to that line item. But it will also expand to technical support.

And I will yield to further questions and if I get some further replies I will come back.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you for that. I mean, if . . . if—

The Chairman: Minister . . . MP Fahy, one second. You need to be acknowledged by the Chair.

So, I will thank the Minister for her response and I will now recognise the Member from constituency 20, MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. I was getting very excited, ready to stand up a little early. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And thank you to the Minister for those answers. As she has rightly noted there are outstanding questions and I will allow her to get [that] information and I will continue to ask questions for the next while.

Just in follow-up to a couple of statements made in relation to what we heard. I think I heard there was not really a travel schedule there. And there was note made of this Cost of Living Summit, which a lot has been put on it. I query that because I do note

that there was one major question missing from that survey as I looked at it. I am just curious as to why no question was asked, at least from my review, as to whether or not those being asked thought it was important to grow Bermuda's population. I leave that there because I don't remember seeing that in the survey and maybe the Minister can clarify that.

Either way it would appear then that we have \$1.4 million put aside for professional services, and as yet unengaged consultants, depending on the outcome of the Cost of Living Summit in June. Perhaps, if it is this Ministry that is likely to be dealing with price controls pursuant to the Throne Speech, the Minister might shed light on whether it is this Ministry that would be dealing with . . . I believe there has been talk of a Government-sponsored grocery store. Again, maybe that falls within here, maybe not. But I would be curious to know.

If I may, I will turn more specifically to Head 89 and that is Energy and that is found in the Budget Book beginning on page B-313. I will just have a quick look again at the mission statement which this particular department has four members of staff and that is found on page B-314, line item 99000, under administration. Four members of staff for a whole department. I just flag that up. I wonder if that could be merged with another department to save some costs.

With that said, we see that the mission statement is *to development and advocate for policy legislation and regulatory frameworks and enhance sustainability, stabilise pricing and ensure affordability and build a resilient future for Bermuda's energy, telecom space and satellite industries*. Two of those, space and satellite industries, seem to have taken a pause because of COVID-19 four years ago. I think we can do better than that, frankly.

I will turn in a minute to the five-year plan that, from what I can tell, has not made much progress. I think the people of Bermuda need to know what progress has in fact been made within that plan rather than simply making a broad sweeping statement of COVID-19 given that this Ministry is responsible for satellite and space technology. Again, we have the creation of another committee that advises the Government which seems to be par for the course.

With that said, we have again four members of staff. I think the Minister did share with us the breakdown of what that was in total as to the individuals. But in terms of the integrated resource plan, that comes within the remit of the Department of Energy, I believe, who is following and making sure that the integrated resource plan is being followed? I know the Regulatory Authority [RA] obviously has a role to play in that, a major role to play.

But, again, department objections on page B-313 say that one of the objectives is to *provide education, advice and guidance on policy and regulation for the energy and telecommunication sector. As well as ensuring reduction of fossil fuel imports, balancing*

security sustainability and affordability of energy in Bermuda. That seems to be the agreement of the RA. So there has to be some overlap, presumably someone within that Ministry has some oversight of that integrated resource plan. I would like to know when that integrated resource plan would be in final form because I believe it is late. Maybe the Minister can clarify. The last one was 2019. It is supposed to be published every five years. So perhaps the Minister can clarify in the timing of the next instalment of the integrated resource plan.

One of the items that is within the Budget Book is performance measures, [page] B-315. And it is useful to look at these as you have heard from my previous remarks, because this is a large policy-making Ministry, rather than lots of other measures that you might otherwise find in other much larger ministries. So, again, if you look at the output we have some new measures listed there. This is page B-315, Madam Chairman. It says a number of policy recommendations to be submitted to the Minister in the year is five.

How are these targets met if we don't have final integrated resource plan, if we are still working through a space plan? I am not sure how those variables are calculated. For the number of legislative amendments tabled, is says three. Where does that number come from? These are new measures. One has to presume if they are new measures we already know what those amendments are likely to be. I did hear some presentation as to what is likely to come but maybe the Minister can clarify or perhaps repeat if I missed it. And if I did, I apologise.

Again, number of Cabinet memoranda submitted to Cabinet is five. The way it works is that you get all kinds of different papers that can be presented to Cabinet, from drafting papers to information papers to decision papers. How is that broken down, number of memoranda submitted to Cabinet? Is that related to one initiative, or the information papers? How has this number been calculated?

Again, number of project initiatives. A new number of five, a target outcome of five project initiatives. Maybe the Minister can break that down as to what those projects are likely to be. I think that would be very important.

When we look at revenue, and this is page B-314, this is a very revenue-producing department, the Department of Energy, from general fees. And I thank the Minister for making some clarifications in her Statement as to what some of those fees were, because it is listed. If you look at page B-314, line item 8431, it makes reference to general fees. And I believe that relates to telecoms. It relates to other fees. And again, it is significant. [It] was 2024/25, \$7.9 million. This year it is going to be estimated at \$5.9 [million] because of a reduction of telecom. And I think it was some of the mobile phone carrier fees so that reduces some of the amount.

But what strikes me with some of this is the amount of money here in revenue is a lot. And it is tax. So, when you talk about cost of living, I would certainly hope that these fees would be looked at again in furtherance to reduce the overall cost of living for Bermudians. When you look at the amount of revenue, this is all tax that Mr. and Mrs. Bermuda eventually pay through the Department of Energy.

In addition to that, when you look at electricity fees, one of the questions that people have always asked is, *Well, how . . .* People forget about how the Regulatory Authority is funded. And that is funded through their own fee that is attached to some of these providers. And I think their budget in the last year was \$6 million or something close to it. It may be just over that. And again, perhaps the Minister could clarify.

The budget I think for the RA is \$6.5 [million]. I know that . . . and I am bringing this up, Madam Chairman, if I can get a bit of leeway on it, because there is a requirement (from what I can recall) that the Regulatory Authority gets the Minister's approval for that budget. Is it anticipated that next year that budget is going to increase or decrease? And when is it anticipated that for the Regulatory Authority there will be audited financials? At the moment the last set of financial statements that I could find online were the unaudited financial statements from March 2025 *[sic]*. So again, I would be interested to know about those being audited.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, I put that there and I think that is useful to note . . . sorry, 2024. Yes. Thank you for the clarification.

The Chairman: Member, just real quick. What you just said, is that a question for the Minister or is that—

Hon. Michael Fahy: It is a question. If we could get some clarification on the . . . when audited financials will be received for the RA's last set of financials.

The Chairman: I see. Okay.

Minister, have you noted that question?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, let me just look at this.

Oh, yes, also we have heard mention of the Rocky Mountain Institute [RMI] which the Bermuda Government signed a memorandum of understanding in 2019 (I think), and there were two major tenets of that. One was to do with electric buses and transport and the other pieces (from what I could gather) were to prioritise renewable energy projects and look for

ways to build a more resilient grid. Perhaps given that that is also something that falls under this Ministry, I would be interested to know if there are any key performance indicators within that MOU. And I don't believe that MOU has ever been tabled before the House. I would be curious, if it hasn't been, if the Minister would be prepared to table that MOU for the House to understand the contents and what obligations . . . suite of obligations I say because it is an MOU, as to where we are with that relationship with RMI.

Is it anticipated as well that that relationship will continue past whatever the end date is. I don't know what the end date is. There was a signing ceremony in 2019, and I could not find any information as to how long that was to last. So again, perhaps the Minister can clarify that.

In relation to further work from the Department of Energy . . . and again, I just want people to understand why I am asking some of these questions and how I am relating them in. Under [page B-313] again, is the department objectives. [It is] to *reduce reliance on fossil fuel imports while balancing security sustainability and affordability of energy in Bermuda*. Today we were given a treat of the tabling of the City of Hamilton Plan 2025. And a quick read through that I didn't see anything in there that was an absolute requirement to have renewable energy on new builds and things like that. And I am just wondering if the Honourable Minister could [shed] a light on whether or not the Department of Energy had given comprehensive feedback in relation to the City of Hamilton Plan. Is there any intent to perhaps give further feedback given that there didn't seem to be anything in that City of Hamilton Plan that required new builds absolutely to have renewable energy?

They have to have energy statements. They have to have renewable statements. But does the Minister think it useful, given that we are trying to lower energy costs, to have new builds with some form of renewable energy component? And I would be curious to know what the Department of Energy's stance is on that.

Of course, the Minister also made mention of the ongoing projects to ensure that Government buildings do have renewable energy as part of those buildings, so solar panels, et cetera. And perhaps the Minister could give further details since again it is part of the Department of Energy brief. Not necessarily something you are going to find immediately line by line, but I am going to tie that to the objectives rather broadly. Again, because I think this Ministry is more or less a policy-making Ministry. How many Government buildings now have some form of solar or renewable power attached to it? How many are still to go? And what has been the anticipated . . . or what is the cost savings so far given that this is a major project for the Bermuda Government?

In addition, Madam Chairman, the Minister in her brief said that . . . or reminded us of this plan for there to be fully fleeted electric vehicles. I think 2020. . . I want to say 2026 but maybe it was 2028, that all bikes are supposed . . . motorbikes—2028. Banning of motorcycles, gas motorcycles I think by 2028. I can only write so quickly. I think 2035 was cars and then we went into trucks and different vehicles. But the first year I heard was 2028.

Perhaps the Minister can give further details on how that project is ongoing in terms of requiring Bermudians to have all electric bikes by 2028. And that seems way off to me. I can imagine the outrage on that particularly given I don't see any real progress in infrastructure to allow for fully electrified vehicles through Bermuda. I don't see it. Maybe we will blame COVID-19 for that. But I am sure that will come and that things are slow because of something from five years ago. If we are going to progress these then I think we need, again, the key performance indicators for every single one of those categories from bikes to cars to heavy goods vehicles.

Oh! And . . . and an electric ferry fleet I heard. That is fantastic! Again, these are wonderful ideas—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I tell you . . . I tell you; I won't hear it either. I won't be able to run for the ferry in the morning.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: It will be so quiet.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes. I tell you.

So, there goes the *Corona*, and there goes the other ferries. But again, the cost of that. I would like to know if the Minister could point within the Budget Book as to where those line items are, because it is being mentioned in this debate, in this particular Committee-of-Supply conversation. Therefore, I think we should be told where that is and has it been budgeted for to align with these plans. I think that is important. If we are talking about [it], then show me where it is. Show us where those funds are coming from, how they are being spent and when. Okay?

How many ferries?

Is it for the short routes? The long routes?

Are we going to spend the money on batteries? I mean, the questions can go on and on and on and on. But those are the things that matter to the travelling public. And if the department is putting out these edicts as policy, is it just make work and fanciful ideas that will never be implemented? Or will they? Or is it a case of, *Well, we have to prioritise the things. We have to lower cost*, because, make no mistake,

the infrastructure for something like this would be enormous.

And is that then relying on the private sector to do? And how does that number add up? And the question that I then have is: The Minister said in a previous Statement in this House that she is aware, of course, that the more solar and renewable energy that you install does in fact potentially increase the cost to those that do not have the ability to use solar and wind and the like. Right? So, how does all of this add up when we have one provider that is responsible for the grid? And that's BELCO.

Everybody loves to criticise, but they are the only provider. And we are also aware that you are still pretty much going to need two spinning engines in case it goes dark. Right? If you have solar, the clouds come . . . these are facts. So again, we have these lovely pronouncements from this particular department, but how does it translate into practice? I am sure that we will be told that it is a committee that is going to give advice, and that further information will be forthcoming in respect of that.

The Minister also made mention in her brief of the draft broadcasting policy and financial incentives for local programmes. Okay? I think that is grand but where is that line item? When is that going to happen? Who is going to pay?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry. So . . . so . . . this . . . so, at the moment, for the listening public—

The Chairman: Member, please address your concerns to the Chair.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes. Madam Chairman—

The Chairman: And if you are asking for him to just tell you where it is, I will ask him to note where he . . . either refer to it in the [Budget] Book or refer to it from the brief.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I appreciate your indulgence.

Yes, I was very interested in the fast ferry . . . the electric ferry so I was trying to follow it in the [Budget] Book—

The Chairman: MP . . . MP . . . yes. But I was not giving you permission to speak. I was just saying that I would allow MP Fahy to tell you where he referred it. Because what he has been doing is that he has been referring to the places that he is asking the questions. He is either referring to it from the Budget Book and he has given us the section and, if not, he will let us know that he is referring to it from the brief. And then I will ask if someone else wishes to speak. And you can definitely get up and speak.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, it would be helpful so that I can also relate to it if I decide to make a contribution. Thank you.

The Chairman: No problem. Thank you very much.
MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, specifically for the Member from constituency 2 (I didn't want to say number one and get it wrong; that is the Chair.) I am making specific reference to the Energy Mission Statement which says that the Department of Energy is responsible for Bermuda's energy telecoms, et cetera, and the ministerial brief that the Minister kindly read that made mention of specifically the electric ferries.

More specifically, in relation to . . . again, the broadcasting policy that I am going to ask questions about . . . again, I am making reference here to the Minister's brief and also to the point about telecommunications within the mission statement for which the Department of Energy is responsible.

Madam Chairman, the Minister, as I said, made reference to this broadcasting policy and its financial incentives. And the Minister, I hope, will shed light on what those incentives are likely to look like, the types of fees that will . . . or the types of funds that will be given and under which line item this may fall, or which Ministry or department this potentially will fall. Because, again, I don't see any specific reference in any budgeted line item for these payments. And, again, presumably it is going to come under Culture and Sport. I don't know. But it is interesting that it is mentioned from within this particular Ministry and this Head.

As well, there is an Energy Policy Steering Committee. We did hear a ministerial Statement on this particular . . . yet another committee, I might add. Another committee to give the Government advice. This Ministry has a lot of [advisors]: policy, steering committees, consultants, free—I guess . . . I don't think anyone is getting paid on the Energy Policy Steering Committee. But given that this committee is going to begin work in earnest, perhaps the Minister can share who is on this committee now that it has been announced by ministerial Statement and reference was made to it in a ministerial brief.

When was the committee . . . when did the committee first meet? Who are the members of that committee? Is anybody getting paid on that committee? How many times do they intend to meet? What are their key performance indicators? We can make announcements that sound amazing, but we need details as to what this actually means in practice, given that one of the roles of that committee, from what I recall, is to give advice to the Ministry on ensuring the Integrated Resource Plan is followed. That is what the Ministry should be doing already. I am a little confused

[by] that. Again, what is the cost if any to the department for that?

What I am going to do is . . . I think we have another 30 minutes. But I am keen to ask a number of questions on Land Title and Registration, and I think, if I may continue, Madam Chairman, I would prefer to do it that way and get answers at the end.

The Chairman: You actually have 35 minutes at this time. So, I assume that you want to . . . if you are going to move, I am just going to ask if any other Member would like to speak on this Head before we move away from it, if that's okay?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. Thank you. Yes, yes, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Would any other Member wish to speak on Head 89, Energy?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25, MP Dr. DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

On page [B-]313 regarding the department objectives the first objective, reliance on fossil fuels and so forth, we know that the RA is putting out some kind of request for proposals on wind energy. Could the Minister characterise if this Department of Energy has any involvement and to what extent in that initiative?

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak to Head 89, Energy?

I recognise the Member from constituency 20, MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. I had one more point to make. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I did promise to the listening public, who I am sure is finding this invigorating, that there was a space strategy paper published in 2020, a five-year plan. There were strategic goals. I think the listening public would like to know what the strategic goals are since not much has been achieved, given that this was a major part of a plan for revenue in building Bermuda's reputation.

1. Build Bermuda's reputation as a responsible, leading jurisdiction for space and satellite-related business. (I am not sure that is successful.)
2. Enhance domestic space and satellite-related capabilities. (I don't think so.)
3. Further integrate Bermuda with the international space community.
4. Generate revenue—

The Chairman: Member, just for clarity.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes.

The Chairman: This document is . . .

Hon. Michael Fahy: This is the Bermuda Space Strategy document that was published by the Bermuda Government in 2020. It is a five-year plan. It was published under the previous Minister, Minister Rob-an.

The Chairman: Thank you. And you found it on the Government website or—

Hon. Michael Fahy: I did indeed, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, okay. Thank you.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes.

There are numerous pieces that come under that. There are a number of strategic goals. There are dozens of them, really, that are pages and pages long.

I think what would be very helpful is if the Minister, given this is a policy-making Ministry, could give a comprehensive update as to whether or not that strategic plan has in fact even come close to being filled. I did hear that other things have taken priorities. But given that clearly a lot of work was put into a five-year plan, perhaps the Minister would undertake to give a comprehensive update at some point by way of a ministerial Statement or otherwise so that the public is aware of what has or has not happened.

I don't have any other questions in that particular . . . at this moment in time, Madam Chairman, so I sit for you in relation to others.

The Chairman: Okay. I will just ask if any other Member wishes to speak to Head 89, Energy?

None at this time.

So, are we going to move to the next head, which was [Head] 97?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: So, I am assuming, MP Fahy, that you would like to speak on Head 97.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I am not getting this right every time, am I, Madam Chairman? But thank you—

The Chairman: It's okay.

Hon. Michael Fahy: —for your indulgence.

The Chairman: I'm here to make sure you follow the rules.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Quite. Thank you very much.

The Chairman: You are welcome.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Madam Chairman, you are quite right. I am going to speak now to Head 97, Land Title and Registration. And there are a number of items here where I think clarity is required based on the ministerial brief and some of the numbers.

Again, I will just take us to [page] B-317 which is the employee numbers (full-time equivalents) and again 2024 was revised numbers of nine members and that is going to jump to 13. I did hear the Minister say there are a couple of unfilled posts and there were going to be a couple of temporary posts and there is someone who is going to be involved in making sure that documents are scanned to try and improve efficiency.

What I am not following here is in relation to some of these numbers. So, Madam Chairman, if we have a look at the performance measures to begin with on page B-318, and it says on that page under performance measures, *To maintain the registering of mortgages alien register, land transfer notices to within 10 days of receipt of notice in the office.* [There is] a 100 per cent target outcome. *Increase digital data pertaining to land ownership.* [There is] a 100 per cent target outcome, up from 95 [per cent] and 90 per cent, respectively. And *increase public stakeholder meetings, 100 per cent.* It sounds like things have gone pretty well in the Land Registry. But the numbers are a little bit different.

If we look at [page] B-317, on Land Title Registry fees, that is under the revenue summary, line item 8294. You will see that the revised estimate of revenue was \$724,000, in 2024/25. The estimate for 2025/26 is \$402,000. It is estimated to go down which aligns, quite neatly I might add, with the original estimate from 2024/25 of \$402,000. That is remarkable that it is the same. I find it interesting that if we are using digital technologies things should get better. We are going to increase to 13 staff. But the revenue is going to go down.

Now, I hope the Minister can explain why they believe that is going to happen. Is it because of less transactions? Is it indicative of the housing market? I think it could be. It is a very funny number that we are going to increase staff, increase digitisation, which apparently is so efficient, but we are increasing staff. I don't follow. Then again, the revenue is going to decrease.

Again, we see professional services. You will see year over year, Madam Chairman, on [page] B-317 that professional services, 2023/24, the actual number is [\$]324,000. The original estimate in 2024/25 was [\$]70,000. The revised estimate is more than double that. [\$]160,000. Now it has gone down to [\$]54,000. Again, perhaps the Minister would . . . I think that's relating to an individual who is continuing to provide professional services for the purposes of

ensuring training and what-not for Bermudians to become familiar with the systems.

The difficulty that we have with this department [is that] it is not doing its job fast enough. I can tell you that it is not going well. And I say that because of the number of property attorneys who have complained to me over the years about the Land Title Registry not completing what it is supposed to complete in a timely fashion. As the Minister said in her brief this particular department is in correspondence with the Office of the Tax Commissioner for the purposes of land tax and the like. And [it is also in correspondence] with the section that is responsible for doing land registry assessments . . . sorry, assessments on property value, the Land Valuation Department. The knock-on effect, Madam Chairman, that I need to share is the amount of time that it seems to take from the time that papers are lodged with this particular department from the time that you actually then eventually get a bill for land tax on [the] property transaction. People are putting money aside to pay for a land tax bill that is taking forever to come to them once a property transaction is complete.

So, rather than have these very interesting, not-really-telling-me-much performance indicators, why not tell us exactly how many of each type of transaction registered has in fact been done year on year so we can have a proper measure of the effectiveness of this department? How many property sale transactions have been registered properly with this department? How many mortgages have been done? How many alien registers have been done? How many land transfer notices have been done? That is a far better way to measure effectiveness so that the public knows where the backlogs are in this department.

We know it is a problem. Hopefully the increase of staff will help. So will digitisation we are told which has not always been the case when we look at other departments, like immigration, for example. It doesn't always come to fruition with what we are told in briefs and in ministerial Statements.

Madam Chairman, we understand that this system, I think it is [page] C-16, I think that . . . if I recall [page] C-16 is the amount of money in relation to land registry . . . no, that's gone. Okay. I've got that wrong. Excuse me, Madam Chairman.

So, overall, I think, Madam Chairman, what we see here is what appears to be lots of wonderful promises on policy. It is very difficult to get a measure of a lot of these policies through a Budget Book. We have had to really listen carefully to the ministerial brief on this. Thirty-three staff; small-ish budget and an awful lot of policy work to do across every single one of these heads. I suspect a lot of it is unachievable. But anyway, I will take my moment to give others to ask questions and for the Minister to give some answers. And if I have any further questions I will certainly seek to be recognised.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak to Head 97, Land Title and Registration?

No. Minister, you have 23 minutes left in your debate.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

If I may just . . . In regard to the Honourable Member's questions regarding the RA's budget, Members would know particularly that the RA is a quango under the department and the Ministry's remit. Therefore, the audited financials are annually produced. I will seek to get an update in terms of when they expect to publish it. Their annual budgets.

I note the Honourable Member's question around when it will be released or the numbers associated with it and if it was under the department and Ministry's remit. No, it is not. It is actually approved by the Ministry of Finance. However, the Ministry does work to define and share its priorities. And you may have noted in my ministerial brief where I spoke of the ministerial directives that will be forthcoming alongside the principles in which we are seeking for enhanced regulations as well as awareness of information, including their annual budgets as well as their annual progress to implementing their various strategic pillars.

In relation to the next IRP, that too is under the arraignment of the Regulatory Authority, and it is expected that it will be finalised soon. The IRP is actually written by the utility and reviewed and approved by the regulator. And so, we have requested that we receive an update relating to that and we anticipate that it will be approved in short order soon. And we will seek to update this Honourable House once that has been completed.

Regarding the performance measures in the Department of Energy's Budget Book items. They relate specifically to the regulatory reforms that I spoke of, namely, the Electricity Act, the Regulatory Authority Act, Electronic Communications Act and the possible broadcasting communication policy as well. And so, I do trust that that will be sufficient.

Relating to the Rocky Mountain Institute, yes, the Ministry and department, Madam Chairman, have been working to have support where we have policy for the Government solar initiative which had identified 36 government buildings that would be eligible for solar installation to lower the government's annual electricity cost. They are still in phase 1 of 2. It was paused due to COVID-19. And you can appreciate that I am getting caught up with the initiatives that are under my remit over the past two months; however, the solar initiative has been supported by the Rocky Mountain Institute. Additionally, they have successful-

ly supported the electrification of the bus fleet. And so, this is another project that they are seeking to support.

The question relating to price controls and if it does fall under the Ministry's remit, yes, mainly the Cost of Living Act and the subsequent essential goods that are included in the Essential Goods Act. Sorry. Additionally the Government grocery that you refer to is actually not within the remit. I am not particularly aware of all of the provisions, therefore, I cannot speak to it specifically.

Additionally, the Department of Energy does provide policy advice and support to the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, namely their EVolve policy and so they would be suited to speak to all of the different ferry and other initiatives that you referenced in terms of the specifics. The department provides that cohesion.

You mentioned the recently announced City of Hamilton Plan. To support and enhance collaboration and unified messaging as well as unified policy across government, the Ministry of Transport is one area where we successfully had enhanced collaboration. And we seek to do the same across the other government ministries and departments including Planning and the other associated departments and sections.

The EPSC, the Energy Policy Steering Committee. Notably, a recent ministerial Statement included the fact that they were newly formed to support the department and the Ministry in updating its fuel and energy policy. This is recognising that there are a number of energy stakeholders in our Bermuda environment and accordingly these various stakeholders provide different feedback and different perspectives of which the department can use to enhance its policy. The members at present are Mr. Adrian Dill who is the chair as well as the newly appointed Director of Energy. Additionally, Mr. Simon Clinton, also from the Department of Energy, he also has a background in support and has supported some private renewable energy firms. Mr. Dennis Pimentel who is the former utility sector employee and now providing consultancy service in this sector, in this space; Mr. Denton Williams, former Regulatory Authority expert and executive; Mr. Craig Simmons who is an economist; Ms. Regina Ferguson who is from Public Works; Mr. Geoff Smith from DENR; Mr. Stuart Kriendler who is from the renewable energy industry; Mr. Francios Rogers from Blue Planet Alliance; and Mr. Kneyone Murrar also from Blue Plant Alliance.

And to your question about if they will be paid, the answer is no. But, recognising that the energy transition and our energy policy is quite complex and it does interact with various stakeholders, namely the Regulatory Authority, the Utility Renewable Energy and its technologies, Public Works as well as Environment, this steering committee is seeking to ensure that we have the most updated policy that is in step and aligned both with our country's objectives as de-

fined in the current IRP and any of the proposed provisions in the proposed IRP that is soon to be confirmed.

The question relating to the wind study which was recently announced by the Regulatory Authority. In short, no, we will not be managing or involved in the procurement process. All expressions of interest are being run through the Regulatory Authority.

Relating to the City of Hamilton Plan, energy efficiency and conservation items have been incorporated into the proposed building code which has also taken into consideration climate resilience. And you may have noted in my brief where I talked about the Project GO. And so, this is closely aligned to the success of that programme as well.

The question on Bermuda government buildings and the number that do have solar, at present TCD [Transport Control Department], DPT [Department of Public Transportation], GPO (our Post Office) and the National Sports [Centre] are all buildings that currently have solar installed. And they have just completed the purchase by which they could confirm the lands and the properties that will be eligible for solar installation for use.

Your question relating to the Cost of Living Survey and the population increase. This is a question that may be better suited for the Minister responsible for Economy and Labour. But the survey means and purposes were defined as the lived experiences of cost for those living in Bermuda and the business cost and the experiences of those who have businesses. So, I would not necessarily project that they would speak to solutions, but they could talk about their lived experiences with cost of living both from a business/entrepreneurial perspective as well as residence in the community. But I appreciate the Member's contribution relating to that.

What else . . . I am just turning to Land Title Registry. We spoke of the increase in staff and registrations. I am actually awaiting a technical reply relating to the numbers and the line items. Notably the professional services do relate to the temporary engagement of consultants who are no longer there but there is a senior consultant who actually has been there since the creation of the Land Title Registry and has provided advisory services over time with a view to transition. Most notably, the legal officer [which] is now the legal officer trainee post is now being filled with the view that we will be able to increase the internal capacity in the section department to enhance those registrations.

Relating the 2024 original estimate of \$402[,000], revenue revised from \$724[,000]. The reason is associated with the decreased projection [which] was lower as not many high valued properties were being registered, and the late application fees due to attorneys now being trained in this application process. Additionally, the difference in professional fees is because of . . . relating to the Land Title Regis-

tration Office. It is due to an office manager who was in this post before and it was a temporary position and now we have put in a consultant to support this until the recruitment has concluded.

The Chairman: Minister, just letting you know that you have 10 minutes left.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you.

I believe I answered the Honourable Member's questions. There may be a few outstanding that I am still awaiting technical replies. I think you asked for . . . yes. You can clarify any outstanding questions, and I will seek to see if I have updates to support a reply. Thank you.

The Chairman: Does any other Member wish to any of the heads at this time? It would be Head 93, 89 and 97. I note that we have eight minutes left.

I recognise the Member from constituency 20, MP Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Chairman. And thank you to the Honourable Minister for answering a number of the questions. I know there are still a number outstanding. But I note that there was nothing more said about any key performance indicators with the MOU with the Rocky Mountain Institute and what else is within that agreement. When does it expire? Is it likely to be renewed? Those kinds of things. And would the Honourable Minister table the MOU to this House?

There are a number of other items. And again, the Minister has said she is waiting for some answers so it may be that they are on the way to the Minister, but the Minister noted that as part of the initiative to have renewable energy on government buildings that 36 have been identified. Interestingly, we had this past week a parliamentary question where the Shadow Minister for Public Works received a listing of all government buildings. It is enormous. And it is only 36 out of hundreds and hundreds. So, I would be curious to get a listing of the 36 buildings that have in fact been identified, and I am sure the Minister can provide, and a parliamentary question can be put for that so people understand the full number.

And the question that then related to that you will recall was, Will all projects for every government building be put into one project in terms of an RFP or is it an individual building that would be subject to an RFP for the renewable energy, solar or otherwise?

In relation to, again, the Land Title Registry, I would urge and request that we have better data points to measure the performance of this department because no explanation has been given as to why there is a quite significant delay between registration of properties for sale and taxes. Now, nobody ever wants to pay taxes, but people should know how much they are likely to pay and should not have to

then be burdened with a long-time waiting for land tax, post transaction. We know that is a problem. So, that needs to be done. And again, the performance indicators as to how many land titles have been registered. Again, I put it to the Minister that those types of information would be useful.

In follow-up to the answer, and forgive me if I didn't quite understand the response in relation to the anticipated decline in revenue. I think I heard the Minister suggest, dare I say, the lawyers didn't get it right. And maybe they are not trained properly in the system. I think that is what I heard. I am happy to take clarification on that. I cannot imagine us lawyers would get it wrong.

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I say that facetiously, of course. But it would be interesting to know how that is . . . and if in fact these lawyers are getting it wrong, then they need to be properly trained. And so again, that is part of the remit of this department to make sure they are properly trained. But I am not a conveyancing attorney and neither is my friend to the left here. So at least we do not have to take the stick on that.

But I will give the Minister an opportunity to respond if she has further answers that maybe she can clarify in the time remaining, Madam Chairman. I think you . . . it's probably three minutes or so.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister, you have five minutes.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I neglected . . . I thank the Honourable Member for his questions, the Shadow Minister. I neglected to relate to the RMI or speak to the MOU. The RMI were initially engaged to support two parts, namely, the bus fleet as well as the government project. It is a non-profit organisation . . . just by way of your information. And they support world leading energy advisor. Madam Chairman, if you don't mind me reading from their website. And the Government of Bermuda signed this agreement to launch its energy transition back in 2018.

The question relating to the delay in registrations, I know namely the Land Title Registry Office upon inception sought to digitise the entire land registry process. And there are a number of triggers in law that are currently enacted to enable such a registration. The total parcels is 23,271, and currently 15 per cent of the Island is registered under the Land Title Registry system. That does not equate to . . . it does not speak to the number of provisions that have been either the first number of triggers that are enacted in law as associated to the 15 per cent, but notably they are seeking to address the backlog by way of the AI system to support the initial part of the two-part regis-

tration process. In addition to digitising the mapping process, which is a more technical process but notwithstanding that the goal is to be able to streamline this process and decrease the production times.

Relating to the fees that have declined, it was actually due to the lawyers becoming more trained so therefore they were not receiving the late fees associated with any sort of registration . . . the Land Title Registry Office.

I think I have answered your questions, most notably. I am happy to table the MOU once I become more aware of the provisions. It was a 2008 MOU with RMI, and I know that the project at present is across both the Department of Energy and Public Works. And so, I will seek to get more clarification on that and provide an update to this Honourable House as associated with it.

I just want to make sure . . . Yes. Relating to the steering committee and its KPIs (key performance indicators) or outcomes, their particular focus would be to support the updating of both the fuel policy and the electricity policy. So those are the two objectives.

I think the Honourable Member had also asked me a question about . . . no. I think we have answered most of the questions. Okay. Perfect.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

We have . . . well, really we have just enough time now to allow you to go and rise and report and to move your heads. Sorry.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that Heads 93, 89 and 97 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 93, 89 and 97 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Home Affairs Heads 93, 89 and 97 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.]

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I move that the honourable Committee of Supply do rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

Thank you, Members.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 8:03 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Deputy Speaker: It has been reported that the [Committee of Supply] rose and reported progress.

Is there any objection to that?

There are none.

In that case we move into the next business [on the Orders of the Day]. And it is my understanding that all matters under Orders of the Day will be carried over.

Before I call on the Premier, I will call on the Minister of Cabinet Office.

STANDING ORDER 14 SUSPENDED

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that Standing Order 14 be suspended so I may present a notice of motion.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that Standing Order 14 be suspended.

Are there any objections?

[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]

NOTICE OF MOTION

CITY OF HAMILTON PLAN 2025

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, I hereby give notice that at the next day of meeting I propose to move the following motion:

BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House approve the City of Hamilton Plan 2025 pursuant to the provisions of section 11 of the Development and Planning Act 1974.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
I now call on the Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

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

I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Wednesday, 14 May 2025.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that this Honourable House do now adjourn.

Are there any objections to that?

There being none, so moved.

[At 8:04 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Wednesday, May 14, 2025.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
14 MAY 2025
10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 7 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning members.
Members, we will do the prayers first.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Somner, Clerk]

[Gavel]

The Deputy Speaker: You can be seated.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Deputy Speaker: The minutes of 9 May [2025] and the minutes of 12 May [2025] are deferred.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER OR
MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Deputy Speaker: There are apologies coming from the [Honourable] Premier, the actual Speaker himself [the Honourable Dennis P. Lister, Jr.], [Minister], [Honourable] Jason Hayward, Member Leroy Bean, [Honourable] Deputy Premier De Silva and I also understand that Member Robin Tucker is unable to join us because she has suffered an accident. Hopefully she recovers from that speedily.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PETITIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Deputy Speaker: I call on the Honourable Minister Weeks.

STAND UP, SPEAK UP, SAVE LIVES

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, colleagues and those in the listening audience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to thank those in this House and the listening audience for lending me their ear this morning.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I come before you, not just as a public servant, but as a community member, a neighbour, a parent, a brother, an uncle and a friend. Like you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I love this country. I love my people. I believe in our potential. And I know, deep in my heart, that we are better than the senseless violence that threatens to tear us apart.

Today, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to speak to you plainly and from the heart, because this is not just another speech. This is a call to action, a call for courage, a call to our collective conscience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must decide together, right here and right now who we are and for what we are going to stand. I am pleading to all of us, with these simple but powerful six words: [Stand UP](#), [Speak UP](#), [Save LIVES](#)!

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me begin with a truth that we all know, but sometimes hesitate to say out loud: violent crime is hurting Bermuda. Physical violence, gun violence, stabbings, assaults—these are not abstract problems. These are not distant headlines. They are tragedies unfolding in our own backyards, in our own families, in our own communities—sometimes next door—and they are rendering us asunder. They are tearing at our moral fibre, our character and our identity as a people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, each act of violence is a wound on our national soul. Each life lost is not just a number, but a name. A son, a daughter, a brother, a cousin, a friend. Some of them were bright lights in their communities. Some were trying to turn their lives around. Some were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time and yes, some may have been caught up in the game. But all of them had val-

ue. All of them, Madam Deputy Speaker, deserved a future.

The hardest part to accept in all this is that in virtually every incident that blights our community, someone knows who did it. Someone saw something. Someone heard something. Someone has a piece of the puzzle that could bring justice to a grieving family. But too often, that someone stays silent and in doing so, they are actively aiding and abetting this heinous and destructive behaviour. Why? Perhaps because of fear. Maybe because of distrust, or maybe they just do not care. Or, because of a culture that has over time told us that it is safer to look the other way.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I understand that fear is real. But today, I want to say clearly and with every ounce of compassion in my body: Bermuda, our silence is costing lives.

The first step, Madam Deputy Speaker, that we must take is to Stand Up. Standing up means refusing to accept violence as just the way things are. It means saying, *Not in my neighbourhood. Not in my school. Not in my home. And not on my watch.*

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have to stand up for our youth, many of whom are being lured into dangerous paths before they ever get a fair shot at life. We must stand up for the mothers burying their sons. For the children growing up without fathers. For the innocent bystanders caught in the crossfire.

Standing up means showing that we are not afraid to say that enough is REALLY enough. Standing up also means standing with each other. We must stand up as a community—united, not divided by fear or frustration.

- When we see a young man drifting toward the streets, we intervene and offer assistance or guidance.
- When we see a young woman being lured into gang life, we pull her back by pointing her in a positive direction.
- When someone is in danger, we do not wait for the authorities—we become our brother's and sister's keeper.

Do not get me wrong, Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not about vigilante justice. This is about community strength. This is about reclaiming the streets, the schools, the parks, the corners—and our peace and security.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must speak up. Yes, the second step is to SPEAK UP! This is perhaps the hardest part, because speaking up requires courage. It requires trust. It requires faith that our voice will matter and that it will be protected.

But let me tell you this Madam Deputy Speaker: speaking up is one of the most powerful things we can do. Every time someone comes forward with information, no matter how small, we move one step closer to solving a crime. One step closer to holding a callous killer accountable. One step closer to preventing the next act of violence.

Perhaps one may think that *It's not my business*. But if someone out there has taken a life, it is my business, and as a matter of fact and for the record—it is all of our business.

Madam Deputy Speaker, someone may worry, *What if I become a target?* But there are safe, anonymous ways to report what you know. We are strengthening our witness protection systems to allow people to freely and safely provide useful information.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are also investing in community policing. We are working hard daily to build a system of justice that does not just demand information but earns trust as well. Our voice could be the difference between another cold case and a family finally getting answers and justice. Our words could help stop the cycle of retaliation and revenge. Our courage could inspire others to come forward as well.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we cannot build safer communities with silence. We need people to speak up—in homes, in our churches, in WhatsApp chats, on social media, at town halls, at our sports clubs and in our neighbour's yards. Say something. Ask questions. Share what you know.

Madam Deputy Speaker, even a whisper can start a movement. We need to start a movement. We need to do all that we can do to save lives. At the heart of my plea today is for us to work together to put an end to this madness and to save lives.

When WE stand up and when WE speak up, WE are not just solving crimes—WE are actually preventing them. WE are saving the next young man from picking up a gun. WE are saving the next family from that knock on the door or phone call that every parent fears. WE are saving Bermuda from becoming a place where violence becomes normal.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are not there yet but we must be relentless in preventing this from occurring. I want to remind everyone that justice is not just about punishment—it is about prevention. When someone is held accountable, it sends a message:

- It tells our youth that there are consequences.
- It tells our communities that their pain matters.
- It tells the perpetrators that *this* community will not protect them in their wrongdoing.
- And just as importantly, it tells the victims that we see them, we honour them, and we will not forget them.

Madam Deputy Speaker:

- We are not powerless.
- We are not helpless.
- We are not alone.
- We can save lives—not through magic, not through slogans, but through action.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the solution is found in community effort. Now let me be clear, I have said this repeatedly and I will say it again here now—this is not just the responsibility of the police. It is not just the job of government. It is not just about laws and sen-

tences. It is about all of us. Teachers and pastors; coaches and neighbours; parents and friends. The people who run barbershops and beauty salons. The elders sitting on the porch; the youth on the block. Everyone has a role to play.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I implore families to talk to their children as children often know more than we think. Let's listen to them. Teach them, that it is all right to tell—there is no such thing as a snitch, because telling the truth is always a good thing. We must teach our children about conflict resolution. Show them alternatives to violence. Support them in their school programmes; get them involved in community programmes. Let us support rehabilitation and reintegration for those young men or women who are trying to leave a life of violence behind. Hold all leaders accountable. And yes, if you know something, say something.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we must build a Bermuda where there is no safe haven for violent criminals, no code of silence that protects murderers, no aiding and abetting those who are physically harming others; and no corner where justice cannot reach.

Madam Deputy Speaker, let me share a story of hope. Recently, a mother whose son was killed in a senseless act of violence came forward to me and said, *I don't want revenge, Minister. I want justice. I want no other mother to go through what I've gone through.*

And do you know what gave her strength, Madam Deputy Speaker? It was her community. People who stood up and spoke up—not with anger, but with truth. And because of that, her son's killer was brought to justice. It did not bring her son back, but it brought some peace for her. It helped her to take a step towards healing.

Madam Deputy Speaker, that is the power of standing up. That is the power of speaking up. That is the power of saving lives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I send out an urgent call to action

- to all in this Honourable House;
- to those listening right now to their radios—whether in your car or in your home or in your offices;
- to those listening right now, by way of social media;
- to families who know that their loved ones are caught up or involved but are afraid to speak up;
- to those young men and women who want to do more than just talk about what they know in their living rooms or in the halls of their schools;
- and, even to those involved in violent acts who are fed up with a lifestyle of guns and violence and want to change. It is time to come home, as the pastors would say. Put down your weapons and come home.

To all of us—we are all tired of these senseless acts of violence and I know that we have had enough.

Madam Deputy Speaker, and all of Bermuda, I leave you with this, as I shared up at the vigil held at Legends just last week:

- If you know something—stand up.
- If you see something—speak up.
- If you care about Bermuda—help save lives.
- Do not wait for the next tragedy to hit closer to home.
- Do not wait for the headlines to carry the name of someone that you love.
- Do not wait until it is too late.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the silence of those who have information has allowed this problem to grow, but from this moment forward, our voices—united, determined and fearless—can bring about change.

Let us build a Bermuda where children can play without fear—

- where families can walk the streets in peace and safety;
- where parents do not have to worry about whether or not their son will return home safely when they leave the house;
- where we can leave our doors open again and not have to worry (Do any of us remember those times?);
- where justice is not delayed and truth is not buried in silence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we are better than this violence. We are stronger than this fear. And we must not be bystanders in our own story. Again, I implore our people to: Stand up, speak up and save lives. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: I have one Member's name down and that is Member King.

Member King, did you want to put questions to the Minister? I recognise you.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. I have a couple of questions for the Minister of National Security. Thank you.

QUESTION 1: STAND UP, SPEAK UP, SAVE LIVES

Mr. Robert King: Understanding that the prevalence of violent crime has increased and the seriousness

and the number of incidents, are consultations currently occurring between the Attorney General's Chambers and the Ministry of National Security about amending sentencing guidelines? In particular the penalties for violent offences.

Would you prefer I put all the questions and then . . . okay.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Deputy Speaker, all conversations are being held that are relevant to where we find ourselves right now in Bermuda. But I want to be clear while I am on my feet that longer sentences are not going to fix the problem. Corporal punishment is not going to fix the problem.

The police are there. This Government has done everything it can financially and in other support to help the police do what they need to do to make Bermuda safer. But the key core in making Bermuda safer is not longer sentences. It is the community standing up, speaking up to all of us to work together to save lives.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Do you have a supplemental question or . . .

Mr. Robert King: I do, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Robert King: For clarification, I was not necessarily speaking about stronger sentences. What I was speaking about was the appropriate sentences in relation to the seriousness of the offence as opposed to a blanket . . . we need to be much . . . more onerous to sentences, et cetera. That is not what I was saying. They need to be appropriate to the seriousness of the offence, but I will continue on.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, your supplemental.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Sure. Understanding that we have persons, as the Minister has rightly identified, who are silent when they know things about criminals who may be residing with them, or they are creating safe harbour for them, is there going to be some action on the application of the law as relates . . . understanding that they have conversations with the Attorney General's Chambers in terms of harbouring of fugitives? Because I know with young persons who have gone missing and they appeal to the public, I haven't seen anybody brought to justice for that.

The Deputy Speaker: OK, so your question is, Is there going to be some sort of application with respect to—

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.
Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am certain that there are laws already on the books for harbouring criminals and fugitives from justice. So, I am certain that if it is ever proven that a citizen is harbouring someone that is wanted and proven to be a member or of having committed any violent acts, I am certain that the appropriate law will be applied for anyone that is harbouring someone.

The Deputy Speaker: You have a second supplemental? Or is it a new question?

Mr. Robert King: New question.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Go ahead, Member.

QUESTION 2: STAND UP, SPEAK UP, SAVE LIVES

Mr. Robert King: Understanding that the prevalence of serious crime has increased (murders due to gun violence and stabbings), is there consideration to a gun and bladed weapon amnesty for those for weapons that cause death?

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I want to start off by saying that we have to be careful with the statements we make because what has been happening in these last couple of days has been violent crimes, but to draw the conclusion that violent crime has increased without facts is . . . it is treading down a road until we have the facts. Right?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: There is a time when we all get on our feet, and we all have the microphone and so I have no problem speaking when it is my time and then waiting for the next person to take their turn.

So, while I am here on my feet, I want to say that we have to be careful when we talk about crime and whatnot, because what we do not want to do is give our communities the wrong impression. There is crime and there are steps being done by our Police Service and this Government to ensure that we are safe. So let us work together to see what we can do,

each one of us and then ask our community to make sure that we do our part to keep Bermuda safe.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Supplemental.

QUESTION 3: STAND UP, SPEAK UP, SAVE LIVES

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Understanding that violent crimes have increased and deaths, as reported in government statistics and police statistics, is there a strategic plan with specific performance measures and timelines that will address this problem? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: That is your supplemental?

Mr. Robert King: That is my final question. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, third question. Okay. Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We brought an anti-violence strategy to the House, I think at the end of last year, November or December, that addresses where we are as a country and our plan on going forward.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Any supplemental?

Mr. Robert King: A supplemental, yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, I recognise—

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: Madam Deputy Speaker, in terms of the [National] Violence Reduction Strategy, if memory serves me correctly, there were no specific timelines or performance measures as relates to that strategy.
Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay that is just . . . okay, thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish—sorry. Sorry. I recognise Member Campbell because he did indicate that he wished to ask questions.

QUESTION 1: STAND UP, SPEAK UP, SAVE LIVES

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to ask the Minister . . . it is difficult, and I understand that. It is extremely difficult to measure the success of the Gang Violence Reduction Team. But I would like to ask Minister if he believes that the team is appropriately resourced.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Gang Violence Reduction Team is doing a good job in the role that they have to combat violence and there is always room for more resources. But resources—how much resources is enough? You know? We as a community have to do what we have got to do.

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

Mr. Vance Campbell: No supplemental. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Any new questions? None.
That brings question period to a close.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member from constituency 15. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to offer a few congrats this morning. First of all, to the Bermuda School Sports Federation (BSSF) and that is the sporting body made up of mainly PE (physical education) teachers. But it is a separate body who hosted and organised the middle school interschool sports yesterday. I did have the opportunity late in the day to get up and experience the end of the festivities yesterday, and I did catch most of the 4x100 metre relay.

So, I do want to congratulate all middle school students who were involved and my colleague here who formerly was the Minister of Education will be pleased that I was interested to see that some of the new parish primary schools, their older grades are now participating in this level as well. So, it was a sight to see and everybody wonders, *Well, what is going to happen with sports?* But I want to congratulate them because there were individuals from Purvis Primary school as well as Francis Patton that actually took part with the traditional middle school students yesterday. So, congratulations to everyone involved and I want to highlight the individual winners, well the individual group winner, not individual, sorry, the group winners from the schools.

So, the overall female winner for middle school interschool sports was the Saltus Grammar School. The overall male winner for middle school interschool sports was the Whitney Institute Middle School and the overall school again, defending their title was the Saltus Grammar School. So, congratulations to them. Congratulations to their PE teachers, many of them I do know well, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, from a previous life.

Also, I would like to send congrats to all primary school students who are going to take part this afternoon. So primary school students (or maybe now) are doing interschool sports. And that is a very important part of sporting that we have had over the history of time in Bermuda.

And just switching gears a little bit, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to send congratulations—and this was an event that I attended a couple of weeks ago and that is to the Grace [Methodist] Church. Many would know that Grace Church down there on North Shore [Road] which happens to be in Pembroke East, constituency 15. They celebrated 115 years, I believe, a couple of weeks ago and I had the opportunity to attend with my branch chair, and I want to shout out to two gentlemen who were honoured by Grace Church for their service and that is Mr. Gino Brangman, who lives in constituency 15, and . . . forgive me, I forget his first name but I will go with Mr. Mallory, who was also honoured.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Right on the bell.

Is there any other Member who wishes to speak? I recognise the Government Whip. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Good morning, [Madam Deputy] Speaker. Thank you for recognising me. Good morning to my colleagues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like congratulations to be sent to a very good family friend of ours and I would imagine you might want to be included once I give the name. It is now Dr. Jana Pitcher, who has just recently graduated from Liberty University with a doctorate in education in educational leadership.

Just for some background, Dr. Pitcher is the daughter of a long-standing party member, Ms. Ianthia Butler, and she has recently, I think, been a past chair of your constituency, if that is correct. So, I ask that congratulations be sent out. And as I said, I wish to associate you, if you wish. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any other Members who wish to . . . I recognise the Member from constituency 13.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker

I would like to join in with the Member who just [stood] for the congratulations for Dr. Pitcher. Dr. Pitcher is probably one of our finest principals within our system, coming from . . . as an administrator at the preschool level to now where she resides at the Gilbert Institute, which will be closing at the end of this

year. But she will be moving on to another location. She is probably one of the top principals that we do have within our system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to say congratulations to St. Philip A.M.E. who launched their series of recognising the matriarchs of the A.M.E. church for St. Philip, and this Sunday was recognition of, one, my grandmother and of my great aunt, Catherine Stovel. It was interesting as I was doing the history for this event to have to go back in memory and remember actually having conversations with my great aunt who was old enough to have lived in Tucker's Town, and was old enough to have been removed from Tucker's Town and help build not only the church that was in Tucker's Town and eventually destroyed, but the new church that now sits on Harrington Sound Road. So, it was an emotional Sunday for myself and my family who attended that service to recognise those two great women who helped build that church and reminisce about their time spent in Tucker's Town prior to being forcibly removed.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 36. Member, you have the floor.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would just like to take the opportunity. I would like to continue with the congratulations that I began at our last sitting for constituency 36 for the Musical Extravaganza where they honoured one of our most outstanding musicians in Bermuda, who is a member of our constituency, Mr. Max Maybury. It was certainly a wonderful time for Mr. Maybury, because that week he was also celebrated by [Wendell] "Shine" Hayward and honoured as well as honoured in the Spring into the Arts [Festival] for the educational school system. So, I would like to congratulate them and if possible, a letter be written to acknowledge their hard work and the contribution of Mr. Maybury.

I would also like to take the opportunity to offer thanks and congratulations to Reverend Cyril Simmons and his wife, Mrs. Regina Simmons, who are the organisers for the National Day of Prayer, which was held on the grounds of the House of Assembly. And we would like to thank the team that worked along with them. We would like to thank the members of the Legislature who came for the meeting that was held last week on those sacred grounds, and we would like to thank our community for remembering the importance of prayer and the power of coming together to lift the concerns of our joint community.

Thank you so much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak? I recognise the Minister from constituency 4.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I want to take the opportunity to give congratulatory remarks. If House Members are not aware, this month we are recognising mental health for our youth, and yesterday I had the opportunity to sit in on a Youth Mental Health Show debate. And our young people were debating the topic: "This House believes that the age of consent to access mental health services should be reduced from 18 to 16." And it was . . . first of all, I want to congratulate the debaters who had the research, endurance and courage to come forward with their remarks as it relates to this topic. And they brought forward some very important considerations being that this month is anti-stigma month for mental health. They were relating the change from adult to 16 so that more youth could have access to mental health services—not necessarily medication or prescription, but mental health services as a whole. And so, I want to congratulate the debaters as there were some involvement with the debate clubs, or youth groups, as well as Mirrors. And so, I want to say a big well done to our debaters.

As well as the Office of Youth Affairs who put on a youth mindfulness fair yesterday. Sorry, the debate was on Monday, not yesterday. But the youth mindfulness fair for our young people, which was put on by the Office of Youth Affairs, was run very well. A couple of Members of Parliament, Ministers, did attend that event as well. But they had opportunities to do yoga and some mindfulness activities, some therapy through art. And it just gives us the opportunity to let our young people know, particularly with mental health [issues], that there are other ways in which you can get—and I would like to associate Minister Rabain as well as Minister Adams, who also attended. I think—the Attorney General also had attended as well. So that our young people have a better understanding of mental health and that it is . . . we are not developing these stereotypes and beliefs and perspectives in our mind with people who are having difficulty with mental health. And so, it is good to reach out to the young people in that way. So, I want to thank all those persons who were involved in planning those activities and please take the opportunity to contribute to other mental health activities for our youth this month.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak on congrats and/or obits?

There being none, we shall move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

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

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the Orders of the Day, and we will be resuming into the Committee of Supply for further consideration.

I call on the Minister of Cabinet Office to move us.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House now resume in the Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we resume into Committee of Supply.

Are there any objections? There are none. So, moved.

I call on Member Lawrence Scott to assume the Chair.

House in Committee at 10:40 am

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Chairman: Good morning, Members.

With it having been moved. Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

We are now doing Public Works and Environment, Heads 36, 53, *[sic]* 68, 81 and 82. This is a four-and-a-half-hour debate, starting now.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Could you read those heads again?

The Chairman: We have Heads 36, 53, *[sic]* 68, 81 and 82.

[Crosstalk]

An Hon. Member: I don't see [Head] 53.

[Pause]

The Chairman: We are doing Public Works and Environment for Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82 and this is a four-and-a-half-hour debate.

Minister Adams, you have the floor.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you. Thank you and good morning, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move the following Heads 36, the Ministry of Public Works Headquarters; 68, Parks; 79 Environment and Natural Resources; 81 Public Lands and Buildings; 82 Works and Engineering be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, today I rise to address this Honourable House on a matter that is fundamental to the very functioning, safety, and future of our country—the work and budget of the Ministry of Public Works and Environment for the fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, this Ministry does more than just maintain infrastructure—it underpins the daily lives of every resident and visitor, supports the engine of our economy, and safeguards the natural beauty and environmental health of our Island home. It is the Ministry through which we manage Bermuda's most valuable physical and environmental assets and deliver the essential services that keep the country running. The scope of the Ministry's portfolio is unmatched in breadth and complexity. Allow me to illustrate the scale and significance of the responsibilities we bear:

- More than 2,000 acres of public land and over 750 government buildings, carefully managed by the Department of Public Lands and Buildings. These assets hold a combined insured value exceeding \$1.5 billion and include eve-

rything from schools and clinics to government offices and historical sites.

- A network of over 600 public roads, totalling approximately 225 kilometres, forming the life-lines of our economy—carrying people, goods, services, and opportunity to every corner of the Island.
- Over 80 public docks and purpose-built berths, critical to our maritime economy, enabling the docking of cruise ships, cargo vessels, fishing boats, and private watercraft—linking Bermuda to the world and supporting jobs in shipping, tourism, and trade.
- Municipal solid waste collection and disposal for over 60,000 residents and visitors to ensure the cleanliness of our Island and maintain the health and welfare of our people through environmentally responsible means.
- Freshwater reservoirs with a combined storage capacity of more than two million gallons, representing one of the most strategically important and scarce resources we possess. The Ministry is a guardian of this essential supply.
- Seventy-five public parks, beaches, school grounds, and recreational spaces, which we not only maintain for public enjoyment, but also protect for future generations as stewards of our environment and biodiversity.

And, Mr. Chairman, I am proud to note the Ministry's growing leadership in sustainability and climate resilience—a responsibility that has become more urgent with each passing year.

We are actively undertaking:

- Island-wide waste reduction initiatives, including enhanced recycling collection, the expansion of household composting pilots, strategic upgrades at the Material Recovery Facility, and ongoing investment in the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility;
- Green energy infrastructure projects, including the installation of solar PV systems across multiple government sites, the integration of energy-efficient lighting and HVAC systems, and accelerating the uptake of electric vehicles and charging stations;
- Marine and coastal conservation programmes, such as shoreline stabilisation works, mangrove replanting, and the promotion of best practices in marina and boating operations;
- Climate resilience strategies, along with the construction of flood defences, sea wall rehabilitation, and investment in sustainable drainage systems;

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Public Works and Environment is a Ministry that touches every life, every day. From the roads we drive, to the schools our children attend, to the beaches we enjoy, to the

rainwater we rely on—this Ministry is woven into the very fabric of life in Bermuda.

But more than that, it is a Ministry that must look forward. The challenges of the 21st century—climate change, rising sea levels, ageing infrastructure, resource scarcity, and changing demographics—require vision, coordination, and investment. That is what this budget seeks to enable.

Strategic Investment for Long-Term Impact

Hon. Jache Adams: Infrastructure is not merely about fixing potholes or maintaining buildings. It is a strategic asset—one that determines how efficiently our economy functions, how sustainably we manage our resources, and how prepared we are for the future.

Our investment in infrastructure

- drives economic growth by enabling commerce, improving logistics, and supporting the movement of people and goods;
- supports workforce development, creating skilled and semi-skilled jobs in construction, engineering, environmental management, and public services;
- enhances our international competitiveness, particularly in tourism, by ensuring a clean, functional, and welcoming environment for visitors;
- promotes equity, by improving access to public services and opportunities for all Bermudians;
- protects the environment, by integrating sustainability into our planning, procurement, and operations; and
- builds resilience, helping us respond effectively to natural disasters, climate threats, and infrastructure failure.

Mr. Chairman, this is why, as outlined on page B-201, the Ministry has been allocated a 6 per cent increase in its overall budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year. This increase is a clear and deliberate signal of this Government's strong commitment to investing in the core infrastructure and environmental systems that form the foundation of Bermuda's long-term progress and prosperity.

The Operational Budget, also known as the Current Account, stands at \$84,140,000, supporting the day-to-day services, personnel, and maintenance functions essential to the Ministry's mandate. The Ministry also anticipates generating \$16,286,000 in revenue over the fiscal year, through fees, service charges, and other sources.

In addition, the Ministry has been allocated a Capital Budget totalling \$57,327,000. This includes \$50,492,000 earmarked for Capital Development Projects, such as major infrastructure upgrades and public works improvements, and \$6,835,000 for Capital Acquisitions, which will fund the purchase of critical

equipment and technologies needed to modernise service delivery.

This substantial capital investment enables the Ministry to press forward with long-deferred infrastructure works, address maintenance backlogs, upgrade essential facilities, and implement transformative environmental initiatives that have been in the planning stages. It reflects not only financial commitment, but confidence in the Ministry's ability to deliver results for the people of Bermuda.

To support this work, the Ministry's established staffing level for the fiscal year 2025/26 is 720 full-time equivalents [FTEs] showing a reduction of 43. It is important to clarify that this reduction does not represent a loss of jobs or a downsizing of the Ministry's workforce. Rather, it is the result of a revised and more accurate approach to position budgeting. In previous years, the reported number of posts included all positions on the department's current establishment list, regardless of whether they were actively filled, underactive recruitment, or even funded. This approach created a discrepancy between the official headcount and the actual operational staffing levels.

For fiscal year 2025/26, we have adopted a more realistic and transparent methodology. The revised figures now reflect only those posts that are either currently filled or funded and in the process of being filled through active recruitment. This change ensures that the staffing figures presented are more closely aligned with the Ministry's true operational capacity, providing a clearer picture of workforce resources and enabling better planning and accountability.

Mr. Chairman, while we fully acknowledge that the Ministry continues to require additional personnel resources to meet the growing demands on our services, this new approach to position budgeting represents a responsible step toward greater financial accuracy and accountability. By aligning the reported staffing numbers with actual, funded positions, we are better able to manage costs and balance the books, while still keeping a clear view of where staffing gaps exist.

At this time, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the dedicated team across the Ministry of Public Works and Environment. Your efforts may not always be visible to the public eye, but their impact is felt every single day. Your commitment and service are truly invaluable, and I thank each and every one of you for your continued dedication.

Mr. Chairman, with that said, this budget represents more than a financial allocation. It is a vision for a stronger, cleaner, more resilient Bermuda—one where infrastructure serves the people, where development respects the environment, and where government leads by example.

As stewards of both our built environment and our natural heritage, this Ministry stands ready to

meet today's demands while preparing for tomorrow's challenges.

With that, I now direct Honourable Members to Head 36, Ministry of Public Works and Environment Headquarters, where the detailed financial and operational breakdown is available for review on pages B-202 through B-206, page C-5 and page C-13.

HEAD 36—MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the overarching objective of the Ministry Headquarters (Finance and Administration) is to serve as the central coordinating and support hub for the entire Ministry. Its primary function is to provide the essential financial, administrative, human resource, and strategic planning services that enable the effective operation of all departments under the Ministry's umbrella.

These include the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, the Department of Works and Engineering, the Department of Parks, and the Department of Environment and Natural Resources—each of which delivers a wide range of vital programmes and public services across the Island. From infrastructure maintenance and land management, to environmental protection and recreational space upkeep, the success of these departments depends heavily on the efficiency, oversight, and support provided by the Ministry Headquarters.

The Headquarters ensures that departmental operations are not only properly resourced, but also aligned with Government policy, regulatory frameworks, and fiscal accountability. It plays a critical role in budgeting, procurement, inventory management, performance monitoring, and compliance—helping to ensure that the Ministry as a whole functions cohesively and delivers measurable results for the people of Bermuda.

Simply put, the Ministry Headquarters provides the backbone of administrative and financial stability that allows each department to focus on its core mandate, innovative where necessary, and execute its programmes with integrity and professionalism. Mr. Chairman, the services provided by the Ministry Headquarters are organised into the following five programmes which are found on page B-203:

1. Head Office Administration, 3601;
2. Accounts, 3610;
3. Purchasing, 3611;
4. Telecommunications, 3612;
5. Central Office Administration, 3613.

The Ministry Headquarters total operational budget for 2025/26 is \$6,620,000 an increase of \$293,000.00 which will be explained later in this presentation.

Head Office Administration Programme, 3601

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Head Office Administration Programme 3601 encompasses three core components: the Executive Office, Headquarters Administration, and Safety and Health. Together, these units form the strategic and operational nucleus of the Ministry, ensuring coordinated leadership, policy implementation, and workforce safety across all departments.

Under the direction of the Permanent Secretary, Headquarters Administration provides centralised oversight and management support to the Ministry's departments. This includes ensuring that the Minister's strategic policy priorities are executed efficiently and effectively. Specifically, the unit is responsible for the implementation of the Ministry's Throne Speech initiatives, the execution and monitoring of the annual business plan, oversight of health and safety compliance, and the coordination of numerous administrative projects and special assignments. In essence, it ensures that the Ministry remains aligned with Government goals while operating in a structured, accountable, and results-driven manner.

Mr. Chairman, a vital component of this programme is the Safety and Health Office, which plays an essential role in safeguarding the well-being of Ministry employees and the public alike. During the 2024/25 fiscal year, the Office delivered over 12 safety training sessions, totalling 68 hours of instruction, and attended by more than 100 Ministry staff. These sessions covered key areas such as workplace hazard awareness, equipment handling, emergency protocols, and site-specific risk mitigation.

In addition to training, the Ministry conducted a range of safety and health assessments across various operations. These assessments were not only critical in protecting employees as they carry out essential and, at times, hazardous duties, but also instrumental in mitigating risks to the general public where Ministry activities intersect with public spaces. As a result of these evaluations, new safety protocols and procedures have been developed and implemented, strengthening the Ministry's overall culture of safety and operational responsibilities.

Mr. Chairman, the operational budget for programme 3601, Head Office Administration for the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$2,473,000. This represents an increase of \$41,000 over the previous year's allocation. The primary drivers of this increase are related to pay scale upgrades for staff positions, including upward adjustments such as from PS Grade 20 to PS Grade 21, and the implementation of findings from the Management Consulting Services job description review process, which resulted in revised compensation levels to reflect updated job scopes and responsibilities.

Mr. Chairman, I also wish to take this opportunity to remind Honourable Members that in February of this year, the Government fulfilled its 2024 commitment to place public sector workers ahead of infla-

tion, while helping to offset the financial burden resulting from six of the eight wage freezes endured by civil servants in previous years. This adjustment is reflected across various Ministry programmes and will be referenced throughout this presentation to help explain some of the budgetary increases detailed.

Public Works Accounts Programme, 3610

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Accounts Programme 3610 plays a critical role in the financial stewardship of the Ministry by delivering a wide range of core accounting services to all operating departments. These services include accounts payable, accounts receivable, payroll processing, capital asset management, and both financial and non-financial reporting functions that are essential for transparent and accountable public administration.

This section is responsible for the preparation and distribution of both the monthly and weekly payroll, ensuring that staff are compensated in a timely and accurate manner. It also oversees the issuance of vendor cheques and invoices for services rendered by the Ministry's operational units. In addition, the Accounts Programme facilitates the collection and recording of all Ministry revenues, including payments made by online banking, credit card, cash, and cheque—ensuring accurate and secure reconciliation of funds received for public services.

A key enabler of this programme's effectiveness is the use of a centralised government accounting system, through which the teams manage the annual budget preparation process and produces monthly financial management reports for the Ministry and the Budget Office. These reports serve as vital tools for informed decision-making, allowing for continuous monitoring and control of expenditures across both the Current Account and the Ministry's Capital Development and Capital Acquisition budgets.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2025/26 fiscal year, the operational budget for Accounts Programme 3610 is \$1,380,000 representing an increase of \$119,000 compared to the previous year's budget. This increase is largely attributed to staff-related adjustments, including the filling of two previously vacant positions—which, in the last fiscal year, were only budgeted for half-year funding—as well as the public service salary increases referenced earlier in this presentation.

This investment in staffing ensures the Ministry maintains the capacity to manage its growing financial responsibilities, enhance internal controls, and improve service delivery through efficient and timely financial operations.

Purchasing Programme, 3611

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Purchasing Programme 3611 provides a critical, centralised support function within the Ministry, offering procurement

services, inventory management, warehousing, and disposal of surplus assets. This programme not only supports the operational needs of the Ministry's internal departments—such as Works and Engineering, Parks, Public Lands and Buildings, and Environment and Natural Resources—but also extends procurement assistance to external government departments when required.

Its role is fundamental to ensuring that materials, supplies, and services are sourced efficiently, economically, and in compliance with Government regulations, while also ensuring accountability in the management of public resources.

Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming 2025/26 fiscal year, the Purchasing Section will undertake a strategic focus on reviewing and strengthening internal controls, operational procedures, and policy frameworks.

Key priorities for the Purchasing Programme this year include

- the creation and enhancement of supply chain-related policies, aimed at standardising procurement practices and improving transparency;
- the updating of operational procedures and end-user guidance documentation to reflect the centralised model and evolving best practices;
- closer collaboration with the Accountant General's Department to fully leverage the capabilities of the E1 enterprise system; and
- the refinement of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor performance, track procurement efficiency, and support data-driven decision-making.

This modernised approach is expected to deliver long-term efficiencies, reduce waste, enhance accountability, and provide better service delivery across all Ministry departments.

Mr. Chairman, the operational budget for the Purchasing Programme 3611 for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$1,538,000, representing an increase of \$69,000 over the previous year's allocation. As with other programme areas, this increase is staff-related, reflecting pay scale upgrades—for example, positions moving from PS Grade 20 to PS Grade 21—as well as the previously referenced public service salary adjustments introduced earlier this year to help offset prior wage freezes and ensure compensation keeps pace with inflation.

This additional funding will ensure that the Ministry is properly resourced to professionalise procurement practices, optimise supply chain operations, and continue to uphold the principles of good governance in the management of public funds and assets.

Telecommunications Programme, 3612

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Telecommunications Programme 3612 plays a vital role in the

Ministry by managing both internal and external communications infrastructure, a responsibility that ensures the seamless operation of government services, public safety, and national connectivity.

Internally, the programme provides and maintains essential communication tools, including the replacement and servicing of telephone systems and related equipment, and the management of mobile service contracts for staff across all Ministry departments. These services support day-to-day operations, facilitate coordination among teams, and enable real-time response for frontline workers in the field.

Externally, the Programme oversees a portfolio of critical infrastructure in the form of seven government-owned telecommunications towers, strategically located at:

- Somerset Police Station,
- Alton Hill,
- Warwick Camp,
- Police Communications Operations in Prospect,
- The Quarry,
- Fort George,
- And St. David's Lighthouse.

These towers serve as crucial communications hubs—not only for Government departments, including emergency and protective services—but also, in some cases, for third-party providers that support Bermuda's broader telecommunications network. Their continued operation is essential for both national security and the delivery of government services.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to also announce a significant infrastructure project planned for this fiscal year: in collaboration with the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, the Ministry will be constructing a new communications tower in St. David's. This will allow for the relocation of all communications equipment currently mounted on the St. David's Lighthouse, thereby enabling the commencement of long-overdue restoration work on the Lighthouse itself—a nationally important cultural and historical landmark. I will speak to the capital funding for this project in more detail during my remarks on the Capital Acquisitions.

Mr. Chairman, the operational budget for Telecommunications Programme 3612 for the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$807,000, reflecting a \$26,000 increase over the previous year's allocation. This increase is primarily due to higher service charges for Government telephones and mobile usage, consistent with increased departmental reliance on mobile technology and external communication systems to support field and emergency operations.

This budget ensures that both the internal communications needs of the Ministry and the external infrastructure supporting island-wide public communications are properly maintained, modernised, and positioned to meet Bermuda's current and future needs.

The Chairman: And for the listening audience, we are on Head 36 of the Ministry of Public Works and Environment with the Minister Jache Adams presenting. He is currently talking about telecommunications which is under line item 3612.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And now that I have finished that section, I will move on.

Central Office Administration Programme, 3613

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Central Office Administration Programme 3613—formerly known as the Human Resource Programme—was historically focused on direct employee services and personnel management within the Ministry. While many of these human resource functions, such as recruitment, employee onboarding, and organisational development, have since been centralised under the Department of Employee and Organisational Development, the Ministry continues to play an active and supportive role in several critical areas.

Specifically, the Ministry retains responsibility for assisting with recruitment processes, supporting employee relations, and coordinating training and professional development opportunities for staff across its various departments. These responsibilities are essential to maintaining a skilled, engaged, and well-supported public service workforce—particularly in a Ministry as operationally diverse and workforce-intensive as Public Works and Environment.

Mr. Chairman, the second key component of this programme is Central Filing, which plays a vital role in the management of official records for the Ministry. This includes the secure handling, archiving, and retrieval of human resource records, Cabinet documents, capital project files, and contracts. Central Filing also ensures the preservation and accessibility of records associated with the Ministry's legislative responsibilities, ensuring compliance with statutory obligations and supporting transparency and institutional memory.

The Central Filing function is especially important in the current climate of digital transformation, as the Ministry works to modernise its records management practices while safeguarding the integrity and confidentiality of both digital and physical records. These efforts not only support operational efficiency but also uphold the principles of good governance and accountability.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Central Office Administration Programme 3613 has been allocated an operational budget of \$422,000, representing an increase of \$38,000 over the current year's budget. This increase is attributed primarily to two factors:

- First, the expansion of training and development opportunities for Ministry staff, which

supports capacity-building and career progression;

- And second, the salary uplifts resulting from the Government's commitment to address long-standing public service wage freezes, as referenced in earlier remarks.

This allocation ensures that the Ministry can continue to support its departments and personnel effectively, while also maintaining robust administrative systems that are essential to both daily operations and long-term strategic goals.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now direct Honourable Members to page B-204 of the Estimates Book, which provides a detailed breakdown of the Ministry's Current Account Estimates for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Upon review, you will note a collective increase of \$141,000 in salaries and an additional \$108,000 in wages, alongside a \$68,000 increase in the Ministry's training budget. These increases reflect this Government's continued commitment to investing in our public officers—not only by ensuring fair compensation in line with revised pay scales, but also by equipping staff with the professional development opportunities needed to grow, adapt, and lead within an evolving public service environment.

Mr. Chairman, you will also observe an \$884,000 increase under the Professional Services line item. In this context, professional services refer to individuals or entities retained to support public officers in the delivery of programmes, projects, and strategic objectives. This includes the hiring of temporary personnel, summer students, local and international consultants, and specialist service providers or firms that possess the technical expertise necessary to supplement our internal capacity.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the increase of professional services, the Ministry is placing a stronger emphasis on ensuring that these resources are strategically deployed and accountability-driven. To this end, we will be monitoring the outcomes and deliverables associated with each engagement. This includes clearly defined scopes of work, performance benchmarks, and reporting requirements for consultants and contracted service providers.

By doing so, the Ministry aims to maximise the return on investment for every dollar spent in this category—ensuring that these professional services do not simply fill gaps, but actively contribute to capacity building, project acceleration, and the successful execution of key initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, you will further note a \$900,000 reduction under Grants and Contributions. This is not a cut in overall government support, but rather a realignment of funding responsibilities. Specifically, this amount has been transferred to the Min-

istry of Housing and Municipalities, which now has jurisdiction over the Corporation of St. George's. The associated grant, previously administered under this Ministry, was operational in nature and pertained to support for the Corporation when it fell under our remit.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, through the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, the Ministry manages the rental of designated parking spaces within Government-owned car parks to both public officers and, where available, members of the general public. These spaces are offered at a nominal fee.

For the 2025/26 fiscal year, we anticipate this initiative will generate approximately \$16,000 in revenue. While not a major source of income, it reflects the Ministry's ongoing efforts to optimise the use of government assets and identify additional revenue streams that help offset operational costs.

Full-Time Equivalents (FTE)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the budgeted number of employees for the Ministry Headquarters is 39 as reflected on page B-205, no change from the previous fiscal year.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as outlined on page B-206, the Ministry Headquarters has established a number of key performance targets for the 2025/26 fiscal year to ensure continued accountability, safety, and operational excellence.

Specifically, the Ministry Headquarters will:

- Anticipate the filing of approximately 12 accident reports over the course of the year. While our ultimate goal is to achieve zero incidents, this projection—given the Ministry's large workforce and broad operational remit—is considered within acceptable safety margins. Importantly, every incident is reviewed thoroughly, with corrective actions taken to reduce future risk.
- Conduct four comprehensive safety and health assessments, each followed by the implementation of corrective measures to improve worksite conditions and reduce hazards.
- Deliver 12 safety and health training sessions for Ministry employees, reinforcing compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1982 and the Occupational Safety and Health Regulations 2009, while promoting a culture of safety and awareness across the organisation.

- Continue to meet Government-mandated deadlines for public officer performance reporting, ensuring that HR evaluations are conducted in a timely and structured manner.
- Ensure that new employee records are updated within three weeks of the start date, including beneficiary information, training profiles, and other relevant documentation. This contributes to stronger personnel management and more efficient service delivery.
- Maintain compliance with Public Access to Information (PATI) requirements by ensuring all executed contracts are accurately recorded and published, thereby upholding standards of transparency and good governance.
- Commence a new series of training sessions focused on procurement best practices. These sessions are being reintroduced following the retirement of a key staff member last year. With a new team member now on board and familiarising themselves with internal processes, the Ministry is positioned to strengthen procurement integrity and efficiency moving forward.

Mr. Chairman, these performance measures reflect the Ministry's commitment to continuous improvement, legislative compliance, and the effective stewardship of public resources. They form part of a broader effort to build capacity, reduce risk, and enhance accountability at all levels of the organisation.

Capital Development

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, turning to page C-5, I wish to highlight that there are certain cost centres reflected under the Ministry Headquarters which, in practical terms, are managed by other departments within the broader Ministry.

While the Budget Book identifies five capital cost centres under the Ministry Headquarters, it is important to clarify that only two of these are directly overseen by the Headquarters team. The remaining three are managed by their respective departments and will be discussed in detail during their individual budget presentations under the appropriate heads.

Mr. Chairman, focusing now on the capital projects that are managed directly by the Ministry Headquarters, the 2025/26 Capital Expenditure Plan includes the following allocations under Capital Development:

- Cost centre 75050—Minor Works: allocated \$300,000; and
- Cost centre 75053—Miscellaneous Small Projects: allocated \$280,000

These particular cost centres are typically used to fund discretionary community-based projects—small but meaningful initiatives that enhance public infrastructure, improve amenities, or respond to urgent local needs that fall outside the scope of larger

capital programmes. Examples of such works include minor building repairs, accessibility improvements, fencing installations, landscaping upgrades, and enhancements to public-use spaces.

Mr. Chairman, you will also note a decrease in the allocation for cost centre 75050 compared to the previous year. As Honourable Members may recall, during the mid-year budgetary review in 2024, this cost centre received a one-time increase specifically to support minor community projects. That additional funding was fully utilised on targeted initiatives, such as landscaping works, fencing upgrades along North Shore, and other small-scale improvements that addressed community feedback and improved the functionality and safety of public spaces.

While the allocation for 2025/26 returns to its standard level, these funds continue to play a vital role in giving the Ministry the flexibility to act swiftly on community priorities and address infrastructure needs that do not require full-scale capital project planning.

Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the total Capital Acquisitions Plan for the Ministry of Public Works—Headquarters for the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$878,500, as outlined on page C-13.

This allocation includes funding for one capital acquisition that is directly managed by the Ministry Headquarters:

- Cost centre 76868—Communications Equipment: This allocation will fund the purchase and installation of [a] new communications [tower] in St. David's. As mentioned earlier in my presentation, this new tower is critical to relocating existing telecommunications infrastructure currently mounted on the St. David's Lighthouse, thereby allowing for essential preservation and renovation works to proceed at that historically significant site.

Mr. Chairman, while the Estimates reflect three cost centres under the Ministry Headquarters, I would like to clarify that only the aforementioned cost centre—related to the communications equipment—is managed directly by the Headquarters team. The remaining two cost centres fall under the remit of the Department of Works and Engineering, and their details will be addressed in that department's specific presentation.

This targeted investment underlines the Ministry's ongoing efforts to ensure the reliability of our critical communications infrastructure, while also supporting the conservation of Bermuda's heritage assets.

Mr. Chairman, before concluding, I would like to take a moment to recognise Ms. Elizabeth Smith, who retired this past November after more than 20 years of dedicated service to the Ministry's Purchasing Section.

Ms. Smith was a cornerstone of our procurement operations, working diligently behind the scenes to ensure the Ministry's needs were met with integrity and a deep knowledge of the processes. Her calm presence, professionalism, and unwavering commitment earned her the respect and gratitude of colleagues across the Ministry.

She was not only a skilled public officer, but also a generous team member, always ready to support others and share her institutional knowledge.

On behalf of the Ministry, I extend our heartfelt thanks to Ms. Smith for her exceptional service and wish her a fulfilling and well-earned retirement.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation for the Ministry Headquarters, Head 36 and I will now turn to Head 68, the Department of Parks as found on pages B-207 through B-213, page C-6 and page C-13.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Are you opening up for questions now? Or are you going to go straight into Head 68, which is Parks?

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes.

The Chairman: All right.

HEAD 68—DEPARTMENT OF PARKS

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Parks plays a vital role in the stewardship of Bermuda's natural and recreational landscapes. It is entrusted with the administration and management of protected areas as outlined in both the Bermuda National Parks Act 1986 and the Bermuda National Parks Amendment Act 2017.

These Acts categorise protected areas into three classifications:

- Class A—[Nature] Reserves, which fall under the responsibility of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (and will be addressed in my next brief);
- Class B—Amenity Parks, managed by the Department of Parks; and
- Class C—Recreational Parks, which are overseen by the Department of Sport and Recreation.

Under Class B, the Department of Parks is responsible for 76 amenity parks, which include a broad range of public spaces, such as playgrounds, historic forts, landscaped gardens, and the extensive Bermuda Railway Trail, a treasured corridor for walkers, cyclists, and nature enthusiasts.

The department's mission is clear and impactful: *To [develop] and maintain public amenity parks, beaches, forts, and public school grounds, and to cultivate plants for use in areas under the department's remit. To provide safe, aesthetically pleasing, active*

and passive recreational and educational facilities for the enjoyment of residents and visitors alike.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to maintaining these green and cultural spaces, the department also delivers a vital Lifeguard Service at four of Bermuda's busiest public beaches: Horseshoe Bay, John Smith's Bay, Clearwater Beach, and Turtle Bay. These lifeguards are professionally trained and ensure the safety of thousands of beachgoers every year.

Beyond parkland and beaches, the Department of Parks also manages a wide-ranging portfolio of responsibilities that includes the landscape and horticultural maintenance of

- roadside verges and roundabouts;
- public school grounds;
- government health care facilities (clinics, rest homes);
- post offices and community centres;
- historic and ceremonial sites such as Clifton, The Laurels, Montpelier, and Government House.

The department is also responsible for plant propagation, cultivation, and upkeep at government properties, supporting Bermuda's biodiversity and contributing to the aesthetic appeal of public spaces across the Island.

Mr. Chairman, the work of the Department of Parks is critical not only to environmental preservation but also to public well-being, tourism, and national pride. Its contribution to the maintenance and protection of open spaces ensures that Bermuda's natural heritage is accessible, safe, and enjoyable for residents and visitors.

As we continue to face the challenges of urban development, climate change, and population growth, the goal of the department remains unwavering: to develop, conserve, and protect open spaces for current and future generations.

The value of this department cannot be overstated, and its contributions reach far beyond aesthetics—they are foundational to quality of life in Bermuda. With that in mind, I am pleased to state that the Current Account Expenditure estimate allotted to the Department of Parks for the 2025/26 fiscal year . . .

Mr. Chairman, as seen on page B-208, the Current Account Expenditure is \$11,547,000 which represents a \$1,278,000 increase over the prior year's original budget of \$10,268,882 and is broken down into five programmes:

1. Park Services, 6801
2. Lifeguard Service, 6802
3. Park Maintenance, 6803
4. Administration, 6804
5. Forts, 6805

Park Ranger Service, 6801

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the first programme under the Department of Parks is programme

6801, Park Ranger Service, associated with cost centre 78000.

The Park Ranger Service is responsible for enforcing the provisions of the National Parks Act 1986 and the National Parks Regulations 1988. Rangers patrol Bermuda's national parks, beaches, and nature reserves, monitoring the condition of these areas and the activities taking place within them. Their duties include responding to incidents, ensuring compliance with park regulations, and supporting the safe and responsible use of public lands.

Rangers also play a key role in managing special events and functions held within the parks, liaising closely with community groups, event organisers, and industry partners to ensure smooth operations and minimal environmental impact.

Mr. Chairman, beyond enforcement duties, the Park Ranger Service is deeply engaged in community outreach and education. On an annual basis, Rangers support and participate in a range of public service initiatives, including:

- Charity walks and cycling fundraisers,
- CPR, First Aid, and AED certification courses,
- Guided interpretive tours for schools and summer camps,
- Organised clean-up campaigns—both scheduled and post-hurricane,
- Collaborative projects with civic and environmental organisations.

The [Park Ranger] Service enjoys strong working relationships with key stakeholders, including the Bermuda Police Service—particularly the Community Action Team—as well as Keep Bermuda Beautiful (KBB), the Friends of the Bermuda Railway Trail, and the Association of Bermuda International Companies (ABIC). These partnerships enhance the department's ability to enforce regulations and preserve the natural beauty of our parks.

However, Mr. Chairman, despite these efforts, the issue of abandoned vehicles, boats, furniture, and illegal dumping in our parks remains a persistent challenge. The department continues to work proactively and collaboratively to address these matters and mitigate their environmental and aesthetic impact.

For the 2025/26 fiscal year, the budget allocation for the Park Ranger Service is \$575,000, representing an increase of \$77,000 compared to the previous year. This increase is primarily due to the addition of one new full-time [position] within the Ranger team, as well as the salary scale adjustments previously referenced, reflecting government-wide efforts to ensure fair compensation for public officers.

Lifeguard Service, 6802

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the second programme under the Department of Parks is programme 6802, Lifeguard Service, which falls under cost centre 78010.

This critical service is responsible for enforcing the National Parks Regulations 1988 as they pertain to public beach safety. The Lifeguard Service provides trained personnel at four public beaches—Horseshoe Bay, John Smith's Bay, Clearwater Beach, and Turtle Bay—and delivers water safety outreach across the Island.

In addition to their daily responsibilities, lifeguards support community events such as the Bermuda Triathlon, providing essential water safety oversight. They also contribute to the Emergency Measures Organisation (EMO) by offering real-time surf condition assessments before and after storms and hurricanes. Moreover, their training makes them valuable assets during post-storm recovery efforts, assisting with tree felling, road clearance, and general restoration work on government properties and beaches.

Mr. Chairman, as I have noted previously, enhanced lifeguard coverage at our beaches is urgently needed—particularly as tourism rebounds and considering recent tragic incidents that have highlighted the vital role these frontline professionals play in protecting lives.

At present, the service is largely seasonal, resulting in gaps in coverage during the off-season, which leaves our beaches vulnerable. Despite previous budget increases, the department continues to experience challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified lifeguards—an issue compounded by global shortages in water safety personnel.

To address this, the Government is taking decisive action. We are

- reviewing the organisational structure of the Lifeguard Service,
- updating job descriptions and compensation packages,
- and collaborating with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) to elevate training standards and safety protocols.

In support of this commitment, the 2025/26 budget allocates \$1,520,000 to the Lifeguard Service, an increase of \$818,000 over the previous fiscal year.

This enhanced funding will facilitate the recruitment of up to eight full-time consultant lifeguards, who will be engaged on one- to two-year contracts. This measure ensures consistent, year-round coverage at our major beaches while longer-term human resources processes are finalised.

To clarify, the additional funding is not simply divided among consultants; rather, it supports a comprehensive staffing package that includes

- a consultant pay rate of \$30.61 per hour,
- room and board for all eight consultants, including any Bermudian hires who meet the criteria,
- health insurance coverage for these frontline safety personnel,

- modest pay scale increases for seasonal life-guards, aimed at improving retention,
- and an expanded contingency budget to accommodate overtime and emergency deployments during hurricane season and other crises.

Mr. Chairman, this investment reflects the Government's clear and unwavering commitment to public safety, workforce stability, and the protection of our residents and visitors.

I am pleased to report that the department is in the final stages of securing these qualified individuals, and I look forward to providing this Honourable House with a formal update in the near future.

Park Maintenance, 6803

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the third programme within the Department of Parks is programme 6803, Park Maintenance Service, encompassing nine distinct sub-programmes as detailed on page B-208. This division employs the majority of the department's staff and is integral to the day-to-day maintenance of Bermuda's protected areas.

In accordance with the Bermuda National Parks Act 1986 and its amendments, the Park Maintenance Service is responsible for

- landscape maintenance of amenity parks, beaches, and associated facilities;
- sanitation services across the Bermuda National Parks System;
- horticultural upkeep along roadside verges, public school grounds, clinics, rest homes, post offices, and other Government properties, including Clifton, The Laurels, Montpelier, and Government House.

Additionally, the department's versatile staff provide vital support to the Emergency Measures Organisation, assisting with recovery efforts following hurricanes and storms to ensure Bermuda's swift return to normalcy.

As such, the section's Budget Allocations for 2025/26 are as follows:

- Government House and Camden Programme [(78015)]: \$357,000 (an increase of \$64,000), reflecting staff reassignments and salary scale adjustments.
- Maintenance and Development Programme [(78020)]: \$1,074,000 (an increase of \$120,000), due to staff movements and salary scale adjustments.
- Eastern Parks Programme [(78030)]: \$855,000 (a decrease of \$148,000), resulting from staff reassignments.
- Tree Service Programme [(78035)]: \$431,000 (a decrease of \$108,000), attributed to staff movements.
- Western Parks Programme [(78040)]: \$1,461,000 (an increase of \$48,000), due to

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staff reassignments and salary scale increases.

- School Grounds Programme [(78045)]: \$556,000 (an increase of \$21,000), primarily due to increased material costs.
- Tulo Valley Nursery Programme [(78055)]: \$695,000 (an increase of \$276,000), reflecting staff reassignments and salary scale adjustments.
- Botanical Gardens and Arboretum Programme [(78065)]: \$1,549,000 (a decrease of \$36,000), resulting from staff reassignments.
- Railway Trail Programme [(78100)]: \$320,000, consistent with the previous budget cycle. This programme requires targeted landscape management, including the removal of invasive species and the introduction of native and endemic plants.

Mr. Chairman, the department's commitment to maintaining Bermuda's parks and green spaces is unwavering. Through strategic staffing and budget allocations, we continue to ensure that these areas remain safe, accessible, and aesthetically pleasing to residents and visitors alike.

Administration, 6804

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the fourth programme at the Department of Parks is 6804, Administration and Planning, cost centre 78050.

The Administration and Planning Programme 78050 is the hub of the department where the operational and organisational functions that underpin the running of the department are conceived and implemented. This section works closely with the superintendents as there is collaboration required on many of the Parks' initiatives.

The Administration and Planning Teams are responsible for the issuing permits to lease areas within the amenity parks and forts. The Planning component of this programme is responsible for drafting and developing plans for areas within the national parks, as well as park planning and design, the drafting of park management plans, the issuance of licences, and leases for concession operations in addition to capital project oversight, parks assets analysis and other key operational activities.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for this programme is \$1,371,000, an increase of \$53,000 attributed to salary scale increases.

Mr. Chairman, the Administrative section also includes the Agricultural Exhibition, cost centre 78110 which has a \$236,625 budget an increase of \$64,607 to help bring this annual tradition to fruition.

Forts, 6805

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the fifth and final programme under the Department of Parks is pro-

gramme 6805, Forts and Historical Sites, listed under cost centre 78080.

The Department of Parks is the steward of Bermuda's rich cultural and historical legacy, including the preservation and upkeep of numerous forts and historical sites. These treasured locations are not only integral to our heritage but continue to serve as popular venues for both residents and visitors.

Fort St. Catherine, in particular, remains the most visited fortification and holds special significance as part of the UNESCO World Heritage Site in the Town of St. George's. Recognised as one of the top cultural attractions in Bermuda, Fort St. Catherine is especially appealing to history enthusiasts and continues to generate strong interest for events such as weddings, guided tours, and educational visits—with bookings already secured for the 2025/26 fiscal year.

To preserve and promote these important sites, the department will continue to collaborate with key stakeholders, including the Bermuda Tourism Authority and other local partners, to enhance marketing efforts, to improve accessibility, and ensure proper maintenance of these historical assets.

In support of these efforts, a total allocation of \$541,000 has been set aside for this programme in the 2025/26 fiscal year—a modest increase of \$23,000 from the previous year. This increase will fund staff training initiatives and salary scale adjustments, enabling the department to strengthen its capacity to protect and showcase Bermuda's cultural heritage.

Before I move on, Mr. Chairman, it would be remiss of me not to mention Mrs. Francine Trott—a relative of my honourable colleagues from the eastern end of the Island and a dedicated public servant whose career has left an indelible mark on the Department of Parks, particularly within the Forts Section.

Mrs. Trott has served the department with distinction for over 30 years, bringing not only a wealth of knowledge and experience, but also a deep sense of pride and care to her work. Her commitment to preserving and maintaining some of Bermuda's most treasured historic sites has been nothing short of extraordinary.

Throughout her tenure, she played a vital role in ensuring that our forts—which are symbols of Bermuda's rich history—remained safe, accessible, and well cared for, not just for our residents, but also for the hundreds of visitors who walk their grounds each year.

Beyond her technical contributions, Mrs. Trott has been a mentor and a source of steady support to her colleagues—always willing to share her knowledge, offer a helping hand, and take pride in a job well done. Her presence within the department will be missed dearly.

On behalf of the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, I extend our heartfelt gratitude to Mrs.

Francine Trott for her decades of dedicated service. We wish her all the very best in her retirement—may it be filled with health, happiness, and the same sense of purpose that she brought to her work each and every day.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. And for the listening public we are on the Ministry of Public Works and Environment. It is a four-and-a-half-hour debate, five Heads—36, 68, 79, 81 and 82. We have just completed the second head which is Head 68 and I believe that the Minister is going to go onto Head 79.

Hon. Jache Adams: Not quite, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Oh, sorry.

Hon. Jache Adams: Almost finished.

The Chairman: I was too slow on the last one, too fast on this one.

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes, yes, yes.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jache Adams: We'll get it right. We'll get it right.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now draw Honourable Members' attention to page B-209, which outlines the Ministry's Current Account Estimates for the 2025/26 fiscal year in detail.

Upon review, Members will note a collective increase of \$171,000 in salaries and an additional \$306,000 in wages. These adjustments reflect this Government's ongoing commitment to fair compensation and investment in our public officers, particularly in recognition of their dedication and the increasingly complex demands of public service.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, there is an \$800,000 increase under the Professional Services line item. As previously discussed, this allocation is tied directly to the engagement of consultant life-guards, which forms a critical part of our strategy to strengthen beach safety.

This targeted use of professional services represents not only a strategic response to staffing shortfalls but also a proactive approach to enhancing public safety during a time of growing tourism and increased beach usage.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department anticipates generating \$227,000 in revenue during the 2025/26 fiscal year—consistent with the amount collected in the previous year.

Full-Time Equivalents (FTE)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the budgeted number of employees for the Department of Parks is 132 as reflected on page B-210, a decrease of one from the previous fiscal year.

As previously noted, the reduction in the reported number of posts does not indicate job losses or downsizing but rather reflects a more accurate and transparent budgeting approach. Unlike past years, the current figures include only filled or actively funded positions, providing a more realistic view of the department's true staffing levels and supporting better planning and resource management.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as outlined on page B-211, the department has set forth a series of key performance targets for the 2025/26 fiscal year to guide service delivery, ensure legislative compliance, and reinforce our commitment to operational excellence across all programme areas.

For the Park Ranger Service, the department anticipates the following:

- Issuance of 45 camping permits within our parklands. This represents a slight increase over 2024/25, when fewer permits were issued.
- Approximately 460 special permits for large-scale events—again, an increase from last fiscal year, reflecting greater demand for park-based activities.
- A forecast of 180 incidents reported across the Parks system. While this number appears high, I am pleased to note that only 40 incidents were recorded in 2024/25, and the projection accounts for expanded reporting and monitoring.
- Ten interpretive tours are planned for the year. This is double the five conducted last year, with the previous reduction largely due to increased private-sector offerings by local tour operators.

With respect to the Lifeguard Service:

- Lifeguards are expected to provide coverage at four public beaches, with potential expansion depending on the number of qualified seasonal applicants.
- While 54 water rescues were performed in the last fiscal year, we are working to reduce this figure through enhanced public awareness, increased preventative measures, and better compliance with safety guidance.
- We will also continue to monitor and respond to metrics such as preventative actions, minor and major first aid treatments, with the goal of minimising risk through proactive engagement.

For Park Maintenance operations: the department will continue delivering high-quality landscaping, sanitation, and horticultural services across parks, beaches, school grounds, and other government properties. I am pleased to report that the team consistently met its performance expectations throughout 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, these performance indicators reflect the department's ongoing efforts to promote continuous improvement, enhance public safety, and uphold accountability. They serve as measurable outcomes tied to our broader mission of preserving Bermuda's natural and recreational assets for the enjoyment and well-being of all.

Capital Developments

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, for the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Department of Parks will undertake several important capital projects that reflect the Government's continued commitment to enhancing Bermuda's public spaces and infrastructure.

To support this, the department has been allocated \$1.2 million under the Park Improvements line item 75101, as outlined on page C-6. This funding will be used for a variety of infrastructure upgrades, including:

- repairs to the Kindley Field Boat Ramp at Stonecrusher Corner, improving access and safety for the boating community;
- installation of a Temporary Lifeguard Station at Horseshoe Bay to enhance beach safety during peak periods;
- repairs to the Tulo Valley Government Plant Nursery Greenhouse, which supports the propagation and care of flora used across public lands;
- renovations to the Cacti House, Exotic House, and Visitor's Centre at the Botanical Gardens to improve visitor experience and preserve these vital assets; and
- replacement of playground and outdoor exercise equipment at various locations across the Island to support healthy recreation and public wellness.

Mr. Chairman, I also wish to address the longstanding issue of the department's administrative headquarters. Since 2016, the department has been operating from a temporary space on the first floor of Global House in Hamilton, following the deterioration of its previous facility. This current location, while functional in the interim, is not fit for the operational or administrative needs of the department.

As such, the Government has allocated \$500,000 (also found on page C-6) to continue the design and planning of a new purpose-built Headquarters and Maintenance Facility at the Marsh Folly site. This project represents a strategic investment in the department's long-term capacity and will ensure that

staff are housed in a modern, efficient, and purpose-designed environment that enables them to better serve the public.

Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, under Capital Acquisitions, cost centre 76474, Vehicles, as outlined on page C-13, there is a reported allocation for vehicle purchases.

However, as with previous years, while this cost centre appears under the Department of Parks, it is important to clarify that the Department of Works and Engineering is responsible for managing and executing this line item. As such, further details regarding this allocation will be provided during that presentation.

Mr. Chairman, this now concludes my presentation for the Department of Parks, Head 68, and I will now turn to Head 79—Department of Environment and Natural Resources as found on pages B-214 through B-[221], C-6, C-13 and C-19.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. For the listening public, we have just concluded the second of five heads. We just finished Head 68 and the Minister is now going to go into Head 79 under the Environment and Natural Resources.

Minister.

HEAD 79—DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 79, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources [DENR], found on pages B-214 through B-221, C-6, C-13 and C-19 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mission

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, starting on page B-214, the Mission of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is *To protect Bermuda's environment and responsibly manage its natural resources*.

The department's objectives comprise the following:

1. To provide strategic direction and management in the formulation and implementation of legislation, policy, and standards to protect Bermuda's environment.
2. To reduce negative impacts to Bermuda's natural environment, biodiversity, natural resources, and marine heritage.
3. To increase the Island's food security and local food production.

4. To better ensure the survival of threatened species and habitats.
5. To improve humane care and protection of animals.
6. To improve the quality of Bermuda's ambient air and water quality.
7. To improve care and appreciation of Bermuda's natural environment and marine cultural heritage.

To meet these objectives, the department has 14 business units as shown on page B-215 each of which comprise a varied complement of skilled officers. The business units are as follows:

- 89000 Administration
- 89010 Marine Resources
- 89020 Marine Conservation
- 89030 Marine Heritage and Health
- 89040 Marine Enforcement
- 89050 Terrestrial Conservation
- 89060 Veterinary Services
- 89070 Animal Control
- 89080 Plant Protection
- 89090 Agronomy
- 89100 Pollution Control
- 89110 BAMZ Administration
- 89120 Aquarium and Zoo
- 89130 Museum

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, on page B-216 you will note that the department's total budget allocation is approximately \$9,148,000 for the 2025/26 fiscal year. This represents an increase of \$279,000, or 3 per cent when compared to the original budget of the previous year. This increase is due to the increase in salary and wages and energy costs, as well as the hiring of a new temporary assistant for the Marine Resources Section.

Mr. Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account estimates is found on page B-216 and includes the following:

- The total salaries for the department is shown on Line 1 and is an increase of \$135,000 from fiscal year 2024/25. Wages is shown on Line 2 with an increase of \$121,000, an 11 per cent increase. The total of salaries and wages represents 79 per cent of the department's budget.
- Professional Services is shown on Line 9 and is \$276,000. This budget provides funds for the overseas consultant agronomist and to undertake specialised environmental-related scientific studies and monitoring to address various pollution and fisheries issues.
- Energy is shown on Line 13 and is \$494,000. This is the same allocation as the previous year. It is noted that high energy costs are re-

quired to energise the numerous buildings managed by the department, inclusive of the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo [BAMZ], as well as the Agriculture Services Centre.

I would note that significant efforts have been made to reduce energy consumption throughout the department where possible. Both the department headquarters and the BAMZ have significant solar installations and the BAMZ also has an integrated energy reduction plan that they have been implementing for several years. An audit of energy usage across the five sites and other buildings of the department is recommended to ensure that the benefits of solar installations and other cost-saving measures are maximised.

- Grants and contributions are shown on Line 18 in the amount of \$230,000. These funds account for the grant to the Bermuda Institute for Ocean Sciences [BIOS] to address some of the requirements of the Clean Air Act. Further explanation will be provided under Grants and Contributions.

Mr. Chairman, these increases to salaries have been offset where possible with savings from building rental for a satellite fisheries warden.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department's Revenue Summary is found on page B-217. The department generates revenue from a variety of licences, permits, services and other fees including: licensing of dogs, lobster and fishing activities, water rights, clean air operating licences, crop storage fees and daily visitor admissions to BAMZ.

The department's projected revenue is estimated to be \$1,374,000 for the 2025/26 fiscal year. This estimate represents an increase of \$6,000 when compared to the original estimate of the 2024/25 fiscal year.

An analysis of the projected revenue, includes the following:

- Admissions, 8253, is shown on Line 2. Admissions are projected to increase \$38,000 over the original estimate from 2024/25. This increase is attributed to revenue expected from an upward trend in entrance fees into the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo [BAMZ].
- Several other revenue cost centres are expected to decrease slightly, and these will be explained as part of the forthcoming performance measures discussion. However, of note are the reductions of Lobster Divers Licence by \$21,000 or 33 per cent. This is reflective of a decision to reduce the number of licences to lessen the pressure on Bermuda's lobster population, which continues to show

signs of significant stress, and to help this important resource recover. It is noted that the expected reduction in dog licence revenue across the Bermuda Post Office counter in 8495 of \$40,000 and associated increase in expected revenue collected at the department head office Dog Licences reflects the transition to the GovPilot online licence payment system that is currently in the process of being beta tested.

Manpower

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department has 79 full-time equivalent posts as shown on page B-218 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. This remains the same as for the original for last year's budget.

Currently the department has 10 funded vacancies. Priority to fill the following funded posts this year include:

- Fisheries Warden
- Accounts Assistant
- Administrative Officer
- Plant Protection Officer
- Veterinary Officer
- Marketing Manager [BIU—Agriculture Service Centre]
- Marine Enforcement Officer
- Environmental Engineer
- Agronomist
- Collector of Marine Specimens

The department is in the process of identifying a trainee agronomist to provide critical services to our farmers after the previous trainee resigned in November 2024. I also note that the department continues to modernise numerous job descriptions throughout the department's organisational structure to accurately reflect operational need and priorities.

Capital Development Expenditure

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the capital expenditure budget for the department can be found on page C-6.

The department has two active capital accounts focused on minor works.

Project 75271, Minor Works for the Environment and Natural Resources is a capital minor works budget of \$150,000 that will provide for the general maintenance and upgrading of the headquarters facility and plant protection laboratory located in the Botanical Gardens, the Coney Island Facility for marine resources management and enforcement, the Government Agriculture Service Centre in Prospect, the Government kennels, and improvements in the 200 acres of Government-owned nature reserves and associated buildings managed by the department.

Due to the need for specialised facilities and educational displays \$100,000 has been allocated to the Bermuda Aquarium Museum and Zoo, for repairs to exhibits and life support systems. This is shown in Project 75236, Aquarium Refurbishment. This includes minor repairs to ensure the continued operation of the Zoo and Aquarium.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to announce that \$2,500,000 has been allocated to continue the ground investigation work for the replacement Agriculture Services Centre. This is shown in Project 75367, [Agriculture Services Centre]. I can advise that at this time a new replacement centre has been designed and received full Planning permission. This funding will allow for the completion of the project's contract and preparation of the new site adjacent to the current facility. I look forward to briefing this Honourable House on this and other important agriculture-related projects that are aimed at providing important support to our farmers and bolstering the Island's food security.

Mr. Chairman, I am also pleased to announce that \$1,750,000 has been allocated towards the implementation of the Master Plan 2025–2038 to improve and transform the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo. This is shown as 75371, BAMZ Master Plan—Infrastructure.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jache Adams: One happy customer.

[Laughter]

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department has traditionally engaged local entities to undertake specialised studies, such as the Ambient Air Quality programme through the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Sciences [BIOS]. The funding for the Ambient Air quality monitoring programme can be found on page C-19 as 7006, BBSR—Air/Water Quality Study.

The grant for \$230,000 will enable the department to meet its monitoring requirements mandated by the Clean Air Act 1991. I can confirm that seven monitoring stations are currently being installed in areas around the Island, including in the vicinity of BELCO, to monitor the Island's air quality. I will elaborate on this in due course.

Output Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, while a complete tabulation of the Output Measures for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources can be found on pages B-219 to B-221 of the Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26, I will endeavour to highlight some of the measures of note.

Business Unit 89000, Administration
Noted on Budget Page B-219

Hon. Jache Adams: Twenty-four protected species permit applications for research licences were issued to local and international researchers within five working days in fiscal year 2024/25. This is higher than the seven issued for 2023/24 and perhaps reflects the need for greater understanding of our local biodiversity.

Research topics included a wide gamut of interest including surveys for reintroduced captive-bred endemic land snails and Bermuda skinks, cave mapping as well as collecting and identifying marine cave-dwelling species, and surveys on non-native freshwater crayfish in local wetlands. Work continued to determine the status of our leafcutter bees, potential sea level rise impacts to caves, collection of terrestrial plant seeds, and rat detection in the landscape using artificial intelligence. All of these were paid for by our project collaborators at no cost to the Government. A number of invasive pest species continue to have a negative impact on Bermuda's ecology and farming sector, as well as being nuisances to the general public. These are predominantly bird species such as feral chickens, pigeons and crows. However, the department is also addressing increasing numbers of complaints from other species such as rabbits and guinea pigs that have been released into the wild. The department removed over 6,000 pest species for 2024/25 which is down on 2023/24 at 8,000 species.

Business Unit 89010, Marine Resources Noted on
Budget Page B-219.

Hon. Jache Adams: Sustaining our local fisheries is paramount. In the fiscal year 2024/25, the Marine Resources Section continued to successfully manage the licensing of our commercial finfish and lobster fisheries, and the recreational lobster and spearfishing fisheries, as well as providing support to the Marine Resources Board and the Commercial Fisheries Council. Work also continued on data collection for the spiny lobster, guinea chick, and black grouper research programmes, including a pilot spiny lobster recruitment study. The section also maintained compliance with our membership to the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas [ICCAT], as well as providing support to the Sargasso Sea Commission.

Additionally, the Marine Resources Section served as the department lead for several specialised projects, including the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme and the UK Blue Belt Ocean Shield Programme. Some of the achievements under these programmes during the past year are

- the completion of the final draft of a Blue Prosperity Plan for Bermuda, which includes a

Marine Spatial Plan and a Blue Economy Strategy; and

- the preparation of a Cabinet memo to seek Government approval for a Marine Development Act that will enable the Marine Spatial Plan and promote sustainable use of Bermuda's marine environment;

The Chairman: Minister—

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes.

The Chairman: I am actually very riveted in what you are talking about because in another life I wanted to be a marine biologist. However, it has been brought to my attention that we are approaching the 12:30 mark, so I will leave it up to you to find a place to leave off and then you can move the motion to take us to lunch.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will be one minute.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Hon. Jache Adams:

- the finalisation of a stock assessment for the red hind fishery;
- the development of a new online platform and mobile app designed to modernise fisheries data management in Bermuda;
- actioning of the 2024-25 workplan for the Blue Belt Ocean Shield Programme that is strengthening marine enforcement and compliance, alongside maritime domain awareness; and
- the development of data sharing protocols and a shiprider agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard to assist with monitoring Bermuda's waters for IUU [illegal, unreported and unregulated] fishing.

Mr. Speaker *[sic]*, I think at this moment, I will—Mr. Chairman, I move at this moment . . . I will stop here for lunch, so I move that we break for lunch and return at 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: The motion has been moved that we go to lunch and come back at 2:00 pm. Any objections?

No objections. We will break for lunch.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:30 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:06 pm

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC WORKS AND ENVIRONMENT

[Continuation thereon]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members. We are now in the resumption of the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

I call on the Minister in charge to continue, and I do believe we are at Head 79. Am I correct, Minister?

Hon. Jache Adams: That is correct, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister. Go right ahead.

HEAD 79—DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES [DENR]

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, for the listening audience I am on the output measures for business unit 89020 Marine Conservation noted in the Budget Book on page B-219.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Marine Conservation

Hon. Jache Adams: In addition to its many other duties in 2024/25 the Marine Conservation Section reviewed 10 planning applications pertaining to the marine environment, presenting all of them to the Marine Resources Board within four weeks of receiving the application. This represents 100 per cent response target. This was down on the numbers of consultations received in 2023/24 at 17, but all were responded to within the Department of Planning in 2024/25. It is expected that in 2025/26 this may increase to 25 applications, but this is wholly dependent on development interest.

Mr. Chairman, 75 marine habitat assessments were conducted in the 2024/25 period. The majority of these were related to seagrass surveys. This was an increase from the 65 habitat assessments completed in 2023/24.

Marine Heritage and Health

Hon. Jache Adams: The Marine Heritage and Health, [which] is noted on page B-219. In 2024/25, the 14 marine heritage consultations were conducted by the section within 20 working days which was slightly down on the 2023/24 period of 17 consultations. It is expected that in 2025/26 dependent on development

interest, the numbers will remain about the same as the original forecast with 12 applications being received, and 100 per cent being responded to within 20 working days.

Visits to protected dive sites and use of the Government-managed moorings by residents continue to increase as cruise ship and airlines visits continue to grow and more residents visit our reef. The percentage of the 40 protected dive site moorings being largely in place and operational for the summer of 2024/25 dive season represents 97.5 per cent of the total. These represent an increase from the actual number of dive site moorings available in 2023/24 of 35, representing 88 per cent of the required availability for the summer months.

In 2025/26 it is expected that there will be 40 dive site moorings in place for the whole summer season and 100 per cent will be assessed within 60 days and repairs made in readiness for the season. This coming season is expected to be very active as both tour operators and recreational marine users take advantage of this unique natural resource. The department has also recently improved the website that describes the wreck at each site location, including no fishing zones and other restrictions and protections.

The department and the Ministry are most grateful to the Stempel Foundation for its continued support of this important project.

The DENR Marine Heritage Section's boat *Firefly* was badly damaged in Hurricane Ernesto in August of 2024. Survey of the crash scene deemed it was unsafe to repair. Insurance claims were brought and paid to Government in January of 2025 and application for the 2025/26 budget has been made for a replacement research boat for the Marine Heritage section and to assist with various BOPP-driven [Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme] monitoring programmes.

Marine Enforcement

Hon. Jache Adams: Marine Enforcement is noted in the Budget Book on page B-220. In budget year 2024/25, there were 250 vessels were stopped and checked with particular attention to daily bag limits, fish size, and species restrictions. This level was below a typical season though an increase on 2023/24 at 215 vessel searches. This was due to personnel issues. I am happy to report that all patrol vessels are now in working order and efforts to synergise with the [Bermuda] Coast Guard Unit continues. Summonses for three cases of illegal fishing activity have been issued in the past 12 months with a further five cases due to lead to summonses shortly.

The DENR Coast Guard Unit and Marine and Port Services contribute to the witness statements for these cases with DENR leading on three and the Coast Guard Unit leading on five cases. It is noted that the current number of cases for prosecution are

significantly up on the 2023/24 period of one. The department is also working with the Department of Public Prosecutions [DPP] to provide improved training on the importance of the fishery statutes in the context of protecting our marine environment against the ever-increasing stresses created by climate change.

Training of the judiciary is an important priority after a recent illegal fishing case resulted in a suspended sentence. The Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy is due for completion in June of 2025.

Terrestrial Conservation

Hon. Jache Adams: Terrestrial Conservation is noted in the Budget Book on page B-220. An important part of the Terrestrial Conservation section's mission is to *provide environmental and habitat assessment advice to the Department of Planning and members of the public for all matters related to terrestrial conservation zones.*

In fiscal year 2024/25, the section undertook 110 consultations on Planning applications, Environmental Impact Assessment Scoping Reports [EIAs], Conservation Management Plans, and proposed landscape schemes and 90 per cent were responded to within 20 days. This is slightly more than for the 2023/24 period at 109 consultations where 98 per cent were responded to within the 20 working day target. It is expected that similar numbers of applications will occur in this upcoming fiscal year.

The Terrestrial Conservation Crew continued their important job maintaining Bermuda's Government Nature Reserves, especially those used frequently by the public including visitors, such as Cooper's Island and Spittal Pond Nature Reserves. This work includes trail maintenance and control of invasive species such as Casuarina and Brazil Pepper, as well as replanting with native and endemic species.

The number of guided tours and talks provided by this section, especially to school and educational groups continues to be at normal levels of 49 for 2024/25 which is similar to 2023/24 at 50.

Veterinary Services

Hon. Jache Adams: Veterinary Services is noted, again in the Budget Book at page B-220. Activities of the Veterinary Services Section remained customer-focused on animal imports and re-visiting the conditions of entry for various species. However, a significant portion of activity focused on work in conjunction with animal control on animal welfare and judicial matters. As a result, lesser attention focused on farm production and animal welfare on farms over 2023/24 and 2024/25.

The additional Disease Response Plan that is currently being drafted for 2025/26 is to address avian flu if it reaches Bermuda. The resources required to

meet the task listed in the plan in preparation for such a response will be discussed within the Ministry.

Animal Control

Hon. Jache Adams: Again, this is noted in the Budget Book on page B-220. During 2024/25, the percentage of dogs believed to be eligible for licensure and which were actually licensed was 30 per cent, which is a slight increase in 2023/24 at 26 per cent. This percentage is likely the result of multiple factors at play, including ongoing economic challenges in the community and the lack of awareness on behalf of dog owners. The department has set a forecast of a 40 per cent target for licensing for 2025/26 in anticipation of widespread publicity campaign and broadening enforcement tools. It is noted that the new online GovPilot licensing system is not for new licences, due to the various checks required for new pets, but for licence renewals. The total number of incidents and complaints investigated over 2023/24 was 1,027 and the average response time improved to one day. These numbers do not reflect the complexity of cases and the burden of housing and caring for the 387 animals taken in over the year.

Plant Protection

Hon. Jache Adams: Plant Protection is noted in the Budget Book on page B-220. There were 1,043,932 incoming items inspected for plant pests and diseases in 2024/25, with 9 per cent of those being found to be infested. This was a slight increase on the number of inspections for 2023/24 at 1,003,781 where typically 10 per cent were shown to be infested. It is expected that the trend for plant imports will remain steady in 2025/26. However, it is projected that the plant pest infestations may increase as a result of projected climate change which could lead to increases in pest populations and pest expansion into new geographical regions.

As in previous years, our plant protection biosecurity inspection process continues to be robust with high entry standards for propagation material and vigorous quarantine inspections taking place upon entry for all products that could pose a pest or disease risk to our environment. This includes mandatory inspections upon arrival of all floral and plant material: seeds, bulbs, fruits, vegetables, sand and potting mixes. Together these efforts continue to exclude the serious plant pests and diseases that would negatively impact our environment and our agricultural industry.

I am also happy to report that this year the Island received shipments of seed potatoes, strawberries plants and sweet potato cuttings for planting. These will be used to produce this year's crop and contribute positively to the Island's food security. The Plant Protection section continued its efforts to ensure that the importation process was smooth this year and

reissued its guidance and regularly provided calendar alerts to importers as well as support at all stages. Further, all fees for regular inspections of food-related imports undertaken by the Plant Protection Laboratory continued to be waived in order to assist with keeping importation costs at a minimum.

A challenge that was addressed in 2024/25 was the unexpected arrival of lanternfly insects, a potential new pest to Bermuda that were littered over the outer surface of incoming cruise ships from the East Coast of the United States. Teams of DENR officers responded quickly to the situation, performing onboard quarantine inspections of arriving high-risk cruise vessels. In stating pre-arrival pest checks and carrying out follow-up inspections until it was clear that the lanternfly pest population no longer posed a risk to Bermuda.

It is noted that the many swarms of lanternfly insects currently in the US have arrived as invasive species from Asia.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Agronomy

Hon. Jache Adams: Agronomy is noted in the Budget Book on page B-221. The Agriculture Service Centre is one of the main means by which the Government can provide direct assistance to our local farmers. The centre provides cold storage for local crops, ice for farmers and fishermen, packaging materials, banana ripening services, seeds, and chemicals.

In 2024/25, the Centre handled a total of \$212,000 of produce, goods and services in support of the agriculture industry. This was similar; a slight increase in 2023/24 at \$210,000. This general trend with a small increase is expected to continue through this year and in 2025/26. Similarly, I note that the economic embargos for locally grown vegetables are expected to remain consistent with 145 implemented in 2023/24 and 138 embargos issued in 2024/25. This confirms that our farmers are able to meet the local demand of certain crops for the entire Island for periods of time. Our consultant agronomist is working well with local farmers to help introduce more heat-tolerant varieties of certain crops in order to extend the growing season thereby extending the periods of the embargos.

I would like to extend a big thank you to all of our local farmers for all of their continued efforts with their hard work and their contributions to the improvement of the industry. Their produce continues to be of high quality and is therefore in high demand by the general public, restaurants and grocery stores. We look forward to seeing continued increases in the local agricultural industry and the Government will play its part to assisting and supporting our farmers to produce more good quality food for our Island. Increased local produce leads to increased food security. The

availability of high quality, locally sourced fresh produce lends itself to healthier diets and improved well-being. We will continue to work with the Board of Agriculture and the Farmers Association to identify efficiencies and potential production cost reductions.

Pollution Control

Hon. Jache Adams: Again, noted in the Budget Book on page B-221. The Island's four main freshwater lenses remain at full capacity, but some allocated sectors continue to be underutilised causing the excess rainwater captured to overflow to the sea. Processes to fairly reallocate water rights to companies who will abstract fully the fresh groundwater that is available to them are being progressed. All reported spills of oil and fuel were monitored and cleaned up according to the Government guidelines. The progress made under the MOU [Memorandum of Understanding] between the Government and KBB [Keep Bermuda Beautiful] has resulted in 143 abandoned and derelict vessels being surveyed and advertised in *The Official Gazette* since 2021. Once suitably advertised, Government provides instruction to KBB for these vessels to be removed to the Airport Waste Management Facility using marine contractors who also drain fuel and oil and remove batteries as well. Working closely with the Bermuda Shipping and Maritime Authority and Marine and Port Services new regulations to address abandoned and derelict vessels are being considered that will help to address associated pollution and aesthetic issues with the goal of sharing these costs within the boating public.

Bermuda Aquarium, Museum Zoo Administration

Hon. Jache Adams: Bermuda Aquarium, Museum Zoo Administration [BAMZ] is noted in the Budget Book on page B-221. I am happy to report that the facility maintained its accreditation with the Association of Zoos and Aquariums and the facility continues to be one of the most popular attractions for both locals and visitors alike.

I would like to take a moment to thank the hard-working staff at the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo for their dedication to all the animals in their care.

The Aquarium and Zoo

Hon. Jache Adams: Onsite veterinary examinations continued on a fairly normal schedule with over 250 animals in the Government collection receiving preventative veterinary care in fiscal year 2024/25. These numbers are a slight increase on 2023/24 at 232 animals receiving veterinary care.

Museum

Hon. Jache Adams: The Museum is again in the Budget Book at page B-221. The number of specimens, images and research papers added to the natural history collection was 5,076 in 2023/24 which is down on the target level of 4,000 due to the vacant underfunded librarian post.

MAJOR POLICY CHANGES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Hon. Jache Adams: I will now provide additional details on the specialised projects that teams at the department had been working extremely hard on in addition to their regular duties.

Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme

Hon. Jache Adams: Firstly, Mr. Chairman, I would like to update this Honourable House on the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme [BOPP]. As noted in previous years, the Government embarked on this programme in partnership with the nonprofit Waitt Institute and the Bermuda Institute of Ocean Science [BIOS] in June of 2019. The result of this programme will be the creation of an integrated marine spatial plan for the entirety of Bermuda's 200 nautical mile Economic Exclusive Zone [EEZ]. Also included in this initiative is a Blue Economy Strategy which will look into identifying ways to capitalise on numerous opportunities in our waters such as for fisheries, blue tourism, and ocean renewable energy.

In April of 2024 a finalised draft of the Marine Spatial Plan and Blue Economy Strategy, known together as the Blue Prosperity Plan was produced. The Minister of Home Affairs subsequently nominated an independent review panel to evaluate and respond to public submissions on the Blue Prosperity Plan's proposed marine protected area network and potential use areas. The panel provided its final recommendations to the Ministry later in 2024 and expressed strong support for the core objectives of the Marine Spatial Plan which included promoting the sustainable use of marine resources within the Bermuda's EEZ, protecting the marine ecosystems and enabling the recovery of fish and other marine populations to historically abundant levels.

In response to these recommendations the Ministry of Home Affairs committed to integrating a number of objectives into the final Marine Spatial Plan and it reaffirmed its commitment to adopting a phased implementation strategy of the plan to foster trust and ensure effective enforcement. Upon assuming my position as Minister of Public Works and Environment, I announced that the Government will be pausing implementation of new marine protected areas until an agreement was reached with local fishermen on better enforcement and fairer data collection rules to support any new marine protected areas. My Ministry recognises that collaboration and inclusivity are key to achieving the Blue Prosperity Plan's objectives and

stresses that stakeholder engagement and partnership will be prioritised as the plan evolves.

Since taking office, I have met with and discussed the Blue Prosperity Plan with the Government's Statutory Board, the Commercial Fisheries Council, the Fishermen's Association of Bermuda and key personnel within the department, Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme and the Waitt Institute. As a reminder, the public can find all of the draft plans, background documents and consultation reports on the website www.bermudaoceanprosperity.org.

In addition to the progress made on the Marine Spatial Plan work also advanced on the Blue Economy Strategy. Particularly on the establishment of an Ocean Fund that will work hand in hand with the Marine Spatial Plan. As indicated by a press release on 3 February 2025, the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Fund Limited has now been formally gazetted for incorporation. Once implemented, the Ocean Fund will drive financing into Bermuda projects and businesses to grow the economy in areas related to sustainable fisheries, sustainable tourism, marine technology, renewable energy and nature-based projects.

Mr. Chairman, another notable accomplishment under the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme in 2024 was the finalisation of an assessment of the Red Hind population in Bermuda. In collaboration with the University of California, Santa Barbara's emLab, it is well known that the Red Hind is a key local commercial and recreational fish species and there have been a number of studies conducted on the Red Hind fishery over the years. The 2024 assessment leveraged data collected from the previous studies along with new data to evaluate the status of the Red Hind population in Bermuda.

It is worth noting here, Mr. Chairman, that while the Fishermen's Association of Bermuda disapproves of some aspects of the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme, and have been quite vocal about that, commercial fishermen have largely supported research on the Red Hind population for decades, with several fisherman actively helping with the studies by taking researchers out on their boats and assisting with data collection. I would like to therefore thank all of those fishermen who have assisted the department with the Red Hind research programme and other research initiatives over the years. The results of the Red Hind stock assessment were positive and indicated that the stock is currently being fished within sustainable levels.

Mr. Chairman, with funding through the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme partnership, the department worked with Shellcatch, an experienced developer of fisheries data management software to implement a new online platform and mobile app to modernise fisheries' data management in Bermuda. The system streamlines the licensing process, simplifies catch reporting for fishers and ensures that rele-

vant information is easily accessible to support scientific research and enforcement activities.

Commercial and recreational fishermen have requested a user-friendly, app-based reporting system for many years. The department worked closely with experienced fishermen to gather input on the app's user-interface and functionality. By incorporating their feedback, this new platform aims to streamline the submission of the catch data which plays a vital role in guiding fisheries' management.

Better Marine Resources Enforcement

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry continues to emphasise that effective enforcement is one of the most critical elements of effective marine resources management.

In 2024/25, the department continued its work with the United Kingdom on its Blue Belt Ocean Shield Programme. This work not only involves the Department of Environment and Natural Resources but also includes the Royal Bermuda Regiment's Coast Guard and the Department of Marine and Ports [Services]. This increased collaboration has resulted in a number of cases being prepared for prosecution. The evolving partnership with the US Coast Guard has led to signing of a shiprider agreement to allow the Bermuda Government officers to undertake patrols on US Coast Guard vessels in Bermuda's EEZ [Economic Empowerment Zone] as well as the surrounding high seas.

The US Coast Guard along with the UK Marine Management Organisation has also been providing regular intelligence feeds on international fishing vessels operating near our EEZ boundary which is allowing for a better understanding of the patterns of activity that could affect us.

I would like to thank the Government House and the US Consulate for their great support in these important initiatives. In addition to this work, a consultant was hired through the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme to assist with finalising the Bermuda Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy. The consultant is providing targeted recommendations to enhance the strategy, aligning the strategy with emerging partnerships and initiatives and considering the recommendations made by the Marine Spatial Plan Independent Review Panel, particularly those reflecting enforcement concerns raised by the Bermuda community.

Animal Control and Dogs

Hon. Jache Adams: During 2024/25 the ad hoc Canine Advisory Committee examined the various issues surrounding dogs and presented its findings and operations to the Ministry for consideration. The department also presented options to the new Ministry and will be working to identify the preferred way forward to address public concerns around dangerous dogs, ille-

gal breeding, irresponsible ownership issues and including some legislative amendments that are anticipated.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Jache Adams: Advancements were made for an online 'GovPilot' dog licence renewal system which has undergone some beta-tests and the issues identified are currently being addressed. The final rollout is anticipated very soon following final testing to ensure accuracy of information available to the public, privacy of personal information, accuracy of fees and appropriate back-end handling of funds and financial reconciliation practices.

Management Services conducted a review of animal control and has offered its recommendations on the functions of animal control to create a more effective and efficient service. Animal Control officers received specialised training gaining knowledge needed in their daily activities to ensure the safety of themselves and the animals they handle.

Tackling Pest Species

Hon. Jache Adams: Work has continued in the monitoring and management of local pests, disease and invasive species that threaten the Island's economy, human health, and fragile environment. The department continues to control pest bird species mainly focused on feral chickens.

Our farmers continue to bear the brunt of the unwanted attentions of these birds that are seeing whole fields of crops decimated. Every effort is being made to remove as many birds as possible and the Board of Agriculture is currently considering additional recommendations to the Minister.

As provided in recent Ministry press articles, I would strongly encourage those members of the public to not feed feral chickens. And for those who have chickens to be responsible and not allow them to stray or to be dumped in public areas and fields. The discovery feral colony of non-native crayfish has prompted DENR to draft amendments to the Invasive Alien Species Act.

Establishment of Critical Habitat Designation for Nonsuch Island

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is expected to make a case under the Protected Species Act 2003 to designate Nonsuch Island and other Cahow nesting islands as critical habitat. The successful establishment of viable populations of the endemic cahow or Bermuda Petrel and the endemic Greater Bermuda Land Snail on Nonsuch Island greatly improving the recovery of these endangered species.

In collaboration with overseas researchers, three new scientific publications on the cahow have been published or are in preparation.

Ensuring We Have Clean Air and Water

Hon. Jache Adams: The Pollution Control Section of the DENR has a major role in the maintenance and training of the National Oil Pollution Contingency Plan in addition to ensuring that the local spill emergency plans of Bermuda's licensed ports and oil-handling facilities are aligned to this National Plan.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Jache Adams: This section also manages the spill response equipment in addition to maintaining links with various organisations that can offer overseas assistance in the event of a large spill.

The UK Maritime Coast Guard Agency recognises this effort and has committed over \$343,251 over the past four years for ongoing training and equipment procurement including offshore oil spill response booms, dispersant and skimmer equipment. As a result, Bermuda is currently able to meet the demands of audits required by the International Maritime Organization [IMO].

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Jache Adams: The Pollution Control Section has continued to manage complaints by the public related to air quality issues from BELCO's large particle soot emissions, fumes from local tank vents and down drafting of exhaust fumes in addition to concern of these impacts to residential water tanks. Through the Environmental Authority the operating licence conditions for the BELCO control plants have been revised annually to tighten emission parameters and to increase oversight of these emissions.

Government-funded portable monitoring sensors have been installed at four locations with another three sensors soon to be installed. The operating licence requires BELCO to also maintain ambient air quality monitoring stations at Cemetery Lane and at the top of Langton Hill.

BELCO continues to select BIOS [Bermuda Institute for Ocean Sciences] for the independent water quality residential water tanks which is conditioned in their operating licence. Data for the 59 properties analysed to date since 2020 has shown compliance to the "primary" UK drinking water standards and World Health Organization [WHO] guidelines for fuel combustion-related contaminants.

"Secondary" standards for aluminium and iron have been exceeded in 12 properties to date, with the five iron exceedances possibly originating from the metal exhaust flues of the BELCO North Power Station when combined with the soot emissions. "Sec-

ondary” standards relate to the aesthetic qualities of water, including clarity and taste.

The Pollution Control Section continues to seek best regulatory practice from other developed jurisdictions to monitor and legislate such large particle soot emissions but to date this can only be described as an unacceptable nuisance. Details of the Clean Air Amendment Regulations are provided in the plans for the upcoming year.

Increased Food Security

Hon. Jache Adams: The department continued to provide its important industry support services at the existing 100-plus-year-old Agricultural Services Centre while preparing for a replacement centre. This facility will be critical for the Island’s food security. Consultations have continued with the Farmers Association and its members to identify and clarify the challenges and priorities for the industry. Accurate identification of obstacles to the sustainability and growth of the industry will ensure that departmental efforts are correctly prioritised and the industry is supported.

The consultant agronomist, Mr. Stewart Swanson, continues his valuable work supporting the agricultural industry on a wide range of agricultural issues with the goals of reducing costs and improving yields, providing specialised expertise in key issues such as soil management, pest and disease surveillance and the procurement of seeds and supplies.

In conjunction with the specialist, Mr. Swanson has coordinated a nematode survey of the Island’s agricultural field which has culminated in a report that has been shared with the agricultural industry stakeholders. Nematodes are microscopic worms that can be either beneficial or a major pest for crops. Information revealed through this study will help local growers to make informed pest management decisions.

Food security remains a key issue and one this department takes very seriously. DENR officers diligently work with farmers and other industry stakeholders to support and promote local food production while monitoring the equally critical supply of imported produce. There is exciting and welcome news as the realisation of a new purpose-built Agriculture Service Centre looms ever closer. This new facility will help enhance the local agriculture industry by providing greater storage and capacity for short- and long-term storage crops as well as provide other essential services to the industry.

PLANS FOR THE UPCOMING YEAR

Increased Food Security and Reduced Cost of Living

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, this year the department will continue to focus on its efforts on increasing local food production and assisting the agri-

cultural industry in reducing local production costs whether that will be, for example, focusing on the reduction of feral chickens on agricultural land or through the improvement of the economic embargo system to better support the sale of local produce. These measures will translate into increased food security for the Island and reduced cost of living for our residents.

The department and the Board of Agriculture will continue to develop the integrated agriculture strategy which would include a review of the National Crop Strategy 2016–2021 and the draft Dairy Strategy and complete new Livestock/Poultry/Honey and Aquaculture components. Further, the Government will expand its direct support to farmers through continued services provided by the consultant agronomist who will prioritise the needs of the sector. He will continue to explore and promote strategies to increase food production through measures such as effective fertilisation and weed management as well as investigating ways to expand the growing season of crops presently being grown in Bermuda.

Plans for Long-Term Sustainable Use and Conservation of Our Marine Resources in Our Exclusive Economic Zones

Hon. Jache Adams: In the coming year, the department will seek permission from Cabinet for the Marine Development Act to be drafted. This Act provides the framework for the implementation of the Marine Spatial Plan and Blue Economy Strategy which will occur once agreement has been reached with local fishermen regarding better enforcement and fairer data collection rules. Further, the department will provide recommendation for a phased implementation approach for the Marine Spatial Plan to maximise buy-in for all stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman, with regard to fairer data collection, the Government is committed to ensuring that more data is obtained from other marine resource users in addition to the data provided by commercial fishermen as these are common property resources. In order to collect additional fish catch data and to better promote sustainable fishing practices, the department intends to amend the Fisheries Act 1972 and the Fisheries Regulations 2010 to require licences for recreational fishing activity from boats.

Current data collection programmes to inform assessments of important commercial fish and lobster stocks will continue as these will help inform potential changes to existing policy. The department will also assume control of the yearly maintenance and IT support costs for the new fisheries Shellcatch data base. Additionally, efforts will continue to protect our critical seagrass and mangrove habitats through better management of existing areas where these habitats are found and through new plantings.

Integrated and Effective Marine Enforcement of the EEZ

Hon. Jache Adams: Ensuring marine resources enforcement is essential and the marine resources enforcement strategy is being updated to show Government's commitment to addressing illegal fishing activity under existing national statutes. The enforcement strategy will also continue to be integrated with the Bermuda Ocean Prosperity Programme [BOPP] and the UK Blue Belt Ocean Shield programme to enhance the Island's marine domain awareness as well as its capacity and capability to effectively address offences over the entirety of our EEZ.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Addressing Lost Seagrass Beds

Hon. Jache Adams: Following the significant loss of seagrass habitat in Bermuda over the past decade that coincided with a large population growth of green turtles, which subsequently crashed in 2020, measures are being taken to help the seagrass recover. In addition to expanding sites that exclude the pressures of turtle grazing, the Department of Environment and Natural Resources is working with other departments and private organisations to evaluate and promote environmentally friendly moorings.

Novel seagrass planting studies are also being monitored internationally.

Tracking Pest Species

Hon. Jache Adams: Work will continue in the monitoring and management of local pests, diseases and invasive species that threaten the Island's economy, human health and fragile environment.

A public awareness campaign will be developed to help the public and stakeholders better understand the recently passed Invasive Alien Species Act 2021 and Regulations 2022 as well as the listed pest species. Discussions with importers for the pet trade will be undertaken to better understand the species that could potentially become invasive to Bermuda which will lead to proposed amendments to the Alien Invasive Species Act. It is noted that controls will be applied during 2025 to address the recently discovered invasive population of crayfish in Devonshire Marsh.

Ensuring We Have Clean Air and Water

Hon. Jache Adams: The Clean Air Amendment Act 2024 has passed through the House and Senate to align with best practices to better manage pollution and to include nuisance events to advance higher standards and penalties for infractions. The Clean Air Amendment Regulations have been prepared and are

due to be tabled and debated in the House in the near future.

Similarly, the Water Resources Amendment Act 2024 also passed through the House and Senate to improve upon controlling pollution to ground water and sea water. The Water Resources Amendment Regulations to address pollution to ground that presents a risk to ground water are being completed by Attorney General's Chambers ahead of being debated in the House in 2025.

Better Management of Animals

Hon. Jache Adams: I recognise that recently there has been an increase of irresponsible dog ownership and management incidents. I also note that the Animal Control Section has been working diligently to address these issues. But the responsibility cannot be shouldered by the Government. The management of dogs is a community issue. Dogs are supposed to be man's best friend, and we need to treat them as such. With that in mind, the previous Minister Roban reconstituted the ad hoc Advisory Committee under the leadership of Senator Lindsay [Simmons]-Wilson. The committee is made up of the stakeholder groups that have advocated for dog welfare. The output from the committee in addition to the considerations of the chief veterinary officer, are now being considered on what can be done to ensure Bermuda's dogs are more responsibly managed and the community kept safe from dangerous dog attacks.

The Animal Control Section will continue to implement the Dogs Act 2008 with a view to improve the keeping of animals and promote the prevention of bites and injury. This year the department will continue its work to implement the new ticketing and citation regulations that will provide more efficient enforcement and mandatory bite reports for better data collection and informed management. As noted, the department will also be implementing a campaign to increase public awareness of the Dogs Act and responsibilities of owners.

Increased Environmental Education

Hon. Jache Adams: Numerous improvements are also in process at the Bermuda Aquarium, Museum and Zoo [BAMZ] to ensure that safety of the animals enhance the enjoyment of our visitors to the facility and ensure that we retain the valuable AZA [Association of Zoos and Aquariums] accreditation that the facility has enjoyed these past decades. Additionally, as part of the Marine Resources Enforcement Strategy, the department will develop a new campaign to raise awareness of the rules and regulations governing youth and interaction with threatened marine resources.

Improved Visibility of Bermuda's Maritime Heritage

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, several significant film and television projects were initiated with notable international producers in 2024 and we expect to see several projects launched in 2025 that feature Bermuda's rich maritime heritage. A new website has been launched that highlights the location of the many historic wrecks, dive sites and no-fishing areas in addition to your current location through your mobile device.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to thank the hard-working and dedicated members of staff in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, including Director Dr. Geoff Smith, Dr. Tammy Warren, Dr. Sarah Manuel, Dr. Philippe Rouja, Dr. Jonathan Nisbett, Dr. Mark Outerbridge, Dr. Ian Walker, Mr. John Edmunds, Ms. Claire Jessey, Mr. Jeremy Madeiros, and Ms. Alvona Wolffe and their very able teams. I hope to get to meet them all during my time at the Ministry of Public Works and Environment.

Mr. Chairman, this now concludes my presentation for the Department of Environment and Natural Resources, Head 79. I will turn to Head 81, Department of Public Lands and Buildings as found on pages B-222 through B-224 and C-6.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

The Minister has certainly found his stride. The Minister just concluded Head 79, as he mentioned. And we . . . just to remind Members that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates and Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. This is under the Ministry of Public Works and Environment. It is under the direction of Minister Jache Adams.

Minister, you may continue on pages 22, 23.

HEAD 81—DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC LANDS AND BUILDINGS

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Today I present the strategic role, responsibilities and planned activities of the Department of Public Lands and Buildings for the fiscal year 2025/26.

The department's guiding mandate, Mr. Chairman, is: *To effectively manage Government property and provide national mapping to [enable] the delivery of effective public services.*

This mandate may sound straightforward at first glance, but in reality, it encompasses a vast and multifaceted portfolio that supports nearly every aspect of government operations. The department is not just a custodian of land and property—it is a foundational enabler of service delivery, a facilitator of public access, and a steward of national infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Public Lands and Buildings is responsible for the administration and strategic oversight of more than 2,000 acres

of Government-owned land and approximately 750 buildings across the country.

These assets are not abstract figures. They include a wide spectrum of property types, each serving a vital function within our national framework:

- **Public Service Facilities:** These include police stations, post offices, fire stations, customs facilities, and courthouses—sites where citizens interact directly with government services and exercise their rights.
- **Educational Infrastructure:** The department supports the Ministry of Education through the management and maintenance of primary, middle, and senior schools. These buildings must be safe, secure, and conducive to learning.
- **Residential Properties:** We manage several Government-owned residences provided to civil servants and essential staff, ensuring proper living conditions and maintaining fair rental arrangements.
- **Heritage and Strategic Sites:** The portfolio includes two national lighthouses, multiple farms, community beaches, and a number of government-owned islands—each representing both cultural value and strategic utility.

These properties must be well-maintained, fully compliant with health and safety standards, and adapted to evolving needs, especially in light of climate resilience and technological advancement.

In addition to the Government's own properties, the department is responsible for managing a significant number of lease agreements.

For the 2025/26 fiscal year, the department will oversee 75 active leases with private sector landlords and Government Quasi-Autonomous Non-Governmental Organisations (otherwise known as Quangos). These leases are critical for housing operations that cannot be accommodated within the Government's existing estate.

Mr. Chairman, the department plays a critical enabling role to all other ministries and public sector agencies. Our core function is to ensure that every Ministry—whether it is Health, Education, National Security, or Social Services—has the physical infrastructure it needs to fulfil its mandate.

Without reliable, safe, and strategically located premises, no Ministry can deliver its services effectively. That is why the department must act not only as a property manager but as a strategic partner, engaging with ministries early in the planning process, ensuring alignment between operational needs and physical spaces.

We also work to ensure compliance with building codes, accessibility standards, and health and safety regulations across the entire Government estate.

As detailed on page B-222 of the Estimates, the department's operations are structured into five

core programmes, each representing a pillar of our service delivery model.

8100, Administration

Hon. Jache Adams: This programme encompasses financial management, human resources, strategic planning, procurement, and interagency coordination. It is the administrative engine that ensures the department runs effectively and remains accountable to the public.

8101, Buildings

Hon. Jache Adams: This programme is responsible for the maintenance, inspection, and renovation of Government buildings. This includes both preventative and responsive maintenance to avoid service interruptions. In 2025/26, we plan to modernise maintenance protocols, improve energy efficiency, and implement centralised tracking systems.

8102, Estates

Hon. Jache Adams: This programme manages land ownership, acquisitions, disposals, boundary clarifications, and lease administration. It ensures that Government land and foreshores are properly recorded, utilised efficiently, and safeguarded against encroachment or underuse.

8103, Land Surveys

Hon. Jache Adams: A vital programme providing national mapping services, geographic information systems (otherwise known as GIS), and land survey support to ministries and the public. In the coming year, we aim to digitise our mapping archives and expand online access to survey data.

8105, Project Management

Hon. Jache Adams: This programme oversees the delivery of capital projects and large-scale infrastructure works. It ensures that Government construction projects are completed on time, within budget, and to specification. For fiscal year 2025/26, several innovation projects and new public facility builds are scheduled to commence under this programme.

The Department of Public Lands and Buildings is far more than a property custodian—it is an enabler of public service, a guardian of national infrastructure, and a planner of our physical legacy. Through effective estate management, strategic lease oversight, and capital project execution, we ensure that public services are delivered from facilities that are safe, accessible, and fit for purpose.

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to—

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Jache Adams: —for the fiscal year 2025/26, the department has been allocated a total budget of \$22,469,000, reflecting an increase of \$703,000 over the previous fiscal year as reported on page B-222.

8100, Administration and Training

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8100, Administration and Training, which plays a central role in ensuring the effective operation and strategic direction of the Department of Public Lands and Buildings.

This programme has been allocated a total budget of \$566,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26. Its core objective is *To provide senior management leadership and administrative support for the Estates and Buildings sections*. In essence, programme 8100 underpins the department's overall capacity to deliver its mandate by ensuring sound governance, well-coordinated internal operations, and a trained and capable workforce.

91000, [Administration]

Hon. Jache Adams: This cost centre is allocated \$255,000 for the upcoming fiscal year. It supports the department's senior management team, administrative personnel, and internal operations. This includes human resources, financial oversight, communications, internal audits, and interdepartmental coordination.

Effective administration is not merely clerical, it ensures that planning is strategic, operations are accountable, and resources are optimally deployed. This team serves as the backbone of the department's structure, ensuring all programmes are properly supported.

91001, Training and Apprenticeship

Hon. Jache Adams: This cost centre has been allocated \$311,000, reflecting the department's continued and growing commitment to skills development, capacity building, and the nurturing of local talent. This allocation supports

- technical and professional training for existing staff;
- apprenticeship programmes designed to prepare young people for careers in estate management, building maintenance, surveying, and project management;
- [certification] and continuing education initiatives; and
- partnerships with technical schools and local institutions to support practical on-the-job training.

These investments are critical in ensuring the long-term sustainability of the department's operations by cultivating the next generation of skilled professionals within the public sector.

Mr. Chairman, the total allocation of \$566,000 represents an increase of \$49,000 compared to the 2024/25 fiscal year. This increase is primarily driven by expanded investment in training and apprenticeship initiatives, reflecting our strategic priority to

- address current and anticipated skills shortages in estate and facilities management;
- ensure staff remain current with evolving industry standards, technologies, and best practices; and
- expand employment and learning opportunities for young people entering the workforce.

As we continue toward modernising Government property management, investing in our people—both current staff and future talent—is not a luxury, but a necessity.

8101, Buildings

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8101, Buildings, which is a cornerstone of the department's operational framework and a critical component in ensuring the safety, functionality, and longevity of the Government's built infrastructure.

This programme carries the mandate *To effectively manage the maintenance, repair, and renovation of all Government buildings.*

This essential responsibility spans a diverse range of properties—from schools, police stations, and post offices to Government offices and residential buildings—ensuring that these assets remain safe, serviceable, and fit for purpose.

Mr. Chairman, the Buildings programme is organised into two dedicated cost centres, each with a distinct operational focus:

- **Services Management, [91002]:** Allocated \$1,251,000 This cost centre oversees the strategic and technical coordination of all maintenance activities across the Government estate. It includes staffing, inspections, compliance with building codes and safety regulations, and centralised management of maintenance requests.
- **Maintenance, [91003]:** Allocated \$8,713,000 This cost centre covers the direct costs of maintenance, including repairs, renovations, contracted services, emergency responses, and material procurement. It is the primary operational arm of the Buildings programme.

Together, these cost centres comprise a total programme budget of \$9,964,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, this represents an overall increase of \$431,000 compared to the 2024/25 fiscal year. The increase is driven by three key factors:

1. **Salaries and Wages Uplift** as aforementioned. Adjustments have been made to reflect revised pay scales, union negotiations, and cost-of-living increases, ensuring the department remains competitive in attracting and retaining skilled technical staff.
2. **Realignment of Work Units:** Operational efficiencies and restructuring have led to a more strategic deployment of resources within the Buildings section, which is now better equipped to respond to service demands and implement preventative maintenance strategies.
3. **Rising Material and Contractual Costs:** Inflation and global supply chain pressures have led to increased costs for essential materials such as electrical components, plumbing supplies, HVAC parts, and roofing materials, as well as for outsourced labour and services.

8102, Estates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8102, Estates, which is a vital division within the Department of Public Lands and Buildings. This section is tasked with delivering comprehensive property and land management services to all Government ministries and departments, while also providing a range of services to the general public in matters relating to Government-owned land.

The core responsibilities of the Estates section include:

- property insurance management for Government-owned assets;
- land and building acquisition to support the expansion of public services;
- leasing arrangements, both inbound and outbound, ensuring efficient and lawful use of Government property; and
- oversight of Government-owned land, including licensing and leasing of strategic national assets such as islands, the foreshore, and the seabed.

As the official custodian of these critical national assets, the Estates section plays a key role in safeguarding the public interest and ensuring the responsible stewardship of land and property resources.

Mr. Chairman, programme 8102, [Estates], is structured into two distinct cost centres, each with targeted responsibilities.

- **91004, Property Asset Management:** This cost centre focuses on the day-to-day and strategic management of the Government's property portfolio. It includes activities related to leases, licences, acquisitions, valuations, and ensuring compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.
- **91005, Insurance:** This cost centre administers the insurance coverage for Government

buildings and properties, ensuring that assets are protected against loss, damage, and unforeseen events. It also handles claims processing and insurance policy management.

For the fiscal year 2025/26, the Estates programme has been allocated a total budget of \$10,828,000.

Mr. Chairman, this allocation reflects an increase of \$229,000 over the previous fiscal year. This increase is primarily attributed to the recruitment of two additional Estate surveyors. These appointments are a strategic investment intended to strengthen the department's internal expertise and capacity to

- more efficiently manage the increasing volume and complexity of property transactions;
- accelerate processing times for leases and licences;
- enhance oversight and accountability in the use of Government land; and
- support ministries with timely advice on property matters as service needs grow.

These new surveyors will also contribute to long-term planning and help identify opportunities for better utilisation of Government assets.

The Chairman: Minister, you have about an hour and a half left. It is about that, yes. Carry on.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Land Survey Management

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now move to programme 8103, Land Surveys, which is administered under cost centre 91007—

The Chairman: And we remain on page B-222. Am I correct?

Hon. Jache Adams: Yes.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: For the fiscal year 2025/26, this programme has been allocated a budget of \$385,000, which represents a decrease of \$61,000 compared to the previous fiscal year. This reduction is primarily due to the completion of specific equipment upgrades and administrative needs.

Mr. Chairman, the Land Surveys section plays a vital role in supporting not only the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, but also the wider Government of Bermuda through the provision of specialised surveying, mapping, and spatial data services.

Key responsibilities of this section include:

1. Establishment and Maintenance of the National Control Monument Network. This network is a [geodetic] infrastructure that provides the foundation for all land-based spatial

measurements in Bermuda. It ensures that both Government agencies and private land survey companies operate within a consistent and internationally recognised coordinate system, thus preserving the accuracy and integrity of land ownership and development data.

2. National Mapping and Geospatial Information Services. The section is responsible for the production, maintenance, and dissemination of Bermuda's official maps and geospatial datasets. These tools are essential for urban planning, infrastructure development, emergency response coordination, and environmental management across Government.
3. Hydrographic Surveying and Data Collection. In a significant cost-saving and capacity-building shift, the section has internalised hydrographic survey functions—tasks that were previously outsourced to overseas contractors. These include seabed mapping, coastal profiling, and other marine data acquisition efforts that support maritime safety, infrastructure planning, and environmental protection.

In addition to its national-level responsibilities, Mr. Chairman, the Land Surveys section also plays a direct, operational role in supporting engineering and construction projects managed by the Ministry. These services include

- boundary identification and topographic surveys for capital works;
- precise layout support for construction sites and support infrastructure projects; and
- verification of land measurements for Government buildings and facilities.

Such contributions are vital in minimising construction delays, ensuring legal compliance with land boundaries, and enabling efficient project execution.

Another critical responsibility of this section is the creation, assignment, and maintenance of primary civic addresses across the Island. This function underpins numerous public services—from emergency response systems and postal delivery to utility provision and voter registration. Maintaining a robust and accurate address database is foundational to effective governance and public safety.

[91008], Project Management

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to programme 8105, Project Management, which has been allocated a budget of \$726,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26. This represents an increase of \$55,000 over the previous year. The increase is primarily driven by the rising cost of professional consultancy services and the growing number of capital development projects.

Mr. Chairman, this section plays a central coordinating role in the planning, implementation, and

oversight of Government capital projects. Specifically, the Project Management Unit is responsible for

- managing capital development projects directly undertaken by the Department of Public Lands and Buildings; and
- ensuring that all facility modifications and property improvements align with service delivery objectives, safety standards, and long-term infrastructure planning.

Mr. Chairman, the work of this section is not simply technical—it is strategic. Through the effective management of facility upgrades and new construction, the Project Management Unit ensures that the built environment continues to evolve in alignment with the changing needs of public service delivery.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now draw Honourable Members' attention to page B-223, which outlines the Ministry's Current Account Estimates for the 2025/26 fiscal year in detail.

Upon review, Members will note a collective increase of \$132,000 in salaries and an additional \$540,000 in wages. These adjustments again reflect this Government's ongoing commitment to fair compensation and investment in our public officers, particularly in recognition of their dedication and the increasingly complex demands of public service.

Additionally, Mr. Chairman, there is a \$162,000 increase under the Rentals line item. This is for renovations to several Government rental properties to update the aging infrastructure.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department anticipates generating \$3,247,000 in revenue during the 2025/26 fiscal year mainly attributed to the renting of Government apartments to employees of the Government and leasing of Government foreshores.

Full-Time Equivalents (FTE)

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the budgeted number of employees for the department is 162 as reflected, a decrease of five from the previous fiscal year.

To reiterate, the apparent reduction in staffing numbers is the result of a methodological correction, not a reduction in the total workforce. In previous years, all approved posts were counted—whether filled, vacant, or unfunded. This year, the figures more accurately reflect the actual staffing situation

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: As outlined on page B-224, the Department of Public Lands and Buildings has estab-

lished a comprehensive set of Key Performance Targets for the 2025/26 fiscal year. These targets serve as a strategic framework to guide the department's operations, enhance the quality and consistency of service delivery, and ensure full compliance with relevant legislative and regulatory requirements.

These performance benchmarks have been carefully designed to support our overarching mandate—managing Government property and land assets with integrity, transparency, and efficiency—while also reinforcing our commitment to operational excellence across all programme areas, including Administration, Buildings, Estates, Land Surveys, and Project Management.

Capital Works Plans

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, as found on page [C]-6, there are several planned capital works that will take place across the various capital cost centres.

Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 allocation for capital development cost centre [75112] for Major Buildings Upgrade Projects is \$3,639,000. This account enables the department to carry out major works to improve and redevelop facilities to modernise and to make them fit for purpose and meet statutory compliance. Whilst the demand for work often exceeds the budget allocation. However, the department strives to prioritise works for the most effective use of the capital funds available.

The works under this account for 2025/26 include but not limited to the replacement and upgrade of the central air-conditioning system for offices in the Government Administration Building; improvements to several buildings in the Botanical Gardens; refurbishment of Gibbs Hill and St. David's Lighthouses; and exterior works to Prospect Depot.

Mr. Chairman, the capital budget for 2025/26 has \$250,000 under cost centre 75298 as found on page [C]-6 for the Government Administration building bathroom upgrades and will be spent on renovating the bathroom around the two buildings.

Mr. Chairman, the capital budget for 2025/26 also has \$2.9 million under cost centre 75309 for All Schools Maintenance and will be spent on annual scheduled improvements, repairs and painting works to our schools.

Mr. Chairman, school facility maintenance continues to be a priority for the department. The Buildings, Estates and Project Management sections are working closely with the Education Department on aligning school buildings with the longer-term Education Reform Plan for the Bermuda Public School System. Whilst the Education [Reform] Plan is underway the general infrastructure of all schools must still be maintained as part the Government Estate. The focus for works under 75309 will [be] scheduled external and interior painting and air conditioning improvements.

Mr. Chairman, capital budget 75327 has been allocated a sum of \$50,000 for the completion of the sewage disposal infrastructure works at Horseshoe Bay Beach [House].

Mr. Chairman, in 2025/26 the Government remains committed under capital code 75357 to reduce our carbon footprint by installing roof mounted solar photovoltaic panels. However, we also need to allow for time to renovate the Government's assets as well. Therefore, \$50,000 has been allocated to continue studies across the Government Estate in order to adequately prepare for this transition. However, I would like to note that multiple Government buildings already have solar panels installed including the Government Administration Building, General Post Office Building, the Department of Public Transportation Headquarters and the Transportation Control Department.

Mr. Chairman, a capital budget Account 75366 for 2025/26 in the amount of \$300,000 for continuing with the installation programme for [Electric] Vehicle [EV] charging infrastructure required to support the Government's initiative to move towards EV's for the Government's fleet. Locations are being identified and infrastructure installed for charging stations ahead of procurement of EVs.

75099, Office Relocations

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, Office Relocations capital cost centre 75099, which is reported under Ministry Headquarters, has a sum allocated in the amount of \$5,085,000.

This capital budget account allows for the planning and fit-out costs for moving and improving Government offices. For 2024/25 this budget account will enable the movement of the Registrar of Companies. There are planned improvements to offices at Global House and the Government Administration Building.

Mr. Chairman, in addition, the department takes the responsibility for the Design, Planning, Project Management and Capital Development Expenditure for [other] Departments Projects in Government Facilities, including, as examples:

- Education Reform Projects, [75360]
- Government House, [75340]
- Marine and Ports Workshops, [75351]
- Lefroy House Care Community, [75361]
- Parish Clinics Refurbishments, [75347]
- Royal Bermuda Regiment Coastguard Facility, [75362]
- Royal Bermuda Regiment Officers' Mess Bathrooms, [75363]
- Police Headquarters Prospect Refurbishment, [75103]

Mr. Chairman, as I conclude the Budget Brief for Head 81, the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, I would like to take this opportunity to rec-

ognise all the staff in the department and thank them for their hard work of maintaining the support facilities that enable the delivery of public services.

I will now move to Head 82, Works and Engineering as found on pages B-225 through B-231, C-6, C-7 and C-13, the last in my presentation.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister.

We are just reminded that we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

We are now going into Head 82.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: I'm sorry. Minister, go right ahead. You have about an hour and 15 minutes left.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

HEAD 82—DEPARTMENT OF WORKS AND ENGINEERING

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Works and Engineering is *To ensure the effective and prudent management of all engineering services related to the construction, erection, improvement, maintenance, and repair of Government infrastructure, as well as the operation of essential water and waste treatment services.*

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Works and Engineering is a cornerstone of public service in Bermuda, delivering a wide range of essential functions that directly support the daily lives of our residents. The department is entrusted with the ongoing maintenance, repair, and improvement of Government infrastructure and the provision of critical services such as water supply, solid waste management, and environmental protection.

Our responsibilities touch nearly every part of Bermuda's physical infrastructure. From ensuring that roads are safe and passable, to maintaining clean drinking water and treating sewage, the department works tirelessly, often behind the scenes, to uphold the standard of living that Bermudians rightly expect.

To fulfil its mandate, the department is organised into seven operational programmes, each with its own specialised responsibilities. I would like to briefly outline these sections.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you.

1. Administration [programme 8200] provides for the salaried senior management staff of the department. The mandate of the senior management team is the efficient management of the seven sections of the department.

2. Engineering [programme 8201] provides quality electrical, mechanical and structural engineering services.
3. Highways [programme 8202] develop and maintain the public road infrastructure to ensure the safe passage of motorists and pedestrians.
4. Waste Management [programme 8203] arranges for the collection and safe disposal of Bermuda's solid wastes.
5. Quarry Transport [programme 8204] manages the fleet and equipment purchasing and mechanical maintenance for majority of the Government vehicle fleet.
6. Quarry Products [programme 8205] services the Government Asphalt Plant and associated paving operation products.
7. Water and Sewage [programme 8206] provided planning, design, construction, operation and maintenance of the Government water extraction, treatment and distribution systems and the wastewater collection and distribution systems.

As we look ahead to the fiscal year 2025/26, the continued investment in the department's programmes is essential to maintaining and improving the infrastructure that underpins Bermuda's economy and quality of life.

I now present the Department of Works and Engineering's budget estimate, which reflects our strategic priorities, operational needs, and commitment to delivering value to the people of Bermuda. However, before I begin, Mr. Chairman, it is important to distinguish between the Operational Budget and the Capital Budget when considering the funding of the department's work.

The Operational Budget covers the day-to-day expenses whilst in contrast the Capital Budget is dedicated to funding major infrastructure projects and long-term investments. These include large-scale road resurfacing, bridge rehabilitation, water and sewage system upgrades, heavy equipment purchases, and other construction or replacement initiatives that extend beyond routine maintenance.

Mr. Chairman, while the operational budget supports the foundational functions of the department, most of the department's major work is funded through the Capital Accounts. This is where the bulk of resources are allocated to support the planning, design, and execution of substantial [public] infrastructure improvements.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the department's operational budget.

2025/26 Operational Budget

Hon. Jache Adams: As detailed on pages B-226 and B-227, the estimated current expenditure for the Department of Works and Engineering for the fiscal year

2025/26 is \$34,316,000, which represents an increase of \$1.88 million from the 2023/24 original budget level.

8200, Administration

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, turning to Administration. Administration provides funding for the salaried senior management [team] of the department. As previously outlined, the mandate of this team is to ensure the effective and efficient oversight of the department's seven operational sections.

Mr. Chairman, an operational budget allocation of \$312,000 has been designated for programme 8200 for fiscal year 2025/26. This represents an increase of \$26,000 compared to 2024/25. The increase can be attributed to salary adjustments as previously explained.

8201, Engineering

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Engineering Services programme is to provide quality electrical, mechanical and structural engineering services. Within this, there are three separate functions: Electrical/Mechanical, Electrical Support and Structures.

A budget of \$1.685 million has been allocated for this programme, representing a \$61,000 increase compared to the 2023/24 budget. This increase is owed to the salary uplift negotiated and increases in material cost for maintenance.

Mr. Chairman, with respect to cost centre 92002, Electrical, it has been allocated \$605,000. This is no change to the previous budget.

8202, Highways

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Highways programme is entrusted with the vital responsibility of developing and maintaining the nation's public road infrastructure. Its core mandate is to ensure the safe, efficient, and reliable movement of both motorists and pedestrians across the country. This encompasses the full spectrum of activities related to the planning, design, and execution of road infrastructure projects, with a particular focus on the following:

- routine [road] resurfacing;
- installation and maintenance of drainage systems;
- erection and upkeep of signage and road markings;
- construction and reinforcement of retaining structures; and
- provision and maintenance of public bus shelters.

It is important to underscore, Mr. Chairman, that the provisions being discussed here fall strictly within the scope of the programme's operational budget. This means these allocations are intended for

the ongoing minor maintenance, management, and support activities necessary to keep the road infrastructure functional on a day-to-day basis. These are distinct from capital investments, which relate to large-scale infrastructure development projects and new construction works which will be discussed soon.

Given the breadth of the programme's mandate and the critical importance of road paving in ensuring road safety and longevity, we have initiated an internal assessment to explore the feasibility of establishing a dedicated unit focused exclusively on road paving operations. This proposed restructuring is aimed at improving efficiency, enhancing project delivery, and ensuring more specialised attention to one of the most resource-intensive and high impact aspects of our work. We recognise that any such change must be carefully considered, and as such, consultations are currently underway.

However, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that a \$5,804,000 budget has been allocated to this programme, representing an increase of \$466,000 as compared to the 2024/25 original budget. This increase is primarily due to the salary uplift negotiated and the hiring of additional personnel.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated for Management stands at \$969,000 for the fiscal year, reflecting an increase of \$51,000 over the original 2024/25 allocation. This increase is primarily due to salary adjustments arising from Government-approved wage uplifts.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre [92007] for Public Road Cleaning is \$1,705,000, representing an increase of \$296,000 over the previous fiscal year. This unit is tasked with the cleaning and maintenance of public highways, including tree trimming and vegetation control, and oversees the Solo Sweeper Programme.

8203, Waste Management

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Waste Management programme is to arrange for the collection and [safe] disposal of Bermuda's solid wastes.

Mr. Chairman, a budget of \$19[187,000] has been allocated to this programme for fiscal year 2025/26. This represents an increase of \$644,000 as compared to the original 2024/25 budget. This increase represents additional staffing and maintenance costs for the Tynes Bay facility as well as the Waste Management Collection section. This increase also encompasses salary uplift negotiated.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre [92012] for Airport Disposal Facility is \$1.237 million, an increase of \$14,000 from last year's original budget. This increase is again attributed to salary uplifts.

Mr. Chairman, the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility plays a critical dual role in Bermuda's national infrastructure by providing both refuse dis-

posal and renewable energy generation. As the Island's primary waste management facility, it is responsible for the safe and environmentally sound [incineration] of household and commercial waste, significantly reducing landfill dependency and helping to manage the country's limited land resources.

Mr. Chairman, [cost centre 92016] Tynes Bay Administration is \$724,000, reflecting an increase of \$41,000.

Similarly, [cost centre 92017] Tynes Bay Operations stands at \$5.9 million, representing an increase of \$38,000 compared to the original budget of last fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, I will turn to the Quarry Transport.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

8204, Quarry Transport

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Government Fleet and Operations Section (more commonly known as the Quarry) is comprehensive and operationally significant.

Mr. Chairman, a \$3,139,000 budget has been allocated to this programme, representing an increase of \$453,000 as compared to the original 2024/25 budget. This increase is due to the hiring of additional personnel, salary uplift and increases in maintenance and parts budgets across the section.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for cost centre 92034. Quarry Receipts, is set at negative \$5,500,000, consistent with the 2024/25 allocation. This cost centre functions as an internal recharge budget, where the negative value represents the recovery of costs for services provided by the Quarry programme to other Government departments and agencies. These services include vehicle repairs, equipment leasing, and mechanical maintenance, with expenses offset through internal charges applied to the users of those services.

8205, Quarry Products

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, a budget of \$2.1 million has been allocated for cost centre [92023], the Asphalt Plant, representing an increase of \$21,000 over the previous fiscal year.

In addition, a rechargeable budget of \$3[140,000] has been allocated for quarry products under this programme for fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to address a potential question regarding the purchase and production of asphalt. While this administration has consistently communicated that a new asphalt plant is on its way—which will significantly improve paving capacity—some may question why current production remains limited. The answer lies in the reality that the new plant is not scheduled to be operational until the

first quarter of 2026. Until that time, we must strategically limit production to preserve the functionality of the existing ageing plant, as previously discussed in an earlier session.

8206, Water and Sewage

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the Water and Sewage programme, on page B-227, was allocated a budget of \$5.2 million. This represents an increase of \$209,000 as compared to the original 2024/25 budget.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, I now draw Honourable Members' attention to page B-227, which outlines the department's Current Account Estimates for the [2025/26] fiscal year in detail.

Revenue Summary

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the department anticipates generating \$11.4 million in revenue.

Full-Time Equivalents

Hon. Jache Adams: The number full-time equivalents is 308.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jache Adams: As outlined on page B-229 through B-231, the Works and Engineering department's performance across various business units for the period 2023/24 to 2025/26 demonstrates a consistent focus on operational efficiency, public service delivery, and infrastructure development.

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Jache Adams: Let me see how much more I have left.

The Chairman: We have about 65 minutes, Minister. (I am going to say) About 60 minutes left to this debate.

Hon. Jache Adams: Okay. I will . . . give me a few more minutes and then I will open the floor to question.

The Chairman: No, go right ahead, Minister.

75042, Road Works

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for this cost centre stands at \$5,000,000, which matches

previous years. While this budget is certainly important for continuing major maintenance work, including road [re]surfacing, junction improvements, road widening, and the installation of new sidewalks, I must acknowledge that this amount is simply not enough to fully address the growing demands of our road infrastructure.

We are all acutely aware of the deteriorating state of our roads, and the concerns raised by the public are both valid and justified. The frustrations of the public are not lost on us, and we are committed to addressing these challenges.

Mr. Chairman, I will skip to Quarry Refurbishment.

The Chairman: Yes.

75264, Quarry Refurbishment

Hon. Jache Adams: The 2025/26 estimate for this cost centre, for the Quarry Refurbishment is \$5,575,000. This funding will support critical infrastructure upgrades at the Quarry Depot, including the decommissioning of the existing asphalt production plant, and site preparation for the installation of the new asphalt plant.

In addition, a portion of these funds will be allocated toward the establishment of training and testing sites, which will enhance our operational readiness and support the development of a skilled workforce capable of operating and maintaining the new equipment efficiently.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, my last topic will be on vehicles.

The Chairman: Yes, sir.

76495, Vehicles and Equipment

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, since 2013, and well before my time in this Honourable House, budget constraints have significantly limited the replacement of vehicles and equipment, resulting in a fleet that is now, on average, over 10 years old. This has led to increasing maintenance challenges, particularly due to the difficulty in sourcing replacement parts [for] outdated models.

These limitations have had real and measurable impacts across Government operations. Although a 2015 report recommended a phased replacement strategy, it was unfortunately not implemented at the time due to a combination of ongoing budgetary pressures, management turnover at the Quarry, and the widespread disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Chairman, under the 2025/26 budget, vehicle and equipment replacements will focus on units that have clearly surpassed their useful economic life, are in poor or unsafe condition, or are no longer suitable.

ble for their intended purpose. While many of these replacements will not yet be electric vehicles, they are being treated as “bridge vehicles,” essential interim solutions to support Government operations while we work toward our target of achieving a fully electrified fleet by 2035.

The estimate for this annual allocation is \$5,181,000 and will be used to procure the following amongst others:

- replacement kettle trucks
- new drainage cleaning vehicles
- mild-hybrid diesel utility vehicles
- new bucket trucks
- replacement vans for community centres

76917, Electric Vehicles

Hon. Jache Adams: Mr. Chairman, this capital programme is aimed to have Government lead by example with the replacement of combustion vehicles [with] electrical vehicles. Using the data from our pilot study, we have identified areas within Government that provide the best opportunity for adoption based upon the upgradability of locations to provide the necessary charging infrastructure.

It is envisioned that as our charging infrastructure is established that this budget will grow to accelerate the transition to EVs. The 2025/26 estimate for this annual allocation is \$150,000.

76764, Parks Vehicles

Hon. Jache Adams: And finally, Mr. Chairman, this cost centre is under the management of the Quarry, and some of their purchases include the ones mentioned before.

The 2025/26 estimate for this annual allocation is \$625,000.

And so, Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation of the Department of Works and Engineering, and indeed, the Ministry of Public Works and Environment. I certainly open the floor to any questions.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister.

The Minister has concluded his brief, and we are still in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

Would any other Member like to speak on any of these heads?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Certainly, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much. I recognise the Honourable Craig Cannonier, Opposition Whip, Shadow Minister for Public Works and Environment from constituency 12.

And Mr. Cannonier, if you would just pause for a second as we have a transfer and change in the Chair to the Honourable Lawrence Scott, JP MP.

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon.

Honourable Member, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you. Thank you very much.

I must say I thought I was going to have more time. I have like 25 pages of questions here. And—

An Hon. Member: You have got about a half an hour.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I couldn't help it. I was accommodating Government and all of its changes because we have so many Ministers out—not here!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Well, if you—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I'm here. I'm here to talk. I would have loved to have had more time but we—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: You have the floor, Member.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Be careful to chirp.

I have some serious concerns concerning this particular Ministry and I will start off by saying . . . and I want to . . . this has nothing to do with . . . our Public Works civil servants do a fantastic job at the work that they have to do. It has not been easy for them to work under the conditions that we have. But when I am told in the general statement that this budget represents 36 (through Public Works) a real investment going forward, all of the investments that I see thus far are because of salaries or employee cuts. So while they are saving money . . . so it increases the allotments, or we are actually not adding staff where we have to obviously pay a little more but the production is not showing that.

And so, my concern first of all is this here. If we look at on the general page, page B-201, if you go down . . . and I have to move quickly here. If we go right down to Capital Expenditure under Development, you will see an allotment there that says \$50,492,000. Correct? Yes, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: You are—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Under Development—yes. If you move to your left and you look under 2024/25 original amount, you will see \$35,697,000. Now that is quite a difference. And as the Minister was speaking, that's an incredible . . . that is beautiful to see that we have got this kind of development. However, I am going to table for this House from the budget of 2024/25, for everyone . . . I need somebody . . . Member, just take that up to the desk.

You will see that in actual fact under Development [Estimate] for 2024/25 budget, the allocation was actually \$52,992,000. In other words, what I am getting at is, if the 2024/25 budget original amount was \$52 million and here we are with 2025/26 with an amount of \$50,492,000, that's a loss. That is not an increase in development. And so that number needs to be corrected in the 2025/26 budget amount. It has to be corrected to \$52,992,000.

I can see how it would be a problem because now it basically . . . it looks like it is inflating what we are doing in development when in actual fact we are allotting less money to it. So, I have tabled that, and I am hoping as we go through this . . . I tend to . . . one of my pet peeves is to find some of the challenges in the [Budget] Book and comparisons and ensure that they make the changes in the future. So, I hope that this changes because I did bring this up before. So, we need to change the Development amount under the 2025/26 Budget Book. We need to actually change that now to \$52 million.

The Chairman: Member, I do see exactly what you are talking about but . . . and I haven't done any deeper digging, but it does say right next to the \$52,992,000 in 2024/25 "For details of scheme see section C, pages 4 to 16." Did we look into that as well just to see if that provided any explanation?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. So what I am saying to you is that this actual amount, even if you go back to pages C-4 to C-16, you still have to make the correction, because you cannot have a revised amount to what basically is almost like we are saying we are putting the revised amount and when we do these calculations we always calculate between the 2024/25 original amount and the 2025/26 original allotted amount, which gives us disparity. Not between the revised amount.

So maybe there was a mistake there. I am not blaming anyone who was trying to do anything, but the actual numbers themselves reflect something completely different. And it is a major difference because as I go through the general statement, what we are talking about here is . . . you know, the Premier has said that the end of austerity has happened. But when I start adding up these total figures, it still feels like we are in austerity measures.

Where is the . . . the Ministry of Public Works, if we take a look over on page B-202, really under the department objectives and the mission statement, it says "To ensure the provision of sustainable infrastructures, systems and properties for the operation of public services." That is the bones of the country. Literally the bones of the country. And every other Ministry then puts its flesh on top of those bones because Public Works touches everything. And I know that, you know, you have been around for a while. It touches everything. Ministers in the House and in Cabinet when they are deliberating, they are coming to Public Works because, *Listen, I want to do this stuff over here*. Every single Minister is touched in Cabinet by this Ministry. So, I wanted to qualify that so that we are clear.

But if we also go back over to page B-201 (and I am going to move swiftly here), and we look under Revenues. If we look under Revenues under Environment and Natural Resources, I got to say this here. I feel for the Minister. Back in the day I remember Public Works only had three heads. Okay? I am saying back in the day . . . I shouldn't even say that. But I was debating only three heads, and they are huge heads. Right? [It was] 81, the Headquarters, 81, 82. But now we are . . . we are . . . I mean, the poor Minister. He is not even going to be able to have a cup of tea or coffee in the morning. This is incredible that we are adding this on.

I do not know how Public Works staffing is going to be able to keep up with this here because that Environment and Natural Resources is a huge thing. But if you look at it, I see revenue is \$6 million and underneath [is] public lands and building revenues of \$4 million. We are losing a little revenue under Works and Engineering. We will talk about that as we get into details. Hopefully we have the time.

My question on this page is, Is there potential to grow this? I mean, one of the things that I find when we are running government . . . in the private sector, we are always looking for an opportunity to grow revenue. But I have never heard . . . and even when I was in the Ministry, I wasn't really paying close attention, but we got a young, energetic Minister here and I am asking him the question, Can we look at how we can grow these revenues?

The challenge with growing the revenues is this: Revenue is driven by people. We got a problem there, right? We got to face up to the problem that we got less people here. So, we got to figure this out. But there is still opportunity to grow this revenue. So, I want to know from the Minister whether or not he will take a commitment to looking at how we can grow revenue. And we will get into that stuff as we go on a little further.

We need to spend more time than this. And I thank the Minister for reminding us on page B-201 in his general statement about letting us know that we got 600 roads and 80 public docks, and we got 2,000-

plus acres and all of this stuff that we are responsible for, it is important that we look for every opportunity that we can to improve. I believe, on page B-201, under the current expenditure (at the top) for Heads 36, 68, 79, 81, and 82, we have a commitment of \$4.4 million more.

If we truly are going to put investment into the country, the first complaint that comes out of everyone's mouth, Mr. Chairman, is, *It's either the roads are messed up . . . this or that. The railings are not fixed. They have been down forever. This wall is down . . .* And that type of thing. If we are truly going to invest, I would love to see, not 6 per cent, I would love to see a 10 per cent increase there which is a true titling on our commitment to the country.

This Ministry touches everyone. If Public Works messes up . . . and let's just say for instance the roads are messed up and we got all kinds of stuff going on. People are going slow. Then people get frustrated. Right? And now something simple that we are doing as far as allocations is affecting their real-life experience. If we have to . . . and in the general statement as he mentioned about roadworks, if we have to repave an area two and three times because we didn't get it right in the first place, imagine the frustration on the people trying to get to work, trying to get home and the like. So I will say that in general comment.

I want to move over to page B-202. And under the department objectives, number 1, to provide management oversight for Public Works, and I will let everyone read through the rest of it. I have a question. What are some of the Minister's policy objectives for 2025/26 that are going to allow us to see some progression here? What are some of those new policies that we are going to be putting in place that are going to make this whole thing more effective for Bermudians as they met out their everyday lives and we maintain a good bone structure?

The third objective here is to meet human resource needs. Now what I would like to do is . . . what . . . what . . . for human resources needs what have been some of those difficult areas that we have not been able to fill? I can say some of them off the top of my head, but we just heard, through the Minister's briefing where he talked about as we go further on down the line, we are trying to get an agronomist, we are going to have to get people . . . lifeguards and all these kinds of different things. And Estates as well. It is difficult to get qualified Bermudians because we have foreigners in those positions right now who are surveyors and the like. Some of those difficult areas, why are they difficult and what are we doing about it?

The former Minister did spend some time on talking about youth and training youth, so I want to get to that.

And then on page B-202, I will go down to number eight, *to ensure that controls promulgated by code of practice and other associated policies as it*

relates to procurement of goods and services. I know that the Minister, like I said, he is a young guy, so I am sure he hit the ground running. What are the challenges and what opportunities can we identify where we can get better at this? Because the more that we put out to procurement the more work that is getting done, the more people who we can hire and hopefully better salaries. And more important than a better salary, or an increased salary, but work in and of itself, sustained work is how it works to maintain people in the position that they are in. So if they can give me some indication there on some of these things.

So now I am going to go over to some of the analysis on page . . . I've got page B-201 here. I have got a whole bunch of questions. I won't do those questions, though. I am going to move on because we need to get to some of this stuff. And we will get to it in the analysis.

So, on page B-203, what I would like to be able to do . . . (I'll just flip over to my notes here.) On page B-203, if we take a look at . . . we are still on Head 36, unit 3601 and 46111, Administration. The Minister mentioned . . . and we are looking at the numbers there. We are spending \$41,000 more. The Minister mentioned new protocols in this particular area. I was curious as to what some of those new protocols might be.

Now, in addition to that, if you look at the actual estimate for 2025/26 of \$2.4 million, I draw your attention across to the far left under the actual for 2023/24. Which has been a pet peeve for me for many years. We spent \$5.9 million in 2023/24. That is double what we originally quoted for. That is double what the revised amount . . . more than double, three times the amount of the revised amount. And simply more than double the estimate for 2025/26. And we don't get these actual numbers until almost two years later. And it is bothering me because it is way over what we calculated for, so why is there such a huge difference?

If we go down to Finance Management, 3610, on page B-203, again we are under Head 36. I guess I was trying to understand what are we doing with the \$119,000 more. I was trying to take note from the Minister on these particular areas here to just see . . . see . . . now this involves accounts payable, receivables, payroll and the like. So, I believe he said that it was staff adjustments that are counted for that. And that's fine. I get it. But again, if it is staff adjustments, then I understand that. Mr. Chairman, \$119,000 I am not sure what particular position that relates to as far as staff adjustments are concerned. So, it would be nice to know what we are talking about there. I think last year there was some mention about truck fees and stuff like that. But I will leave that alone.

Let's go down to unit 36111. We are still on page B-203 under Purchasing. Again, as I was trying to take note of what was being said, I think this had to do with pay scale adjustments once again. And I am

getting to a point here because, again, as I said in my general statement, all of these increases, really dollar allotments, are not because we are investing in infrastructure and the like. It is because of salary adjustments. I understand that the Minister mentioned that.

What I would like to know is . . . go down to Purchasing under 36111. I was just curious. When it comes to the wholesalers and retailers that we purchase from, do we get a bulk or a discount as government because of the volume of what it is that we are purchasing from the retailers and the wholesalers? It would be nice to know if we are doing that. I mean, certainly we want to buy Bermuda. And if we can strike up a relationship with whoever, it would be nice to know what kind of discounts we are getting in this particular area.

Also, if we look at Supply Stores. The Minister did give some word to that there, so I will leave that alone.

Under 3612, Telecommunications . . . let me just look through my notes here, what he said. Telecommunications. He said that this increase, \$26,000, was due to . . . I believe he said higher fees. But what I wasn't quite sure of was the maintenance. I am not sure. What kind of fees are we talking about? That these fees are higher. Is that with the phone companies? I don't know.

The Chairman: You just have 30 minutes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Okay. I am going to skip over all of that. I am going to move over to Parks because we just don't have the time.

What I would like to ask is if the Minister, if he is obliged . . . typically, Minister Burch would give me his briefing. I would be able to write it down as he was very kind. I didn't even have to ask for it. He just gave it to me. You know, I must not be in good with this particular new Minister.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, I am going to big him up a little bit.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And I was also allotted the fortune of giving the questions that I couldn't get to him, and he actually answered the questions the following week. So, if I could submit those questions, because there are lot of questions. I won't look for it in a week but if I could submit those maybe the Minister would oblige in being able to get me some answers to those.

So, I think what I am going to do, and it is unfortunate that I do not have the time. You know, it is beyond some of the things. I would like to point out if I could, Mr. Chairman, move over to page B-211 under

Head 68, Parks. I am going to jump ahead here because [there] is so little time.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: If I could jump . . . I am jumping over pages here, Whip.

Under page B-211, under Performance Measures, if I follow on down to Performance Measures under Government House. In the middle of the page, 78015. Is this . . . and go down two rows there. Total number of bedding plants installed. If you look at the revised forecast, it says [\$]120,000. That has got to be an error. Correct? Because the original forecast \$12,000, the target forecast \$12,000. Now, unless we hired about a dozen people to help us with installing bedding plants and got some volunteer organisation, I would like to know if that is a mistake. If it is, again, I am a stickler about this stuff because this is records for the history. If it needs to be changed, please change it. It has crept up before in other areas under performance measures, if we could do that.

Under Maintenance and Development, 78020, Number of toilets serviced. I notice that . . . I don't know where we got all these toilets, but anyhow, 3,500 serviced toilets. Is that . . . does that mean all of our buildings and what not? Where are all these toilets?

An Hon. Member: Schools.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Schools. Yes, there we go. Schools as well. I don't know. I have no clue. Do you know?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I don't know. It would be nice to know. Sometimes these performance measures . . . what the heck is that talking about—3,500?

Now, the Government has . . . and it is saying that it is investing in infrastructure and building new buildings, well, that number should have gone up from 3,500 from two years ago. It hasn't. One of the issues also I do have is I need to understand why have we taken out of performance measures in most of the Public Works areas. Why have we taken the actual outcome out? There has got to be a reasoning behind why we have taken it out. But if you take out the actual outcome in 2023/24 and it is all zeros—this is the first time I have seen this in these slots—if we take that out it avoids the public from holding us accountable as Government and Opposition as to exactly what is going on. Now there has got to be a reason for that. I don't know what it is. Maybe it was a Cabinet decision. I don't know. I just don't know but it would be nice to find out.

The Chairman: I don't know the actual answer but just keep in mind that would be around the exit of COVID-19.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: In 2023/24, we were well out of . . . we were still functioning. I mean, if you look at these, we were still cleaning toilets, Mr. Chairman. It is zero. We were still planting plants. It is zero. So, I am just . . . there has got to be a more philosophical, more strategic decision for it. I just don't know what it is because all these performance measures are at zero.

You know, again, over on page B-212 under Head 68, Parks. Total number of corporate events held at Fort St. Catherine. Now this is where I want to talk about revenue. Remember, as I said earlier about revenue? I mean, Fort St. Catherine is pretty popular. Are we actually working with like other ministries, like Tourism and the like? I know that that was mentioned that we do work with them in other areas in getting publication. But I mean, what a picturesque place to have a wedding there and have pictures and advertise around the world. Maybe that is something we can do. Maybe we are already doing it. I don't know. But this is an opportunity to increase revenue significantly because it is a public spot. It is beautiful. It would be nice to be able to . . . unless St. Fort Catherine is not being kept up. But I do know that we were spending time.

Now when it comes to Fort St. Catherine in this performance measures, and the other forts, I also know that historically we used volunteers. So, I would like to know if the volunteers still exist who are helping us run and maintain these forts. Are they still in place? Because we had quite a few. Maybe they are not now. It would be nice to know whether or not they still are. And if they aren't, you know, we can increase revenue. We got time. We get this thing up and going.

Now, I am going to quickly switch over and I pray that the Honourable Member will allow me to get all of these questions to him. He did mention about Professional Services that I thought was important that we get on with the work that needs to be done. I am concerned in a few areas, and I will point that out when it comes to Professional Services, as we move on. (Sorry. Here we go. Page 222)

I am going to now move over. On page B-216, under head . . . I am moving over to Environment and Natural Resources because I am trying to move through all of these things here because I really want to get to the capital development and stuff. Under Head 79, Environment and Natural Resources . . . let me first say this here. That was very in-depth. I have never had to look at Environment. In fact, I can tell you most things about most all other ministries. But Environment was one of those where I never really paid close attention, so I got to do better there.

So, I want to thank the Minister for the detail. It took up a bit of time, but it was very detailed and informative. So, I am grateful for that. Now I know how

to debate it, and I will be much better prepared next year.

But what I would like to know—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes.

Under the mission statement, B-214. I will start there. Head 79, Environment and Natural Resources. Objectives: *To increase Island's food security and local food production.* That is something that has always been near and dear to many people's hearts, Mr. Chairman. I mean, I had a fantastic meal last night, local wahoo, with local pumpkin and local tomatoes. I mean, beautiful! Well-seasoned. I had a good time at that meal.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I cooked it myself. That's the thing.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That's the thing. I cooked it myself and my wife said, *My goodness, man. We need to open up a restaurant.*

What I would like to know is this, under that objective . . . and we can't know . . . we . . . there ain't no food security at my house. I ain't got one garden. But under three, I was wondering if the Ministry would consider this here. You know, we have reclaimed land back in . . . years ago, back in 2012, 2013. We reclaimed land. Of course, we had America's Cup because they used that part that we reclaimed. But that was for essentially entertainment, investment as well. Would we consider, or could the Ministry consider an opportunity to reclaim land solely earmarked for agriculture? I think it would be a fantastic thing.

The challenge we have in Bermuda is everything has to be imported. And the Minister was very clear that we do have certain crops that we now . . . that we do, like potatoes. I was glad to hear about the sweet potatoes because I couldn't get sweet potatoes forever this year. I was wondering what in the world was wrong. But now we have an opportunity. We need to add more land for housing, quite frankly, and for agriculture. It is important because one ship during COVID-19, Mr. Chairman, we were struggling to get Bounty Scott towels, and different products. We can't afford that. We have got to be sustainable here. So I want Public Works to really consider this. Now that Environment has been enjoined into it, can we consider this here as potential for growing more agriculture land and earmarked for that?

Now, let me move over here. On page B-216, the Minister mentioned that we have got an allotment here under the Subjective Analysis. And where was the line item here? Under Professional Services, and

the allotment there really had to do with overseas consultants. Further on he also mentioned about that we were going to have to hire an agronomist. Is that likely to be a local or is that likely to be a foreigner? I have no clue. I know what it is about basically, soil and understanding the challenges with it. But is that expertise on the Island or are we, if we are looking for that person, when are we likely to get it? Because if we don't have it now, then we got issues. Right? We are just not going to make it.

Again, if you look on page B-217, now Environment does a whopping well job with revenue. You can see there we have got revenue of about \$1.374 million. It is extremely consistent. But I am wondering under all of these categories that we see here . . . Now I also understand under 8533, Lobster divers' licence, it is down by \$21,000 [sic]. That is really not a whole lot. I mean, I don't know . . . I'm sorry. That is 21 licences. I don't know what that represents and what the average uptick is for a licence, per licence, how many lobsters they take up. How many . . . I mean, we are making the statement that we don't want to . . . we want to help the stock but what is the average? You know, per licence, what is the average amount of lobster that they pull? Because if it is not that much then I'm not sure it is going to be a helpful type of thing. So, it would be nice to understand that more.

I asked that question . . . I got . . . Oh, okay.

On page B-219, under Performance Measures . . . where is it? Where is the one about . . . Hang on a second here.

The Minister mentioned about the feral animals. Understood there. Public Outreach. The one just before it. Under 89000, Administration, the number of public outreach. That doesn't look like a whole lot when we see a target amount of 10. Especially when this is a very important area to get the public to understand that we got challenges. You know? I mean, chickens are walking into retail outlets right now. They are in town, you know. They were in Shade's and all kinds of stuff. We got to figure this out. Right? We either cull them for their eggs or say goodbye to them. Something has got to happen.

I wanted to get to where we were talking . . . marine conservation. I am trying to find the line item for it where we were talking about . . . oh, under number of feral animals removed, I wanted to ask this question. I have been out to the Pembroke Canal, Mr. Chairman, and I don't know. I go out there . . . I am an animal lover, right? I go out there and I get guppies. You know? To feed bigger fish that I have in the fish tank. Right? And there are millions of them there. Right?

But what I discovered in the Pembroke Canal, to my shock, there is literally . . . there has got to be, easy, 800 in just a small canal part, turtles. I have never seen that many turtles before in my life in one area. I am talking about hundreds and hundreds of

turtles. Does that fall under the feral situation as well? Because somebody is dumping turtles and they are breeding. Maybe they aren't eating enough to keep all the grass from growing there but I think they might be a problem in some area. I don't know. But I can literally tell you that if you go over there, if it is not hundreds, it could be thousands. I mean, I just . . . the water is littered with them.

So, I think if we can get our conservationist people to go over there and check that out. Just don't take the guppies. Leave those. But we need to check out about these turtles because Bermudians are buying turtles, and they are dumping them. And that has got to stop. Okay? So, I will leave that one alone. I am going to move over.

I would like to know, on page B-220, on Head 79, Environment. I really would like to know what is going on. If we go down under business unit 89040, Marine Enforcement. Here we have a number of illegal fish traps—lobster [and] guinea chick traps. How do you even know where these things are? Like they are in the ocean. So how does that happen? How do you get 15 traps? Is somebody diving out there telling you? It is an interesting area, and I just thought, *Well, it would be nice if the public could know.* And if the public knows about traps, that the fishing line gets hooked on them, where they need to call and that kind of thing for that. So how does that process actually work?

The Minister also mentioned about lanternfly coming off of cruise ships. I am glad we got control of that. But under the Environment in and of itself, I was just curious as to whether or not, how do the farmers . . . how are they . . . are they making suggestions about how we can better deal with these pests and the like? Because I know some of these farmers, I have spoken to them. I mean, these guys are sharp. And they may not be doctors, but they know their stuff. How is that relationship going on with the farmers and the Ministry on how we can deal with some of these issues because usually the answer is right in front of us? So, I will move on from there.

Oh, under number of dogs licenced, business unit . . . on the same page, B-220. Business unit 89070, animal control. Number of dogs licenced as a percentage of eligible population. Now I think I know what that means. I did pretty good in problem-solving but I ain't sure when it says 26 per cent. Are we saying that in the actual outcome there that 26 per cent of the dogs on the Island are licenced? Is that what we are saying? It is kind of confusing. Right? Number of dogs licenced as a percentage of eligible population. So if we got 5,000 dogs, that is the eligible population. Are we saying that 26 of them are licensed? Is that what that means?

The Chairman: So, you are asking for actual outcome 2023/24?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Well, what I am saying is . . . yes, under actual outcome in 2023/24, it is 26 per cent. But the original forecast for 2024/25 is 40 per cent and we are still forecasting this year 40 per cent. There is a huge difference between the two, but I just don't understand the actual . . . percentage to what. That is what I would like to know. What is that percentage to? And as I said, is it to the total population of dogs that we have on the Island? Or . . . I just don't know. Or is it for re-licensing? I just don't know. I would like to know, understand more about that.

I am going to move on over to Public Lands and Buildings. I am just going to put my notes away. I have my [Budget] Book in front of me. Under Public Lands and Buildings, on page B-222. If we look at the general summary here, I am looking here and if we go to . . . under the general summary unit 81000, Administration.

And then Training and Apprenticeship, which the Minister talked about 91001, Training and Apprenticeship. Now, the Minister spoke quite eloquently about the fact that we are training, and we are doing these wonderful things but if you look at the revised amount for 2024/25 for Training, we didn't do squat. We didn't do anything. And then our forecast for this year is \$311,000 that we are going to spend in training. And the 2023/24 actual amount, we didn't do any training. Maybe that was because of COVID-19, I don't know. But then we originally said \$273[,000] for 2024/25. And then we didn't do anything.

So, I want to know, what were we doing? We weren't training anybody? It doesn't make any sense to me. But now we want to spend \$311[,000]. Now, typically when you are forecasting you go over your history, the past. So, it has got to be a major reason why we didn't do any training for two years. Two years we didn't do any training. So, what is going on? That is hardly a commitment to getting us to where we need to be. And I was trying to problem-solve this thing here and then I said to myself, *Maybe, you know what, I was going over and I was looking here, and I said, well, no, it can't . . . maybe.* I couldn't figure it out. I could not figure out why. So there has got to be a reason for that.

I would like to . . . he did talk about buildings and the maintenance. Under 8101, Buildings, if we take a look at maintenance, unit 91003, under maintenance. Under the revised amount for 2024/25, we spent \$9.3 million. We originally thought we were going to spend \$8.3 million under 2024/25. So, we have spent over a million dollars in this particular area. That is pretty much, pretty close to the actual amount that we spent in 2023/24. So, I trust in these historical numbers because they are consistent. It is only unfortunate that we don't see these actual amounts until years later. So, I am trying to understand why when there is so much going wrong with our buildings and the like, how is it that we are only estimating \$8.713 [million]?

The Chairman: [You have] 15 minutes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Geez, man. Okay.

Insurance. Under Estates 8102. Insurance, 91005. If you take a look at the revised amount there it is \$8.1 million. But if you look at the original amount for 2024/25 on page B-222, it is \$5.8 million. Like that is \$2.8 million, plus. Maybe a little bit more, increase. What was going on there? Or was that because we added the new Ministry of Environment or something like that? That could be the case. I don't know. But it is not making any sense. Unless a building . . . maybe it is because we have not done anything with the Allenhurst Building. Maybe we lost the insurance on that. I don't know. Because it has been sitting there for years, hopefully something is going to happen there. But we have not gotten to that. So, yes, I am trying to figure that one out.

If we also go down on that page B-222, 8104, Project Management. And I do believe that the Minister was talking about this as well with the allotment of \$726,000. And I recognised that this had to do with hiring project managers on page B-223, at the very bottom where it says, Employee Numbers. So, I am assuming, he did give mention that that was probably the case. But what I don't understand is that we allotted \$671,000 in 2024/25 for the same reason.

And if you look over at the employee numbers on page B-223, you will also see an allotment for five people, but then we didn't hire anyone. No one at all. And I would believe that the project management people are local. Because we do have the expertise here. So, were we having a challenge that we just decided that we are not going to do it after the case? Maybe. Something is happening there as to why we didn't do anything. But if you look now, we are hoping to have six. And I happen to believe that these project managers are actually . . . there are some working now.

So, when exactly . . . also, the second question is: When did we hire them? Because it is lost here in translation when we look at 2024/25. When we look at the revised amount, it is zero. It is completely lost so I am trying to figure out where in the world that goes. So, please, if you can figure that one out, I would appreciate it.

I am going to move on. Under page B-224, and then I am going to move onto . . . probably, [Head] 81. Under the performance measures, business unit 91000, the second line item there says, "Number of vacant Government owned buildings inspected and reports presented to the Minister on the options for the properties." So, what I would like done, I know we have . . . if you look at the outcome, 5, and you look at the revised forecast, 5, and the original forecast 5, I know we have more vacant buildings than that. So, is there a report that we are doing? And how are we acting once we identify these vacant buildings that we have, as I mentioned the Allenhurst Building?

You know, the old police station there. It has been flattened and it has been there for years and years and years.

Government is looking to put legislation in place that if your building is derelict or vacant for too long there may be tax implications, fees, because of that. Government can't own buildings in the city and put legislation in place like that there when they are their own offender. Right? That is prime real estate. I mean, if you put a coffee shop there for the civil servants. Do something. It is an eyesore coming into town. And the thing is just flattened. Just sitting there. Prime real estate. Or sell it.

As I have been saying already, should we consider . . . and that is a question. Should we consider selling Allenhurst Building? You will make some money off of that building. Sell it. We are not doing anything with it. There has been plan after plan after plan, you know. Arbitration Centre and the like. But we haven't . . . it has been years, Mr. Chairman. Nothing has been done there except there are wonderful trees growing. Right? Casuarinas are brilliant. Right? Nothing is happening at all. So, we need to move [swiftly]. And if there is one thing that bugs me and the Minister is going to soon find out, sometimes we can move a little slow. And I think we can do better in that area.

I know my time is dwindling down. So, I am going to move over to Head 82, under Works and Engineering. Where we start talking about on page B-228—sorry. Page B-226. We talk about Highways Management, on page B-226, Highways 8202. Listen guys, I am concerned because if I go over to it . . . and I might as well go over to it while I am here. I am extremely concerned because on page C-6, under Capital Development.

If we go down to 75042, Roadworks, we estimated \$5 million that we were going to spend. And I want to say to preface this, we estimated \$5 million for 2024/25 when we already knew we had problems with our asphalt plant. But we still estimated \$5 million to spend. To spend in the revised amount it [is] \$2.9 million. And so, we have slowed our production because we have an ageing plant but then we go again and say we are going to put \$5 million back there when we already know we can't do it. It is not good forecasting. Right?

So, maybe a statement from the Minister of a realistic amount that is going to be done for this upcoming year. Because every time you go somewhere everybody, the first thing they start talking about it, I mean. Roads! You know, it has gotten so bad that unfortunately, and it is not the Minister's fault, that people are blaming their accidents, all kinds of stuff because of the condition of the roads. Now I ride on the roads. Mostly I ride on a bike, and I am going to tell you, mate, that is like going to Coney Island back in the day when they had a wooden roller coaster. That thing is rocky! I mean, those roads are rough.

And I know the Minister is doing the best that he can but maybe . . . Minister, question. I asked before about the asphalt machinery at the airport. And the reason we didn't use it was because it was in Spanish, the instructions. Do you know that you can scan those instructions in Spanish with AI and it comes out in English? What a wonder! Let's go to the airport and say, *Listen, we need this machinery*. We got to get up to date here. Let somebody give this some thought. I asked the Minister about it. He said, *It is in Spanish. We ain't using it*. How are you going to tell the public it is in Spanish and you can't . . .

An Hon. Member: Former Minister.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, former Minister. Sorry. Former Minister.

I just sat there; Royal Gazette didn't even talk about it. I guess they didn't like that at all. But I know the Minister didn't.

But come on now. That machinery is there at the airport. I mean, that thing, that asphalt at the airport is handling planes jumping on it, not a car rolling on it. We need to do something about it. I am hoping that the Minister comes back and says, *We are going to go down to the airport*. So, please, if you could, go down to the airport and check that out.

So, I go back to page B-226, under Highways and Management. Look, signs are down all over the place. You need more than \$2,000 to keep up. Under 92005, Roads Asphalt & Signs. Like, you are going to spend . . . all of us riding on the roads, you can see some of those signs are so old they are back from the old days. Right? You need to do something about that here. And then when it comes to the road maintenance, 92006, and the Minister did speak about what they were doing there but—

The Chairman: Member, you said they need more than \$2,000?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, there is a \$2,000 increase.

The Chairman: Okay. You need more than a \$2,000 increase?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, man.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Remember, I said 10 per cent is the key for Public Works. You would need a 10 per cent to catch up. I mean, we are behind. I must say I want to thank the PS, this was last year so he wasn't the Minister at the time, but the former Minister. A lot of railings were going up. I did notice that. It was really, really, really, really nice. But we are a long way from where we need to be.

So, I would like for a realistic update on how much more we need to spend to make sure that we get this plant. I mean, this plant has been years now waiting. I still do not understand. This boat is coming from China for sure because it is taking a long time to get this stuff here. I just don't understand why.

So, what I am going to do, Mr. Chairman, is I am going to over to page C-6 and I am going to talk about Capital Development because I know I only have a couple of minutes here.

The Chairman: Yes, you have got five minutes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, I've got five minutes.

Under Capital Development. What I would like to do is go down to Public Works Lands, page C-6, where it talks about Horseshoe Bay beach bathrooms. And last year we had a lot of complaints about this bathroom, maintenance of it, keeping up with it with the number of people who are going there. Have we done anything about that? Are we hiring people to get . . . just like we hiring people to sweep the roads now? We need more people maintaining the bathrooms. I recognise that you have done that, yes. I pay attention.

So, this is our number-one beach. And every year, we are going into a new season, holiday. Every year the tourists are complaining about lines. The bathroom [toilets] are not flushing properly. What exactly is going on? Can we please put some money in here to fix this thing? In 2024 the actual amount we spent was \$4.2 million. And I remember what was going on then because [there were] major, major issues with the backing up. We need to spend way more money in that area.

I want to go over to under C-13 under Capital Acquisitions. The Minister talked about cars and electric cars and the like. We also talked about in Parks . . . sorry. In Parks, yes, that . . . sorry. Under Communications Equipment. (I'm sorry, I'm going too fast.) Mr. Chairman, 76868, Communications Equipment. Where exactly is the tower going in St. David's? Is it near the . . . are we talking about near the lighthouse itself? He never mentioned where exactly that tower was going. And if I didn't ask that question, I would not be able to go back down to my family to make sure that I got an answer for them.

The Chairman: Three minutes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. I am going over to . . . I want to go over to page C-28, under Head 81, Public Lands and Buildings. We are renting out a new building for almost \$200,000 there, \$198,000. The Paradigm Building in Hamilton Parish. It's new. Who is actually in that building? Who is . . . like what Ministry, or . . .? That is \$198,000 for the year in new rent.—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I didn't . . . I didn't . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I do? Oh, from the—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: But who is in it? Is it—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay. That is the occupant. Okay. Good, good, good, Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. I appreciate that. Well done. Well done.

The Chairman: It would be nice if the Chair was included in the conversation.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, my apologies, Mr. Chairman. You told me three minutes, so I panicked.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, so I will go back to my original plea, because I am going to talk about this. I am giving fair warning.

On page B-218 under Ministry of Public Works for . . . for . . . where is my . . . Okay. Yes. For the Ministry we have, in my opinion, probably grossly miscalculated on page B-201, the actual development under Capital Expenditure. Development is \$50,492,000. Yes, that may be what we want to spend but in actual fact the 2024/25 original amount, if you look at the Budget Book last year you will see \$52,992,000. That is a decrease in development and that certainly does not speak to what I understand to be this year because we have a surplus in our budget that we are actually putting our money where our mouth is and investing in the fact that we want Bermuda to get better with these roads, and the like. That does not reflect investment at all. And if that number is correct, I am woefully disappointed that the Ministry was not allowed . . . it is not the PS's fault at all. Cabinet has to bear the responsibility for not making sure that more money was spent in this area.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

We have reached our time allotted. The four-and-a-half-hours has elapsed and that brings us to the end of this debate.

Minister, I will encourage you to move your heads.

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

What I will say to—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jache Adams: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Any comments or just . . .

The Chairman: No time left. You can only move the heads.

Hon. Jache Adams: Okay.

I move that Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the heads be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Public Works and Environment Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.]

The Chairman: That now brings us to the conclusion of that debate for the Ministry of Public Works and Environment on Heads 36, 68, 79, 81 and 82.

Next on the agenda is the Ministry of Tourism and Transport. Something near and dear to my heart. It is going to be piloted through by Minister Owen Darrell. He will be taking on Heads 71, 34, 48, 35 and 30. This is a three-and-a-half-hour debate starting now at 4:46 pm.

Minister, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND TRANSPORT, CULTURE AND SPORT

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon.

Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads: Head 71, Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport, Headquarters; Head 34, Transport Control Department; Head 48, Transport; Head 35; Public Transportation; and Head 30, Marine and Ports be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Are there any objections to these heads being taken under consideration?

With their being no objections, Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 71—MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. (I'm getting myself situated here.) Mr. Chairman, thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I will start with Head 71, Headquarters. This is found on pages B-232 through B-236 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 71, the newly combined Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport Headquarters, found on pages B-232 through B-236 of the Budget Book. The mission of the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport Headquarters is *To create a globally competitive, diverse destination that enhances visitor experiences, expands cultural and sports opportunities, and ensures safe, efficient transportation for all.* That is found on page B-233.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: My apologies, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$34,079,000 as found on page B-234 of the Budget Book has been allocated to the new Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport Headquarters, which represents the combination of the former Ministry of Transport, Head 48 and the former Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport, Head 71. The new Ministry Headquarters will now function under Head 71. The aforementioned budgetary [allocation] of \$34,079,000 represents 34 per cent of the total budget allocation for the Ministry as a whole.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport Headquarters serves as the central hub for strategic leadership, policy development, and oversight across Bermuda's sectors of tourism, transport, culture and sport. It is responsible for setting the vision and direction that guides these sectors. By coordinating initiatives, shaping legislative frameworks and providing high level support to departments and agencies, the Ministry Headquarters plays a vital role in supporting innovation, enhancing service delivery, and promoting Bermuda's identity and competitiveness both locally and internationally.

This investment is essential to strengthen and modernise Bermuda's transportation infrastructure, including our ports and public transit systems. It also supports the growth of our sports and cultural sectors, enhancing the quality of life for our residents and enriching the experience for visitors.

Mr. Chairman, the departments which come under the Ministry Headquarters' remit include:

- Department of Sport and Recreations, Head 20;
- Department of Marine and Ports Services, Head 30;
- Transport Control Department (TCD), Head 34;
- Department of Public Transportation, Head 35; and the
- Department of Culture, Head 52.

In addition, Headquarters maintains oversight of 24 authorities, boards, consuls and committees. Namely, the Bermuda Civil Aviation Authority, the Bermuda Shipping and Maritime Authority, the Bermuda Airport Authority; the Bermuda Tourism Authority; the Bermuda Arts Council; Golf Course Board; Liquor Licence Authority; National Sports Centre Board; the Bermuda Sports Anti-Doping Agency; nine parish councils; Naming and Recognition Committee; Public Service Vehicle Licencing Board; Ports Authority Board; Road Safety Council; Medical Reference Committee; and the Water Safety Council.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, it is anticipated that during the 2025/26 budget cycle, Headquarters will collect approximately \$1,357,000 in revenue, found on page B-235. The revenue is mainly collected from vacation rental fees, hotel licences fees as well as liquor licencing fees.

Subjective Analysis Administration

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the estimated budget for the Administration Section will be \$33,479,000. This represents an increase of \$14,820,000 or an increase of approximately 79 per cent when compared to prior years, cost centre 81000, which did not include the two merged Headquarters. The increase mainly represents the transfer of the Administration Section, cost centre 58000, under the former Headquarters for Transport, Head 48.

Bermuda Airport Authority

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, included in the administration budget is a grant to the Bermuda Airport Authority, an amount of \$14,901,000 for year 2025/26, representing a \$200,000 increase, or approximately 2 per cent over the 2024/25 allocation.

Mr. Chairman, the Airport Authority currently employs 61 full-time equivalent staff including vacancies. The mostly Bermudian, professional workforce has the mandate to provide essential retained Government services as direct employees of the Airport Authority. Part of the increased expense allocation will be used to fund essential overseas training for up to five Bermudian Air Traffic Controllers who joined in Quarter 1 of 2025.

Bermuda Tourism Authority

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, also included in the Administration budget is a grant to the Bermuda Tourism Authority (known as the BTA) of \$15,500,000 for 2025/26, representing a \$540,000 decrease, or

approximately 3.5 per cent compared the 2024/25 revised allocation of \$16,040,000.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation to the Bermuda Tourism Authority reflects the amount requested in its grant application. Should I repeat that, Mr. Chairman? *The budget allocation to the Bermuda Tourism Authority reflects the amount requested in its grant application.* This budget underscores the BTA's continued commitment to reducing its reliance on Government funding. In keeping with the pledges made in the 2024 Throne Speech, the BTA has demonstrated a proactive approach through cost-saving measures and initiatives aimed at generating its own revenue to operate more independently and sustainably.

Mr. Chairman, our total income for the BTA is forecast to be \$32,100,000. The balance of approximately \$16,600,000 forecasted income is from fees paid by visitors staying in Bermuda's hotels, vacation rental units, and by cruise ship passengers. The vast majority of BTA funds are spent on selling and marketing the destination, the sales and marketing organisation, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the BTA operates as the Island's Destination Marketing Organisation, working diligently to advance Bermuda's economic prosperity through a robust and sustainable tourism sector. This Government remains committed to ensuring that every dollar invested in Bermuda's tourism industry delivers measurable returns, fosters job creation, and strengthens our economy.

Mr. Chairman, the tourism sector remains a cornerstone of Bermuda's economy, directly and indirectly impacting thousands of Bermudians. In 2024, the Bermuda Tourism Authority and the Bermuda tourism industry built upon previous successes, achieving substantial growth in key performance indicators.

Total visitor arrivals increased by 4 per cent to approximately 743,000, with air arrivals rising by 9.6 per cent to approximately 203,000, and leisure air arrivals up by 15.2 per cent to approximately 140,000. These results underscore the effectiveness and the strategic efforts to enhance Bermuda's tourism product and strengthen its global positioning.

Transportation Planning Team

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the Transportation Planning section sits within the Ministry Headquarters, cost centre 81060, includes one full-time equivalent employee and is allocated a budget of \$147,000 and can be found on page B-234 of the Budget Book.

The Transportation Planning Section is responsible for managing all aspects of cruise ship operations in Bermuda, including contracts, logistics, regulations, and day-to-day coordination, to ensure continuous and efficient service delivery. It also leads key transportation projects and conducts policy re-

search to support the Ministry's strategic priorities and long-term planning objectives.

Mr. Chairman, in 2024, the cruise ship season began with 190 scheduled calls and a projected passenger count of over 578,000 people. By the end of the season, 17 calls were unfortunately cancelled, 13 due to adverse weather conditions and four as a result of itinerary changes, resulting in 173 actual calls and over 535,000 passengers. This represented a reduction of approximately 43,000 passengers, or 7.4 per cent. Despite the cancellations, the 2024 season outperformed the 2023 season, which recorded a total of over 525,000 cruise passengers.

The economic impact for 2024 included: \$24,500,000 in passenger taxes and \$10,800,000 in transportation infrastructure tax. Additionally, other cruise ship revenue was estimated at \$7,000,000 in cruise ship visitor fees; \$116,500,000 in combined passenger and crew spending; and \$9,300,000 in cruise line disbursement expenses locally.

This culminated in an estimated total of \$168,100,000 in economic activity for 2024. Mr. Chairman, since the first published projections in December 2024 for the 2025 season includes 179 calls, there have been seven cruise ship cancellations. The new conservative projection at this time includes 172 cruise ship calls and approximately 475,000 passengers, based on a similar number of cancellations last year.

Regulatory and Policy

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the Regulatory and Policy Section sits within the Ministry Headquarters, cost centre 81065, includes four full-time equivalent employees and is allocated a budget of \$453,000 and can be found on page B-234 of the Budget Book.

The Regulatory and Policy Section is tasked with managing the full lifecycle of the Tourism Investment Relief applications. This includes the receipt, timely processing, and thorough review of all submissions.

Once applications are approved, the section ensures they are efficiently advanced through the appropriate legislative and administrative channels to facilitate implementation.

Mr. Chairman, the section is also responsible for conducting compliance inspections for hotels and vacation rentals to ensure adherence to relevant standards and regulations. Based on the outcomes of these inspections, they are further responsible for issuing licences and certifications as required to support lawful and high-quality tourism operations.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024 calendar year marked the most active period since the enactment of the Tourism Investment Act 2017. A total of seven applications were approved for relief under the Act, all of which are now in operation. This represents a significant increase, Mr. Chairman, compared to previous

years, which typically saw an average of just one or two successful applications annually. That shows, Mr. Chairman, massive investment in this space.

This notable uptick reflects a glowing level of investor confidence in the tourism sector and renewed interest in Bermuda as a destination for sustainable tourism development.

The Chairman: For the listening public, the Minister is speaking to Head 71, Regulatory Policies, mainly with the focus on hotels.

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

Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 capital budget is for the Bermuda Airport Authority, which totals \$2,713,000, which is found on page C-7. These funds will be directed toward several critical, ongoing and new airport infrastructure projects. Mr. Chairman, as seen on page B-235, there will be a total of 13 full-time equivalent employees in the Ministry Headquarters, Head 71.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecasted performance measures found on B-236 for fiscal year 2024/25 were achieved. Mr. Chairman, this business unit, cost centre 81000, is responsible for the strategic policy development, accounting support for the Ministry. The performance measures of 2024/25 include internal compliance reviews for heads within the Ministry, financial guidance or compliance training sessions for the year, percentage of payments accurately processed within the relevant deadlines and a percentage of ministerial policy priorities completed. All forecasted outcomes were successfully achieved.

Regulatory and Policy, Cost Centre 81065

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, as mentioned previously, this business unit oversees the end-to-end handling of tourism investment relief applications from intake to implementation. It also carries out inspections of hotels and vacation rentals to make sure they have met regulatory standards and compliance requirements.

The performance measures for 2024/25 include ensuring hotel and vacation rental properties are inspected and licensed by the annual deadline of the 31st of March and the 31st of August, respectively. Hotel and vacation rental complaints are acknowledged within 24 hours of receipt. Hotel and vacation rental complaints are investigated within 48 hours of receipt and ensuring final report of hotel and vacation rental complaints are issued within 10 days of complaint. All forecasted outcomes were successfully achieved.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry Headquarters will continue to serve as a strategic and policy development hub for the Ministry. Mr. Chairman, a key focus remains the advancement of Bermuda's cruise industry. In collaboration with the Bermuda Land Development Company, now operating under the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities, plans to extend to the King's Wharf Pier by 200 feet will be implemented. Construction is scheduled to begin on the 2nd of October 2025 with completion expected by the 31st of March 2026. This extension will enable King's Wharf to match the size of Heritage Wharf in capacity. Larger cruise ships will be able to dock more efficiently and deploy additional gangways, improving both embarkation and disembarkation processes.

Mr. Chairman, looking ahead, the cruise ship schedule for 2026 currently includes 190 calls, while the 2027 season, still in early booking stages, already has confirmed 180 calls. These figures, though subject to change, demonstrate a strong and growing interest in Bermuda as a cruise ship destination.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Airport Authority will continue to oversee several ongoing and upcoming infrastructure initiatives related to aviation weather services using the capital funding measured earlier. These include, but are not limited to the

- Aeronautical Information Services;
- Aeronautical Information Management;
- organisational transition;
- Bermuda Weather Service;
- Weather Radar;
- random refurbishment, or resealing;
- Bermuda Weather Service application programme interface;
- Air Traffic Engineering infrastructure upgrades;
- the Bermuda Weather Service website design;
- the Bermuda Weather Service hydrogen gas generator, phase one;
- cybersecurity systems infrastructure upgrades; and
- the air traffic controller simulator.

I am sure you know all of those well, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, in the Tourism sector, the Bermuda Tourism Authority [BTA] will continue its efforts to diversify Bermuda's visitor markets. In 2025 market initiatives will expand, and they have already started to do so beyond the United States to include Canada and other international markets. Mr. Chairman, I am sure everyone has seen the video of the Bermuda Airport Authority at the opening day of the Toronto Bluejays, which seemed to get a lot of popularity. These efforts will be powered by digital campaigns, influence of partnerships and strategic media collaborations to position Bermuda as an aspirational destination for a wider array of leisure travellers.

The BTA will enhance the effectiveness of its partner marketing through BTACONnect, a platform that allows industry stakeholders to manage their presence on gotobermuda.com. This includes updating contact information showcasing amenities, uploading visuals, linking social media accounts and accessing key performance data. In 2024, the BTA consumer website, gotobermuda.bm, received over five million page hits, highlighting growing global interest in Bermuda. Ongoing optimisations to the platform aim to further boost traffic to help partners convert the interest into meaningful economic returns.

Mr. Chairman, you may recall that in 2025 the Throne Speech introduced a new initiative to broaden the Tourism Investment Act 2017 scope. I am sure this one would also interest you, Mr. Chairman. This expansion will extend eligibility for a full suite of concessions to other key sectors, most notably smaller guest houses, and health and medical tourism—facilities to further strengthen the impact and reach of the Act. I will point that out again, Mr. Chairman—smaller guest houses.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thank you, Minister. The Gold Coast of Bermuda will thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: There you go.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the dedicated teams at the Ministry Headquarters and the Authorities under the Ministry for their hard work and solid commitment to the Ministry and its mandate. That concludes, Mr. Chairman, Head 71, the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport Headquarters.

I now, if I may, Mr. Chairman, move on to Head 48, the former Transport Ministry's former Headquarters.

The Chairman: Thank you.

For the listening public, this is a three-and-a-half-hour debate. It has five heads. The Minister has just concluded Head 71 and is going on to Head 48.

HEAD 48—THE FORMER MINISTRY OF TRANSPORT HEADQUARTERS

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

Mr. Chairman, the budget for Head 48, the former Ministry of Transport Headquarters, can be found on pages B-256 to B-257 in the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, as previously stated, effectively February 2025, the Ministry of Transport and the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport were formally merged to create the new Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport. This structural change reflected in the 2025/26 budget specifically on pages B-256 and B-257, where a zero budget allocation is shown for the former Headquarters. This is not an oversight, but rather a result of the consolidation with

all relevant budgetary and programmatic information now centralised under the new combined Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport Headquarters, Head 71.

Accordingly, any past performance, ongoing initiatives and future plans related to the former Head 48 are now addressed under Head 71, which I have just presented, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes the brief for the former Ministry of Transport Headquarters, Head 48. And if you allow, I will move on to Head 30, which is the forgotten Department of Marine and Ports.

The Chairman: For the listening public, the Minister is piloting through his heads. We have done Head 71 and Head 48, and the Minister is now moving on to Head 30, Marine and Ports.

HEAD 30—MARINE AND PORTS

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 30, Department of Marine and Ports found on page B-243 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the mission statement for the Department of Marine and Ports is *The regulation and safe operation of Bermuda's maritime affairs including Marine Board of Security, Search and Rescue and Public Transportation*, found on page B-243.

Mr. Chairman, the Marine and Ports budget allocation of \$23,787,000 represents an increase of \$791,000, or an increase of approximately 3 per cent, over the 2024/25 budget, as seen on page B-243. This increase is due to approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts. Mr. Chairman, it is anticipated that in 2025/26 the Department of Marine and Ports Services will generate revenues of approximately \$6,314,000, found on page B-244. The revenue is collected primarily through fees charged for the provision of ferry services, tug services, boat haulage, pilotage fees, boat moorings and port dues.

Mr. Chairman, the estimated budgets for the Department of Marine and Ports Services West End Dockyard operations are as follows:

- Navigational Aids cost centre 40040 for \$853,000. This represents an increase of \$55,000, or an increase of approximately 7 per cent over the previous year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;
- Tug Service cost centre 40140 for \$2,137,000. This represents an increase of \$93,000, or an increase of approximately 5 per cent, over the previous year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;
- Tender Service cost centre 40210 for \$410,000. This represents an increase of

\$14,000, or an increase of approximately 4 per cent over the previous year's budget to again, Mr. Chairman, cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;

- Dockyard Maintenance cost centre 4260 for \$3,571,000. This represents an increase of \$110,000, or an increase of approximately 3 per cent, over the prior year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;
- Ferry Service cost centre 40090 for \$8,543,000. This represents an increase of \$250,000, or an increase of approximately 3 per cent, over the previous year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;
- Mooring and Boat Regulations cost centre 40150 for \$313,000. This represents an increase of \$11,000, or an increase of approximately 4 per cent, over the prior year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;
- Administration cost centre 40220 for \$3,052,000. This represents an increase of \$130,000, or an increase of approximately 4 per cent, over the prior year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;
- Maritime Safety and Security cost centre 40100 for \$2,632,000. This represents an increase of \$45,000, or an increase of approximately 2 per cent, over last year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts; and
- Pilotage Service and Offshore Search and Rescue cost centre 40180 for \$2,276,000. This represents an increase of \$83,000, or an increase of approximately 4 per cent, over the prior year's budget to cover approved negotiated salary and wage uplifts;

Mr. Chairman, capital development and expenditure for the department is set at \$1,887,000. This could be found on page C-7. It has been appropriated for the ongoing Marine and Ports Dockyard Workshop Renovations. And a further \$525,000 has been appropriated for the Floating Docks Refit project. Capital Acquisition is found on page C-14.

Mr. Chairman, Capital Acquisition Expenditure for the department is set at \$9,598,000. Mr. Chairman, \$815,000 has been set aside for navigational aids for the department's ageing ship navigation infrastructure. And a further \$8,759,000 has been appropriated for the completion of the two 550-passenger ferries in the fourth quarter of 2025, which is currently on budget and on schedule. Mr. Chairman—on budget and on schedule.

Manpower, found on page B-245. Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget estimates include funds for 46 . . . Sorry, that should be—I am going to check on

that. But it says 46 full-time equivalent employees. Performance measures by business unit are found on pages B-246 to B-247.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITORS

The Chairman: And the Chair would just like to recognise the technical staff who are here to support the Minister. They are making sure that, as he said, everything remains on time and on budget.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

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

I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26 were for the most part fully achieved.

NAV Aids, Cost Centre 40040

Hon. Owen Darrell: The performance target of ensuring that all inshore and offshore lights and beacons were operational 99.5 per cent of the time was successfully achieved in 2024/25. This high standard of service is expected to be maintained in 2025/26 with the target outcome anticipated to be achieved. This continued success of this measure is supported by a well-managed inventory of replacing lights and captain's stock, ensuring quick response and minimal down time when maintenance or replacements are needed.

Tugs, Cost Centre 40140

Hon. Owen Darrell: The measure to provide tug services to international shipping without delay 100 per cent of the time was successfully achieved in 2024/25. This high level of reliability is expected to continue in 2025/26 with the target outcome anticipated to be met. This achievement is largely attributed to effective coordination and the provision of advanced notice for scheduling, shipping arrivals and departures which has helped prevent service conflicts and ensure timely assistance.

Dockyard Maintenance, Cost Centre 40260

Hon. Owen Darrell: The measure is to achieve full compliance with Lloyd's Register survey requirements by ensuring 100 per cent of the fleet is dry-docked annually, as well as maintaining 100 per cent vessel availability. To meet the published schedule was successfully achieved in 2024/25. This standard is expected to be sustained in 2025/26 with the target outcome anticipated to be met. The achievement was supported by an increase in staffing levels, Mr. Chairman.

Ferries, Cost Centre 40090

Hon. Owen Darrell: This measure to provide on-time ferry services to the public, ensuring sufficient vessels are available to meet the published schedule 99 per cent of the time, was not achieved in 2024/25, due to challenges related to an ageing fleet. However, efforts are underway to improve performance with a forecasted goal to reduce ferry service delays and cancellations by 10 per cent in 2025/26. While the target outcome will require significant effort, it is considered achievable. A key development supporting this improvement is the anticipated arrival of two new ferries in Bermuda during the fourth quarter of this year, which will enhance fleet reliability and service consistency, Mr. Chairman.

Boats and Moorings, Cost Centre 40150

Hon. Owen Darrell: The measure to process all mooring applications within six weeks 100 per cent of the time and to relicense all moorings by the published deadline of 31 May at least 90 per cent of the time was successfully achieved in 2024/25. Although the removal of illegal, unregistered moorings remains dependent on available manpower, overall service levels have improved. For 2025/26, the department aims to reduce mooring processing times by one week with the target outcome expected to be achieved.

Administration, Cost Centre 4220

Hon. Owen Darrell: The measure to ensure that 80 per cent of staff are standard of training certification and watchkeeping certified and 100 per cent of performance appraisals are completed by the deadline was successfully achieved in 2024/25. For 2025/26 the department aims to increase the number of standard of training certification watchkeeping certified staff by 15 per cent, with the target outcome expected to be met. This goal is supported by the full operation and on-Island Maritime Academy, which provides more accessible and timely training, helping to shorten certification timelines to enhance workforce readiness.

Maritime Safety and Security, Cost Centre 4100

Hon. Owen Darrell: This measure to respond to distress calls and deploy vessels to offshore search and rescue cases in a timely manner 100 per cent of the time, along with reducing the registration timeframe for the new distress beacons from 14 to 7 days, was successfully achieved in 2024/25. The high standard of service is expected to be maintained for 2025/26. The achievement was supported by enhanced radar capabilities and the use of long-range CCTV cameras,

which have significantly improved response times and situational awareness during maritime emergencies.

Pilot Services, Cost Centre 4180

Hon. Owen Darrell: This measure to provide branch pilots for all arriving and departing international ships and ensure the availability of branch pilots and pilot boats 100 per cent of the time was successfully achieved in 2024/25. This level of service is expected to be maintained in 2025/26. The achievement was made possible by having two well-maintained pilot boats and a full complement of licensed, qualified pilots ensuring uninterrupted and efficient pilotage operations.

Mr. Chairman, the department will continue consulting with stakeholders to ensure the continued implementation of the Marine and Ports Services Act 2021 remains a smooth transition to the new legislation.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, plans for the upcoming year will include the following:

- Training of departmental staff to international standards will continue to ensure the department meets its international obligations in line with safe manning requirements.
- Continue progress for the department's succession planning to ensure highly technical posts within the department are filled by qualified Bermudians with the relaunch of the department's training programme.
- Continue training for tug crews of the department's state-of-the-art tugs.
- Introduce two new 550-passenger ferries to the fleet in the fourth quarter of this year.
- Continue progressing the renovation of the Marine and Ports Workshop in partnership with the Department of Works and Engineering.
- Continue with the public-private partnership programme for the removal of all derelict boats.

Mr. Chairman, as mentioned in previous years, the Department of Marine and Ports Services represents one of the most critical operational arms of the Government of Bermuda. And it facilitates the movement of vital shipping commerce in and out of Bermuda's ports. The services of the department provide and include the public ferry boats, pilot boats, tug boats ship tender services, boats and mooring registration, and the Bermuda Maritime Operation Centre. Additionally, the department is responsible for the co-ordination of international search and rescue operations in this region of the North Atlantic. And retains oversight of overseas seaport security and marine

border control in compliance with international standards.

Mr. Chairman, I conclude Head 30 by expressing my appreciation to the leadership and the staff of the Department of Marine and Ports Services for their ongoing dedication to providing consistently high-quality customer service. And if you will, Mr. Chairman, I now will move on Head 34, the Transport Control Department.

The Chairman: For the listening public, this is a three-and-a-half-hour debate on the Ministry of Tourism and Transport. We are just over half an hour into this debate, as we started at 4:46. We will end at 8:16. We have done four of the five heads, and the Minister is about to move the last head, which is Head 34.

Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 34—TRANSPORT CONTROL DEPARTMENT

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

The budget head for Head 34, Transport Control Department, commonly referred to as TCD, can be found on pages B-248 to B-251 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the mission statement for the Transport Control Department is *To ensure the safety of all road users*, which is found on page B-248.

Mr. Chairman, the TCD's budget allocation of \$6,008,000 in 2025/26 is a \$447,000, or an 8 per cent increase over the allocation for 2024/25, which can be found on page B-248.

Under the General Summary of Expenditure for business units, you will find that the estimates for 2025/26 of each business unit have slightly changed from the 2024/25 estimates. The core allocation of funds is not very much from previous years. The minor increase will primarily be applied to compensation, facility operations and maintenance.

Mr. Chairman, it is anticipated that during the 2025/26 budget cycle, the TCD will collect approximately \$31,534,000 in revenue, found on page B-249. This represents an approximately 2 per cent increase over the 2024/25 total revenues.

Mr. Chairman, the estimated budget for the Administration section will be \$2,523,000. This represents an increase of \$237,000, or an increase of approximately 10 per cent over the previous year's budget to cover outstanding maintenance for equipment that requires assistance from overseas vendors.

Registration Section, Cost Centre 44040

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, Registration section, which is cost centre 44040, processed 78,161 customer transactions in 2024. The estimated budget for this section is \$1,077,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26. The additional \$49,000 represents a 5 per cent increase over the 2024/25 budget. Again, Mr.

Chairman, this increase is attributed to salary increases.

Examinations, Cost Centre 44000

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, for this fiscal cycle, the Examinations section estimated budget of \$1,393,000 represents a \$48,000, or a 4 per cent increase over the previous year. This is mainly attributed to salary increases.

Traffic Control, Cost Centre 4410

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the estimated budget for the Traffic Control section will be \$747,000. This represents a \$105,000, or a 16 per cent increase over the previous year's budget to cover costs attributed to the busy cruise ship season to ensure staffing at the piers and places of interest like Horseshoe Bay and are related to traffic control.

Road Safety, Cost Centre 44090

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the estimated budget for the Road Safety section will be \$268,000. This represents an approximate 3 per cent increase, or \$8,000 increase over the previous year's budget to cover additional media campaigns and the anticipated Project Ride enhancements. Of the \$268,000 allocated to the Road Safety section, as seen on page B-248 of the Budget Book, the Road Safety Council will receive a grant in the amount of \$80,000 for the Project Ride Programme, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget estimates include funds for 46 full-time equivalents (or employees), as seen on page B-250. Mr. Chairman, the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2024/25 found on page B-251 were mostly achieved.

Administration, Cost Centre 44210

Hon. Owen Darrell: In 2024/25 the target to answer 60 per cent of incoming call centre calls within five minutes was successfully achieved. The target of 2025/26 will be maintained. This has been supported by the hiring of a second customer service representative, enabling the team to better manage the high volume of approximately 12,000 calls received each month. The customer service representatives play a key role in delivering timely responses by providing both general information and guidance on the new online services now available to the public.

In 2024/25, the goal of processing accounts receivable invoices within five business days was successfully achieved. Looking ahead, this level of performance is forecast to continue in 2025/26 with the target outcome anticipated to be met. This has been made possible by the hiring of an accounts

clerk, completing the staffing requirements within the Accounts section. In 2024/25, the target of processing accounts payable invoices within five business days was successfully met. For 2025/26, the forecast aims to maintain the five business days with the expectation that the target will be achieved.

Registrations, Cost Centre 44040

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, in 2024/25 the goal of servicing 75 per cent of customers within 30 minutes of ticket collection was successfully achieved. This level of performance is forecast to continue in 2025/26 with this target expected to be met. This is supported by successful recruitment efforts over the past year, which filled key vacancies in this section. Additionally, the implementation of a new customer management system has contributed significantly by distributing work evenly amongst clerks, resulting in a more consistent and efficient flow of customers.

Examinations, Cost Centre 44000

Hon. Owen Darrell: In 2024/25, the target of providing 90 per cent of requested driving test appointments within 10 business days was successfully achieved. This level of performance is forecast to continue in 2025/26 with the target outcome expected to be met. The achievement is largely attributed to the consistent staffing levels, with three examiners dedicated to conducting both driving and riding tests. This has significantly improved scheduling efficiency, reducing the average wait time for appointments within one week.

Examinations, Cost Centre 44000

Hon. Owen Darrell: For fiscal year 2025/26, the objective of keeping response times of 10 business days to abandoned vehicle complaints will remain. This target could not be met in 2024/25 because the section had to rely on external vendors to collect vehicles. The process to secure a vehicle with a lift, to collect cycles, has commenced. Therefore, it is expected that the performance measure will be met this fiscal cycle.

A new online reporting system is now in place to assist with the ticketing of vehicles, and the section will continue to work with the private sector to collect abandoned cars and trucks.

The Chairman: And for the listening public, the Minister is roughly 45 minutes into his three-and-a-half-hour debate. He has done four of the five heads. We are currently on Head 34 going through the performance measures.

Minister, you have the floor.

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

In 2024/25, the objective of maintaining 90 per cent pass rate for Project Ride was not achieved. This

is partly due to the increasing number of 15-year-old children who registered for the programme who had never ridden a pedal bike. To achieve this objective for the next fiscal cycle, instructors now request that parents enrol their children *after* learning to ride a pedal bike, which is a much safer approach. I think so, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: No. In my day, you just knew how to ride a pedal bike from the time you were three. So . . .

Hon. Owen Darrell: Okay.

In light of this new initiative, the success rate of 90 per cent is expected to be met this cycle. During the last fiscal cycle, a new instruction manual was produced. As a result, the on-road instruction and examinations component to enhance programmes are scheduled to commence later this year.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the Transport Control Department [TCD] continues to review its governing legislation with the view of modernising sections and regulations addressing modern vehicle trends and technology. A major project currently underway at TCD is to provide the option of submitting applications and requests online. Several of the application forms have already been placed online and more will soon follow.

The applications set for digitisation include a wide array of permits, licences and services including

- Project Ride instructor application;
- exemption application for tint, seatbelt, signage and licensing fees;
- importation and replacement of vehicles and vehicle parts;
- public service vehicle permit;
- sporting association trailer permit;
- change vehicle category for different use application;
- registration of a classic car;
- commercial vehicle permit;
- learner's permit;
- driver's licence; and
- the public service vehicle or heavy truck licence.

Mr. Chairman, this digital transformation began with the following three applications, which came into effect on March 30 of this year:

1. Project Ride instructor application;
2. exemption application for tint, seatbelts, signage and licensing fees; and
3. the importation and replacement of vehicles and vehicle parts application.

The next phase of the digitised applications is set to be launched this June, next month, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, in November 2025, TCD will serve as the pilot agency for the Government's Digital Payment Initiative, acting as a prototype for the broader implementation across other public sectors. By transitioning its payment system to include a digital platform, the department will demonstrate the practical benefits of adopting cashless transactions such as improved efficiency, transparency and convenience for the public. This initiative will start with vehicle licensing fees. As the first point of contact, TCD's successful adoption will set the foundation for standards of future governmentwide digital payment solutions. And, Mr. Chairman, we saw the success of the conference that we just had just last week. So we are happy to be on board with this, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Road Safety Council will work in conjunction with the Road Safety Officer to continue the implementation of Operation Caution, the Government's five-year road safety strategy. From 2018 to 2023, Operation Caution has been extended now to 2025 to cover the time lost during the pandemic. One of the key deliverables of the strategy for 2024/25 was a recommendation to enhance the Project Ride programme for Bermuda youth licence applicants to undergo training and final practical exams on public roads. This enhancement is near completion and is expected to go live this fiscal cycle.

Mr. Chairman, I end Head 34 by thanking the leadership and staff of the Transport Control Department for their efforts and continuously delivering a high level of customer service. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. That concludes the brief of the Transport Control Department, Head 34, and I now move to Head 35, the Department of Public Transportation.

The Chairman: For the listening audience, the Minister is moving to Head 35, which will be the last of the heads that he has to move. This debate started at 4:46. We will end at 8:16. And we are currently just approximately just outside of an hour in.

Minister, you have the floor.

HEAD 35—THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

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

The budget for the Head 35, the Department of Public Transportation, is found on pages B-252 to B-255 of the Budget Book. Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Public Transportation is *Moving Bermuda with a quality public bus service*, found on page B-252.

Mr. Chairman, a total of \$25,279,000 has been allocated for this Head 35. This represents an increase of \$1,439,000 over the previous year, or a 6 per cent increase. The increase will primarily be used to cover the salary increases. The department has five business units: Bus Operations, Repair Ser-

vices, Inventory and Management, Administration and Management Support Administration.

The analysis by business unit is as follows:

Bus Operations, Cost Centre 45010

Hon. Owen Darrell: The current account expenditure for Bus Operations cost centre 45010 is estimated to be \$13,203,000 for 2025/26 and represents an increase of \$766,000, or an approximate increase of 6 per cent over the prior year's budget. This change is due primarily to an increase in full-time bus operator hours that will equip the department to further improve scheduled bus service.

Repair Services, Cost Centre 45090

Hon. Owen Darrell: The current expenditure for Repair Services cost centre 45090 is estimated to be \$4,458,000 for 2025/26 and represents a decrease of \$167,000, or 4 per cent under the prior year's budget. This change is primarily due to the electrification of the bus fleet and the reduction of reliance on diesel fuel.

Inventory Management, Cost Centre 45115

Hon. Owen Darrell: The current expenditure for Inventory Management cost centre 45115 is estimated to be \$1,527,000 for 2025/26 and represents an increase of \$64,000, or approximately 4 per cent over the prior year's budget. This change is primarily due to the planned maintenance of the buses.

Administration, Cost Centre 45120

Hon. Owen Darrell: The expenditure of Administration cost centre 45120, which accounts for salaries, utilities and shared services, is estimated to be \$5,024,000 for 2025/26 and represents an increase of \$677,000, or an approximately 16 per cent increase over the previous year. This change is primarily due to improvements to the bus service to create a more convenient experience for passengers.

Management Support, Cost Centre 45200

Hon. Owen Darrell: The expenditure for Management Support is estimated to be \$1,067,000 for 2025/26 and represents an increase of \$99,000, or 10 per cent over the budget of 2024/25. This change is primarily due to the increase in staff compensation.

Revenue

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the revenue for the department is estimated to be \$5,551,000. This is an increase of \$1,351,000 over the previous year's original budget found on page B-353. As the depart-

ment continues to improve access to a more reliable and digitised service, revenue is reflected accordingly.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimate

Hon. Owen Darrell: The subjective analysis of the current account estimate of the Department of Public Transportation is found on page B-253. I will highlight the material category increased and decreases:

- Training. The increase is due to planned development of staff.
- Communications. The increase is due to improved connectivity for facilities and telemetry boxes on e-buses.
- Professional Services. Increase in professional services is due to the increase in operational costs associated with achieving performance measure targets.
- Equipment purchase. Decrease is due to the prioritisation of other current expenditures.
- Other expenses. Increase due to bank charges and fees partially related to increased digital fare media and bank card sales.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the capital expenditure is found on pages C-7 and C-14.

Mr. Chairman, the capital development estimate for the department is estimated to be \$1,600,000 to address the ongoing upgrades at the Fort Langton and satellite depots. The capital acquisition estimate for the department is estimated to be \$5,054,000 for the acquisition of approximately 20 new electric buses. Twenty new electric buses, Mr. Chairman!

The Chairman: I remember when the first one came in.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, I am sure you took a ride on them, too.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The continued phased introduction of the new digital fare media system, replacement support vehicles, updated computer equipment and other necessary upgrades to the facilities, tools and equipment.

Mr. Chairman, the total complement of full-time equivalents is estimated to be 244 as recorded on page B-254 in the Budget Book. This is an increase of one full-time employee over the 2024/25 budget.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2024/25 were mostly achieved.

Bus Operations, Cost Centre 45010

Hon. Owen Darrell: Bus Operations coordinates the public bus service that is in operation 365 a year, 18 hours per day, Mr. Chairman, in order to provide the Island-wide transportation across 11 bus routes. Unlike most public transportation systems around the world, school bus service is coordinated during the school year with free transportation provided year-round to resident school students.

Reduction of complaints by 50 per cent was achieved. Improvements have been made in better tracking for passenger feedback, and number of passenger complaints through the Bermuda Government online Feedback form and Shorelink online contact form. The target of 30 per cent reduction of serious vehicle incidents was achieved. There was an approximate 35 per cent reduction in the number of serious incidents involving Department of Public Transportation vehicles.

Improved ridership. Passenger count by 5 per cent was achieved. Investments in improving the passenger experience, e-bus and Digital Fare Media app have led to increased fare media revenue, thus improved ridership. Further investments in technology-driven collection of ridership data are planned.

Repair Servicing, Cost Centre 45090

Hon. Owen Darrell: The department employs a team of professionals in repair servicing to maintain the fleet of public buses, support vehicles and equipment. Maintaining the number of buses in service daily at 80 per cent of the total fleet should improve with the retirement of the aged, old diesel bus fleet and the continued investment in electric buses, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: And for the listening public, the Minister is presenting Head 35, Public Transportation. Minister, you have the floor.

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

Inventory Management, Cost Centre 45115

Hon. Owen Darrell: Parts for vehicles and equipment were procured, stored, controlled and issued by the Storage section, which falls under Inventory Management. The department was able to achieve the target of 5 per cent or fewer average number of buses out of service due to parts. All planned maintenance was achieved due to maintaining the target of 80 per cent of the parts required for the plan presented to the Maintenance programme.

Administration, Cost Centre 45120

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Administration section is primarily responsible for developing department strategy, policy and procedures, ensuring that the people, processes and resources are available to deliver a

quality public bus service. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of the identified occupational safety and health issues were addressed. Further alignment of resources will facilitate additional improvements and the delivery of training so as to meet the target outcome of 100 per cent of front-line staff completing customer service training. Six critical vacancies were noted at the end of 2024/25. Recruitment and training will continue with the aim of meeting the targeted outcome of zero critical vacancies.

Management Support, Cost Centre 45200

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Management Support team is responsible for selling and processing bus and ferry fares and providing administrative services for accounts, procurement and human resources. The department aimed to process vendor payments within five business days. However, Mr. Chairman, it unfortunately fell short of the target. Improvements are planned for recruitment of staff to address shortages and improvements in processing procedures to ensure that targets will be achieved.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Public Transportation continues to build on recent improvements to the provision of the bus service. The department continues provision of scheduled bus service including school bus service without the assistance of mini-buses. With continuing investment over the year, the Department of Public Transportation fleet of buses will be over 90 per cent electric and without doubt be prepared to provide a reliable service for the people of Bermuda. The Department of Public Transportation has realised advances in technology in recent years and plans to maintain the positive momentum in tangible enhancements to the public bus service.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Public Transportation aspires to be the mode of the transportation of choice for Bermuda residents and visitors. This year the final phases of digital fare media will be introduced as an easy and efficient way of paying bus fare. Passengers will be encouraged to download the mobile Shorelink app from the comfort of their home to purchase fare, plan trips and monitor bus schedules . . . oh, sorry, monitor bus *locations*, Mr. Chairman. We are getting like London.

One of the most impactful advantages of a digital fare media system implementation will be the ability of passengers to tap on their cell phone or tap their bank card on a device installed on the bus, which will automatically verify that the bus fare has been paid. Passengers using their mobile device to monitor the location of the next bus while waiting at the bus stop is a highly anticipated improvement to the customer experience.

Investing in talent within the department will be a continued focus. Training and experience will be afforded cheaply to those who desire and have capacity for investment. The team has once again exhibited

the benefits of internal development by daily observation and continuing nominations for the Public Service Excellence Awards.

Mr. Chairman, I conclude Head 35 by expressing my appreciation to the leadership and the entire team at the Department of Public Transportation for their ongoing commitment to providing excellent transportation to the public. And, Mr. Chairman, I would also like to thank my Permanent Secretary, who is here in the Chamber today, Ms. Shivon Washington, for her leadership in the newly formed Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport. As well, one of her trainees who is with her today, and Mr. Mannard Packwood, who runs all things money-related in the Ministry.

So, thank you to that team, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation today for Heads 71, 48, 30, 34 and 35 under the remit of the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who would like to speak to the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, [Culture and Sport], Heads 71, 34, 48, 35, and 30?

The Chair recognises Member Robinson.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you to the Minister for that comprehensive brief and allowing a good bit of time for questions.

Mr. Chairman, where would you prefer me to start? At Head 71 and work right through?

The Chairman: This is your response. So . . .

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Perfect. Okay.

So, I will kick off at Head 71 then on page B-234. One of the first things that I wanted to highlight is that it is just a point really. We saw a 4 per cent increase overall in the Ministry, and that was kind of highlighted as almost an investment. But it seems, as we heard throughout the brief, that most of these increases and most of this investment has actually gone to salaries, so I just want to make sure that that is clear for the listening audience.

With the Professional Services, the Minister did speak about this. But I believe that the jump from a 2024/25 revised \$50,000 in professional services overall under this subjective analysis of current account estimates to \$804,000 in the 2025/26 estimate, those warrant a bit more explanation, I believe. So, if we could focus in a bit more on that line item and the cost and the reasons why that increase has come about overall for the entire Ministry, I would appreciate that.

Also, just moving to Other Expenses in that same—

The Chairman: Remember. This could be because they have combined multiple ministries together.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Right. Yes. I just wanted to clarify that because it is a big jump. And we did see that in Administration as well there is almost a \$15 million jump. So, you know, these are big numbers, and it would be remiss of me not to highlight them.

The Chairman: Yes. But I do remember the Minister's mentioning that in his brief.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes. Yes. I just wanted to make sure that these increases were still mentioned.

So just going into Other Expenses, we have an increase here where it is budgeted at \$4,000 pretty much throughout 2023/24 into the 2025/26 estimate, it jumps to \$21,000. And I just wanted to get a bit of clarity on that because that is an increase in other expenses and not really defined in the Budget Book. And it was a pretty lengthy brief, so if I missed the definition of "Other Expenses" under that line item, I apologise. But I would like to get clarity on that.

Also, as far as Training, we see training is zeroed out here in 2024/25 revised. And there was a lot of mention of training throughout the brief. And now we have seen the estimate of training at \$22,000 in the 2025/26 to return. So, I am wondering what caused that zero-out? And also, why was it only \$1,000 spent in training in 2023/24? And in the original 2024/25, only \$6,000? So, you know, those are some numbers there that are a bit conflicted in my opinion as far as how much training is actually being done. If we can get a bit of clarity on that.

Also, there was a lot of mention of . . . and I think this was repeated for emphasis, that the BTA is a marketing agency that is meant to sell the Island. And we see Advertisement and Promotion here in that same line item on page B-234. It was zeroed out in 2023/24 and has steadily increased to now being a budget of \$15,000. So, what is that marketing going toward within the department and Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport? Because we just have a lot of emphasis on the fact that BTA is the main advertiser. I just want to make sure that we get a distinction between the Ministry's budget for that and the BTAs. And this is internal advertising and marketing for just the Ministry departments and not other things. (Let me just make sure I have got my notes here.)

Just jumping here to the Revenue summary on page B-235. We have the Vacation Rental Fee, which has been budgeted for \$400,000 as a revenue source. And it has only hit 271. And I believe that this is a pretty paltry number when it comes to the massive budget given to this particular Ministry. However, it does represent a burden for those who are in the vacation rental industry. So, I just wanted to put it to the Minister if he would consider potentially repealing

this vacation rental tax to further stimulate beds and capacity. Because obviously that is something that the parties have been divided on for a bit. And I just thought I would put that question, seeing as how the tax is not really yielding much in the grand scheme of things, but is causing hardship for folks who are relying on it for additional income.

And I also wanted to say I welcome the brief increase in cruise ship arrivals that I heard. That is good news, and I just wanted to make sure that it was not overlooked. That we on this side do support those increases and green shoots of growth in tourism. And that that was very welcome news.

I would not spend too much time on this particular head because it is an overarching HQ portion for the entire Ministry. So, I would like to just move to Head 30, which is Marine and Ports.

So 40090, Ferry Service, I just wanted to know if the two new ferries that are being built and purchased will alter these numbers in any way? Do these current estimates include the addition of these two new ferries? And this is page B-243 for the Chairman.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Continue. Go right ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, sir.

The Chairman: As I catch up . . . but go right ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes. So, I just wanted to get clarification that if these two new ferries are being built, is that included in the numbers of 40090 under General Summary on page B-243?

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And also, looking at Dockyard Maintenance, this is a bit of a private interest here, being as that is where I grew up.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, I want to just get a bit of clarity on the breakdown of what occurs in this Maintenance line item. And also, I understand that the increase is for salary uplifts. However, it is a fairly large increase, and I just would like to know what the folks of Dockyard are getting for that line item.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: As far as Maritime Safety and Security, I find this to be a very important topic, and I just would like to get a bit of insight into what is

making up this particular line item. I heard a brief mention, but I am still not quite sure on exactly what this particular amount is covering. So, I would just like to get a bit of clarity on that because obviously this is a very important topic.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. Go right ahead, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes. And Mr. Chairman, just also bear with me. This is my first time in the House. So if I colour outside the line, I hope that you will . . .

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, we are taking all of that into consideration. In my humble opinion, you are doing a very good job.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you. Thank you.

The Chairman: Please do continue.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So just jumping to page B-244, we have under Expenditure, Other Personnel Costs which seems to be coming in consistently over what is budgeted. So, we have a revised 2024/25 budget of \$46,000, which is actually higher than the original estimate in that same year. And then we see that the estimated 2025/26 amount goes back to \$34,000. Is this going to be achievable? What is this line item covering? And why is it that it has been re-budgeted down when we have exceeded that budget amount in previous years?

Also, in that Training section, once again, we see that that entire budget has been revised down. It was not utilised in 2024/25. There was a \$335,000 budget original estimate, which was underspent. And then we see in 2025/26 that this is actually budgeted for more training. And I am wondering, is this to do with a particular initiative or does the Ministry believe that it will be able to overachieve what it has in training in the past? I just wanted to get a little bit more insight on that number. And if it is not utilised, maybe it could be utilised somewhere in another line item that may need it.

Of course, this is (I want to say) one of our favourite topics in this House, which is Travel. And we have here a budgeted increase 2025/26 estimate to \$178,000, which I just wanted to get a bit of clarity as to the reason why this is increased and what this travel budget is going to be covering. And how will it benefit the people of Bermuda?

Also, just heading down to Energy, on page B-244, I am still in Subjective Analysis, the energy bill of the Marine and Ports is \$2,933,000. And you know, this is a pretty monstrous electricity bill. And we hear a lot about the electric buses, and we hear a lot about solar panels and energy efficiency from this particular

Government. I am wondering, is any of that being applied to this particular energy bill? Is this energy bill being racked up utilising effectiveness and solar panels and energy efficiency? And how will that number be improved or not improved by more electricity and more infrastructure when it comes to that sort of thing? So, I would just like to get a bit of clarity on that.

And a little bit of future planning as to whether or not this bill is that size because of a hindrance to advancement? Or is it that size because it has always been how we have always done it? Because obviously \$2 million could go long a way in any other line item. So, I just want to get a bit of clarity on that, Mr. Chairman.

Also, my eyebrows always rise when I see Other Expenses in a line item. So just a bit of clarity here, because you have it zeroed out in 2024/25 in the original. But then a revised budget says \$29,000 was spent and then we zeroed it out again in the 2025/26 estimate. Is this unbudgeted expenses, or a last-minute cause that came up? Or was this a cause that was just not anticipated by the Ministry? Could we get some clarity on what occurred there and what is going on in that particular line item?

My honourable colleague who spoke before me in another debate mentioned Government chasing revenue or gearing itself to, you know, be a bit more revenue-centred without compromising the people whom we all serve, but potentially offsetting some costs with what is going on in the global and international economy. So, we go down to the Revenue summary on page B-244. And there seems to be over a \$1 million decrease in revenue from this particular line item from the 2023/24 actual to now. And I just wanted to know, Is this over \$1 million decrease in revenue causing any sort of ripple effect in the Ministry? Has the Minister identified what may be the cause of this decline in revenue? Because it does look as though it could be due to fewer private boats and fewer . . . mostly population-driven things. So, this may be a signal or a symptom of our population issue.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And the fact that, you know, we are getting fewer people on the Island, with private boats and various things. And it is causing a decrease, and we have seen it here in this particular line item. Or it could be economic pressures or showcasing a struggling local economy where folks are not able to maintain certain benefits and goods that they once had. And this is now reflected in almost a \$1 million decrease in this particular source. So just a little bit of clarity as to whether or not this impacted the Ministry or whether or not they are looking to remedy that going forward, because I see that in the 2025/26 estimate for that revenue, the goal is to increase it back to over \$6 million where it was previously in

2023/24. And I would just like to also know how they intend to achieve that goal, how the Minister or his team intend to achieve that goal.

And we all welcome new ferries. I know my colleague catches the ferries quite often. And we want to see an increased and more effective ferry service going forward. So we welcome the purchase of new ferries.

And I would like to congratulate the Minister on that because it is something that a lot of my constituents and I am sure his have welcomed.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: But as we to go to page B-245 under the Full-Time Equivalent, we see . . . I want to say a decrease of one person. But the decrease of one person in the Ferry Service is not the thing that catches my attention. It is the fact that the budgeted amount is 72 full-time equivalents, or full-time staff. So, it does not seem like we have actually hit that 72 full-time staff even going back to 2023/24. And if we are now decreasing and we are still budgeting for 2025/26 to hit 72, how will two new ferries impact this? Because if you have under the budgeted amount, or as I would assume, the Ministry's aimed amount, Mr. Chairman, where that is what they are looking to have for what I would say . . . I guess we could work it as the Ministry's function and number for an effective ferry service. It says 72.

You are adding two new ferries to that. So, is that going to cause an impact on the current folks who are working there to be able to utilise and to provide that service? Because we can get two new ferries. But if we do not have the people to operate them, if we are putting extra strain on the workforce, how does that affect things going forward? So, I just want some clarity on that number and whether the Ministry has set a hard target to do 72 full-time equivalents, or whether that is just number that is put in the Budget Book as a placeholder? And if there are any issues of hiring as well. You know, like what may be some of the issues that they have come across when hiring? Or what has been the hold-up there when it comes to that?

I am jumping over here to Performance Measures. This is page B-247. The Minister did a comprehensive job of speaking to most of these. But the one that is still sticking out to me is this removal of 500 illegal and unregistered moorings by year-end. The actual outcome for 2023/24 was 20 per cent. And the target outcome for this fiscal year is 40 per cent. And the reason given was it could not be done due to available manpower. So how much available manpower is required for us to get that number to even about 50 per cent? And how long does the Minister intend for this removal to take? Because we are getting a lot of talk about addressing problems, long-standing issues. This seems to be something that

could drag on for a while and affect people. Because we are setting the bar at 40 per cent because we do not have the available manpower.

So, I would go now . . . I am going to get through and then I will make way for anyone else. But I just want to get through all of these heads with all of my questions, and then we can circle back. If that is fine with you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: That is fine. Continue on. Go right ahead, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, I am going to Head 34 now, which is Transport Control Department.

The Chairman: One moment, please, unless the Minister wishes to reply.

No, Minister, you do not wish to reply?

Just tell him to continue on.

[No audible response]

The Chairman: That is fine. All right. Go ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you. I appreciate that.

So, we are on page B-248. And I just wanted to speak about the department objectives because as the Shadow Minister I have received a few concerns about the data collection and data maintenance of the TCD when it comes to how many taxis and vehicles are on the road and information being requested to assist with certain business decisions. And I see that it is an objective here. So, I just would like for the Minister to speak to, How is the data management? How has digitisation potentially affected and improved? And will we see a bit more collaboration with the private industries like the BTOA [Bermuda Taxi Owners and Operators Association] and others who may require that for their future planning and also to service their membership?

The same thing in Department Objectives. *To review and modernise the motor car and road traffic legislation.* Now, I have not been in this Honourable House for a long time. But I have not seen a lot of modernisation of our road laws as of yet. So, I would just like to ask for any progress on this. And if there is any legislation in this fiscal year that we can expect from the Minister and this department when it comes to modernising our laws to not only make things easier for folks who are operating in our transport industry to operate, but also to provide a much better service to those who will utilise it? And I know that that is a goal that the Minister has listed, and I support him in that goal, the Honourable Minister in that goal. But just to get a little bit of clarity on what legislation may be coming down the pipeline that the people of Bermuda can look forward to [that] say, *This is an objective, but this is also something tangible that will change in this next fiscal year.*

Now, moving to the General Summary, the line item 44090, Road Safety.

Page B-248, Member. Thank you.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, you are where?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Page B-248. And I am at 44090, Road Safety.

The Chairman: Thank you. Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: This is a huge line item here for many Bermudians who are either listening, those in the Chamber as well. You know, we have all seen and grieved, some of us, unfortunate losses on the road, critical accidents, things that impact all of us. And not to be critical, but I do believe that if there is one thing I would like to see increased in this budget, it would be the funding going toward road safety. It has increased from 2023 to 2024. But it is budgeted in 2025/26, estimated to be \$268,000. And personally, I feel like we need to find a way to increase that number because I just feel like it is a critical thing, and it is very clear that what we are doing currently is not working. You know, we are not quite breaking that systemic root that is causing a lot of these poor driving habits.

And of course, it is not all on Government. And you cannot police behaviour. You cannot apply a policy for behaviour. But I do believe that we can push a little bit harder in this area to try and support the folks who are, even if that means applying a bit more collaboration with Project Ride and looking at different ways in which we can strengthen the training process before folks get on the road. So, I really do not think that \$268,000 in the light of what is budgeted in this particular ministry is enough for that. So, I just would like to understand what is being done in this particular line item, 44090, and whether or not that budget is deemed suitable by the Ministry to cover what the goal is supposed to be achieving.

(Let me see. I have got a lot of notes here. So forgive me.)

The Chairman: No, go right ahead.

Members, we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26 in the name of the Honourable Minister for Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport. That will be covering, if I am correct, [Heads] 71, 34, 48, 35 and of course where the Shadow Minister just was, and that was in Head 30.

Shadow Minister.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that.

So, we are on page B-248, and I just wanted to ask here under the Transport Control Department header if there is any update on the ridesharing pro-

ject that was slated to be brought forward? I believe it was mentioned last year March. What is the update on that? Has the Minister or the Ministry been able to get the buy-in and support from the BTOA [Bermuda Taxi Owners and Operators Association] who has made their opposition to this quite public? And also, we are talking about a lot of things for digitisation and all of that. How are we doing with the ridesharing project? I did not hear an update in the brief. And along with this, when will we anticipate to see regulation come down when it comes to these ridesharing and also certain unregulated applications that are providing ridesharing services, or at least were? I am not too sure if they are now.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Well, you know, Island: GO!, Minister. You are aware. You haven't. Oh. The local news network took a ride in Island: GO! So, it was operating. Somebody picked them up.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, I just want to just let you know just so that we are clear and as it relates to most of the Shadow Ministers who do provide opportunities for us, for the House—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes.

The Chairman: —to go into Committee and debate these different heads. I believe Head 74 is not part of what you asked for us to have a look at and ask the Minister to review. I do believe, and I stand corrected should that be the case, that we are looking at Heads 71, 34, 48, 35 and 30. And I do believe the Road Safety Council, Traffic Control and all of the rest fall under another head. Now—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: No. I am on Head 34.

The Chairman: As I said, you are on Head 34, correct.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes.

The Chairman: You did not ask us to review that. Head 34 is not one of yours, is it?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

The Chairman: Let me make sure.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Okay, great. Carry on. It was not on my list, but go ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Oh, Mr. Chairman, you almost got my Whip in trouble!

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Just carry on. I am just making sure that I was correct and making sure that [the Honourable Member] was on those heads.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you.

The Chairman: Is that correct?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I appreciate it. Yes.

The Chairman: Okay. Carry on. I apologise for the interruption.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: No, that is okay. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you. So, carry on.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And I just wanted to see if we could get some regulation or some idea on when these potential apps. So, I guess I will ask a series of questions on this.

The Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Number one, is the Ministry or Minister aware of any unregulated dispatch apps currently operating? What was the resolution of the Island: GO! inquiry in which the last I heard, the former Minister asked for a legal inquiry? And also, what is the future planning to make sure that this does not occur and that we can see some dispatch legislation and regulation for that? Because that is a big issue because it is money leaving Bermuda's shores and undermining the current regulated industry that is doing things the right way.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And so, we want to make sure that in this fiscal year the Ministry and Minister can provide some sort of clarity and support for those who are following the rules. You know, rule-breaking and unregulated dispatch and applications will be snuffed out, cracked down on and dealt with in an effective way.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So that is one part.

And also under the line item Examination 44000, there were a few complaints made to me as the Shadow Minister regarding the timing of vehicle inspections for taxis and minibuses during peak travel hours or peak arrivals or cruise ship arrivals. And I just wanted to put this question to the Minister and to the Ministry: How does that process go when you are asking for taxis and minibuses to be relicensed and to be inspected? Because we all want to see a thriving tourism industry, and we all want to make sure that everything is done in a way that supports that. So, if you have occasions where taxis and minibuses are not available for folks when they get off of a cruise ship because they have been called to do a vehicle inspection, that is not necessarily optimal for a first impression to tourists and also for returning visitors. So, we want people to have a good impression and come back and continue to come back to Bermuda.

So, could the Minister and the Ministry let me know if they have any knowledge of that occurring? If it has occurred, how can it be prevented? And do we have an examination schedule for taxi drivers and minibus drivers that is collaborative with what we know to be peak season? Because I am sure the Ministry and Minister who deal with tourism know when the peak arrivals are and what the cruise ship schedules look like. So how can we make sure that those examinations and inspections do not occur during times where we need to provide service to visitors and locals alike who may require it?

Just jumping to page B-249 under Wages. And I just found it peculiar here that wages are zeroed out. And I just wanted to get some clarity on that line item and why the wages have been zeroed out in the 2025/26 Estimate.

And coming down to Professional Services, once again we see an increase here in professional services, and this has been a theme throughout multiple sections of the Budget Book. So, I just would like to know, what is the reasoning for the increase here in professional services up from \$411,000 in 2024/25 revised to \$623,000 in the 2025/26 estimate?

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And what are the details of this particular line item when you say professional services? And how does that apply to the Transport Control Department?

And just moving to Repair and Maintenance in this same area on page B-249 in Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimate. It is budgeted there for \$481,000 for repair and maintenance. And I recall in the brief the Minister did mention that there was planned maintenance, certainly, but I am not sure this was the section. So, I would just like to ask because we see in 2024/25 revised when it was \$219,000 spent. So, we have budgeted almost double that in the next year. So, is that because of some planned

maintenance? Are there more things that require repair? I would like to just get a bit of insight on that.

Equipment and Minor Capital Spending in that same box originally was zeroed out in 2023/24. It seems to be added to the budget for an original estimate of \$3,000. However, in the 2024/25 revised, it was \$8,000. So, we have a zeroed-out amount added here in 2023/24, and it has gone over what was budgeted in that line item. And then in 2025/26, we anticipate that it will go back to \$3,000. And I just want to know, What was the overage there for that line item in Equipment and Minor Capital? And why do the Ministry and the Minister believe that \$3,000 is suitable when we went over that in 2024/25?

And we have another line item directly underneath that, same page, Other Expenses. Again 2023/24 was a \$775,000 budget there that in the revised 2024/25 original was \$10,000. A big disparity. Only for it to be revised to \$678,000. So, you have a \$678,000 spend. But in 2025/26 it is only \$10,000 budgeted there. So, what is the disparity in that number? And what is the line item of other expenses on page B-249? Because it is a very large . . . I do not want to use the word "overspend"; I will wait until I get the explanation. But it is a very large discrepancy there in what was spent and what was budgeted.

So, I also heard in the brief that there was an increase here in revenue by (I believe it was) 2 per cent. Do not let me quote it; I am sure I can be corrected. But in this revenue summary it is an increase, and the Government is correct, and the Minister is correct to say that. But it is key to note that it still comes under what Government has budgeted for that revenue in 2025/26. And it came under as well in 2024/25. So, we have to be careful when we tell the people of Bermuda that there is an increase. It is, but it is not what the Ministry's and the Minister's goals were set for in that particular time. So, I think it is key. I wanted to make that [distinction] there and to ask, How do the Minister and Ministry intend to reach that set goal? They are heading in the right direction, but it is crucial to paint the whole picture for Bermudians to know that the actual budgeted amount was not reached in the last year. So how will we reach it this year?

(Right. Just going through my notes here, Mr. Chairman.)

The Chairman: Carry on.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Right. So just heading over to Performance Measures. It is a bit of a discrepancy between the percentages that are showing and not. Because in the business unit 44090 on the Road Safety, we do get a percentage of 90 per cent as the target. But not all of the percentages are presented in these performance measures, especially when we get into 44110, Traffic Control. Sorry, not that one. In the

44000 Examination where we do not get a percentage here, but I think it was listed in the brief.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. You are on page B-251; am I correct? Yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes.

The Chairman: Right. Go right ahead, Shadow Minister.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, I am just wondering why is it a . . . not all of the percentages where they apply are being displayed in that particular performance measure. Because it is easy to say *Achieved, Expected to achieve*, but what number are we working with? And also, on the same page. I just wanted to ask, regarding the cost centre 44040 Registration and the 44210 Administration, are these particular percentages due to increase due to potential digitisation of TCD? Will we see a higher standard being set with more things being offset now by the improvement of the digitisation at TCD? Does the Ministry expect to set a bit of a higher benchmark than 60 per cent and 75 per cent, to serve 75 per cent of customers within 30 minutes and answer 60 per cent of incoming calls within five minutes?

Understanding and appreciating the work that folks do at TCD and understanding it is a large volume, as the Minister spoke about in his brief. But I just wanted to know whether or not they anticipated that that will be aided by digitisation where more resources may be allocated to this? And we might be able to get that increased.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And I would be remiss [not] to ask when we talk about digitisation, and TCD is a holder of data and many people's personal data that I ask and inquire of the Minister and the Ministry, How have they considered cybersecurity when it comes to this particular digitisation process? Because as we know, we did have a very crippling cyberattack. And it will be nice to reassure the members of the public and also the Members of this Chamber that if we are moving to a digitised TCD that there are stringent and effective measures in place to protect the personal data of the folks who are using it and also the personal data of those who are working there as the civil service. So, I just would like to get a bit of insight on whether or not that cybersecurity component has been paired and considered along with the digitisation of TCD.

Now I will move to Head 35. (I will just sort out my notes here, Mr. Chairman.)

The Chairman: No, go right ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: All right. I will say I feel for the Minister in this regard because it is a very large ministerial load to carry. So, I am sorting through, and I will be right with you.

The Chairman: Just for the benefit of Members, as I mentioned before, we are in the Committee of Supply. We are looking through heads for the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport, Heads 71, 34, 48, 35, 30.

Shadow Minister, go right ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just looking at page B-252, which is under General Summary, looking at line item 45000, Auxiliary Bus Services. And we see here in 2023/24 an actual that was \$238,000 budgeted here spent. In the 2024/25 original revised, it zeroed out. In the original it zeroed out, and then in the revised of that same year, it was \$163,000. And then it zeroed out again in 2025/26 estimate. And I just want to be sure that this is . . . Like what are the particulars of this line item? Why is it zeroed out and then spent? Why not have a standing budget for it if it is going to be utilised? And why are the amounts fluctuating? Because it seems like the Government is intending to not budget for it in 2025/26, and that seems to have been a mistake made in the previous years because it ended up being a spend under that line item.

So, Bus Operations. There is an increase in the operations here most likely due to salary uplift. But we are seeing a bit of a decrease in staff here. So, I just wanted to get a bit of clarity on the correlation between the decrease in staff and the increase of salaries seeming to offset and increase that number. That just has me a little bit perplexed.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, you like that word?

The Chairman: I reluctantly accept it, but go ahead, Shadow Minister.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Just moving down to Maintenance. It would be nice to know just under 45090 Repair Services and under 3502 Maintenance, how many buses are actually in need of repair? How many buses are currently being repaired? How many are in need of repair? What is the state of our fleet when it comes to repairs and maintenance? Because, you know, we see that even though there was not over \$4 million spent in 2024/25, we do see that in the 2025/26 estimate, that is budgeted for \$4,458,000. So there is intent for repairs to be done. And I just would like to know how much of our fleet requires repairs.

And this is for one of my constituents who requested that I mention the need for more buses for the disabled, more disability inclusive buses where folks who are disabled or have mobility issues can utilise the buses. And I just wanted to know whether or not the Ministry is looking into that and whether or not all of these electric buses that are being ordered are also wheelchair-accessible for disabled folks and providing a bit more accessibility for people who may need it. So just general comment if they can answer that.

And when the Minister mentioned 20 new electric buses, is this correlating with the capital acquisitions of new buses, that is the number of new buses that are being purchased? I just want to be sure because it does not have the number of buses in the line item. But I just want to know if that is the number of new buses that are being purchased with that capital acquisition.

And what is the Ministry's working number for an effective fleet? How many buses do we need in operation to say that we are fully covered and all of our routes are fully covered? So just the working number from the Ministry would really help. And also, to let us know how many buses we have when it comes to comparison to that working number. So, if it is 450, do we have 300? You know, just give us a bit of an insight into where we stand as far as a fully operational, fully covered bus fleet and what that number is.

Just jumping to page B-253, going to Transport, there is a sharp increase here in Subjective Analysis and Current Accounts Estimates where you saw in the actual 2023/24 there was \$92,000. And it moved to \$79,000 in the original 2024/25. But that \$79,000 was revised in that same year to \$200,000—or \$203,000. That is a very big revision. And I would like to just get a bit of clarity on that number and line item and why that revision occurred and why we budgeted in 2025/26 an estimate at \$80,000 when the amount spent last year was far more than that.

And just moving down to Professional Services again, I would just like to get a bit of insight on this particular line item when it comes to an original budget in 2024/25. We actually came in under that at \$788,000 in the revised. But we budgeted to increase back to \$1,228,000. So, if we came in on the budget, what is the reason for such a large increase? And are we anticipating an increase in that line item? So, if I can get a bit more clarity on what that line item is servicing for Public Transportation and how that improved this budget?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And with Repair and Maintenance, we also see here a \$675,000 number for the 2024/25 original. And that revised amount in that same year went up to over \$1 million in Repair and

Maintenance. So, what exactly occurred here that caused that amount to jump up like that in the same year? You know, was there an increase in collisions or were there more damages at that particular time? And we see in the 2025/26 estimate that it is actually budgeting to go down to \$729,000. And how feasible is that when we know we spent \$1 million last year? Is there a reason behind that? Is there perceived savings that are going to occur? And if so, I would like to just get a little bit more insight on that.

Materials and Supplies. In the same Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, we see almost a consistent kind of overage here in this particular line item. In 2023/24 it was \$2,186,000, which dropped in the following year but by \$1 million. But I would like to know, what was the cause of that spike in 2023/24's actual? And also, how have we anticipated that we will be able to keep that number down underneath \$1 million that we have budgeted in 2025/26's estimate, knowing that we have consistently spent over \$1 million on supplies and materials? So, I just would like a bit of clarity on that as well.

And just moving over to page B-254, which is Employee Numbers. As I mentioned previously, we have seen a slight increase in employees from 2023/24 when it comes to bus operators. And this is 45010. But we are still under the Ministry's target of 168. And we are ordering 20 new buses. So, we are running into the same issue that I mentioned previously in the ferry services. You know, we are ordering 20 new buses, but we are under what our set goal is for the number of posts in bus operations. So, I just want to know from the Ministry and the Minister whether or not this 143 number is workable when it comes to the addition of 20 new buses or whether or not that number is needing to increase? How will the Minister achieve the 168 necessary bus operation staff? And whether or not there will be effective coverage for all routes, especially if this results in decreased hours, which was mentioned in the brief, increased hours for operators? And is that sustainable for the operators if they are required to have an increased workload for them?

And digital fare media, which I think all of us would welcome Bermuda stepping into the 21st century. What are some troubleshooting measures for that should it have some issues? Because I do recall . . . I do not know how credible it was, and the Minister can correct me if I am wrong. But there was a post done where it was apparently in French.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Well, you know. Yes. You enjoy Twitter too, Minister. Why, yes.

The Chairman: Everything to the Chair. Do not leave me out of it. Do not leave me out of it.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: I wish to be a part of this. Speak to me.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes. No problem, Mr. Chairman.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: The Minister I am sure is going to sort this in a moment. Go right ahead.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes. Of course, yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: You know, I am sure. So, I am just wondering with that issue that came up, what are the troubleshooting measures for some of our more senior, seasoned members who may have issues with using the digital media? And how will that be dealt with on the fly, especially if it is being utilised away from the central hub, the central bus station and is just being picked up on, let us say somewhere far from where the central hub is? So, I just would like a little bit of clarity on potential troubleshooting that may happen.

Okay. Heading over to page B-255, looking at the Performance Measures, seeing on-time delivery of all scheduled services a discontinued measure. And I just would like to know for that line item why this particular measure was discontinued? As on the face of it, for someone who obviously is just reading it, it seems like a measure we would like to keep to have on-time delivery of all scheduled services. So, I would just like to get a little bit of clarity on that.

Number of passenger complaints, minus-50 per cent, Mr. Chairman. As a measure to what? What was the number of complaints? What is the minus-50 per cent? What is the current number? And what are we measuring that minus-50 per cent off of? The reduced number of serious vehicle incidents, again a minus-30 per cent off of what? So, we are looking at performance measures that are giving you the deduction of what happened, and we do not have the base numbers to measure whether or not that is at a sustainable level or not. So, I would like know what number that minus-30 per cent is based off of?

Improved ridership passenger count. Again, this one was not really included in 2023/24 actual outcome, but we see a 5 per cent, which I assume is wanting to be a 5 per cent increase as opposed to what? What number? So I would like to see what number they are aiming for and I am sure that we will be able to rustle that up.

Moving down to, Maintain the number of buses in service daily at 80 per cent of the total fleet. The revised forecast in 2024/25 was at 68 per cent. And if

am reading this correctly, and I beg the indulgence of the Ministry and the Minister to correct me if I am incorrect. But it seems as though this particular performance measure is letting us know that in 2024/25 on a daily, only 68 per cent of the operational bus fleet was in service on any day-to-day. If that is the case, why is only 68 per cent of the bus fleet available? Is it because they are getting scheduled maintenance? Is it because they are unavailable?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Is there a breakdown of infrastructure when it comes to the electric buses' infrastructure to charge and different things? Because I know that this has been an ongoing issue that Bermuda's infrastructure has not really matched yet the required output for this particular fleet. Just my inquiry. I stand to be corrected if I am incorrect. And just maintain buses according to preventative maintenance programmes. And the forecast, the aim was 90 per cent and it was only 73 per cent achieved. And I just want to know if there is any issue with maintaining buses and provided maintenance. Is it the transfer from diesel to electric that may be causing a bit of issues when it comes to having available mechanics? Like what is the reason we cannot achieve? Because the Ministry believed—it set the number at 90 per cent. So that was estimated as to what we could have gotten to. And unfortunately, we only reached 73 per cent. Which is a pass. So I do not want to come across like I do not appreciate the work that is being done in the Ministry. But it is not where the Ministry had set itself up to be. So I just wanted to get a bit of clarity on that as well.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And this number here, Average number of buses out of service due to parts. I just would like a little bit of a dive into what exactly—are these parts that are not available or sourced easily on-Island? And also, how is it that it is 5 per cent—but we know that the original forecast had 68 per cent on the road and we only have 5 per cent not on the road due to service of parts. But just a little correlation of that particular number.

The reduction of inventory levels, what was this in reference to? It was a pretty fast brief, so I might have missed it. But it is a discontinued measure in 2025/26, and I just wanted to know why that measure was discontinued. I did not mean it in any disrespect for you, Minister, about indeed a fast brief. I actually appreciate that. I just mean maybe I might have missed something that was said. Because, you know—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And yes. I am on Twitter, so you know—

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Address identified occupational, safety and health issues under business unit 45120. This measure is discontinued in 2025/26. So, address and identify occupational, safety and health issues I think is a performance measure we want to keep as well. So, I just wanted to know why that was discontinued and if it was anything to do with staff or anything like that. And I would appreciate some insight in that.

And also the percentage of identified occupational safety and health issues addressed seems to only have kind of started in 2023/24. Was that happening previously, or is it that just because it doesn't go past 2023/24? And I just want to get that clarity as to the track record of that.

Complete customer service training for front-line staff. Well, we started at 1 per cent in 2023/24. It is just concerning. But even more concerning is that we were unable to achieve 50 per cent. I say "we" because, you know, we all have to stand up in front of our constituents and explain these sort of things. But I would like to get some clarity onto why we seem to be unable to achieve 100 per cent front-line training for staff and what the hold-ups might be for that?

And last, one of the last ones I would say, is Produce Performance Report Analysis and Confirmation by the Budget Office deadline. This is a discontinued measure in 2025/26. And I just would like to know why? Because I think a performance report analysis and confirmation by the Budget Office deadline sounds important. But I would leave way to get clarity from the Minister and the Ministry.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I think I will pause there. And if you would give me leave for the answers to some of these questions or to—

The Chairman: No. I think let us yield to other Members to see if any other Member wishes to speak on these particular heads. That would be Heads 71, 34, 48, 35 and 30. Let us see if any other Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

I recognise the Honourable Member.

Mr. Swan, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Just ever so briefly as it relates to the head pertaining to ferries.

The Chairman: Yes. And recognising that there is about an hour and 15 minutes left. So go right ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is quite some time.

The Chairman: Yes, it is. Go right ahead.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I thank the Minister for being so generous with his time to allow other Members to contribute to the debate.

I communicated this to the Minister that as it comes to public transportation that with the difficulties that we have on the roads—just a little preamble to my question—that we need to get as many people using public transportation, particularly on the water, as possible. And I know we did have a commuter ferry service in St. George's at one time that went to Hamilton. I have always felt that an integrated ferry and bus . . . And just recently the Minister did a wonderful initiative in Cut Road. There are other areas that could be integrated, Ferry Reach, for instance. I declare my interest. I happen to be a Member of Parliament for that area.

But it could very well be integrated with the ferry service in the commuter and in the evening time to allow persons in some far-reaching communities . . . and I do not want to take the liberty to speak for others, like Spanish Point and others. But there could be areas in which we can encourage people to use public transportation and to get more people on the water. And even maybe as a test case integrating that. And then in these smaller areas, maybe initially it might be something like a minibus size.

But I would think with the commuter service, that could be something. Because we have got to do something about the road. And the Junior Minister who was the Road Safety Chairman for many years did an outstanding job as a young MP, having held that role as Chairman of Road Safety now some, I dare say, 40 years ago. I know he did a wonderful job.

The Chairman: Right. Right.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: But we still have many people succumbing to, and condolences to the family of persons just as recently as this week who lost their life on the road. We have got to do more to get people off of the road. And I believe the water, particularly with commuters in the evening, and my community in St. George's and constituency could very well be the pilot case. And I would take an undertaking to help the Minister communicate that to people to be able . . . Because it is going to take a campaign.

The Chairman: Right. Right. Okay.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: So that is my contribution at this time. Should there be any other time I would like to do. But I appreciate the Minister for allowing me

to make a contribution in the time that he afforded that allows a little country backbencher to jump in today.

The Chairman: Not a problem at all. We would like to thank you very much, Mr. Swan.

I recognise the Shadow Minister for Finance.
Mr. DeCouto, you have the floor.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was not sure I caught the page number and the line number for those prior remarks—

[Laughter]

The Chairman: I gave him a slight bit of . . . he said he was going to speak *ever so briefly*. And I was about to break in when he finished his remarks, and I allowed him to continue. So, I recognise that he did not mention . . . On the record, I would certainly state to Members that when you are getting up, please give us the line item for which you are speaking—

[Crosstalk]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I was admonished—

The Chairman: —sticking with the numbers that we are—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I was particularly admonished—

The Chairman: I don't want to take too much of your time.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —to be careful of that, and so I turn to page B-235.

The Chairman: Your point is taken.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Page B-235, Head 71, Revenue 8090, Vacation Rental Fees.

The Chairman: Sure.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: This was budgeted last year for \$400,000, came in at \$271,000 and it was budgeted again for \$400,000. And I am trying to understand what will change this year that they will actually achieve that revenue.

And if I recall, I believe there was some [reluctance] by those who are operating vacation rental properties to in fact pay those fees. So perhaps the Minister could comment on their approach to that situation.

Turning now to page B-244, I will probably echo my colleague's comments. As you may know,

Mr. Chairman, I am a boater. So, I pay close attention to things like mooring fees, this being the time of year to have completed your mooring registration (anyone listening). And I notice that it is the same question as before because last year line 8173 under Revenue, last year was budgeted for \$900,000 or \$901,000. It came in at 746 and again was budgeted at \$901[,000]. So obviously we would like to understand what the decline was and what is changing this year.

And now I turn to page B-247, and I am actually sticking on the theme of moorings, removal of illegal moorings. And it is a question regarding boating registration, actually, mooring and boat registration. So, you could perhaps also stick to B-244, 8169 if you prefer. And we have heard in other ministries about the derelict boats. And of course, there is always a cost to pick these boats up and remove them. And that is one reason they remain derelict, as boat owners cannot afford. And has the Ministry considered requiring insurance? Just like when you drive your car you have to have insurance. Should you not, in order to license your boat, have insurance both for the protection of injury and damage to other boaters and for the unfortunate situation we have when after a hurricane.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you. Those are my three questions, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak to these particular heads?

I recognise the Shadow Minister.

Honourable Member Fahy, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I have a number of questions across a number of different heads. I will start first with Head 30 and in particular will look at the Capital Expenditure on page C-14. It is noted in line item 76540, which is Ferries and Pilot Boats. And I think what we would like is confirmation that the new ferries are not electric. Because in the previous debate we were told that we are hearing electric ferries. I thought that is what the Member from St. George's was going to ask about. But I think if we could get some clarity on that.

In addition, for the two new—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Michael Fahy: I thought you would comment. I thought the Member would comment, Mr. Chairman.

In relation to the two new ferries, which I understand are going to replace two older ferries, the

previous Minister (to the current Honourable Minister) had made mention I think in 2024 that there was a possibility that the old ferries would be sold. And I would like to understand if there is any progress, any potential sale of those two ferries. And if so, will they be possibly sold locally or would they be sold overseas? And in addition to that, has there been any interest expressed to the Bermuda Government and these particular departments under this head for the purchase of those two vessels? They are still operational. They are not languishing in Dockyard. So, one presumes that they are viable, and viable for that matter. So, I would like some clarity on that.

As well, we have heard an awful lot across these debates, Mr. Chairman, about digitisation. We heard it in debates on Monday. We have also heard the digitisation of the bus fares, et cetera, which I think is fantastic. And I agree. I am going to say that because I know it is something that . . . Interesting. When I held the role of Minister of Transport and tourism this was something that we had urgently begun to explore and ran out of time. But with that said, I am glad to see progress made on that. So, can the Minister advise if there is intent in the next year or two to digitise the ferry fares like the bus fares? I think that is important. And why is that?

When you in fact turn to Marine and Ports, and I think that is under page B-244 (in my notes). Let us just take us to that. You can see under Ferry Receipts 8187 that ferry receipts have consistently been, well, \$630,000 for 2023/24. The original estimate then in 2024/25 was \$100,000 in terms of revenue for ferry receipts, which then declined on the revised 2024/25 to \$545,000. That is quite a decline in terms of what was estimated to what in fact was collected. Given that the Minister in his brief made it clear that it is the Government's intent that the public transportation network should be the primary transportation of Bermudians, that is not a good number. It is not a good look.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Michael Fahy: When you compare, Mr. Chairman, the takings in respect of the various ministries or the various departments, what is interesting when we look at public transportation, and if you look at Head 35, because I just want to bring a comparison to it (you will see on page B-253), there is quite a significant revenue source breakdown for the bus service between passes, tickets, cash, media fare for passes, tickets and tokens. And it is broken down quite significantly so you can get a good understanding of how the fares are collected and how they are being used. What you do not see in respect of the ferries is a similar breakdown. And I think it would be very helpful going forward, since in fact some measures are not measurable anymore in the bus service, that maybe

we can have some extra measurables in the Marine and Ports Services.

Now, I do have, Mr. Chairman, a real interest in this. As my colleague, the Shadow Minister for this portfolio, mentioned, I am a very regular user of the Pink Ferry Route, being a resident of Hinson's Island. So, I am very dependent on that ferry service. And I do want to, with your leave, Mr. Chairman, thank the staff of the Department of Marine and Ports, who, despite some of the bad rep, do a good job. And I have said it consistently. And when they do, I do acknowledge that and write the director and say, *They've done an amazing job*. They are out there in 40-knot winds sometimes, okay? Even though it gets cancelled and people say it is inconvenient, there is now a WhatsApp group and people are communicating. So, the ferry is something that I would encourage people to use.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Michael Fahy: I really do, and I have been absolute about that.

So, any encouragement that we can give to get people to use the ferries will increase revenue, which is something that, again, another Shadow Minister spoke about in a previous debate, is finding revenue sources. It seems to me that that is a great opportunity because there are wide gaps here. If there is \$800,000 estimated and we are only collecting \$545,000, there is a big gap. Okay? So perhaps we can see some improvements next year.

Sticking now or jumping to page B-253, which is Head 35 on Public Transportation. I am not sure where this fits. I am going to assume on page B-252 the Department Objective says, *To deliver a convenient and cost-effective daily bus service*. Has there been any progress made since it was last announced by a previous Minister, the Honourable Minister from constituency 29, about a revised bus schedule? It has been outstanding for some time. And I did not hear any mention of it in the Minister's brief. It is a sad thing, and there are a number of things that then flow from that. And those who are in the department will know what I am talking about, and I hope it is not actually the case anymore.

With that in mind about a bus schedule, perhaps the Minister can advise how many Grey Routes there are. And can the Minister explain what that means in due course? But how many Grey Routes exist, if any? Is there intent that at the Headquarters . . . again, I am just going to go with Head 35 in a general sense at HQ for that or it can also fit under the HQ for the Ministry, I suppose. Is there proper digitisation at the actual headquarters for the buses? And is there still relative manual dispatching? And in addition, are the bus driver schedules still done by hand in booklets? Because they were eight years ago. I would like to know if this progress, again, given that there is

a drive across the Government to have digitisation . . . it certainly will improve, I would imagine, some of the performance measures.

Having another look, Mr. Chairman, in respect of buses generally, just looking at line item 45010. (I did not write the page number down on that.) Yes, that would be on pages B-252 and B-254, I think.

The Chairman: Page B-252.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Mr. Chairman, we do see that there are issues obviously with bus repair and maintenance, and the figures have increased. I am not following why that is the case if we are having an improved bus fleet.

If we are moving toward electric buses, which are more efficient, are newer, presumably the money is being spent on those buses that are old and decrepit and do need replacing. And again, I pose the question: On those buses that are being retired, is there an intent to sell? I believe at one point we sold buses to Cuba, I think, a number of years ago. So, I think that happened quite some time ago. But again, it is something that I would like some clarity on. On page B-255, line 45090, and that is . . . again I thought the repair and servicing, which I have said.

Under business unit Bus Operations 45010, improve the ridership passenger count, the Shadow Minister has already made comments about 5 per cent increase. It does not seem like a lot actually if the desire, again, is to increase ridership for a 5 per cent increase. It just does not seem like very much.

One of the things as well perhaps the Minister can add some clarity to, is that there was a time, certainly a number of years ago, when, sadly, there were quite a number of assaults on bus drivers. And it was abhorrent. And I remember a number of incidences when I was Minister that we had to really, unfortunately come to the House (and to another place, certainly) and speak about these acts. And I am wondering if the Minister could shed some light on improved safety for the drivers themselves and what measures have been taken to see that happen. Because again the drivers are on the front line and are driving on very dangerous roads. I do not think they should ever be in a position where they are facing possible assault from passengers.

If I may, I will just quickly go to page C-14. (I just had some notes.) Oh, yes. Generally, and I am just sorry. I should have mentioned this under Head 30 again on Marine and Ports and ferries generally.

The Chairman: It is fine.

Mr. Michael Fahy: And I put it under HQ.

Under New Ferries, can the Minister shed light on whether or not there will be vendor opportunities on board the ferries for Bermuda businesses? And for ferry riders, you will often see vendors at the

various ferry stops selling different sundries and things. Whether that is kosher or not I do not know. But we encourage it. But again, there are opportunities on these ferries in relation to that.

The other point that I would like to make here, and a question that arises is we do spend an awful lot of money on these ferries. I would be very interested to know what the daily breakdown is per ferry. Because a lot of times in the off season you see some of the very large ferries running very empty, which is very costly. And it always seems to me that it would be a useful thing . . . and again I need to preface this. When the Opposition was Government we negotiated a deal with Norwegian Cruise Lines for a ferry. And the Honourable Member from St. George's will be well cognisant and recognise that ferry that did service and ran service and continues to run service.

The Chairman: I am giving you the same latitude that I gave the Honourable Member from St. George's.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Thank you. Thank you very much. I do appreciate it, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: The time is running out. Carry on. Go ahead.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Yes. No line on those ferries, from St. George's to Dockyard. And it seems to me there must be opportunities again for some arrangements to be made.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Because a lot of the times the ferries that are servicing Dockyard to Hamilton are primarily, during the day, tourists. That is not servicing locals. So, are we getting value for money in respect of that given the low ferry receipts (which I identified that line item already), those ferry receipts, \$545,000 last year, given the massive numbers of people who are travelling on these ferries? It does not seem to me that we are getting the revenue that we should be getting. If these ferries have 550 seats each . . . what are we . . . do the numbers. The numbers do not make sense on the revenue. So perhaps we could get clarity and even consider getting at least some estimates as to how many of the users are guests to Bermuda rather than locals. Because I think people do want to understand where their tax dollars are going. And who it is servicing.

So, I know the Shadow Minister has asked a number of questions. As I said, forgive me. I have a particular interest in some of these, and I may make more contributions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: You join Mr. DeCouto in having an interest.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Correct.

The Chairman: Very well.

Does any other Member wish to speak to these heads?

I recognise the Deputy Opposition Leader. You have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I just have a couple of quick questions.

The Chairman: Sure.

Mr. Ben Smith: On page B-252 under Transportation, Head 35, specifically under 45010 for Bus Operations, just wondering if there has been any consideration for extending the time period of buses running during the night hours? The reason I ask that is because we have a lot of people in Bermuda who work shift work and would probably be looking for transportation in hours that a lot of us are probably sleeping.

At the same time, we also know that we have issues in the Island with people consuming alcohol. And we know that even when we give people notice, they still continue to get pulled over for drink-driving. We have dangerous issues on our roads. Could this be an opportunity for us to provide a cheaper solution rather than taxi fares, which sometimes make people make a choice to go get behind their wheel when they could be taking a cheaper way of transportation?

So, I am just wondering if there has been any consideration, any thought on what that would look like. Obviously, you are talking about increasing shifts. So, I know there would have to be a lot of consideration on the labour side. But considering some of these issues, it could be something that could help us in two specific areas: one for those shift workers; and, two, to try to get some of our people off the road when they have been consuming.

Mr. Chairman, the other one that I was looking at is under the Maintenance section, on that same page B-252. My question really is, If the Minister could give us an idea whether some of these buses that have to get maintained are being damaged on our roads because we have had lots of foliage in the road which has caused some of our cars to actually go over the line. So, is this an issue that is causing a knock-on effect which is causing damage to maybe the sides of our buses that are now having to be repaired?

So, if you could give us some information about some of those repairs that are having to happen that are different from what I would call the maintenance on, you know, the engine of the vehicle, more in the structure of the vehicle that potentially is happening because of some of these other issues?

So, with that, I will take my seat. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Deputy Opposition Leader.

I will recognise any other Member who wishes to speak on any of these heads.

[Pause]

The Chairman: I recognise the Honourable Member Mr. Robinson.

Mr. Robinson, do you have another?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you.

The Chairman: Go right ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes. Just really quickly, I just wanted to get a quick update on the licensing issue for and whether or not there will be any sort of legislation, amendments coming down the line to ensure that they are supported as they have the first Bermudian pilot. And I am sure the Minister also supports that venture.

So, I just wanted to know if there are any amendments because there was a bureaucratic snafu where, unfortunately, we are operating without. So, this is on Head 71 and mentioned in the Minister's brief. He mentioned the BTA.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Chairman: Let us not take too many liberties on that.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes.

The Chairman: I mean, keep it in my direction, but let us not go too far into the Tourism Authority.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: They are not sure now, Mr. Chairman. Unfortunate.

Unfortunate.

It is a lot of chatter. But I believe that we are allowed to ask questions on the brief, and I just wanted to note—

The Chairman: No. I prefer more . . . no, one moment. One moment, Mr. Robinson.

I prefer, more, frankly. And I allowed Mr. Swan, and I allowed the Honourable Member Fahy and Honourable Member Swan to have some latitude. However, there will be an opportunity to discuss the BTA, and there will be an opportunity for us to do that, but not under the heads that we are currently being charged with today.

I appreciate the fact that you said *the Minister mentioned it*. I got that. The Minister is saying that he did not. I would rather, if you do not mind, err on the path of sticking to the brief.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: No, that is fine. But—

The Chairman: If you do not mind.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: What I was referring to—

The Chairman: Go right ahead. Yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: What I was referring to, Mr. Chairman, is we are dealing with the head Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport, Head 71. And underneath that, you know, you can make policy proposals. And that is budgeted in there that in the brief things were mentioned underneath that head that I am just asking if there is any legislation regarding tourism—because this is a Tourism and Transport sort of question.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: You know . . . Yes.

The Chairman: I recognise you have done Head 71. I am satisfied that we have covered it and let us keep it at this level. I would rather you did not.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Okay. No problem, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Mr. Robinson, you have done well thus far. So, I would like to keep along that lane. And if you do not mind—

[Laughter]

The Chairman: The Minister is opposing vociferously. So, I would ask that you would stick with that and then we can go right ahead.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, Mr. Chairman. And then I can make way for answers.

The Chairman: Thank you very much.

Minister, you have about 55 minutes left. But before you do, is there any other Member wishing to speak on this on any of these heads?

No other Members wish to speak.

The substantive Minister, you have the floor.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I just want to thank the Shadow Minister. I want to thank his colleagues, the Honourable Member from constituency 20, the Hon-

ourable Member from constituency 8. Anybody else? I just want to say thank you. Because I did not hear them; you know they like to chirp (I think one said) about the time that they do not have. But I gave them a solid two and a half hours.

The Chairman: You did provide sufficient time, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Solid two and a half hours, they used quite a bit of that.

The Chairman: A good time.

Hon. Owen Darrell: But with that, I want to thank my team who have been listening. And I hope they were listening a little bit more than the Shadow Minister. But I did not mention *once* BermudAir in my brief, not once. And I think the Honourable Member was trying to connect BermudAir to Transport, not Tourism.

But with that said, we will get to that when we get through with the answers. But I do want to go through a comprehensive answer session because as a former educator, as you would know, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: I do.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Question and answer sometimes is where individuals learn the most. So, I am pleased to provide some of these answers.

Honourable Member? Yes?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Okay, great. I am just making sure that we are good.

So, we will start with Head 71. And there were some questions asked on Headquarters. And it was page B-234 I believe that this question came from. And they asked about the 4 per cent increase in the Ministry. And the Honourable Shadow Minister from the other side questioned about the investment and how I had highlighted the investment. Then it sounds like the Honourable Shadow Minister took a little bit of a swipe at me because he said that it was not an investment; it was mainly on salaries.

But I will tell the Honourable Shadow Minister this: Any good manager knows that an investment in your team—and that solid team that you see right here and the ones whom you may not see—everyone knows that that, Mr. Chairman, is a solid investment. I will start there. There is no greater investment than the team of workers whom we have in the Government of Bermuda, our public officers.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And that is why, Mr. Chairman, we have taken great steps and gone to great lengths to further invest in the money that they take home so they can continue to give quality service and service to the people of this country, Mr. Chairman. So I will not agree with—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Chairman: Speak to the Chair.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, I am just waiting. You hear a lot of chirping.

The Chairman: Yes, you said that.

Hon. Owen Darrell: You know, I had fun with this one, Mr. Chairman.

So, I would reiterate that I do not know if that was a little bit of a dig or a little bit of a slight. But that investment—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister, just take your seat just for a minute.

I accept. Go ahead. The Honourable Member Robinson, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: The Honourable Minister—

The Chairman: You should wait for me to speak first. Mr. Robinson, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate it.

The Chairman: Right.

POINT OF ORDER
[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: The Honourable Minister is presenting improper motive here, right?

The Chairman: Ah.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I at no time wanted to criticise the raises that the public servants were getting. And I respect their work, and I want to clarify that to the listening audience, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chairman: That is fine. You have done so. I got it. You have done so.

Honourable Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I just want to reiterate that that investment is an investment well spent. So, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank you for pointing that out from the other side.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: But to—

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Do not take it, Minister. Do not take it, Minister. Go right ahead. Speak to the—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Investment in people, Mr. Chairman, is very, very important.

The Chairman: Resist the temptation, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, no, I am good. I am good.

The Chairman: Okay, good. Carry on, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I just . . . you know me. [I am a] Cleveland County boy. I bat and bat well; and bat long.

So, the second one, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: As the Vice President from Cleveland County looks on, I see.

The Chairman: He is taking notes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I see.

The second question was on Professional Services, and again, Mr. Chairman, this was on page B-231 around Professional Services. And the question was that there seemed to be a jump in 2024/25 of \$50,000 for the overall current estimates. And the Honourable Shadow Minister asked for further explanation. And he just wanted to focus on that line item and what was the reason for that increase. I am happy to report, Mr. Chairman, that that increase is due to the combined Ministry HQ of the two former Headquarters, and we put it together. And that is why the Professional Services was increased. So, it is pretty, pretty self-explanatory there, Mr. Chairman.

As far as Other Expenses, which was another line item, that question was asked by the Honourable Shadow Minister. [He] asked about an increase of \$4,000 previously, but then it jumped to \$21,000. The Honourable Shadow Minister wanted me to clarify because it was not defined in the Budget Book. And the

clarification, simply, Mr. Chairman, is that the increase was again due to the combined Headquarters.

Further question on Head [71] regarded training. Again training, also investment in people. It was zeroed out in the 2025/26 returns. The Honourable Shadow Minister wanted to know what caused the zero-outs. And it seemed only \$6,000 seems . . . I am not sure about the question. How much training is being done? The answer is the Government provides internal training at no cost. So internal training is encouraged before external training, which costs. So that is the explanation there. And this one I know the Honourable Shadow Minister has in previous times had a lot to say on the Bermuda Tourism Authority. He has had a *lot*. And he has asked me to break my silence a few times. Then he has asked me to stay out of it. And then he has asked me to dig into it. So, I am a little confused as to whether [he wants] the Government to get involved in the BTA or he wants the Government to stay in the—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —of the BTA.

The Chairman: Right. I understand.

Hon. Owen Darrell: But nonetheless, Mr. Chairman, I will . . . I will . . . I will, Mr. Chairman—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Temptation as well.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Absolutely. I will endeavour to dig into the Bermuda Tourism Authority and break my silence.

The Chairman: Yes. Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: You are doing well, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: But, Mr. Chairman, I could tell you this. I do not think I have seen this many on the other side for a Budget-Committee-of-Supply debate in a while. But I am honoured, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: They were waiting for something—

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I will continue on. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: They were waiting for such a time as this.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I have sat and watched others before. Come on! Stop it.
All right.

The Chairman: Speak to the Chair. Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I will continue on, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —with the Bermuda Tourism Authority. And I would just like to reiterate—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —and I would like to follow on, Mr. Chairman. And I will go and talk about the Bermuda Tourism Authority. And I would like to reiterate at this time, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Please go ahead.

Hon. Owen Darrell: That the Bermuda Tourism Authority is a marketing, a sales and marketing agency. And that is the investment that I think another party at some other time decided to take it away from Government to make it independent. And I am happy that the Bermuda Tourism Authority are doing good work in this aspect of sales and marketing Bermuda.

The Chairman: Yes, yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: [The Opposition] asked about advertising and promotion being zeroed out in 2025 but is now a budget of \$15,000. Okay. So, the marketing I think that they are looking at in Head 71 is not detail of the Bermuda Tourism Authority. It is important to understand that once we give the grants to the Bermuda Tourism Authority, the Honourable Shadow Minister would be happy to know that I have no involvement as to how they spend their money and what they do as far as operations.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: A lot of hypotheticals being thrown out over the other side, Mr. Chairman.

But the BTA budget, again I will reiterate, is not detailed in the [Budget] Book. So again, I think the Honourable Shadow Minister, in all due respect, is not clear as to how government grants actually work and how they are actually indicated in the Budget Book. We give the grant to the BTA. The BTA do all of their own operations. And you will be happy to hear, Mr. Chairman, that I have zero operational control as to what they do over there.

The Chairman: There you are. There you are.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, the distinction here is that the line item that [the Honourable Shadow Minister] saw on Advertising and Promotion has nothing to do with the Bermuda Tourism Authority.

There was a question here about the vacation rental fee, and it was a budget of revenue of \$400,000 as a revenue source. And I think two Members from the other side mentioned that the \$271[,000] that we did receive, falling short of the \$400,000, seems paltry (in their words) for *a massive budget, but represents a burden for those in vacation rental industry potentially*. The suggestion was that we should repeal this.

A revenue of \$400,000 reflects the actual units available. And I will concede, Mr. Chairman, that the collection is lower, however. And we are working to work on ways that we can get collection. There is a commitment . . . I am sure the Honourable Shadow Minister will be happy to hear this. There is a commitment to review this legislation as was laid in the platform. It was laid out. And again, this question is very important for the other side because they asked it multiple times. So, I am happy to give that answer.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I would like to point out and say thank you to the Honourable Shadow Minister for his recognition that he appreciates the cruise increase. So, I was very happy to see that. And another one . . . So yes. That is Head 71. So, I am happy to give those answers for Head 71, Mr. Chairman.

And I will move on to the questions that we received for Head 34, which is the Transport Control Department. And this question, I believe, came from page B-248 regarding the objectives. I guess this was a comment that the Honourable Shadow Minister had received concerns regarding data collection and maintenance, the number of taxis and vehicles on the road. And he has asked me if I can speak to how data management affected and improved, and will we see more collaboration with (I guess) private operators and the Bermuda Taxi Owners and Operators Association [BTOA].

So, the department and even myself, Mr. Chairman, have met with several industry stakeholders to address this issue. In fact, we met with the BTOA very recently to strategise. And I know the department has been meeting with them on efforts that will benefit the department and the industry. And I would like to take time, Mr. Chairman, to speak on the transportation of Bermuda. And as the Minister now responsible for Tourism and Transport, I will tell you that speaking to the stakeholders about transport is something that they have been long concerned about. And it is very important that we have these meetings, we have these collaborations so that we can get it right in the name of service, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, I am glad that this was raised. And these collaborative efforts are going to benefit all stakeholders. In tourism, they are going to benefit locals because when you want to move, Mr. Chairman, you want to move when you want to move.

The Chairman: Correct.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, thank you for pointing that out. And the data management basically leads these discussions and these agenda items when we are trying to make things better for the user, the local user as well as the visiting user. So, I am very happy to be able to be in the room as one Ministry now and be able to see these issues that affect both sides of the aisle. So, we are happy to continue on with this collaboration.

Another question under the Transport Control Department. Will we review and revise the motor car legislation? I will tell you this, any good government continues to review legislation, and if it is continuing to be effective to the people whom we serve. So, legislation, especially this one, goes way back to years and years gone by. So as much as we would like to go out and canvass and change everything tomorrow, there are some things that take some time. Changes that will positively affect one group of individuals may negatively affect the others. So, the answer to that question is that we do continuously review that legislation and happy to report that there have been updates to the Motor Car Act. Examples are the classic cars.

The Chairman: Oh, absolutely!

Hon. Owen Darrell: I know some of the friends of individuals of those on the other side have these classic cars. And they take . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: No, no, no, no, no.

The Chairman: Friends are taking advantage. Yes, Minister, go ahead.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, yes. They are happy to have these classic cars.

The Chairman: Yes. Oh, absolutely.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And so that is one example that I could give. That is one example that I could give of classic car legislation.

The Chairman: That is correct.

Hon. Owen Darrell: How we have looked at it and we have tried to make it better for individuals in the community.

I will tell you that the Transport Control Department has worked with the Office of the Tax Commissioner on legislation. And you will see that collection on these taxes and fees has done very well in other areas, mainly tax season, minibuses. Because we notice that the way the legislation was set up was not really conducive to collecting these fees. So yes, we look at this Motor Car Act. We link with other ministries, other departments. And there are several matters still in Chambers that are being drafted. Example as was raised before could be the Project Ride programme.

So yes, I am happy that the Honourable Shadow Minister pointed out that the Motor Car Act is a piece of legislation that we are continuously looking at reviewing and making changes to in the betterment of the individuals whom we serve, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Exactly, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you.

So, another question, and this is again under . . . well . . . this one again is under . . . Head 34. Sorry. I lost my place there. There was a question on Road Safety. And this came from page B-248. And they rightly point out that it is a huge line item, and that is important because road safety is very important. And as the Honourable Shadow Minister has pointed out that he would like to see an increase in funding, a comment there he made was that what we are doing is not working. The approach of Road Safety is shared between the Transport Control Department and the Bermuda Police Service, as well as Public Works. Each play a respective part to educate the public and enforce laws. So, what you may see there may not encompass everything that is happening in Road Safety.

And I would just like at this time, Mr. Chairman, to point out the new Chair of the Road Safety Council, Mr. Altonio Roberts. And he jumped in with two feet a couple of weeks ago with the Road Safety Week.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I am sure . . . I am disappointed that if road safety is such, *such* a big deal and they would like to see more money to it . . . I am really disappointed, Mr. Chairman, that not one from the other side showed up to Road Safety weekend, the launch of it, to support the new Chair, to support those from the hospital, to support the young people.

The Chairman: Aah. Aah.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Pardon?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: That is the question that I am answering that comes. And I am so glad that the Honourable Member asked that, Mr. Chairman, because I think that comes—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Continue to the Chair, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. I tell you, one thing I will give a thorough approach—

The Chairman: You know that the line items are necessary.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —because as we started, as an educator, if there are students who do not get it, Mr. Chairman, I will gladly go over it so that they can get it. That is called *reinforcing the message*. I do that very well. So, I will go over it again since they asked, Mr. Chairman. I tell you. Do it again.

So, they were asking about on page B-248, I think that is where it was where they mentioned road safety.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, again I will get back to it. The Road Safety Council had an opening and a launch. And it is great to get up in this place and speak about what we should be doing more. But as I say, every time I get in front of the media, that support comes in many different ways, Mr. Chairman. And I am disappointed, I must say, that the support of the Junior Road Safety Council, the new Road Safety Chair, the outgoing chair did not seem to be appreciated by those on the other side. But I am glad that they pointed—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I am sorry, Mr. Chairman. It sounds like the other side wants me to do their administration for them.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: One second, Honourable Minister, yes. Thank you.

I recognise the learned Member from constituency 22.

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

The Chairman: You have the floor.

POINT OF ORDER*[Misleading]*

Mr. Scott Pearman: I think the Minister might be inadvertently misleading the House. He may not have been present in the Chamber during the debate when his colleague on those benches, who was chairing the Road Safety Council, was commended by me for doing so. That debate occurred only two days ago.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: A friendly reminder, Minister. Minister, continue with your brief.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: We have the Hansard.

The Chairman: Resist the temptation, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: No. I am good. I am glad. I am glad we got that out of the way because in my notes it says that road safety is very important. And, Mr. Chairman, I agree that it is very important.

The Chairman: It is.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I look forward. I look forward to seeing more participation from all sides and all benches as the Honourable Member pointed out.

We are going on to page B-248. Is there an update on the Ride Sharing project mentioned last year in March? Does the Ministry have buy-in from the BTOA? This is a new transportation initiative. Therefore, legislation is being drafted to create the new category. We are continuously meeting with the drafters to go over the legislation to make sure that it is correct and right so when we do produce this legislation that they have asked us to look into, that it is fine-tuned, it is user-friendly for everyone. And as of right now, Mr. Chairman, a timeline has not been set. However, I can tell you that every single day we strive to make the user and the transportation experience in this Island better than the day before.

When do we anticipate seeing regulation, consequences for unregulated persons or dispatchers such as Island: GO!?

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I think the Honourable Shadow Minister said he saw that on the app on Twitter.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, oh, sorry. No, sorry. I do. I will retract that. I think I did.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I thought maybe that is where it was.

But the Island: GO! app, as I understand it, is not a local product. As I am sure the Honourable Shadow Minister will understand more than me, it is difficult for us to address its use until we find someone who is actually using it and receiving money for its service. So, if the Honourable Shadow Minister feels that that is such a concern, we would love to get his sources as to the illegal activity that he may know about when it comes to transportation services in Bermuda.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes. Mr. Robinson, go ahead.

POINT OF ORDER*[Imputing improper motive]*

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, thank you.

I just think the Honourable Minister is inadvertently imputing improper motive, right? The Island: GO! App was reported by Bermuda Broadcasting, and that is public record. So, it has not been doing any illegal sources.

The Chairman: Right. Right. Right.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I would accept that. I would accept that.

The Chairman: Fine

Hon. Owen Darrell: But it goes to my point. So, I will retract the statement about their possibly knowing.

The Chairman: Well, we do want to remind the public that if you see something to say something.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes. But I will say the answer to the question, the original question, is that it becomes very difficult for us to really go after and enforce or check what is going on. We do not know where it is operating from and who is operating it.

The Chairman: Correct.

Hon. Owen Darrell: There were complaints made regarding the timing of vehicle inspections. I want to take some time to talk about this. It is very important that we go through this in detail. I think the Honourable Shadow Minister misunderstood the line item of which he was referencing. So, the Honourable [Shadow Minister] did talk about examinations on four, 44

... and then the question came about examining vehicles at a time when it may be busy, or something like that. I think that the Honourable Shadow Minister is speaking about traffic officers. And traffic officers and their role are not examinations, two different things.

Examinations as we know, I will just remind you, Mr. Chairman, is when the year comes to an end and you actually have to physically take your vehicle to the Transport Control Department and go through the process. You know, there are some workers who are there, the ones whom we have invested in. And they come out, and they ask you to line up and drive your car in. And they actually inspect your vehicle, also known as *examine* your vehicle. So that is what that line item is when it speaks to examinations. The taxi industry has asked, because I would know, I have some interest in that.

The Chairman: It is a matter of public record.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes. And it is a matter of public record that once upon a time taxis used to be examined in January of the year, early. And you had to register by, I think it was, January 31. It was the industry that came to Government and said, *This is not the ideal time to examine and relicense our vehicles because it is the slowest months of the year.* So in listening to the taxi industry we actually took those examinations—I do not think those were the ones that the Honourable Shadow Minister was talking about—but the Government took those examinations and moved them closer to the busy season so that operators and owners could have, you know, a little bit more money in their pocket to take care of any examinations, any repairs or the registration.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, it is important to know that the times of these examinations have been adjusted because we look, Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —to serve it the best that we can. And I think that it is important to point that out. Although, the examinations, I think, that the Honourable Shadow Minister was talking about were not that. It is the work of traffic officers who actually do traffic enforcement.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, I would go back to a previous question, where he said, *Well, there are people using these illegal apps and things like that and the other.* Sometimes when you have these traffic officers, enforcement needs to be done sometimes when you

least expect it so that you may be able to catch some wrongdoing.

The Chairman: Hmmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, we cannot have it both ways, Mr. Chairman. You cannot say, *Well, look, let us be hands-off on this enforcement, let us let people do whatever they want because it may not be convenient for us to enforce the laws that come under the Motor-car Act that they have asked us to look at.* But if we want to get it right, sometimes the traffic officers have to enforce those laws at times. But that is not, and I want to point that out, the examination line item of which the Shadow Minister was speaking on.

Wages. Why are wages zeroed out? The answer to that is a just a simple clerical one: wages were moved to salaries.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Professional services. What is the reason for the increase? And the details of the line item for TCD. The increase of \$150,000 which represents overseas vendors, visiting to assist with the commissioning of new examination equipment.

We will go to Repair and Maintenance. The budget is \$481,000. What is the cause of this large increase? The increase is actually \$62,000, which represents replacing security systems such as barriers, outfitting satellite centres with additional cameras, safety measures and upkeep of the facilities that were built in 2007. I can tell you from being at the Transport Control Department, there are some areas that are definitely showing their age and, you know, are looking a little long in the tooth as they say, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Equipment. The Honourable Shadow Minister—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —and I am just going to attribute most of these to the Honourable Shadow Minister because I am sure his team would not mind.

The Chairman: He did have help.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, he did have some assistance.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I am so glad I could give them so much time so I can take their questions.

The Chairman: And Members, we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the estimates of revenue and expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are discussing Heads 71, 34, 48, 35 and 30. The Minister with responsibility for Tourism, Transport, Culture and Sport, the Honourable Owen Darrell, has the floor.

And Minister, I am looking at about 25 minutes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: If that is what you say, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: If I am correct. It is about 25, 26 minutes left. But go right ahead, Minister, I do not want to hold you up.

Hon. Owen Darrell: All right. As they say, on February 18, they elected me to speak, and I will do so.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: As much as you allow me to.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, if I only have 25 minutes, I will guarantee that I will do the best I can to make sure that the listeners of this country, and individuals of which I serve, can get all the answers to the questions that the Honourable Opposition has asked.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: You are welcome. Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Absolutely.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Resist the temptation and go ahead.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Everything is good. Me and my colleague next to me, he got something, my mate right here.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So—

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Take your colleague's example.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, thank you, thank you.

The Equipment. \$3,000 in 2024/25, they said, \$8,000? *Has that gone over?* In 2026, they see it goes back to \$3,000, what is the overage? Why do they believe (I guess "they" meaning the Government) be-

lieve that \$3,000 is suitable? Replacing computer equipment that was damaged in a particular cyberattack had to be replaced. So, question: other expenses, \$775, the budget revised was \$10,000, big disparity. What line item—and we are talking about B-249—it is a very large; bank commissions and fees due to the increase in credit card use in vehicle registration. The expenditure will be covered by savings in other budget areas.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Revenue increased, but it comes under what Government budget? It is 2025/26.

The increase does not match the goals. How does the Minister plan to meet the goal? An additional private car category with a higher licensing fee was introduced.

Question on page B-251, Performance Measures. There seems to be a discrepancy between percentages as a target, but not all percentages are present. Some measures, as I said in other things, sometimes support is not measured always in numbers.

The Chairman: Correct.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Sometimes measures are not numerical. So, there will be other performance indicators that may not be numerical. And we have to point that out.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I do not write the Budget Book. Page B-251.

The Chairman: Resist the temptation, Minister.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The registration and administration, are these percentages due to potential digitisation at TCD?

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: The answer is yes.

TCD holds personal data. Have they considered cybersecurity? The answer is yes. All projects are overseen by the Government's Computer Security team at IDT. And I think that comes under my honourable colleague, the Minister of Cabinet and Digital Innovation, who is here.

The Chairman: Aah.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, I want to thank him. I am sure he also has invested in people. As we know,

good managers invest in people, and that is why the salaries there are probably—

The Chairman: There you are.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I am talking to—

An Hon. Member: Answer the question.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Now, hold on. I am going to tell you. I am going to tell you.

The Chairman: The Minister is entitled to some, just some leeway. But he is doing fine.

Hon. Owen Darrell: All right. So that is that.

I am going to move on now. Mr. Chairman, I am going to move on to the Department of Public Transportation.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Wyatt does not have a standard budget for the auxiliary bus service. This line item is used for charters and site-seeing. That has been discontinued for a number of years. Bus operations increased due to salary uplift, decrease in staff, so please explain. There has been an aggressive recruitment process currently happening and therefore the budget reflects anticipation of filling these posts.

Maintenance. How many buses need repair? What is the state of the fleet regarding repairs and maintenance? Approximately 25 per cent of the existing fleet are 20-plus years old and they are requiring extensive maintenance just to meet the daily schedule. Buses for the disabled, more inclusive of mobility issues—is the Ministry looking into this? Are they wheelchair accessible? Several of the new buses are wheelchair accessible.

Electric buses. Does the capital acquisition amount and these buses, do they align? Yes. This is represented in the 20 buses. How many buses do we need to complete a fleet? How many do we have versus how many we need? The fleet consists of 110 buses, which will be maintained. Transport has a sharp increase, 92 to 79 in the original. Why? I will get back to that one.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: What caused the increase—we are talking about repair and maintenance—increase in collisions? There continues to be increasing costs associated with maintaining the diesel buses that we do have left. As the old buses are replaced, this will reduce the need for excessive repair costs.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Materials and supplies. How can we keep the number down in 2026? In 2023/24, the aged diesel fleet was largely still in service. This is very expensive to maintain. Additional bus purchases in 2024/25 were paused and the electric bus purchases that are coming in 2025/26 will resume. And this will result in a lower budget material and supply cost.

This question comes to page B-254. Employee numbers—they have seen a slight increase in employees but still under the Ministry's target. As we are ordering new buses. Is 143 full-time employees workable? And how will the Department of Public Transportation achieve 168 bus operators, and if there will be enough coverage for all routes? A new bus purchase will also facilitate the retirement of the older, expensive, difficult-to-maintain diesel buses remaining in the fleet. And I think that speaks to maintenance guys.

What are troubleshooting measures, what is the issue? This was the one where I think the Honourable Shadow Minister had seen a post somewhere, I will not go to say where I think he may have seen it. But he saw a post somewhere and it was in French. We will have to acknowledge that in any new implementation there are teething pains. However, the department has been swift to correct the issue as they have been presented, and we have corrected them in real time.

Performance measures, on-time delivery of scheduled services—why was this a discontinued measure? Why was it discontinued? There will be a new system planned for the delivery of timing data. Once this process is established, the measure will be reintroduced. Maintain 80 per cent. It seems as though the performance measures are 68 per cent. Are there charging infrastructure issues? The number of buses in service is a fluctuating measure depending on the number of variables that kind of go up and down, minute to minute. Is there an issue with maintaining buses? What is the reason we cannot achieve 90 per cent maintenance levels? There are various reasons for the level of maintenance achieved on buses, such as staffing levels, supply chain difficulties, necessary parts as well as unfortunate accidents. Which, just by design, Mr. Chairman, are unexpected.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Average of buses that are out of service due to parts. The parts ordered for the various series of buses are susceptible to supply chain issues and the parts available. Reduction of inventory levels—what does this refer to?

Give me a second.

As the diesel buses again are discontinued, the relative parts are no longer needed in supply inventory. Is this new? This is a question about safety and health. It was discontinued in 2025/26, was it dropped? This measure was discontinued and re-

placed with a more productive one relating the percentage of issues addressed and resolved.

Customer training and front-line staff. Only 50 per cent was achieved. Why were we unable to achieve 100 per cent training? The shortfall in bus operators prevents the robust administration of training needed. Bus service is a function that must happen, movement of people. When operators are in training, the work must be covered by another and with the insufficient numbers, the core delivery of service takes precedence. The recruitment for bus operators is a rolling one, meaning as soon as one recruitment process ends another one commences to fill the vacant posts. So, if you know any of your constituents, Mr. Chairman, please encourage them to become a bus operator.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Lovely.

Produce performance and reports. I am sorry. A question on page B-252 talks about cost-effective bus service. Any work on a revised bus schedule? I think this came from the Honourable Member from constituency 20.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: It has been considered. It will take us a considerable level of negotiation and coordination, which will be more manageable with the new scheduling software. Feedback will be sourced by the travelling public before any significant changes are implemented. The current process for amending the bus schedule right now, speaking to the other question, is manual, and this software design is going to effectively enhance this service. It will be procured in this fiscal year. The data gained from passengers will also be used to develop schedules that are more convenient and responsive to passenger needs.

How many Grey Routes are there? A Grey run is defined as work that is provided to the public in addition to the public schedule. There are no listed Grey runs. However, many passengers expect and look forward to these additional runs. There are approximately 35 Grey runs per week. Seven per week-day, with no additional runs on weekends. But I would like to take time to talk about a very important initiative that we did when it comes to bus routes. Every once in a while we look to put measures in place that will serve the public. And you would have seen in recent publications just along this line item of Bus Operations that when the call comes from certain segments, we try to put on temporary routes or trial runs to see if they will work.

Mr. Chairman, you may know of a particular Honourable Member of the west, you may know him well—

The Chairman: Absolutely.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —who reached out and asked about a particular trial run.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And you know, it is a lot of consultation that has to go into that. Including the bus operators, including safety, including feasibility of the existing schedule and workers' time. So, we do take those under consideration as you would have seen.

The Chairman: Absolutely.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Some we are able to accommodate. Some may take a little longer, especially when that schedule comes online, to actually bring to fruition.

The Chairman: And we appreciate that. It is appreciated, Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. Thank you. I am sure you would appreciate that. Thank you.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Bus Operations—improve ridership passengers by 5 per cent increase does not seem like a lot. I will leave that as opinion-based. I do not think that one warrants an answer. Page B-252, we see that there are issues. Why have they increased when we have more efficient buses? Retired buses, is there an intent to sell them? I think this also came from the Honourable Member from constituency 20.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Or maybe it was [constituent] 25. I am not sure. But the business unit relates to bus operations in full-time equivalents, which includes bus operators, dispatch inspectors, traffic supervisors and the management of the staff section. So, it might have been a misunderstanding as to what that line item actually referred to.

Assaults on bus drivers, asked if the Minister [would] shed light? When I heard this question, I raised an eyebrow because I think that was . . . and you know, knock on wood that we do not have any, but it has been a while since we have had these types of reports. So, I would say that the Government has done good work in securing the safety of our bus operators.

And this Government takes very seriously the safety of all workers. There is currently an initiative, development of a policy and review of legislation to strengthen the safety and security for all public serv-

ants. So not just bus operators but again these individuals in the public service whom we have invested in. Going back to the top, we are definitely taking steps to making sure that all public servants are indeed safe in their workplace. I thank the Honourable Member from the other side for raising that, and I think it was a backhanded compliment to the Government for making sure that safety is important; thank you.

The Chairman: Minister, just take a seat just for a minute.

The Honourable Member, Mr. Fahy. You have the floor.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Point of clarification, if I may, and it is brief.

The Chairman: Yes.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Michael Fahy: In no way was it a backhanded compliment. It is a compliment. Because I was being absolutely serious that bus operator safety is of prime importance.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Michael Fahy: And it was something that was of concern to me as Minister, and I know it is of concern to the current Minister. Really, I was just trying to bring it to public's attention that that is something I think we both would quite happily stand here and know that is a matter of national importance. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Fahy.
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I do retract the "backhanded compliment."

The Chairman: That is fine.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I do appreciate the Honourable Member for getting up and explaining that.

Just to add to that on safety, specifically on the buses. These new buses that were ordered by another Honourable Member some time ago—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —do come with cameras and recording devices.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Owen Darrell: So maybe that has been a deterrent for the users. And it also makes the operators feel safer. So, thank you for raising that.

Maintenance. Are some of the buses being damaged due to the foliage on the roads? The department is continuing with communication with my colleague who sits to my right in the Department of Parks and Ministry of Public Works to address areas that may pose a problem for buses to safely travel without damage. I can tell you that the increase—I would like to say thank you to the Minister.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: The increase of the working crews that you see out, whether it be solo workers or entire teams, that you see will take chunks of this foliage out to not only make it safer for the buses but for all road users to go through these roads. With that said, I think I will move to the final head that they raised, which was Head 30. And that was Marine and Ports.

The Chairman: Looks like about eight minutes, Minister. About eight minutes left in your brief.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. I think I will get through this in about seven and a half minutes, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, I am going to get through that. That was good, those were good questions. I am happy to give that time because this is important stuff.

Marine and Ports. So, on page B-243, Ferry Service, does it include two ferries? Yes, the cost does include the new ferries. There is a question about dockyard maintenance. They want clarity on the breakdown of the maintenance line item, increased salary uplift; however, it is really large. What are we getting for that line item? This will be a combination of the compensation uplift and the increased inventory purchases to serve the ageing fleet.

Marine time safety and security. There is a very important insight; what makes up this line item? This budget represents the Bermuda Harbour Radio section, which as the Honourable Shadow Minister will know, is housed at Fort George, which covers a 24-hour shift. It is the basis of border control and security as well as our rescue operations. Our search and rescue. It is a very important part of being part of a maritime jurisdiction.

Page B-244. We have expenditure other than personnel cost consistently over the budget. Is this going to be achievable? Yes. Other personnel costs generally consist of acting pay, some overtime pay, but these are generally controllable expenses, Mr. Chairman. The Training section was revised down, it was not utilised in 2024/25, understand, but not budgeting for more training—is it a particular initiative?

More insight to that number? Happy to provide that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Our new, more modern vessels will require operational training for the crews prior. A year of training related to the new tug-boat, and introduction of the two new fast ferries later this year will require additional operator training. Training is also seasonal. We can only train staff during the off season. Also, the mechanical staff needs to be trained on the new machinery for repairs.

This one always seems to get people excited when they see—Travel. So, I am happy to explain this one. Budget increase in 2025/26 was established at \$178,000 and wants to know why the increase and what does that cover? How will it benefit the people of Bermuda? I am happy—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I am just happy to explain that because the Honourable Shadow Minister made a point to point that out, I am going to be as detailed as possible when it comes to this. The travel budget incorporates certification that has to be taken overseas as highly technical officers, such as ship pilots.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And I am happy to report, Mr. Chairman that I happen to know a few branch pilots. And I also went down to Seatrade at the beginning of this year. When you go to Seatrade, you have these cruise ship companies and they have these new boats, and the boats are getting bigger and bigger. Anybody who has been on a cruise recently knows that the boats are not getting smaller. They are getting bigger. I can name one company, Royal Caribbean, that has this Oasis Class that they have been trying to get to Bermuda for some time. That is the more modern boat and that is the one that most people, when you go on royalcaribbean.com, the first one you want to click on is what? The new boat.

So, the training is important because you will recall some years ago there was a storm that happened. The pilots could not see, and the boat went off course a little bit. This increased training makes sure that our pilots are certified in these new classes of ships so that they can go out and make sure that our reefs remain safe, the passengers on board remain safe and the Bermuda jurisdiction is known as a safe jurisdiction for these companies to bring their billion-dollar boats into. So, I am happy to say that these pilots often talk about the simulators that they go up to. Unfortunately, where we are, Bermuda does not have these very expensive and important stimulators—simulators, sorry.

The Chairman: That is fine.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And you have to go—

An Hon. Member: I knew what you meant.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: You knew what I meant? Thank you, thank you.

The Chairman: Your colleagues are saying there are sufficient stimulators. Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Got them excited there, I see.

The Chairman: I tell you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I tell you.

An Hon. Member: That is what they tell me.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I tell you.
And only basic training is available on Island.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, it is very important that we continue to train up our staff right. And with these boats coming, part of it is sea trials and tests. And unfortunately, you cannot trial and test a new boat when it is not in the jurisdiction. That is why the travel is very important because we would not want our users and individuals whom we serve to step foot on a new boat if it has not been deemed safe. So that training and those international standards have to be done.

So new ferries increased for more effective service going forward. How will the two new ferries impact this? There will be no new impact on the new ferries because these are replacement ferries, not additional ferries. So they will have no impact on the current manning or levels. Are there any issues with hiring? What is the hold up? There are no issues with hiring in Marine and Ports. We have a large staff, and there is a high turnover due to retirement. We are in the process of filling all vacant funded posts.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I am going to skip the questions that my colleague asked. I think the Honourable Member from constituency 25 asked about moorings. Illegal boat registration. Has the Ministry required in-

surance for the removal of these illegal boats? We are consulting with Chambers and stakeholders for possible legislation to making private boats' insurance mandatory.

Confirmation that new ferries are not electric. Correct. The new ferries of which we have mentioned in this Budget Debate are not electric. However, the team are conducting reviews on future electrification of ferries. I think those would include the smaller ferries on the Pink Route that the Honourable Member from constituency 20 has expressed his approval with, which one he uses every morning. Or afternoon, I am not sure.

The Chairman: Minister. Minister, you are just about expired.

Hon. Owen Darrell: You are waving me off, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: I will give you 60 seconds.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Okay, thank you.

The Chairman: Absolutely.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Well, Mr. Chairman, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank all Members who come under the Ministry, and the portions of this Ministry that come under Transport. I know we will have another chance to talk about the other two departments in this Ministry next weekend. I look forward to that debate. I would also like to thank the Opposition, the Honourable Shadow Minister and his colleagues, for bringing these well-thought-out and well-communicated questions. And we are happy to stand on our feet and speak as we have been elected, so that the public can get the answers to which are seeking. And I will end where I started.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: There is no greater investment, Mr. Chairman, than people. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Mr. Minister.

That ends and the time has expired in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. And the heads, which were Heads 71, 34, 48, 35, 30, have been debated and the time has expired.

I would like to take this opportunity, as the Minister has done, to thank the Minister and the Shadow Minister and those who have contributed to the debate here this evening.

Minister, if you would move? Your heads.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Absolutely, Mr. Chairman, I would be happy to do that.

Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 71, 34, 48, 35 and 30 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 71, 34, 48, 35 and 30 be approved. Is there an objection to that motion?

There is no objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport Heads 71, 34, 48, 35 and 30 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26.]

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Yes. You can [move to] rise.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise, report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There appears to be no objection to the motion.

It is agreed to. Thank you very much.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

[Pause]

House resumed at 8:19 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Committee rise, report progress and seek leave to sit again. And that motion was approved.

So, Members, that brings us to the next part of the day, and as I understand it, I believe that all [other] matters have been carried over. So, all matters have been carried over.

So that leaves us to . . . I call on the Minister for Cabinet Office.

Minister.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House do adjourn until Friday, May 16, at 10:00 am.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the House adjourn until Friday, May 16, at 10:00 am.

Does anyone wish to speak to this motion?

There is no one who wishes to speak to this motion.

The House has adjourned.

[At 8:20 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am Friday, 16 May 2025.]

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**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
16 MAY 2025
10:02 AM**

Sitting Number 8 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, Members.
We will have the prayers.

PRAYERS

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

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 9 May 2025, 12 May 2025, 14 May 2025]

The Deputy Speaker: We have confirmation of the minutes for 9 May, the minutes of 12 May and the minutes of 14 May [2025].

Does anyone have any objection to these minutes?

There being none, they are approved.

[Minutes of 9 May 2025, 12 May 2025, 14 May 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Deputy Speaker: The Speaker, as you all know, is absent. The Premier may likely be absent for part of the day. He is attempting to be back. Member Ming is absent for today. Member De Silva is absent for today.

There are no other apologies.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PETITIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Deputy Speaker: We have two Statements. I call on the Minister of Cabinet Office to present his first Statement—his only Statement.

**APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMME:
THE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY
DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME**

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this Government recognises the critical role that a robust and skilled Information Technology workforce plays in the future prosperity of Bermuda. In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, the demand for experienced IT professionals is significant, and like many jurisdictions, Bermuda has faced challenges in recruiting and retaining this vital talent. Competition to attract and retain knowledgeable and qualified professionals is fierce; Bermuda competes not only in local circles for this talent but also globally.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to proactively address this need and cultivate a pipeline of Bermudian expertise in this crucial sector, I am pleased to announce an exciting new initiative: the [Information Technology Development Programme](#) (ITDP). This comprehensive three-year apprenticeship programme, led by the Department of Information and Digital Technologies (IDT), is strategically designed to equip Bermudians with the diverse technical and essential soft skills needed to excel in today's IT environment.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the initiative began in February of this year, with two candidates selected with the assistance and guidance of the Department of Workforce Development. A third apprentice was identified in April and brought into the programme immediately. The ITDP offers apprentices a unique and immersive learning experience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, during the programme, each apprentice will complete rotations of at least three months across 10 key areas within IDT.

This extensive exposure will provide a well-rounded understanding of the multifaceted nature of government IT operations. These core areas include:

- Service Desk: Gaining foundational skills in user support and issue resolution.
- Devices: Developing expertise in hardware management and maintenance.
- Networking: Understanding the architecture and operation of critical network infrastructure.
- Infrastructure (VMware & iSeries): Acquiring knowledge in server virtualisation and core business systems.
- Project Management: Learning the principles and practices of successful IT project delivery.
- Unified Communications: Understanding and supporting modern communication technologies.
- Portals: Gaining insights on the development and maintenance of online government platforms.
- Administration: Developing essential organisational and support skills.
- Business Services: Understanding the alignment of IT with broader government objectives.
- Digital Services: Exploring the development and delivery of citizen-centric digital solutions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to ensure practical application and reinforce learning, apprentices undertake a capstone project at the end of each rotation. This provides a valuable opportunity for them to demonstrate their acquired knowledge and contribute meaningfully to IDT's ongoing work.

The ITDP represents a significant investment in the future of Bermuda and its people. By providing comprehensive training and hands-on experience, we are addressing the immediate need for skilled IT professionals within government and creating pathways for rewarding and sustainable careers for Bermudians.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this programme underscores this Government's commitment to digital transformation and empowering Bermudians to participate fully in the opportunities of the digital age. We are confident that the IT Development Programme will cultivate a new generation of talented IT professionals who will contribute significantly to our public services' efficiency, security, and innovation.

Now, Madam Deputy Speaker, please allow me a few minutes to read from participants' submitted testimonies:

From Kyla: "My experience working in the department of IDT, and specifically the portal team has been extremely eye-opening. Going into this programme as an apprentice, I had a few goals but one stood out more than the others. I was hoping to be exposed to the versatility of working in IT and all the opportunities that it held beyond what I can imagine. I can wholeheartedly say that that goal has been fulfilled, I will be leaving this apprenticeship with more

knowledge of my opportunities as well as a [far] clearer direction of where I want to take my career!"

And from Armari: "It has been great to be involved in this programme and work in an exciting field with amazing [colleagues]. The entire IDT staff has been supportive and helpful throughout my entire time here; from the people I've worked closely with to others who I only passed by. I have thoroughly enjoyed the work I have been doing and find this job a perfect fit for me. On top of gaining valuable work experience, I've been learning nonstop about technical and non-technical work such as public service and user support. I very much look forward to the coming weeks."

Madam Deputy Speaker, we look forward to continuing to recognise the accomplishments of our first cohort of apprentices as they advance through the programme and to welcoming the next cohort in due course. I would like to thank the Acting Chief Information Officer, Ms. Gina Benjamin, and her team for their outstanding efforts in bringing this programme to fruition.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I call on the Minister from Youth, Social Development and Seniors.
Minister.

OUT OF SCHOOL PROGRAMME ADVENTURE DAZE! 2025

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I am pleased to rise this morning to inform Honourable Members of this House and the Public about [the Out of School Programme "Adventure Daze! 2025,"](#) which is being organised by the Office of Youth Affairs as a complement to our governmental run summer programmes for children.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Office of Youth Affairs (or TOYA) remains committed to empowering our young people, their families and our community, which is reflected in the various programme offerings that are designed and planned. The programmes, whether held before school, after school or during the school breaks are available for all youth ages 4 to 12 years old.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these specific programmes have been accredited through the Bermuda National Standards Committee and for more than 30 years supporting parents and guardians by providing activities in safe spaces facilitated by TOYA's programme workers who are dedicated to the development of our youth. All programme workers are SCARS and CPR certified, and SunSmart trained. The programme workers who will be operating the out of school programme are currently participating in training to update their skills and knowledge in preparation

for the start of the upcoming “Adventure Daze! 2025” programme.

Madam Deputy Speaker, although the out of school “Adventure Daze! 2025” programme has been promoted in the media and on TOYA social media platforms, such as, Instagram (toyabda), I just wanted to ensure parents and guardians are aware of the availability of this engaging programme. Adventure Daze! 2025 is designed specifically for children who have completed preschool to Primary 6 providing them with an enriching, fun and safe environment to explore, learn, and interact with their peers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this programme will operate from 8:00 am to 6:00 pm for five weeks commencing Monday, 30 June and concluding on Friday, 1 August 2025. The out of school “Adventure Daze! 2025” programme will be offered at our two community centres operated by TOYA—at the Western Zone Community Centre, located at 13 Kitchener Road, Sandys and the Eastern Zone Community Centre at 6 Old Military Road, St. George’s. The Western Zone Community Centre has a capacity for 36 [children], while 48 children can be accommodated at the Eastern Zone Community Centre.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the cost of the out of school programme is \$60.00 per week or two service vouchers, which can be purchased at any post office. To reserve a space for a child in the programme, parents and guardians must pay \$60.00 for the first week during online registration at ospbermuda.bm.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the out of school “Adventure Daze! 2025” programme will provide engaging and educational activities that align with the eight goals outlined in the National Youth Policy. The activities have already been creatively developed around weekly themes, such as:

- Treasure Island,
- Life is a Beach,
- Bermuda Shorts, and
- Splash into Cup Match.

These weekly themes aim to encourage our youth to have an appreciation for Bermuda’s local culture and environmental awareness. The themes also promote teamwork and creativity of our youth while fostering their personal growth and social skills through unique experiences. “Adventure Daze! 2025” ensures young people will leave the programme at the end of the five weeks with not just memorable experiences but with an enhancement of their personal skills and knowledge that will last a lifetime.

Madam Deputy Speaker, some of the personal skills and knowledge our youth will acquire are:

- learning how to tie basic knots, an essential skill for an aspiring sailor;
- making local flavoured ice cream;
- engaging in interactive sessions highlighting the importance of marine conservation and Bermuda’s unique marine environment;

- having group discussions focused on the importance of communication and respect when interacting with peers; and
- engaging in cultural discussions about the history and significance of Cup Match, Madam Deputy Speaker, highlighting both the Somerset and the St George’s Cup Match teams.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the online registration for the out of school “Adventure Daze! 2025” programme opened this morning. I encourage parents and guardians to register their children soon for this one-of-a-kind school experience, as spaces are limited, if they are not gone already because it is past nine o’clock.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: No Member indicated that they wanted to ask questions, so there is no question period today.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member from constituency 25.

Member you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you.

I would like to congratulate all the graduates of the Bermuda College and commend them on their educational journey. Those who know me know I am a big fan of higher education and I wish them continued further success.

I would also like to send my condolences to the family of Minna Scott, particularly her son, R. Wayne, and her daughter, Gina. And R. Wayne Scott, as many of you know, is a former MP from this Chamber. So I send my condolences to them.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does anyone else wish to speak? I recognise the Member from constituency 13.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker I would like to join in with the congratulations to the nearly 100 graduates

that walked across the stage at the Bermuda College. It was . . . I will add it was the new president Dr. [David] Sam's first graduation ceremony and he certainly did make it a memorable one. For the first time that I can remember I observed the president leaving the stage to walk down and walk amongst the students and actually called them out by name and actually get them stand up to raucous applause. So, it was really a different feel to this year. I mean it just felt a little bit, you know, it was just different. It was just different the way it felt. Also, it was emotional as well. There were two students who graduated posthumously. (I think that is how you say it.) And that is the first time I had seen that as well. Those students had gone before, they had satisfied all the criteria for graduation but unfortunately lost their lives before they were able to cross the stage.

In addition to that, Madam Deputy Speaker, the APACE department of the Bermuda College also holds their graduation *after* the graduation. So, some people do not hang around, but I did hang around to see that. And they had nearly 234 graduates that went through APACE, through that. It was particularly rewarding to hear that the most popular course this year in the APACE department was the AI course. And so we do have persons of all ages now embracing this technology and going up there and learning more about it. And so, congratulations to those 234 students as well that got certificates yesterday.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does anyone else wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 4. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

You brought tears to my eyes, Minister Diallo, in regard to the congratulatory remarks for the Bermuda College graduates, particularly Damitri Edwards who had passed . . . and I just want to thank the Bermuda College for acknowledging that. But I also want to acknowledge the graduates of . . . well, all of Bermuda College graduates. I want to be associated with that. And then also the graduates of our TOYA programme. Our supervisors in the out of school programmes participated in a management course with the Bermuda College and they received certificates: Renee James, Jamari Smith, Jahni Williams, Capri Dill graduated yesterday with the American Management Association Management and Supervision certification. So congratulations to you.

I also want to congratulate—I do not know if we did it in the House already, but MP Leroy Bean who received a degree. Is he—oh, he stepped out?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I just want to send congratulations to him. If he was here, I am sure he would tell us, what that degree was. But congratulations to you.

I want to send condolences for one of my constituents, Mr. Alexander Livingston Douglas, known as “Timmy” from Harlem Heights area. I want to send condolences to his family, his children, his wife . . . and just to let them know that we are thinking of them.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 20. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, we have all now heard about the very sad passing of Counsellor Larry Scott and I am sure the House would be enjoined in condolences to his family. Larry and I had a great relationship over the years, had many, many robust discussions politically and would often meet at Bermy Cuisine over coffee and chat. But I became very acquainted with Larry during my time as Minister responsible for Municipalities. When Larry was a source of great advice, counsel, and you will have seen remarks in the paper as well from the Corporation of Hamilton where the mayor and his other colleagues also said very similar things—

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Keep going.

Mr. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

Obviously, his brother Randy has been in the House assisting over the last little while now and I am sure Michael as well is devastated. I did not know the rest of his family. I am sure others did know his family very well. But it is a sad day. He had a wonderful career as an attorney and also sat in another place. I think from what, 1993 to 1997. And was a well-respected member in another place many years ago.

So again, condolences to his family. He will be greatly missed.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Michael Fahy: I associate the whole House. Thank you for that. Yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22.

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

I would like to convey formal condolences to the family of Wayne Cromwell Simmons. I attended his funeral yesterday and I also note that the Honourable Attorney General who sits in another place was also at the funeral. I would like to express my sadness to his wife Antoinette, his son Samuell and his daughter Waynae. He was a lovely, lovely man and died far too soon. He was not even 60 and those who know him know he was a great lover of dogs. He was, in fact, a trainer of dogs and loved all things dogs and had dogs everywhere, as I understand it from many of the tributes that were given. He was a resident in Somerset, I believe he was a resident of the Speaker and I know that he was very close with the Speaker. And I am sure the Speaker would wish to be associated with my observation, as would the Attorney General.

If I could also just add a quick word on the passing of the former Senator Larry Scott. I knew Larry also . . . well, everyone knew Larry. But I also knew him in a professional capacity and I had the pleasure of working with him, alongside him. We were on the same team as it were, albeit for different parties in a case. He was a pleasure and a joy, and he managed to approach the world with a cheerful sense of keeping everything in perspective, and sometimes in that profession, the strains of work can bear down on you, but not with Larry. He was always smiling, always happy and [approachable]. And I see a nod from the Minister Kim Wilson, across the aisle, who of course is also learned counsel, but just a lovely, lovely man and I personally will miss him.

Thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker].

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to be associated with the condolences to family member Larry Scott from Somerset, who was one of those many former Southampton Glebe, now Dalton E. Tucker [Primary] students that served in the legislature. Larry served in the other place and aspired to get here in Sandys South, a constituency that I once ran in as well. Following me, I think he ran maybe in the 1980s and early 1990s. I remember him being the executive director of the United Bermuda Party. And I remember him being very outspoken critic throughout the years. But finally, I know his family and we are part of that St. Kitts connection, and I know he'll be sadly missed, particularly by his siblings.

I would also like condolences to be sent and acknowledged to the family of the late Dennis Madeiros, who has not been living here. But he comes from, as we knew it Cedar Hill, Southampton, Granaway Heights, Coral Acres community. I grew up running in and out of his parent's house, the late Emery Madeiros, Sr. and his mother and his brother Emery Jr., who now lives in Boston, sent me a message that Dennis had passed away overseas. That family was a prolific cricketing family associated with BAA and a footballing family as well. But an entrepreneurial family; his brother would have run Lines' Supermarket up there on Ord Road and the like, where his parents worked for him. I am going back to this back to the late 1960s, early 1970s now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Those my condolences for today.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Minister from constituency 15. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you and good morning, Madam Deputy speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to rise this morning to offer congratulations to one of our public secondary schools, CedarBridge Academy. I had the opportunity to attend CedarBridge Academy yesterday in celebration of their multicultural day and it was fitting as I did say in my remarks that they are holding their multicultural day during Heritage Month, as we are preparing for Heritage Day, which is one week from today. And I just want to send congratulations to, first and foremost, the Principal, Mr. Kenneth Caesar; also, the Deputy Principal, Ms. Natasha Thomas, who actually pulled this together. They had an excellent display from Mr. Showande Butterfield. Many of you will know from H&H Gombey Group, Showande has been around to many schools recently, giving history and an historical account of the Gombey tradition here in Bermuda and what the intricate details of the Gombey costume, their steps and their rituals actually mean. They also had the Filipino Association, the staff had a full lunch celebrating the different cultures that are there actually at CedarBridge Academy.

As you would know as a former educator yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker, that our school systems are full of educators from many different parts of the world. So it was good. I did have a chance to have a nibble at some of that lunch before going in for that. So I wanted to start there and congratulate all of them, because not only did they put it on, but you can see the enthusiasm of the teachers to share their dishes and the cultural dress that they were in and the enthusiasm of the students to actually take part in that. I'm not sure if they were really, really interested in culture or they just were happy to have a couple of moments

out of the classroom. But as you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I did start my career, my professional career as an educator at CedarBridge Academy many, many years ago, and it was really, really rewarding to get back and to see that culture and social studies is still alive and well at that institution. So I just want to say that.

On a sporting front, I want to go back a couple of weeks and congratulate one of our National Sports Governing Bodies, the Bermuda Squash Association. They held their squash Bermuda Open Championship a couple of weeks ago and I want to congratulate the President, the organisers at the Bermuda Squash Club for putting it on and hosting. I also want to congratulate a company, a local company, IQUW that sponsored this and brought in many squash players from around the world. So, I was happy to attend. My son now just keeps asking me, *Daddy when can I play squash?* So, we can tell it was successful.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Just on the bell.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 12. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you.

First of all, I would like to be associated with the remarks concerning the passing of Larry Scott. I had the opportunity many times to have political debates with him and was part of a group and still part of a group that meets on a regular basis and he would always send messages about what he thought, where Bermuda should have . . . the direction that it should have gone and it was quite amazing, he held his middle ground there. You were not quite sure . . . you did not want to assume that he was PLP just because and so he always held this up. A very objective approach to things and I really, really appreciated about that and it is sad to see that he has passed on, and to the family, Honourable Members said his brother and the like, condolences there.

I would also like to give condolences to a good friend. I did not . . . it has been a while now—two weeks. But Leslie Holder, senior . . . I had . . . I just did not know he had passed. And that is going to be another big funeral at the Adventist Church, quite frankly. He was he was an educator as well. Two well-known sons. And so, to the family, I would like to just give my condolences to his two sons and his wife in passing. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 9. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Madam. Deputy Speaker.

I would like to send out congratulatory remarks to Shequita Parson (with no “s”). She went 50 yesterday. She's an educator. She's not in the classroom right now, but I believe she is still having an extreme influence on education in Bermuda. She also was a star on the soccer pitch in the Women's Football League playing for what was known then as Rude Girls, Devonshire Rec. But she's a rising star off the pitch for soccer as well in the CONCACAF region, in particular, and also is getting noticed by FIFA.

So, congratulations to her. She's a former constituent of mine and a friend. So, congratulations to her.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Mr. Vance Campbell: So, we like to associate the entire House with that. I think most people in here know her or knew of her.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak?

There being none, we move on.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

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

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

GOVERNMENT BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: Is there anyone introducing the Insurance Amendment Act?

I recognise the Junior Minister for Finance. Member, you have the floor.

BILL

FIRST READING

INSURANCE AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Good morning, [Madam] Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy 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, the Insurance Amendment Act 2025.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister. We move on.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Deputy Speaker: Which now brings us to the Orders of the Day for the resumption in Committee of Supply for further consideration of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Minister, Acting Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. I move that the house do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Is that approved by Members? Yes.

House in Committee at 10:35 am

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Chairman: Good morning, Honourable Members, and to the listening public. We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures for the year 2025/26.

This morning's first debate will be on the Ministry of Education and the former Minister of Educa-

tion, now present Minister of Cabinet Office, the Honourable Diallo Rabain shall give his brief.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I move following heads: Head 16, Ministry of Education Headquarters; Head 17, Department of Education; and Head 41, Bermuda College now be taken under consideration.

The Chairman: You may proceed, Minister.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, on behalf of Senator, the Hon. Crystal C. Caesar, JP, Minister of Education, I will now present the budget for the Ministry of Education, which comprises the Ministry of Education Headquarters (Head 16), the Department of Education (Head 17), and the Bermuda College (Head 41). Following a change in Ministerial portfolios as a result of the 2025 General Election, the Department of Libraries and Archives (Head 18), now rests with the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget for the Ministry of Education is \$149,190,621 and is found on page B-133 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. This represents an increase of \$9,849,120.

The current account 2025/26 estimated revenue for the Ministry of Education is \$248,000. This budget represents the cost of running and funding the existing public education system; whilst simultaneously investing in the transformation for the present and the future.

Mr. Chairman, the Capital Expenditure estimates for acquisitions and development increased from \$7,883,000 to \$8,187,953 in 2025/26. The number of full-time equivalents [FTEs] for the Ministry has increased by 35, from 1,053 to 1,088 employees, working across Heads 16 and 17.

Mr. Chairman, almost half of the increase in the overall budget is primarily due to the recently finalised union-negotiated pay uplifts. These necessary adjustments, which resulted in a \$4.567 million increase from the initial budget, underscore our commitment to fair compensation for educators, paraeducators and all of our staff members.

Mr. Chairman, moments ago, I referred to changes in ministerial portfolios following the 2025 General Election. While Ministers have changed, the Government and the Government's priority to transform the public education system for children and families remains the same. And while Education Reform is the Government's highest education priority, there are also others.

The following remarks will detail the continuing commitment to Education Reform, and the other investments being made not only to public education,

but to post-secondary and continuous learning via Bermuda College and scholarships and awards.

HEAD 16—MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I would like to begin the budget speech today by detailing the expenditure of the Ministry of Education Headquarters (Head 16).

The Chairman: You may proceed, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The mission of the Ministry Headquarters [HQ], which is found on page B-134, is to provide strategic leadership and policy direction for education and lifelong learning. The objectives of the Ministry Headquarters have been outlined accordingly on the same page.

Today, we will focus primarily on Government's commitment regarding (1) Education Reform, and, (2) the expansion of funding for post-secondary scholarships and awards either directly to students via scholarships or through existing programmes such as the College Promise.

Mr. Chairman, the hard and focused work to reform our public education system continues to be led by the Education Reform Unit (ERU), under the direction of the Minister of Education and the Permanent Secretary. Education Reform is a broad, complex, strategic and operational multi-year transformation agenda.

Progress comes as a result of the [herculean] efforts of the ERU, and collaboration between the Department of Education, schools, educators, support staff, other ministries and departments, Learning Partners, and other community volunteers, all of whom share the common aim of transforming the public education system to meet the needs, interests and aspirations of every child.

Mr. Chairman, while there are many areas to acknowledge and celebrate, I would like to highlight, but three successes at this time, noting that more information on the delivery of Education Reform at the school level will be provided under the Department of Education (Head 17).

The first success to speak of are Learning Partnerships, which provide students with opportunities to engage in real-world, hands-on, applied learning experiences that help them to develop industry-specific knowledge and skills. In many ways these are a modern advancement on work release programmes of our day, and are only possible because caring and willing individuals, companies and organisations have stepped forward and stepped up to invest in young people and Bermuda's future economy. By co-designing projects, mentoring students, and offering hands-on experiences, they help young people to ex-

perience and see the relevance of their education and the discovery of future pathways.

The participation of Learning Partners sends a powerful message: education is also a community responsibility, and when the whole community invests in the growth and potential of our students, we not only raise achievement, but we can build a stronger, more connected Bermuda.

The ERU co-designed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to develop Learning Partnerships with the BPSS that contribute to teaching and learning in all schools. To date this has culminated in 14 signed MoUs, serving CedarBridge Academy, the Berkeley Institute and our third signature school, Sandys Secondary Middle School. To date, our Learning Partners have supported:

- Signature Discovery and Signature Immersion Fairs (or Taster Programmes)
- Lunch and Learns
- Co-teaching
- Curriculum co-design
- Professional Learning, and
- Real-world project co-design and delivery.

Learning Partnerships also help motivate teachers and improve teaching by providing continued professional learning experiences for educators. In the coming months of the new fiscal year, the Signature Taster Programme will continue to engage and motivate Year 7 learners to chart their future career journeys.

A framework will also be co-designed with school leaders to support experiential learning for Year 12 and Year 13. This model will support learners through potential employment contracts, work placements and internships.

In order to ensure sustainability of the Learning Partnership Programme, efforts are continually underway to attract and sign new participants. Many Learning Partners have found the experience to be deeply rewarding, and anyone interested in being part of this programme should contact the ERU for information on how to get involved.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to bring attention to completed and ongoing capital works and investment in our schools under Education Reform. It should be noted that minor works, including those for Education Reform fall under the Department of Education [and will be highlighted under the Department of Education, Head 17].

Mr. Chairman, as many of us who have had involvement with any aspect of construction know, capital works are challenging and often affected by unknown and unpredictable factors. However, with much effort, attention and collaboration with the Ministry of Public Works, we have expanded and improved, built learning environments for better curriculum delivery and learning experiences for our students.

I would now like to provide an overview of the works undertaken in 2024/25 and those planned for

2025/26, noting that major works starting in the current fiscal year will be phased in over time.

- At Purvis Primary Parish School, in 2024/25, the new building containing Year 7 and Year 8 classrooms was completed. Each classroom was fitted out to support new curriculum and approaches to teaching and learning. The library and resource centre were also refurbished.
- In 2025/26, the admin area will be relocated to create appropriate spaces for school counsellors to work and provide services to students. Furniture and equipment in classrooms and other learning environments will continue to be upgraded.
- For the Francis Patton Primary Parish School, 2024/25, the new building to house Year 2 students was completed. It was also fitted out to support new curriculum and new approaches to teaching and learning.
- In 2025/26, furniture and equipment in classrooms and other learning environments will continue to be upgraded.
- At Elliot Primary School, in 2024/25, planning took place to identify critical requirements for its opening in September 2025 as a parish school.
- In 2025/26, storage rooms will be transformed into working space for school counsellors and multiple teacher workstations. Changes will also be made to several classrooms to improve learning environments, for STEM, and other subject areas. A lower school book room will also be created and the staff room upgraded.
- At Harrington Sound Primary School, in 2024/25, planning took place to identify critical requirements for opening in September 2025 as a parish school.
- In 2025/26, renovations will include: converting the principal's office into a new classroom and relocating the principal's and secretary's office to the ground floor; transforming a large storage area into a counsellor's office. Minor works will also open up spaces for teacher offices. Public Works will also investigate the need for new air conditioning and efforts will be considered to increase parking at the school.

Mr. Chairman, changes to facilities are in process and will be phased in over time at Sandys Secondary Middle School will open as a senior signature school in September 2025. In 2024/25, preparations were made for three major works projects. Progress is steadily being made towards redeveloping and refurbishing the old library to create a new library and media centre equipped with integrated cutting-edge [learning] technologies. Learners will be provided with a dynamic and immersive learning environment to

foster information, media and digital literacy. It will also serve as a specialist training facility for the Education Services Signature Learning Programme.

The reception area of the school will also be redeveloped and refurbished to double as a Bermudian-style hotel foyer and serve as a real-world learning environment for students in the Hospitality and Tourism Signature Learning Programme.

Finally, the cafeteria will also be renovated to double as a modern, flexible learning space for students to work individually and in small groups.

Mr. Chairman, continuing with Education Reform, I would like to provide a brief update on the introduction of the Education Authority.

I would be remiss however, if, on behalf of the Minister of Education, I did not first thank Mr. Philip Butterfield who led the Education Authority Working Group (EAWG), tasked with submitting specific recommendations for an Education Authority. As the Chair of BermudaFirst, Mr. Butterfield was instrumental in recommending that an Education Authority be established and getting it onto the national agenda. His commitment to shaping the future of public education was demonstrated again and again as he led the EAWG with focus and purpose. With diligence and fidelity to the Government's promise, the EAWG produced detailed policy recommendations for an Education Authority, which provided a critical resource for the forthcoming legislation.

Although the timeline to bring forward the legislation has been longer than anticipated, it is still a major priority under Education Reform. The time and effort invested during unforeseen delays will help produce sound legislation that will meet the vision and requirements for the future governance of the public education system. This work is being advanced to ensure a phased and measured approach to the development of this legislation. In that vein, the Minister has committed to stakeholders that they will be informed and engaged, with views considered, before legislation is tabled.

Mr. Chairman, before I turn to post-secondary funding, including scholarships and awards, I would like to make a few more comments on Education Reform. The first flows from the knowledge and experience that change and transformation are not easy, and in fact to be more explicit, it can be messy, challenging and exhausting, not only for those in leadership and support roles, but also for the beneficiaries. There are also always lessons to learn and there have been many learning curves, some of which resulted in immediate shifts, and some that were much more difficult to handle. Going forward, the [Minister] will work to strengthen successes and apply learned lessons for the continuous improvement of Education Reform.

The health of the Education Reform programme and project will be tracked by embedding key performance indicators in all workstreams to monitor progress of the stated scope of work and to measure

the return on public investments. The results will also be made public in line with transparency and accountability for the expenditure of public funds.

Earlier and ongoing work will be augmented by the development of a supporting financial plan and an infrastructure plan to ensure that all planning for Education Reform is coherent, transparent and sustainable in the medium- and long-term.

1601—General

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I will now turn to page B-134, where you will see that the Ministry of Education Headquarters has been allocated a budget of \$7,515,152 for the 2025/26 fiscal year. Within business unit 26000, General Administration, \$1,100,616 will support the operational and administrative functions of the Ministry.

Mr. Chairman, under business unit 26140, \$3,924,511 represents operational expenses for the Education Reform Unit which includes \$761,442 for general office operations and supplies and approximately \$3.2 million for consultants for media and other professional support services for professional learning, meetings and events, and professional technical services required for systems and school building infrastructure changes that form part of Education Reform. Of the \$3.2 million, \$1.9 million is set aside for the Innovation Unit's consultant contract and additional funding for anticipated consultancy for the next phases of the reform process.

The contract with Innovation Unit will for the time being provide guidance, support and direction during the change process, and the Ministry of Education will transition away from overseas consultants to have future Education Reform work carried out locally.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 26080 increased to \$725,000. These funds are allocated to the Bermuda College Promise merit award programme and external grants such as the Reading Clinic, WindReach, and The Menuhin Foundation.

Mr. Chairman, \$1,765,025 has been set aside for business unit 26090. This business unit manages the administration of the Ministry's annual Scholarships and Awards programme, which supports students in their pursuit of tertiary-level education.

Mr. Chairman, these awards are in place to improve Bermudians' access to education and training beyond senior school. As most of the scholarships and awards have a financial need criterion, most recipients would have had difficulty realising their post-[secondary] education goals if not for scholarship funding. Our scholarships and awards give countless opportunities to students to help them achieve academic and career success for the benefit of our economy and community, and the individual growth and development of recipients.

Mr. Chairman, last year, the Ministry received a total of 559 student application submissions. This is

a decrease of 79 applications compared to the 638 received the previous year, when we provided funding for 84 students across 10 different scholarships and awards.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to share specific outcomes of past scholarship and awards recipients. The 2022 Non-Traditional Student Awardee received a scholarship for \$20,000 for up to four years to study at the Toronto Metropolitan University. This student has recently graduated with a Bachelor's Degree in Human Resource Management.

Mr. Chairman, further, the 2022 Bermuda Government Scholarship recipient was awarded a \$35,000 scholarship for up to four years to study at Northeastern University. He has since graduated from the programme and obtained a Bachelor's of Science in Industrial Engineering.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-135, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates are shown for the Ministry of Education Headquarters. Line one, Salaries stand at \$677,000 and show a minimal increase of \$33,000 when compared with 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, this year \$45,000 has been budgeted for transportation. This was a new expenditure for the Ministry in 2024/25 with a modest increase of only \$1,000 from the budget year 2025/26. The [transportation] is for students to and from Signature Learning Programme's Taster events, where students get exposure to details of all the Signature Learning Programmes available to them.

Mr. Chairman, the travel expenditure line item of \$97,000 increased by \$3,000, due to travel expenditure for education reform. This funds the attendance at conferences and engaging other jurisdictions that have implemented education reforms.

Expenditure for grants and contributions increased by \$315,000. The full breakdown of the \$2,453,000 budgeted for grants and contributions, can be found on page C-18 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, \$3,378,000 has been budgeted for professional services. This reflects a decrease of \$307,000 for consultancy services previously provided to the Education Reform Unit.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-135, the number of full-time equivalents or employees in the Ministry of Education Headquarters remained the same as last year at six FTEs and funds all posts except for the Permanent Secretary.

Mr. Chairman, finally, on page B-136, performance measures for the Ministry Headquarters are outlined. The targeted outcomes for last year were either achieved or are in the process of being completed. I would like to highlight performance measures for business unit 26080 Grants to External Bodies, as all grant applications to recipients were processed by the target date of 31 July and all grant financials and stated outcomes were reviewed by 31 March.

For business unit 26090 Scholarships and Awards, the Scholarship and Awards Committee

made recommendations for recipients to the Minister by the deadline of 31 July and the Ministry HQ ensured that scholarship funds were disbursed by 31 October of last year.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry Team comprises the Permanent Secretary, our Senior Policy Analyst, the Ministry Comptroller, the Scholarships and Awards Programme Manager, a Trainee Policy Analyst, the Administrative Assistant/Accounts Officer and the Executive Assistant to the Minister.

Mr. Chairman, each team member has contributed to the success of the Ministry's work programmes and I thank the Ministry Headquarters, the Education Reform Unit team, and the working groups for their continued support and diligence.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. This concludes my presentation of the budget for Head 16, the Ministry of Education Headquarters, and I will now move to Head 17, the Department of Education.

HEAD 17—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I now present the budget for Head 17, the Department of Education.

Mr. Chairman, the primary purpose of the Department of Education is to establish, maintain, and advance high-quality education systems that fosters the intellectual, social, and emotional development of all students. The department is also responsible for setting educational standards, developing policies, and ensuring that schools operate efficiently and equitably.

The department works to promote access to education, support professional development for educators, and allocate resources effectively to meet the diverse needs of learners. By overseeing curriculum development, enforcing compliance with educational laws, and [encouraging] innovation, the Department of Education plays a critical role in preparing students to contribute meaningfully to society and the economy.

Mr. Chairman, at the heart of the work for Head 17 is a clear and inspiring vision: to build an education system where all young people are educated to lead personally and professionally, compete locally, and contribute globally. This vision is grounded in our mission to provide every student with equitable access to holistic, high-quality instruction that is culturally relevant and empowers them to reach their full potential. To actualise this vision, the department has five strategic priorities:

1. increasing academic rigour and student engagement;
2. ensuring career, college, and workforce readiness;
3. enhancing the quality of teacher practice and system leadership;
4. improving infrastructure and instructional resources; and

5. ensuring system success.

Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-140, the Department of Education has been allocated \$126.1 million for the fiscal year 2025/26, an increase of \$8.59 million over last year's budget.

1701—Central Administration

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the upcoming budget for business unit 27000 General Administration will provide for the purchase of educational and office supplies needed throughout the school year. For the fiscal year 2025/26, expenses are planned to be increased by \$95,000.

27001—Office of the Commissioner

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Commissioner, which includes the Commissioner of Education, the Director of Academics, the Director of Educational Standards and Accountability (ESA), and an administrative assistant, has been allocated \$821,000, an increase of \$136,000.

The Office of the Commissioner [of Education] provides strategic leadership and oversight for the Bermuda [Public] School System (BPSS) and is responsible for setting educational direction, ensuring policy compliance, maintaining standards, implementing reform initiatives, allocating resources, and driving continuous improvement.

The Executive Leadership [Team], consisting of the Commissioner and Directors, manages the operational functions of the public education system. The Commissioner leads on protocols and strategy, while Directors oversee the Academics and the Standards and Accountability Sections. This team operates through evidence-based and collaborative decision-making to address challenges, ensure accountability, and to promote innovation to achieve system-wide educational outcomes.

The Office of the Commissioner of Education also funds a Communications Consultant to strengthen engagement with school communities. Over the past year, the Consultant has led several key initiatives, including the development of a Media Relations Strategy Proposal, analysis of staff feedback on staffing processes, and the launch of the first annual BPSS communication performance survey.

27030—Human Resources

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this business unit, Human Resources, has been allocated a total of \$655,000 to fund the salaries of administrative staff; for expenses to advertise and recruit staff; and for the provision of annual long service awards to teachers and other employees who are members of the Bermuda Union of Teachers.

Mr. Chairman, this year, the Staff Development budget has increased to \$782,000. This funding supports the salaries of four mentor teachers, the addition of a staff development officer and enables a range of local and overseas training and professional development activities to take place during the fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, in alignment with the Government's priority to develop the capacity of employees, extensive, varied and personalised online and in-person professional development and learning took place throughout the current fiscal year. These sessions were delivered by Department of Education Officers; mentor teachers; school principals; instructional leaders; the Education Reform Unit (ERU) staff; and local and overseas trainers and facilitators.

27090—Educational Standards and Accountability

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the funds allocated to this business unit 27090 is \$1,011,000, with an increase of \$335,000 over last year's budget.

Mr. Chairman, the Educational Standards and Accountability (ESA) Unit plays a pivotal role in overseeing the quality and performance of our school leaders and teaching staff at 15 primary schools; two parish schools; three middle schools, and two senior schools.

During the current fiscal year, the ESA team was led by one Interim Director and one Assistant Director who focused their efforts on supporting primary, parish, middle and senior school leaders and education reform efforts. The Assistant Director also provided support and guidance to parish school leaders and transformation teams for the Purvis Primary Parish School, Francis Patton Parish School, Elliot Primary School and Harrington Sound Primary School; and direct supervision and support of the department's team of four mentor teachers.

Mr. Chairman, all efforts undertaken by the ESA Team have the ultimate aim of fostering improvement and change in instructional and leadership practices.

27095—Attendance

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the budget for the Attendance Unit supports the salaries for the Registration and Attendance Coordinator and four School Attendance Officers.

This team ensures daily school attendance compliance for children of compulsory school age by working collaboratively with school staff and parents/guardians. The Attendance and Registration Coordinator manages the annual school registration and transfer processes for all public schools, from pre-school to senior school.

27160—Substitutes

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the funds allocated to this business unit 27160 is \$4,466,000. Substitute teachers are essential for maintaining educational continuity at [our] schools. They step in when regular teachers are unavailable due to illness or leave. The department employs both allocated substitutes who report to their assigned schools each day; and day-to-day substitutes who cover daily, short-term, long-term, and extended leave.

Mr. Chairman, substitute teachers are also afforded the opportunity to engage in professional development offered by the Department of Education and schools; and they are [also] required to maintain the requirements for a Bermuda Educators Council (BEC) licence.

Mr. Chairman, the overall budget for the Central Administration programme is \$8,287,000 for the 2025/26 fiscal year, which is \$1,759,000 more than the previous year. This increase in funding will enable the department to secure additional substitute teachers; to fill two vacant Assistant Director posts for Educational Standards and Accountability; and to fill the Staff Development Officer post.

1702—Student Services

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Student Services business unit provides a comprehensive range of services and supports aimed at addressing students' academic, behavioural, psychological, physical, and social-emotional needs to ensure their success in school and life. Funding for this unit enables critical and vital services for students, including Behaviour Management and Alternative Education, School Psychology, Adapted Physical Education, and services for students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and hearing or vision impairments. Additionally, it provides counselling, learning support services, and administrative coordination.

Mr. Chairman, these programmes collectively enhance students' abilities to thrive within inclusive educational environments, promote positive behavioural and mental health outcomes, support personalised learning pathways, and ensure that all students—regardless of ability or background—have equitable access to the resources and opportunities needed to reach their full potential.

27061—Behaviour Management

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the funds allocated to the business unit 27061 are \$1,834,000. Mr. Chairman, led by an Education Officer for Behaviour, this business unit provides targeted behavioural support across the school system. The Education Officer supervises Educational Therapists (ETs) and Educational Therapist Assistants (ETAs) in implementing Individualised Classroom Management Plans (ICMPs), Behaviour Intervention Support Plans

(BISPs), Functional Behaviour Assessments (FBAs), and Behaviour Intervention Plans (BIPs).

Mr. Chairman, the Officer also provides support and guidance to school multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) teams and plays a key role in multiple interagency and internal committees, including THRIC (The High Risk Intervention Committee); IGET (Inter-agency Gang Enforcement Team); the Psycho-Educational Committee, and the Clinical Advisory Team (CAT). In addition, the Officer supports students placed in alternative education settings such as CARE, Adult Education, and maintains weekly consultations with key community partners like the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS), Child and Adolescent Services (CAS), Mirrors, the Family Centre, and MASC to ensure coordinated support for shared clients.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit also funds Educational Therapists in preschools and primary schools, and supports two Alternative Education Programmes that serve students with significant behavioural challenges, contributing to safer and more supportive learning environments. Educational Therapists learned evidence-based interventions to support student regulation, examined escalation and de-escalation strategies, and developed proactive behaviour support plans through case studies and role play. They also completed the Crisis Prevention Institute (CPI) Nonviolent Crisis Intervention.

Throughout the 2024/25 school year, Educational Therapists and Assistants participated in professional development focused on trauma-informed approaches to behaviour and classroom support. Mr. Chairman, the Officer for Behaviour, all Educational Therapists and all Educational Therapist assistants are now certified in Crisis Prevention Nonviolent Intervention, a notable achievement for this business unit. Additionally, 100 per cent of the Behaviour Intervention Plans (BIPs) were developed, with fidelity, for all students receiving services; and all Behaviour Intervention Plans (BIPs) and Functional Behaviour Assessments (FBAs) are now included in our online student management system, PowerSchool.

Mr. Chairman, for the new fiscal year, this business unit will focus on the recertification of staff with Crisis Prevention Intervention (CPI) and collecting evidence of direct teaching of replacement behaviours with students, as we continue efforts to ensure safe learning environments for all staff and students.

27062—Success Academy

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the funds allocated to the business unit 27062 are \$28,000. Mr. Chairman, when a student in mainstream education has exhausted all available interventions and supports, the school can apply for that student to be placed in an alternative education setting. As part of the application process, the school is required to pre-

sent the student's case—including documented supports, interventions, and outcomes—to the Clinical Advisory Team (CAT). This team carefully reviews the information and provides a recommendation.

Mr. Chairman, the department currently offers two alternative education programmes: Success Academy [Primary] Programme (SAPP) and Success Academy Middle and Senior (SAMS). These academies are specifically designed to support students whose social-emotional challenges significantly interfere with their learning and the learning of others. Students admitted to the Success Academies receive targeted emotional and behavioural support, including instruction in coping strategies and self-regulation skills, along with academic programming. Once students achieve the goals outlined at admission, they transition back to a general education environment.

For senior-level students, SAMS offers access to recognised certification pathways, including City & Guilds, the General Education Development qualification (GED), and the Penn Foster programme, affording students the opportunity to complete their secondary education at the alternative placement site.

Mr. Chairman, Success Academy celebrated several key accomplishments during the 2024/25 academic year. A standout event was Men's Night, held on 16 April 2025, which welcomed influential male figures from the community to engage with students in an evening of mentorship, inspiration, and connection. With a high student attendance, and approximately 50 men in attendance, the event featured distinguished guests from our community. This event reinforced SAMS's commitment to building positive relationships and community ties.

27063—School Psychology

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this year, [\$1,295,000] has been allocated to support this business unit which supports psychological services for student success across academic, social, emotional, and behavioural areas. School Psychologists also work closely with teachers, families, and school teams to assess learning needs; provide educational evaluations; and to recommend strategies and interventions to promote student growth. They also play a key role in promoting mental health, consulting with staff and families to strengthen classroom support, and developing programmes that enhance school environments. In addition, School Psychologists support crisis prevention and response efforts.

Mr. Chairman, School Psychologists are integral to the Multi-Tier System of Supports (MTSS) framework, as they consult with school staff during school team meetings where student concerns are discussed, interventions are recommended, and progress is monitored before considering formal assessments.

Mr. Chairman, this year School Psychologists presented over 30 professional development workshops to staff and parents which included topics such as “Understanding and Supporting Students Affected by Trauma” and “Stress Management Techniques for Children” integrating greater use of digital technology in assessment practices, increasing efficiency and enabling cost savings.

Mr. Chairman, the performance measures for this business unit focuses on the number of referrals completed in one calendar year. Mr. Chairman, 95 per cent of psycho-educational assessments were completed within the fiscal year against a target of 100 per cent. In the upcoming year, School Psychologists will further streamline assessment and referral forms to enhance accessibility for parents and teachers.

27064—Adapted Physical Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this year, a total of \$332,000 has been allocated to support the Adapted Physical Education (APE) Programme. This essential initiative is delivered by highly trained and dedicated specialist educators. These teachers play a critical role in ensuring that students with diverse physical, cognitive, and developmental needs can access and meaningfully participate in physical education activities alongside their peers.

The APE teachers work closely with school staff, therapists, and families to design and implement individualised modifications that are directly aligned with each student's Individual Education Plan (IEP). Beyond facilitating physical participation, APE teachers also foster social inclusion, motor skill development, and self-confidence among students with disabilities. Their work not only supports physical education and wellness but also plays an integral part in the broader educational and emotional development of these students. The continued investment in this programme reflects our commitment to inclusive education and the belief that all students deserve the opportunity to thrive in every aspect of school life, including physical education.

Mr. Chairman, the APE team also organises the annual Department of Education Adapted Physical [Education] National Track and Field Invitational in partnership with Special Olympics Bermuda. This event welcomes students from P1 to S4 with special physical needs, including those who have moved on to the K. Margaret Carter Centre and other facilities. This programme has been successful in identifying future Paralympians and Special Olympians.

27065—Hearing

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, \$207,000 has been allocated to support the Deaf and Hard of Hearing Programme. This funding supports the employment of a specialised teacher for the deaf and

hard of hearing. This teacher provides tailored academic instruction and works closely with classroom teachers to ensure that all students' needs are met effectively during regular classroom activities.

27066—Vision

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, a budget of \$49,000 has been dedicated to the Vision Programme, focusing on supporting students with visual impairments. This funding ensures the provision of a Specialised Vision Teacher for the remainder of the school year and the necessary technical services, materials in accessible formats (including braille), and technology to guarantee these students have equal access to educational curricula.

27069—Gifted and Talented

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the business unit 27069 Gifted and Talented has been allocated a budget of \$125,000. These funds cover the cost of the salary for one officer who will support activities and events that will supplement the learning experience for students identified as gifted and talented.

27071—Office Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the business unit 27071 Office Support has been allocated a budget of \$611,000. This business unit serves as the secretariat for the Student Services Section and funds the salaries of one Assistant Director of Student Services, two Administrative Assistants, and four learning support teachers who provide services to students with special education needs.

27072—Counselling

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this fiscal year, the Counselling Programme has been allocated \$3,201,000 to support a comprehensive and developmental approach to student counselling. This programme is modelled on international standards and encompasses four key areas: classroom guidance, individual planning, responsive services, and system support. The aim is to foster academic, personal, social, emotional, and future career success for students, integrating preventive and developmental strategies into the school's educational mission.

Mr. Chairman, a key achievement for the 2024/25 school year has been the successful certification of 31 out of 39 school counsellors in adolescent mental health first aid, made possible through collaboration with the Department of Health and support from both local and international trainers. The training enhances their ability to identify early signs of mental health issues—such as anxiety, depression, trauma, and suicidal ideation—and equips them to provide

immediate support and connect students to professional care. This accomplishment strengthens the counselling team's capacity and demonstrates a strong commitment to student well-being and proactive mental health intervention [in schools].

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Pause please, Minister.

The House would like to recognise Senator Crystal Caesar, Minister of Education, her PS and one other lady. Welcome, ladies. *Respice finem.*

Sorry, you can continue. He did not understand that. You can continue.

[Committee of Supply, continuation thereof]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, another notable achievement for the 2024/25 school year was the strengthening of partnerships with local mental health service providers through professional learning days. These sessions gave school counsellors direct engagement with agencies such as FOCUS Counselling; the Coalition for the Protection of Children; the Department of Child and Family Services; and MASC; to enhance their understanding of available services and referral processes.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2025/26 school year, a key priority is to continue to strengthen the connection between School Counsellors and local mental health service providers through ongoing participation in professional learning days.

These sessions are critical as students increasingly face mental health challenges such as anxiety, depression, trauma, ADHD, and other social-emotional difficulties that impact their school success. A significant concern raised by counsellors is the limited availability of mental health providers on the Island, making it even more vital for counsellors to have a thorough understanding of the available services. By enhancing these connections, we can ensure that students are effectively referred to the right resources, addressing their unique needs and promoting their overall well-being.

27073—Summer Programme

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the business unit 27073 Summer Programme has been allocated a budget of \$18,000. These funds are used to cover the costs for summer programmes at the senior schools and Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy. This funding supports ongoing learning and support for students at DAME during part of the summer months.

27074—Learning Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this year's Learning Support budget of \$4,465,000 supports the crucial work of three Education Officers for Special Education and Learning Support and 38 Learning Support Teachers. These professionals provide special education services across the educational spectrum, including preschools, primary and middle schools, the Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy, and our trauma-responsive programmes at our Success Academies. This budget allocation also covers essential assessment materials for accurately diagnosing students with special education needs.

Mr. Chairman, during the reporting period, learning support teachers received targeted training in writing for Language Arts, alongside the implementation of project-based learning as a core instructional strategy. Additionally, the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework was effectively utilised to support smoother transitions of students from M3 to S1 and notably, six students successfully transitioned from more restrictive to less restrictive learning environments, marking significant progress with inclusive education practices.

In the new fiscal year, Learning Support Officers will prioritise instructional support, student accommodations, and collaboration between educators and parents. Additionally, a universal screening process will be implemented for all Year 1 students and training will be provided to equip paraeducators with additional skills to better support teachers, and to reinforce student learning, especially in the core area of mathematics.

27076—Early Childhood Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Early Childhood Education has been allocated \$137,000, which reflects the funding for the salary of the Education Officer for Early Childhood Education and funding for supplies to support the early childhood education programme.

27079—Paraprofessionals

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Paraprofessionals business unit has been allocated a budget of \$7,332,000 for the upcoming fiscal year—an increase of [\$948,000] over the previous year. This increased funding is vital to sustaining the essential services provided by paraprofessionals and educational therapist assistants, who are integral to the success of our students. Paraprofessionals support classroom instruction, promote student well-being, and ensure that students with diverse learning needs—including those with physical disabilities, hearing or vision impairments—receive the tailored support they require to be successful.

27083—Autism Spectrum Disorder

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this business unit has a budget of \$926,000. This funding covers salaries for teachers and paraprofessionals working in ASD programmes across three primary schools, one middle school, and one senior school, with a total of 24 ASD students at the Primary School level; six at the Middle School Level and five at the Senior School level.

27084—Alternative Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this business unit has a budget of \$1,153,000. Mr. Chairman, this budget supports the Success Academy Middle Senior (SAMS) and additional alternative education placements for students who cannot be accommodated at SAMS.

Mr. Chairman, Student Services Section provides an extensive range of educational services for our students with exceptionalities. The total budget allocation for Student Services Programme 1702 for the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$21,713,000.

The performance measures for this unit indicate varying levels of success in meeting the established targets. While the goal was for 100 per cent of schools to implement the MTSS process with fidelity, only 90 per cent met the criteria. Behaviour Intervention Plans (BIPs) exceeded expectations, with 100 per cent completion compared to the 80 per cent target. The IEP process was carried out with 78 per cent completion, slightly surpassing the 75 per cent goal. The percentage of Individual Planning Meetings completed by counsellors was 85 per cent, below the 90 per cent target. On a positive note, psychoeducational assessments exceeded the goal, with 95 per cent completed [between September and August] compared to the 90 per cent target. These outcomes suggest overall strong performance, with room for improvement in school-wide MTSS implementation and counsellor-led planning meetings.

1703—Finance and Corporate

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27002, Finance and Corporate Services, with an allocated budget of \$798,000, is responsible for managing the financial operations of the Department of Education. The unit is staffed by a team of 10 personnel, encompassing a variety of key roles essential to the effective delivery of financial services. These positions include a Departmental Comptroller, a Trainee Departmental Comptroller, a Financial Services Manager, a Payments Supervisor, a Salaries Supervisor, a Salaries Clerk, three Accounts Clerks, and a Messenger.

Under the leadership of the Ministry of Education's Comptroller and the Financial Services Manager, this team efficiently and reliably handles the payment of salaries for over 1,000 educators and staff;

processes payments to suppliers and vendors; and ensures the accurate reconciliation of leave entitlements. They are instrumental in identifying cost-saving opportunities and advising on financial efficiencies to support the department's mission of educational excellence and equity.

27003—Office Accommodation

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this business unit has a budget allocation of \$1,035,000 that funds the salary of the office receptionist and covers costs for the annual rent, office maintenance, electricity, and communication costs for the department's physical offices.

27040—Educational Stores

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this business unit has been allocated a budget of \$566,000, which supports salaries for seven personnel and other expenditures such as rent, inventory freight costs, and gas/diesel. The Stores Section provides centralised purchasing, inventory management and distribution services to the Ministry and Department of Education, all public schools, Bermuda College, and other Government Departments such as the Department of Youth, Sport and Recreation . . . Youth and . . . Department of Youth—that department does not exist anymore.

27041—School Transport

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this business unit has been allocated a budget of \$508,000 to fund the salaries of three bus operators and two bus attendants, whose responsibilities are to ensure the safe transport and direct supervision of students who attend Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy, to and from school every day; and the safe transport of students in ASD programmes in other schools, to and from their off-site learning activities which take place across the Island. Two groundsman who maintain school sports fields and one Labour, Transport and Safety Officer are also funded from this budget. The Labour, Transport and Safety Officer's main responsibility is to oversee and supervise the work of school custodians to ensure clean and healthy school facilities.

27042—Buildings, Grounds and Equipment

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, for the current fiscal year, the budgetary allocation for the maintenance of public school buildings, grounds, and equipment is set at \$1,396,000. This reflects an increase of \$284,000. The allocated funding remains vital to the department's capacity to perform essential

maintenance operations across all public school facilities.

This funding enables the Facilities Manager to uphold the functionality, safety, and compliance of critical infrastructure systems, including life safety mechanisms, elevators, fire alarm systems, water dispensers, and HVAC units. Additionally, it facilitates the provision of pest control services and the oversight of security arrangements at both middle schools and the alternative education institutions.

Facilities upgrades significantly enhanced educational environments and accessibility. Four student hoist lifts were successfully replaced at Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy, ensuring safe and modern support for students with physical disabilities. At Purvis Parish School, Year 3 through Year 6 classrooms and the art room were reconfigured with innovative glass partitions to support flexible, 21st-century learning spaces. Additionally, the refurbishment of Lyceum Preschool was completed as part of the transformation of Francis Patton into a parish school, with temporary relocation managed efficiently and at no cost to families. These improvements reflect a commitment to inclusive, modern, and student-centred learning environments.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit has identified two strategic priorities for the upcoming fiscal year:

Upgrade of CCTV Systems Across All Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This initiative is aimed at significantly enhancing campus security. It includes the integration of advanced features such as facial recognition technology, licence plate readers, and the establishment of centralised CCTV monitoring from the department's central offices.

Ongoing Support for Education Reform Unit (ERU) Initiatives

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Facilities Unit will continue to play a central role in supporting the vision for education reform and school transformation, particularly in executing refurbishment projects for parish schools.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit has three performance measures which all focus on school safety. The target set at 100 per cent for the performance measure for conducting annual safety inspections was achieved and the outcome for school fire drills was exceeded by 25 per cent, reaching a 100 per cent success rate. The outcome for compliance with Safety and Health Committee regulations was 80 per cent against an expected target of 100 per cent, with improvement needed with the submission of Safety and Health Committee minutes.

Mr. Chairman, the department remains steadfast in its commitment to ensuring safe school environments and strengthening the operational infrastruc-

ture of the public education system recognising that safe, functional, and future-ready learning environments at current and transformed schools are fundamental to delivering quality education and improving student achievement outcomes.

27050—IT Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, for the fiscal year 2025/26, the Information Technology (IT) section has been allocated \$2,698,000. This budget supports the salaries of key IT personnel, including an IT Manager, Computer Services Officer, Management Systems Officer, and IT [Support] Officers, who are accountable for defining and delivering IT strategy and capabilities for the Ministry [of Education] (MOE) and the Department of Education (DOE), and the Bermuda Public School System (BPSS). These responsibilities include data analytics and business intelligence, development and support, infrastructure, security and technical services to support and enhance user experiences. The department's IT [Unit] is also responsible for giving oversight and direction to IT and business leaders on strategy, standards and opportunities for shared services and economies of scale.

This fiscal year, the IT Unit made significant strides in modernising and enhancing the technological landscape to support system priorities. Enhancements were made to the telephone system network with the pilot launch of a mass notification system designed for emergency and daily communications and the data centre continued its evolution towards a hybrid and distributed computing model, creating a more robust framework for educational services. Additionally, Wi-Fi 6 upgrades began at Victor Scott and West Pembroke Primary Schools, with broader enhancements improving connectivity in low coverage areas. Wi-Fi 6 is the next generation of Wi-Fi, which improves the network, ensuring the support of faster, more efficient, Internet speed for multiple devices used for instruction and assessment.

The IT Unit also continued to configure and distribute laptops to authorised users across BPSS, supporting instructional and administrative needs. Also, in support of Signature Learning Programmes, training on the PowerSchool Naviance platform was maintained and expanded.

Security also remained a top priority, with continued upgrades to enterprise IT security services and ongoing user awareness training. Online services were enhanced through the implementation of user account management tools and automated patching systems, bolstering operational efficiency.

Mr. Chairman, this unit had five performance measures assigned, and all outcomes were achieved.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, the IT Section will prioritise supporting the Education Reform Unit, Parish Primary Schools, and Signature Learning Programmes, while initiating a transformative [shift] in IT

support personnel roles—from break/fix responsibilities to becoming education solution enablers. The team will continue with the distribution of Chromebooks to students and laptops to department and Ministry staff to reinforce a connected and mobile learning model. A strong emphasis will be placed on maturing IT operations, refining service delivery and monitoring tools, and further integrating the PowerSchool ecosystem, including increased enterprise reporting and the introduction of AI tools. Wi-Fi 6 upgrades will expand across additional locations, and an enterprise backup system will be implemented as part of a broader disaster recovery strategy. The department will also extend pilot programmes for digitisation and the mass notification system, furthering its commitment to modernisation and operational resilience.

1704—Preschools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, moving onto page B-139, the total budget for our 10 preschools for the fiscal year 2025/26 is \$5,001,000. A significant portion, 94 per cent, is allocated to staff salaries. The remaining 6 per cent covers essential operational costs such as resources, training, development, electricity, part-time cleaning services, telecommunication, office equipment, and drinking water.

For the 2024/25 academic year, early childhood [education] efforts focused on strengthening teaching and learning through the full implementation of the Creative Curriculum Kindergarten (CCK), targeted professional development, and enhanced use of student data to inform instruction. Educators received comprehensive training on curriculum delivery, assessment tools, inquiry-based learning, and classroom management strategies to support school readiness and diverse learning needs. Notable achievements included increased educator proficiency, improved student engagement, and the successful reintroduction of the Preschool Summer [School] programme, providing both educational support and afterschool care for families.

Mr. Chairman, our preschools focused on improving student proficiency in literacy, math, and developmental goals, with many preschools showing strong student progress toward curriculum targets. Family engagement was strengthened through initiatives such as home-learning programmes, garden projects, and school events—all implemented with minimal cost and strong community support. Schools also emphasised wellness, sustainability, and curriculum fidelity, supported by staff development and creative use of resources. Additionally, several preschools reallocated funds and formed partnerships to expand programmes in music, physical education, and health, enhancing both equity and the learning experience for students.

Mr. Chairman, [I am pleased to report on] the performance measures related to early childhood ed-

ucation and instructional quality. The [percentage] of preschool students who met established standards for literacy and numeracy exceeded expectations, with an outcome of 95 per cent against a target of 90 per cent. Similarly, 92 per cent of preschool children met the system standards for social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development, surpassing the target of 90 per cent. With respect to instructional quality, 80 per cent of classroom [lessons] observed during system instructional rounds met the established indicators and criteria, achieving the targeted performance level. These outcomes reflect the effectiveness of current strategies and the dedication of our educators in delivering high-quality early learning experiences.

The 2025/26 academic year will prioritise the strategic strengthening of Early Childhood Education (ECE) through targeted reorganisation, expanded early intervention services, and leadership development. Key initiatives include introducing wraparound support services for preschool-aged children, improving inter-departmental collaboration, and enhancing communication across ECE teams. Emphasis will [also] be placed on increasing curriculum fidelity through continued professional development, improving classroom observation and documentation practices, and formalising leadership succession planning to build capacity and sustain school improvement efforts.

1705—Primary Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, continuing on page B-139, the budget for our 15 primary schools for the fiscal year 2025/26 stands at \$32,151,000.

Mr. Chairman, this academic year, primary schools across the Island demonstrated notable achievements through strong community partnerships, service learning, and high levels of student engagement. Schools engaged in meaningful outreach—such as homelessness education, support for seniors, environmental initiatives, and charitable giving—while fostering academic and personal growth. Highlights include award-winning gardening and woodworking projects, literacy improvements, successful sports performances, and vibrant cultural celebrations. These efforts reflect a growing culture of compassion, innovation, and community connection, with students applying their learning beyond the classroom to make a positive impact.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to present the performance measures for primary level student achievement in reading, writing, and mathematics. For students in Year 4 through Year 6, 60 per cent achieved the targeted growth in reading, meeting the established benchmark. In summative writing assessments, 55 per cent of students from Year 3 through Year 6 achieved a score of three or higher, slightly below the target of 60 per cent. Similarly, in mathematics, 65 per cent of Year 3 to Year 6 students achieved a score of three or higher, falling short of the

70 per cent target. Additionally, data is currently being finalised for the percentage of students from Year 2 through Year 6 in each school who achieved at least one grade level of growth based on the common system math assessments, with the target set at 70 per cent. These results provide valuable insight into areas of progress and those requiring continued intervention, focus and support.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates and Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain is delivering the budget for the Ministry of Education.

He is now on Head 17.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

1706—Special Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, continuing on page B-139, business unit 27120, Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy (DAME), provides dedicated educational and therapeutic services to students with severe and profound learning disabilities and complex care needs. Our only special school provides students with an enriching education and developmental support, increases student independence, and helps students to achieve their full potential.

In response to increasing student needs, a major achievement was the formation of an Educational Therapy Team in October 2024, initiated by Student Services, which provides evidence-based interventions. DAME also reinstated staff coaching and strengthened their decision-making process through reliable data collection and intervention fidelity.

A vital ongoing achievement for DAME was the continued partnership with Friends of Hope Academy, Charity 722, which generously supported the school's Arts Education programme. This initiative plays a critical role in nurturing cognitive and creative development among students. Arts Education at DAME flourished through key collaborations. Mr. Jahbarri Wilson, in partnership with Solstice, led weekly art sessions using a compassionate and inclusive approach. His guidance not only met diverse student needs through adapted media and techniques but also contributed to students' success in the Primary School Art Exhibition. Further artistic success was demonstrated at the Annual Exhibition, where students earned multiple awards including 1st, 2nd, 3rd place, and Highly Commended recognitions.

The Dance Therapy Programme, in collaboration with the Bermuda School of Music, thrived under the direction of Dance Movement Therapist, Mrs. Hannah Walters. Her sessions supported students' emotional, social, cognitive, and physical development

and culminated in student participation in the Spring into the Arts performance.

Professional development for the staff at DAME focused on several key areas. Staff received training on writing effective incident reports and understanding mandatory reporting procedures. Crisis Intervention Plans were reviewed and refined to better meet current needs. Additionally, staff participated in Crisis Prevention and Intervention Training designed to build the necessary attitudes and skills for managing challenging behaviours and maintaining a safe learning environment. A strong emphasis was placed on ensuring that all staff were either newly trained or received refresher training to respond effectively to the nuanced behavioural needs of students. DAME will continue to focus professional development efforts on addressing the diverse needs of students in the upcoming school year.

Mr. Chairman, the performance measures for this unit relate directly to the IEP (Individual Educational Plan) process, which maps out individualised and personalised goals for students. Both targets for performance measures were achieved at 100 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, a total of \$1,166,000 has been allocated for DAME, an increase of \$588,000 over the last fiscal year.

1707—Middle Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, we now turn to page B-140 for our Middle Schools. The 2025/26 budget allocation for [the operation of our] three middle schools is \$13,568,000, reflecting a decrease of [\$1,110,000]. This decrease is due mainly to a reduction in the remaining positions at Clearwater Middle School.

Mr. Chairman, for the reporting period of 2023/24 the target for M1 to M3 students achieving targeted growth in reading was set at 60 per cent, with an actual outcome of 55 per cent. Improving reading proficiency remains a key priority across all grade levels. Targets were also established for [M1 to M3] student performance in end-of-year mathematics and writing assessments, aiming for 60 per cent of students to achieve a score of three or higher in each subject area. The actual outcomes showed that 55 per cent of students met this benchmark in both math and writing. The department, in close collaboration with schools, remains committed to strengthening instructional practices and interventions to improve student outcomes in these critical subject areas.

Mr. Chairman, selected students at the Middle School level are taught the City & Guilds curriculum. A target was set for a 90 per cent pass rate for students sitting the City & Guild [assessments]. Mr. Chairman, 85 per cent of the students taking the City & Guilds assessments at the middle school level passed the English and math assessments.

Mr. Chairman, some middle school students also take the IGCSE examinations early. They take these international examinations towards the end of their M3 year rather than at the end of their S2 year at our senior schools. Mr. Chairman, the target of 85 per cent of these students passing the IGCSE examinations for English and mathematics was achieved.

1708—Senior Schools

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, continuing on page B-140, Senior Schools provides grants for CedarBridge Academy and The Berkeley Institute. The total budget allocation for 2025/26 is \$31,370,000.

Mr. Chairman, each senior school is provided with an annual grant for the operational management of their respective school. For the fiscal year 2025/26, CedarBridge [Academy's] funding increased by \$911,000. The Berkeley Institute's total budget has risen by \$1,572,000. These increases are to fund salary uplifts and additional posts at both schools to support Signature Learning Programmes.

I am pleased to report that The Berkeley Institute successfully passed its Mid-Term Accreditation Report with the Middle States Association (MSA) in December 2024. This achievement was a direct result of the dedication, hard work, and commitment of the entire Berkeley team, especially the Internal Accreditation Coordinators. Passing this critical milestone affirms that the school remains steadfast in maintaining the standards of excellence expected by Middle States, while continuing to meet the needs of their students.

Mr. Chairman, CedarBridge Academy is currently in the process of collecting and preparing accreditation documentation for the Middle States Association and we anticipate their success as well. Additionally, in the 2024/25 academic year, CedarBridge Academy demonstrated a strong commitment to professional learning through two major initiatives aimed at enhancing teaching and learning. One of the most impactful efforts was a four-month professional learning series titled Supporting Struggling Students.

In response to data highlighting academic and social challenges among students, 30 teachers participated in this targeted professional development. The series was based on the work of educational expert Robyn Jackson and focused on Tier 1 interventions in relation to the MTSS Framework, to proactively support all learners. Throughout the programme, teachers engaged in reflective discussions and adopted evidence-based strategies that they successfully integrated into their daily teaching practices. As a result, participating educators reported noticeable improvements in student engagement and achievement.

Another significant milestone was the launch of the Creation Station, a cornerstone of the school's ongoing School Transformation initiative. This dynam-

ic facility brings together the school's Library, Multimedia Centre, and an innovative MakerSpace designed to transform classroom learning into hands-on experiences. The MakerSpace serves as a collaborative environment where students and teachers work together on real-world projects that bridge theory and practice. Supported by a dedicated MakerSpace [Resource] Teacher, [faculty] design learning experiences that involve modern tools such as 3D printers and a variety of crafting materials. Students create meaningful artifacts that reflect their learning and deepen their understanding through practical application. The Creation Station exemplifies the school's vision to inspire creativity, critical thinking, and innovation across the curriculum.

Mr. Chairman, the performance outcomes for Senior Schools reflect a mix of achievements and areas requiring targeted improvement. Students scoring three or higher on writing assessments reached an outcome of 45 per cent, [slightly] below the target of 50 per cent. The target for students achieving expected growth in reading was 45 per cent, which was met. College acceptance rates surpassed expectations, with 65 per cent of students gaining admission compared to the 60 per cent target. In the City & Guilds assessments for English and math, students performed above target with a 91 per cent pass rate versus the 90 per cent goal. However, only 45 per cent of students earned the City & Guilds Employability Skills Certification, falling significantly short of the 100 per cent target. For IGCSE subjects, students met the targets in English, math, and science, each achieving the respective 60 per cent, 50 per cent, and 50 per cent benchmarks.

Advanced Placement (AP) exam performance was notably below expectations, with only 4 per cent of students scoring three or higher compared to the 80 per cent [target]. On a positive note, 97 per cent of students graduated with a Bermuda school diploma, exceeding the 92 per cent target, and the cohort graduation rate from S1 to S4 was 91 per cent, surpassing the 85 per cent goal. While 85 per cent of graduates earned an external or internationally recognised credential—slightly below the 90 per cent [target]—the same percentage also graduated with one or more industry-recognised credentials, again just under the 90 per cent benchmark.

1709—Curriculum and Assessment

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, staying on page B-140, the Curriculum Assessment section covers funding for the Cambridge International Curriculum, City & Guilds, Penn Foster, System-Wide Reading Assessments, Career Pathways, the Dual Enrolment Programme, and all related [curricular] resources. The Department of Education annually invests in the Cambridge International Curriculum, enabling Primary 6 and middle school students to under-

go checkpoint diagnostic assessments and sit the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) exams, the last of which are required for obtaining the Bermuda school diploma.

Mr. Chairman, student performance on diagnostic and standardised assessments provide critical data that informs instructional planning, highlights areas requiring targeted intervention, and supports the continuous improvement of teaching, learning and service outcomes.

27020—Assessment and Evaluation

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, we are in our 11th year of administering Cambridge assessments and examinations. All Cambridge assessments, City & Guilds Assessments and Reading assessments, are funded from business unit 27020 (Assessment and Evaluation). The allocated budget for the continued delivery of assessment and evaluation is \$513,000.

27520—Design, Development and Implementations

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, through the Design, Development and Implementation (business unit 27520), the Department of Education is dedicated to enhancing educational outcomes through comprehensive programming and skilled officers. This unit, focusing on Mathematics interventions, Language Arts, Science, Social Studies, Foreign Languages, the Arts, ICT, and Physical Education and Health curricular deliverables, ensures consistent curricular delivery.

Mr. Chairman, the budget for business unit [27520 Design, Development and Implementation] is \$2,135,000 and includes the funding for seven substantive Curriculum Officer [posts]. Mr. Chairman, each officer and programme plays a crucial role in our mission to provide a well-rounded and effective education system. Their work supports academic achievement and prepares our students for personal growth and global citizenship.

During the 2024/25 academic year, key subject areas advanced through curriculum alignment, student engagement, and targeted professional development:

- Science focused on standardised assessments and centralised tracking of student unit assessment results. Inquiry-based learning experiences were implemented across the system on World Water Day. Inquiry-based instruction will be further expanded in 2025/26.
- Social Studies promoted real-world application and civic engagement via community partnerships and events. Future plans include cross-departmental environmental themes and piloting hybrid assessments.

- The Arts saw high [student] participation and national recognition, raising over \$11,000 through Spring into the Arts.
- Instructional Technology enhanced digital literacy and teacher effectiveness with Schoolology modules, AI and cyber hygiene education, and expanded access to coding and robotics.
- Physical Education and Health launched revised standards and integrated technology through delivery of the SPARK PE curriculum and wellness partnerships.
- Reading implemented the University of Florida Initiative phonics [programme] system-wide and used Gates-MacGinitie pre and post assessments to measure progress on student growth.
- Foreign Languages focused on professional development and adopted the Conti pedagogical method to strengthen instruction.

Together, these achievements reflect a comprehensive effort to modernise education and support holistic student development.

27524—College and Career Pathway

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27524 College and Career Pathway has been budgeted at \$453,000. This business unit funds the Employability Skills programme, the Certified Nursing Assistant certification, and the EMT certification at Bermuda College. This cost centre covers the cost of the leadership management of two College and Career Pathways Officers. In addition, this cost centre covers the salary of the Applied Science Technology instructor for our dual enrolment students in the trades and STEM programme at the Bermuda College.

Mr. Chairman, I am delighted to share an exciting initiative reflecting our commitment to enhancing education in Bermuda. In early 2025, the Department of Education partnered with the Bermuda Chess Association to launch a long-term Chess in Education strategy aimed at empowering educators to use chess as an effective teaching tool.

The skills attained emphasise critical thinking, communication, creativity, and collaboration. Alongside these skills, chess fosters essential life skills such as impulse control, perseverance, empathy, and the ability to foresee [consequences].

In March 2025, the Bermuda Chess Association hosted 24 dedicated educators from 14 primary and middle schools for their inaugural "Chess in Education" seminar from 3-5 March. All participants successfully earned a School Instructor designation from FIDE, the world chess governing body.

These schools have successfully established chess clubs and they have begun integrating chess into classroom activities. Looking ahead, our schools are committed to achieving accreditation from the

FIDE Education Commission, with the goal of being recognised as gold, silver, or bronze chess schools.

Mr. Chairman, this programme is not just teaching chess; it is fostering critical thinkers and problem solvers.

1712—Early Childhood Education

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, on page B-140, business unit 1712 Early Childhood Education (ECE) has been budgeted at \$2,744,000. This business unit also covers the Child Development Programme and After [Preschool Care].

Early Childhood Education is a foundational pillar in shaping the future learning and development of our children. This section includes Early Childhood Special Education and Quality Assurance, reflecting our unwavering commitment to transforming early childhood education through innovative strategies. It also underscores our dedication to ensuring that every child is afforded the best possible start in life.

Early childhood education is vital for lifelong learning and development, as it builds foundational cognitive, social, emotional, and physical skills. High-quality early education fosters curiosity, language, numeracy, and social competence, helping to reduce educational disparities through equitable access. Research shows it delivers long-term benefits, such as better health, higher graduation rates, and increased economic productivity, making it both a moral and economically sound investment.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 27175 Child Development has been budgeted at \$2,617,000. The Child Development Programme (CDP), under business unit 27175, continues to serve as a vital pillar of support within our early childhood framework. This programme provides essential funding for the dedicated professionals who work diligently to uphold accreditation standards and enhance the quality of services offered to the parents of Bermuda's youngest children. Despite existing human resource constraints, the programme successfully served 569 children and their families during the past fiscal year. Services provided ranged from developmental screenings to early intervention support, underscoring the programme's comprehensive approach to child development. CDP continues with its efforts to recruit staff to deal with the extended waitlists resulting from the growing demand for these critical services.

In 2024/25, key priorities focused on improving service delivery and operational efficiency. Efforts included maintaining accreditation, reviewing and updating job descriptions, and recruiting for five vacancies—one filled in July 2024 and another expected by August 2025. To meet rising demand, the Developmental Assessment Service was expanded by contracting three psychologists, and counselling services were strengthened through strategic partnerships to ensure quality support for children and families.

The Child Development Programme advanced its commitment to Performance Quality Improvement (PQI) during the reporting period by enhancing service delivery and client outcomes. Key achievements included training staff and implementing updated Individualised Family Service Plans (IFSPs), revising all client forms, and improving data collection and reporting methods. Audits of referrals and waitlists were conducted to improve service access and timeliness. New file audit metrics and screening policies were introduced, and a structured Annual Screening Registration process was implemented. Collaborating with the Digital Transformation Team, the CDP digitised several key forms via the Government portal, improving efficiency and accessibility for both clients and staff.

The Child Development Programme conducted targeted internal staff training to support professional development and enhance service quality. Training topics included boundary setting, accreditation standards, brain development, prenatal trauma, client journey mapping, IFSPs, client observation, and risk prevention. These sessions strengthened staff skills, resulting in better alignment of practices with best standards, and the improvement of effective support for children and families.

Mr. Chairman, during the reporting period, the CDP continued to demonstrate strong outcomes in developmental screening services and family intervention services for behaviour. A total of 366 children between the ages of 18 to 48 months received developmental screenings, enabling the early identification of potential developmental concerns. Although this outcome is under the expected target of 200 screening for 2.5 officers, it reflects good progress is being made. Additionally, CDP maintained a high standard of service delivery in early intervention for behaviour, with 100 per cent of clients who were assigned or deemed eligible successfully receiving early intervention services.

Notably, 100 per cent of these clients demonstrated measurable progress toward their early intervention goals, reflecting the effectiveness of the programme's tailored, family-centred approach. The performance measure for the percentage of families participating in parent education classes and groups is on pause while CDP prepares to shift to a more personalised approach with different levels of parent support.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2025/26 year, CDP's priority areas will be recruitment for current vacancies, especially for the critical post of an Early Intervention Case Manager, fulfilling the responsibilities of accreditation and continuing with the Performance Quality Improvement (PQI) process.

27700—After Preschool Care

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27700 After Preschool Care has been budgeted

at \$127,000. This budget covers the payment cost for After Preschool Care workers and the afterschool care programme for Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy.

Mr. Chairman, I now refer you to page [B-141], the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates for the Department of Education. This page provides an aggregate of the detailed line item expenditures previously mentioned. The variances of significance for the categories are as follows:

1. Overall salaries [and wages] increased by \$2,019,000 (105 per cent);
2. Training costs are \$111,000 (27 per cent) higher and travel costs increased by \$47,000 (261 per cent);
3. Transportation costs increased by \$10,000 ([26] per cent);
4. Communication costs increased by \$102,000 (17 per cent);
5. Professional services increased by \$1,587,000 (113 per cent) due to a big portion of increases in funding for School Psychology, Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy and the Child Development Programme.
6. Rental costs increased by \$434,000 (62 per cent) due to a significant portion of the funds allocated to the Department of Education relocating to a new office [space], separate from the Ministry of Education;
7. Repair and Maintenance costs increased by [\$234,000] (13 per cent) due to an increase in building repairs and maintenance;
8. Energy costs increased by \$325,000 (35 per cent) due to an estimated cost of electricity for the new office location;
9. Materials and Supplies expenditures are \$373,000 (23 per cent) higher due to increases in the purchase of inventory, educational supplies, and office/stationery supplies;
10. Grants and contributions increased by \$3,254,000 (11 per cent), due to support for schools in transition and transformation.

Mr. Chairman, pages B-142 and B-143 show 1,082 FTE posts, an increase of 35 FTEs compared to 2024/25. Most of these relate to the increase in paraprofessionals, substitute teachers and education officers.

Mr. Chairman, pages B-144 through B-147 list the performance measures for the Department of Education. These measures reflect the priority areas that will be monitored and for which school and department staff will be held accountable during the school year.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to express my appreciation to the Department of Education and all school staff for their contributions to both education reform and school operations over the past year. As we move into the 2025/26 fiscal year, we look forward, with optimism to the continued progress and achievements that will advance our collective vision of establishing a

21st century, world-class public education system that serves the needs, passions and aspirations of Bermuda's children.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation on Head 17, the Department of Education. I will now move on to the Budget Estimates for Head 41 Bermuda College.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. For the benefit of Honourable Members and the listening audience, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

Minister Diallo Rabain is giving a report on the budget for the Ministry of Education. He has just concluded Head 17. This debate started at 10:36. It will conclude at 4:06. And he is now on to Head 41.

Minister, you may resume.

HEAD 41—BERMUDA COLLEGE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Bermuda College's mission is *to provide the community with innovative programmes, training, support services and access to partnerships that lead to local and global success*. It demonstrates its commitment to the success of its diverse student body by offering transfer programmes leading to success at the university level, professional and technical training leading to success in the workforce, and preparatory programmes leading to success in the classroom.

Mr. Chairman, as found on page B-148, for the 2025/26 financial year, Bermuda College has been allocated an annual grant of \$15,573,410 by the Ministry of Education as last year, with an additional capital grant of \$500,000 for campus maintenance and upgrades.

Mr. Chairman, the College is led by President [Dr.] David Sam and a Board of Governors chaired by Mr. Nasir Wade. It maintains high standards as an accredited institution by the New England Commission on Higher Education (NECHE) and is working towards re-accreditation in 2026 to continue offering top-notch education.

Mr. Chairman, notable achievements for the past year include the success of the Dual Enrolment Programme, with 41 participants this past year with seven dual enrolment [students] graduating from the College before earning their high school diplomas in May 2024. Four "students of excellence" accepted the invitation and were [inducted] into the Phi Theta Kappa Honour Society, joining the other 67 who have been inducted since the College's Chapter was established in 2019. The College also partners with organisations like BEST for environmental sustainability initiatives and hosts influential events like the Annual Roche Science Week to engage the community in science and conservation.

Mr. Chairman, significant educational milestones were celebrated, including the graduation of 93 students across various disciplines. The College also graduated four students with Bachelor's Degrees in Business Administration in partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University.

Mr. Chairman, in May 2024, the Athora Professional and Career Education Division awarded 149 professional designations and workforce development certificates that included nine public high school students who received their Certificate for Nursing Assistants as part of the Department of Education's dual enrolment programme with the Bermuda College underscoring the College's role in workforce development.

Mr. Chairman, financially, the College's revenue comes from government grants, student tuition, and other sources, totalling approximately \$19 million. Salaries and benefits are the most significant expense, accounting for 66 per cent of the budget. The College also invests in campus improvements and educational resources, supported by the Bermuda College Foundation, which contributes to scholarships, programming, and sustainability projects.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda College Foundation plays a critical role in supporting and enabling the College's efforts to modernise its campus and programmes. Bermuda is grateful to the donors who have supported the current Bermuda College Foundation Fundraising Campaign and shown their commitment to ensuring that all Bermuda residents have access to quality, relevant, tertiary education right here at home.

Mr. Chairman, Bermuda College's 50th Anniversary has truly been a remarkable celebration of a proud milestone in our Island's educational journey. The College launched its commemorative activities in July 2024, beginning with the placement of a commemorative stone in the courtyard and the raising of a newly designed Bermuda College flag to mark this historic occasion. To further honour its legacy and national significance, the College also commissioned a special 50th anniversary postage stamp.

The highlight of the anniversary year was the Bermuda College's 50th Anniversary Gala, held at the Hamilton Princess Hotel and Beach Club under the theme "50 Years: Transforming Lives and Imagining the Future." This event brought together alumni, students, faculty, and community stakeholders in celebration. During the Gala, 10 distinguished alumni were honoured—two representing each decade of the College's history. Former Presidents of the institution were also recognised, and Mr. Craig Simmons and Mr. Frederick Ming were officially conferred the title of Professor Emeritus.

The celebrations continued with the publication of *The Royal Gazette* commemorative supplement, showcasing powerful stories of impact and achievement over the past five decades. Additionally, the College was featured in the Spring 2025 issue of

The Bermudian magazine's "Crow's Nest" section, offering a reflective and celebratory article on its journey.

The College also hosted a 50th Anniversary Golf Tournament, which brought together friends and supporters for a day of fellowship and fundraising. Mr. Chairman, the celebratory calendar will be rounded out by an Alumni Entrepreneur Fair—a fitting tribute to Bermuda College graduates' innovation, creativity, and economic contributions.

Let us all take a moment to salute Bermuda College for 50 years of excellence, impact, and transformation—and to wish it continued success for the next 50 years and beyond.

Mr. Chairman, this now concludes my remarks for Bermuda College, and my overall presentation of the 2025/26 Budget for the Ministry of Education, consisting of Heads 16, 17 and 41.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Minister Diallo Rabain has concluded his presentation for the Ministry of Finance. The Chair now is asking if anyone else would like to speak.

Member from constituency 8, Smith's South. Benjamin Smith, Berkeleyite, Shadow Minister of Education you now have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning. Good afternoon, I should say.

The first thing I would like to do is actually take this opportunity to thank the Minister that just finished reading that brief and to the Minister of Education, because last night they actually sent me the brief in advance to give me an opportunity to read through it.

That opportunity really works towards the collaboration that it takes for us as a community to prioritise that education is extremely important for us to move forward. I really appreciate it. Thank you to the Minister and thank you to Minister Rabain. I also would like to take this opportunity to say special thanks to Minister Rabain who stood in this position as the Minister of Education for a significant amount of time. I believe he might actually have been the longest-serving Minister of Education of all time. That was not an easy role for him to hold for that amount of time.

It is appreciated that he did that and continued to show the importance of education to our community and in that position he took hits several times for being in a position to stand up. Because when the One Bermuda Alliance was the Government, they started to talk about closing certain schools and that same kind of venom that comes from people, just from tradition of certain schools. But this Minister was able to continue to stay there, and I just wanted to make sure that we showed appreciation for what he continued to do. And thank him for representing that position the way he did.

An Hon. Member: Thank you, Ben.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Ben Smith: So now, Mr. Chairman, going toward the questions that arose from listening to the brief that was presented this morning, I would like to start off with Head 16, Ministry of Education Headquarters.

We will start with . . . on page B-134. Just skimming through cause some of my questions were obviously answered in the brief. So under Scholarships and Awards . . . we do acknowledge that the Government has continued to make sure that they are putting money aside for scholarships, knowing how important it is (especially in today's society) to get further education and giving the support to people that need to have that [which] has allowed many people to have opportunities that they would not otherwise have been able to have without having that financial support.

So, we appreciate that the Government has continued to increase the level of support for scholarships. I know that the people who have been able to get achievements through that are very appreciative. But has the Ministry had ability to track the success of scholarship recipients post-graduation to evaluate the success of the programme? As we continue to support our students, you give the financial backing, but do we have a way to assess whether there is a success that is coming from that investment?

Can the Minister please provide the breakdown of the numbers of students receiving scholarships? It would be important for us to have a breakdown of the different areas that people are reaching the point to get these awards, so what is the number that's coming from private schools? What is the number that's coming from public schools? What is the number that's coming from home schooling? And then what is the number of recipients that are (what I would call) "senior students" who potentially are getting further education awards in order . . . who potentially are coming out of that same award process. So, if the Minister could give us a breakdown of that, I think it would be helpful.

And one of the reasons that I think that is important is that we have education that happens in Bermuda, both private and public, and the Minister has rightly said several times that sometimes the private school children get a certain pass where public schools have to take on a more general part of the populace, and sometimes that has an impact on the need that is coming from that area. I think it's important that we identify that and potentially what that means is that in the future it allows the Minister to maybe ask for even more financial support so that we can get more of our young people who need that financial backing to receive financial backing.

Mr. Chairman, still on page B-134, Education Reform Unit. So obviously this is an area that tends to

pop up controversy because there's some issues that people believe when you were doing a reform—anybody will tell you that when you are making major changes, not everybody is going to be in agreement, which causes some pushback.

I will say that I have had the opportunity to meet with the Reform Unit. I thank the Ministry for giving myself and Senator Victoria Cunningham that opportunity. We had the opportunity to ask any question that we wanted to. They gave us some detailed information on what has been happening. And some of the issues when you are going through the reform are multiple layers that have to be supported in order for those changes to happen. And some of the delays are because parents might not be taking on the information.

In some cases, there are people within the department that do not actually want to progress some of these things. And it's not a blame issue. It is really about, as you are going through change, that teething period sometimes causes delays that you cannot really explain how it happens. But I know that through that conversation that we were able to have and I know by some of the conversation that I have had with the Minister that this has been a frustration that because not everybody understands all of the steps and I do have to take this opportunity to say that the information has been sent out. Right? So, they have done several, I want to say there's been ads, they have had meetings, they have done multiple opportunities. But the truth is if you want to get that information, you're going to have to go through the details to get to it.

So, with that, on the education reform specifically, Would the Minister be able to provide the specific deliverables that are expected for the education reform? So, obviously what happens is . . . as you are going through it, people want to know what's happening each step of the way. And that sometimes is the piece that causes the frustration. So, if we could get a little bit more detail on how those assessments are happening each year and how we will be able to get the information on those assessments of the reform, and in what methods that will be done so that some of the anxiety that I think has been kind of in the community can be levelled out.

The other question would be . . . because I know that there has been this engagement with public stakeholders. What has been that feedback from the public stakeholders that might not have matched where the reform has been moving? And with that feedback that has been given, what changes have been made actually been made with the reform based off of the feedback? Because as you are making these major changes, sometimes you have to change.

I think the Minister has actually said it several times here. You know, you have to make sure you've measured a few times before you cut. And this problem in education hasn't . . . it did not just start, so this

has been a long process up to this point. And honestly, it's going to be a long process going forward. And as you're going through it, obviously these frustration points, these hot points are going to happen.

But as we are going through it, we have to make sure that we are communicating every way that we can so that the students, the parents and the community at large are going along on this journey in a way that they feel that it is being collaborative. And I make that statement not saying that it hasn't been collaborative, but the more detail we can give in this situation, I think it will be even more helpful to the community . . . because I will make a comment that it is interesting because the Minister's actually made this statement more than . . . the previous Minister has made this statement a couple of times when it comes to the consultancy. Right? This is another one of those topics that comes up.

You have to get expert advice sometimes in order for us to do something at the vast scale of this reform. So, knowing that you have had that expertise, you would not expect to take the information and then never speak to that group again. It is going to have to be something that they are going to continuously be a part of. There is going to be a cost associated with that.

But in our conversation with them, one of the things that was brought up that this is actually a group that is a charity. And I had that conversation with them. And it is interesting because I am pretty sure that even though the Minister's repeated it, most of the community probably haven't taken that part in. This is about them working towards helping education, helping young people and the more that we can get this information out on how this reform is going to work and how we can get to the best results for our young people, for this point . . . and really when it comes to education, Mr. Chairman, you would have heard me say before, it's not about putting politics when it comes to education. We need to figure out: How do we get to the best result for the next generation?

We have had the ability to go through what I would say was a period of world-class education and we want to ensure that the future generation gets the same opportunity.

So, Mr. Chairman, on page B-135, there is under Grants and Contributions. I am just looking at the difference between . . . so the original for 2024/25 was \$2,138,000, but the revised is \$3,000,130. So, although there has been an increase from the original to what we are estimating for 2025/26 of \$315,000, it doesn't actually match how much was needed in this past year. So, I'm just wondering, if that is a gap that was necessary, why don't we try to get the finances to the level that was needed in 2024/25 and 2025/26? Or has something changed which means that they do not need the same amount of support? So, if we could

just get some clarification on that, that would be helpful. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to now go on to Head 17, Department of Education.

Mr. Chairman, I'm going to start on page B-138 under 27095, School Attendance. So, Mr. Chairman, in the 2022/23 numbers it was \$381,000, but the budgeted number was zero. And then for 2023/24 and 2024/25, there seems to be a discrepancy between what we budget and then what happens. There's a cost that happens afterwards. So, I'm just trying to figure out why is it that we budget for a low number and then the actual . . . there is a cost. Is there something that's changed in there that we could get some clarification on why that happens?

So, in that specific area, can the Minister give us some details on the employees who are involved with following up with attendance breaches? And the reason I asked that specifically is because if the budget number is zero and then the budget number happens, what is that difference coming from? Is it that these people are only hired on a part-time basis? If we could just get some clarity on what is causing that.

If the Minister could provide how many students in the last year were on . . . I guess what we would call prolonged absence, they were away from school for a significant amount of time. I don't know what the gauge is to make it an excessive absence, but if we could get some details on what that is and if there was a problem in primary and in secondary and middle school numbers that were impacted by students being away from school for a significant amount of time.

And what is the process for dealing with a student who is absent for a long time? Is there a check-in phase? Is this when we have these employees go out and knock on doors and actually find out where this student is? So, if we could get some details on that. And if they find that there are students who are absent on an ongoing basis, what is the way to resolve that? And if that is the case, how often are we able to resolve it?

Considering that it is mandatory for students to go to school, do we find that there is becoming more of a kind of grey area because there are students who are leaving school and going into home schooling and there are students who are leaving school and taking their GED? Has that caused a bit of difficulty for the system to be able to gauge where these students are and whether they are actually attending school? And when they transition away from what would be much easier to monitor to these other agencies, is that causing a significant increase in what is necessary for finding out where they are?

So, Mr. Chairman, the next area that I would like to look at is under Substitute Teachers. And that is 27160 still on [page] B-138.

Obviously this has been an issue that has been big for quite a few years now. We have had issues where there were not enough substitute teachers. I see that the Government is now giving money towards substitute teachers. But there seems to be an issue because each year there seems to be an increase in the amount of substitute teachers who are necessary. We have had several school closings, so you would think that now we would have more teachers who are potentially available as they shift from one school to the other. So, is there some issue within that transition that is causing a lack of teachers being available?

In 2023/24, Mr. Chairman, the original was \$3,640,000 for this line item and then it was revised to \$4,000,071. But the actual in this year's [Budget] Book shows \$6,894,000, which is a significant difference from the original budgeted amount. And this is why I am bringing up the fact that there seems to be a significant need for substitute teachers compared to what I guess would be planned for. So, something has caused this this large increase.

I know that at one point part of it was changes in needing teachers who were going to be participating in some of the reform, but I believe that some of those changes happened last year so that there would not be as much strain. But with that said there's a significant increase in the budget from the original budget for 2024/25 and for 2025/26. Over \$1 million is a significant number, but the actual revised number was \$9 million.

Once again, we're budgeting for a lower number than what the actual is. So, I'm just looking at it and saying if that's the case, should we be anticipating that we are going to need more money, more support for substitute teachers? And although I would say everybody in education is going to be happy that there has been an increase, if the increase is not going to match the demand we're going to be in the same situation a year from now. And what I know is that all of us don't want to hear the stories of certain classes not having the actual amount of teachers who are necessary while we're going through the school year.

Continuing on with the thoughts on the substitute teacher, is there an opportunity to have a bigger reserve pool of substitute teachers? And if that is . . . it's difficult because you have to have the reserve pool so that if we run into this critical situation . . . but it would mean that you would have to have budgeted for this because it is going to happen. Teachers are human. So, they are going to fall sick. They're going to have to go on leave for certain things, and in that context, you keep ending up with this number.

So, I'm just asking if we could get some clarity on that and if the Ministry has thought about ways to solve this problem. Because this is not the first time that we've had this conversation and until we come up with something that's going to be able to resolve this,

we probably will continue to be having this particular conversation.

So still under Substitute Teachers, 27160. I am going to ask a question on whether we are seeing more teachers on administrative leave, which is also impacting the number of substitute teachers who are needed. And in that context, giving us some clarity on what would cause that administrative leave. And if we are seeing teachers in that category, which is increasing the demand for substitute teachers, who's responsible for the investigation of a teacher being on administrative leave? What is the length of time? What is the, I guess, average length of time that an investigation has to go on?

For me, I do not want to be the . . . I don't want to say that I know the detail, because the information that I have is only based off of what some teachers have said is happening in certain schools, where teachers are out on administrative leave while that investigation goes on. We have to have a substitute teacher for an extended period of time in that classroom, which obviously impacts the students in that class because they are having to have a different teacher. And it causes that interruption. If there is a way for us to speed up that process, is that something that's being looked at so that we can make sure that our teachers . . . especially if at the end of the investigation the teacher is going right back into that classroom, is there a way that we can prevent long periods of time from the teacher being impacted and the students in that classroom being impacted and having to have a substitute teacher there during that period of time?

Mr. Chairman, I think it has become the buzzword now: "mental health." So, this is another one of those areas that potentially is what is impacting the need for more substitute teachers. We have just come through the COVID-19 period which would have had a significant impact not just on our students but also on our teacher population.

It was remote learning. It was learning completely different ways of being able to teach and then coming back from that period with real changes in the student population. There have been significant changes in how students behave coming out of that COVID-19 period. It has impacted society as a whole, but specifically, a lot of the children were impacted.

And then we are moving forward with an education reform, which also is causing interruptions—not just to the students, but also to teachers and teachers' lives, so that mental health impact potentially is another one of those issues that is causing teachers to be absent from school.

So if the Minister can give us some information on whether that is potentially one of the areas that he's seeing an increase in and I'm going to bring this point up that the services that they have to go to try to help them when they're going through this kind of issue, there is funding that comes under the gov-

ernment health that gives them a certain amount of detail. I think it's \$97.00 is what they get.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, I am going to pause you right there.

We are now at that hour where—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: —you are not recognised. Hold on.

We are now at that hour where it's now 12:30. For the benefit of the listening audience and Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26

Shadow Minister of Education Ben Smith has been giving some very clinical questions to the Minister and shall resume after lunch.

So, I now . . . the Minister has to move.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I now move that we break for lunch and resume at 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:32 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:04 pm

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

[Continuation thereon]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members.

We are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2025/26.

Before the short lunch adjournment we heard from the former Minister of Education who was kindly presenting the heads for the Ministry of Education for the Minister of Education who sits in another place, namely Heads 16, 17 and 41. We then heard from the Honourable Shadow Minister for Education, the Member for constituency 8, Ben Smith, MP who was on his feet when we broke for lunch.

Does anyone wish to speak?

MP Smith, I recognise MP Smith.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good afternoon. I hope everyone had a good break away from the House.

When I left, I was continuing on with some discussion around substitute teachers on page B-138. It's 27160.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Ben Smith: And where I was leaving off was that there is a potential need for teachers to receive some assistance due to some kind of strong issues that happen within that particular job. It can be a stressful job, and we've had some added pressures with what has happened with COVID-19, and now we have education reform. There's been a change in the student population. There's been some negative interaction with some parents. These are all things, factors, that would have been impacting our teachers.

So my questioning was around the mental health side and the help that is provided for teachers who might need that help. And what I was discussing was the fact that under GEHI [Government Employee Health Insurance] they get 12 appointments for the year to receive something for mental health services. And it's about \$97.00 that is provided, but the cost is approximately \$250 per session. So considering that it is going to be difficult for somebody to be able to get the kind of support that they might need, I'm just wondering whether there has been any thought in moving to increase the amount of coverage that teachers, specifically, would have because of the changes in that specific job.

I know that the Fire Service and Police Service have a higher amount covered for these issues because they are in what is called kind of a high stress environment. So [I am] just looking to see if the Minister would be able to provide any details whether there's been any thought of increasing that specific help considering that it could be one of the factors that is leading to us having to rely so heavily on substitute teachers.

Mr. Chairman, my last question on substitute teachers is whether we can get some overall data on the usage so that we have an understanding of where this demand is coming from the most. Is it in our primary schools? Is it in our middle schools? Is it in our secondary schools? If we could get the numbers of how often substitute teachers are needed in each of these schools, I think it would give an indication of whether this is a bigger problem. And I asked before lunch whether there's been a plan put in place so that we can start to try to resolve this considering this has been a situation that has meant even when budgeted \$3,000,000 we have spent up to \$9 million to cover this specific line item.

So, Mr. Chairman, still on page B-138 I'm going to now move on to student services. And the first line that I'd like to look at is 27061, which is Behaviour Management. So I think all of us would agree that there has been, at least publicly, some issues of negative behaviour from some of our students. The shame of it is that a lot of times that's the piece that gets the headline instead of the fact that we have so many other students who are actually performing well and doing great things in their community. But when

we do have issues with behaviour, I just want to make sure that we're doing everything we can to support these students. And my question is, we see there is additional funding, could we get some detail on what that additional funding will specifically help? Is that simply part of the increase in the salaries?

I think all of us would agree that teachers getting more money to do their job is something that all of us can applaud. And I think most people in this Chamber would agree that teachers probably deserve to get more than what they just received. But, obviously, we have to fit within the budget. But in saying that, wanting to know whether this increase is actually going to be supporting, making changes to that behaviour, or is it simply going to be just the financial change for the salaries in that area?

The next one that I'm looking at is going to be under Paraprofessionals. So that is 27079.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, there seems to be an increased use of paraprofessionals. I think it would be important for the listening public to understand what the difference between a paraprofessional and a teacher is, what the qualification difference is, what the expected support level is for paraprofessionals, and how we got to a situation where we need more in this particular area. And with that increased demand, what is the increased support training and maybe giving more qualifications to paraprofessionals if we are going to be relying more and more on them?

And, Mr. Chairman, still on the same page, 27066, which is vision. The Minister gave some specific answers in the brief regarding vision, but I have a question regarding . . . sometimes you're going to have a young student that potentially is having some issues in the classroom that are related to maybe needing some glasses, maybe not being able to see the board, maybe not being able to read the information that's provided for them. And we have to accept that in today's Bermuda sometimes their parent might not have the ability to go out and purchase glasses.

So, if the Minister can give us some information on whether there is a support system in place [and] what that process is. Because there are potentially some parents who are listening that could figure out how they might be able to help their child. And in that case, we want to make sure that we are giving them all the tools that it's going to take to have their best performance in the classroom.

Mr. Chairman, also on 27065, I went down one line. I should have actually dealt with this one first. Which was—

The Chairman: Which is Hearing.

Mr. Ben Smith: Which is Hearing.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: I just have a question because I know specifically that Gilbert Institute was a school that actually had quite a bit of sign language that was happening in the school. There were some programmes there, specifically. And considering that that school is closing, if we could get some indication of whether that support that was in that specific school is now moving to a different school. And the teachers who would have had that extra expertise to sign, whether that has now been moved to a different school and potentially allows for the support of those students in that new school.

Mr. Chairman, there are several areas here that deal with students who have different learning abilities, different learning styles. We have autism here. We have learning support. There's a lot here to deal with students who might need extra support. The question that I ask is, from a data perspective, have we been recording the data? Do we see an increase in the need for this kind of support? It connects to what I was saying earlier about more paraprofessionals. So, are we seeing that our community is needing more support in these areas? Are our children are needing more support in these areas? Which obviously is an increased cost because the government schools are the ones that are really supplying this specific support to students.

Mr. Chairman, it's also an area where I'd like to know whether there are cases that happen where the government system potentially isn't able to provide the kind of support that is necessary for certain students. Some of this is going to be a behaviour issue, some of it is going to be specific learning areas. In that context, when that happens, what is the system to allow that child to get the level of support that is needed for them to progress?

And the reason I ask that is because there are a lot of cases where you find that parents are being burdened with heavy costs because they have to go and find that level of support. Sometimes it's because they are not comfortable with the support that's provided, but in some cases it's because the support isn't available at the amount that is necessary for that child to progress.

And this connects the dots to what I was talking about earlier when I said *absenteeism*. So if a child is pulled out of school to get this kind of support and they are no longer going to their regular classroom, is there a system in place to continue to follow that progress along that child's journey? Checking in with them to make sure that it isn't a child that's being left behind because they needed more support.

Still on the same page, B-138, I just have a quick question. Under 27040, Educational Stores.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, I see the funding that is there for Educational Stores, which is going to be an area where teachers would be able to go and get their supplies for their classroom. I think all of us have heard times the teachers talk about not having certain supplies. There are cases where parents are actually pitching in in order to make sure that the class has the supplies that are needed. I guess the question is, is this a situation where the stores needs to have a bigger budget in order to cover these costs for the teachers? Because the demand on the teachers has gone up. Yes, it is good that they are getting an increase in their salary, but if they are also still continuing to spend money on supplies, it seems that that would not be a fair exchange. So if there is any indication that we can give, that, potentially, there needs to be more funding given to stores so that those supplies are available to the teachers, I think all of us applaud parents who are helping and giving in paper and supplies. But should it really be [their] responsibility?

Mr. Chairman, I'm moving on to page B-139. I'm going to start with 1704, which is Preschool. I just have a question. Because during the transition that's happening as we move from a three-tier system to a two-tier system and signature schools and parish primary schools, some of these changes are meaning that certain schools are closing and people are transferring. I was just wondering if the Minister can give us any feedback on St. Paul's Preschool, specifically, because I believe there is . . . as we move towards a parish primary school which will be working toward having a preschool attached to the parish primary school, is there going to be impact to that specific preschool? And if that is the case, when do we anticipate that happening?

So, Mr. Chairman, moving on to 1705, which is Primary Schools. In the next few weeks we will be seeing two more of our primary schools close, which will mean that there will be students who are transitioning to other schools. Would it be possible for the Minister to provide some details into where those students have moved? So, obviously, there would have been an application process for parents to choose different schools. There was quite a bit of, kind of, anxiety around certain students not being able to get what would have been their first choice.

So, with that being said, it would be important for us to have some details on that so that we have clarity whether all of those situations have been resolved. So that if a student has moved from one school to the next, are we seeing students moving from the closed primary school, public school, to another public school? Are we seeing them move to private school? Are we seeing them move overseas? Just if we could get some details on that data because at this point, we should probably have a good idea where those students are transitioning to.

Mr. Chairman, still on that same page, B-139. I'm looking at 1706, Special Schools. There was a bit

in the brief about the Dame Marjorie Bean [Hope] Academy. There was a significant increase in the budget, which was 102 per cent. If we could just get a little bit more detail of the breakdown of what those expansions are. There was some information in the brief, but a little more detail on what that major increase entails.

And, Mr. Chairman, now we're going to move on to page B-140. And I'm looking under 1707 which is Middle Schools. So, there is, what I'm going to say is a bit of an anomaly. We know that we have schools that are closing. We know that we have schools that have closed. I think one of the things that becomes important when we're in the budget part of the debate is figuring out what happens when you close a school.

So, one of the major factors is that a lot of the finances for schools are going to be based off of teachers. So, when you close the school, a large amount will move out of that particular budget line. But there will be some residual which will be based off of the school facility, maybe some clean up. There is that part. But the part that I'm querying is that within 1707, Middle Schools, we have T. N. Tatem. So, Mr. Chairman, I could be corrected but I believe the T. N. Tatem closed in 2020. So, looking at the previous Budget Book in 2023/24, there was zero budgeted for T. N. Tatem, which would have made sense because it was closed. And then there was zero revised in the 2024/25 Budget Book.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: But the actual in this year's [Budget] Book shows \$1,723,000.

The Chairman: Right. That's page B-140 under 1707 and it's T. N. Tatem, line item 27590.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. Correct.

The Chairman: Yes. Okay. I'm with you.

Mr. Ben Smith: So we went, zero-zero, and then \$1,723,000. Okay. So then that makes me then look at what happens next. So in 2024/25—

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: —there was also zero budgeted.

The Chairman: Right. The original.

Mr. Ben Smith: But the revised shows \$1,361,000. So once again this is a closed school. Zero is budgeted. And then later on we are seeing a significant number being added to the budget. So, if we could get some clarity. And the reason that that would be important is because in the 2025/26 budget, it is estimated at zero again.

The Chairman: Yes. I see that.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, if you follow the way it has happened up until now, potentially, in next year's Budget Book, we're going to see a significant number that was not budgeted that appears for a school that's closed. So, I think we really need to get some clarity on how that happened because all indications that one of the major reasons that that facility closed was because of the health risks to students. So, there hasn't been an announcement that it's continued to be a school, so when we see a number of close to \$2,000,000 being spent out of the Education budget in that facility, I think we need some clarity of how that happened.

So, Mr. Chairman,—

The Chairman: I see the point.

Mr. Ben Smith: —looking at Clearwater Middle School, which has obviously had its budget reduced, because that facility is closed. And it is \$497,000 so I guess the first step would be, Can we get some clarity of what the \$497,000 is in relation to when it comes to Clearwater Middle School? I would understand that the big number once again would have been moved out of that budget line because the teachers would not be there. The reason I'm asking that question is because if it phased down to zero, are we then going to see the budget change later down the line for that facility? And if it's being utilised for a different reason, I guess my question is, Should it be moved to a different Ministry rather than be sitting under the Ministry of Education?

The Chairman: And that's the \$497,000 on page B-140 at line item 27530 for Clearwater?

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, correct.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, I'm moving on to 1708 which is the Senior Schools. So at this time, really what I'd like to see is, How are we assessing the data that is being collected from our senior schools? We have a significant budget. You've seen the budget increase for both schools. Obviously, there is need. But will we see the information made public? Right? So we need to improve our transparency. We need to understand that parents are making decisions on what school they are going to want to send their child to. And in this structure, it will be important for us to know what is happening in these particular schools. What is the data that allows you to know that your child will have a successful path in going to one of our senior secondary schools.

So, Mr. Chairman, still on page B-140, I'm moving on now to 1709 which is Curriculum and As-

essment. So, given the increases in spending, I guess the question I would ask is, When will the national data assessment be made public to schools? Like, what is happening? If you do an assessment, is that information going to be made public so that people know what they're getting out of the assessments? And the reason for this is as we are going through the transition and trying to build confidence in the public education system, the more that we can show the improvement of the assessments, show the growth, I think builds that confidence in the community that things are moving in the correct direction.

Still on page B-140, I'm moving on to 1712, Early Childhood Education. Child Development [27175]. And there is an additional budget given to this area. We on the Opposition have full agreement that we should be putting more finances on the early development of our children. So we have no argument on increasing the budget for this area, but if we could get some details on what that increase is going to give us. Once again, a lot of times the increase within this budget seems to have been linked to increases in salaries. So, what we want to make sure is, is this also something that is going to increase the support, increase the programmes, and allow us to make sure that our students have everything that they need, necessary?

Mr. Chairman, moving on to page B-141. I'm just going to point out that there's a couple of pieces in here that I just wanted to know whether we could get a little more detail on. So Professional Services, the Minister gave a couple of headings that would be fitting in there. But there is an increase of \$1.5 million. So, I am just wondering if we could get a little more detail of what that increase will actually be connected to.

And also, under the line of Energy, the increase, and once again, this is looking at it, there was the original of \$920,000 under Energy.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: But then you look at the revised, it was \$764[,000] and now we are budgeting at \$1.25 [million].

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So the question is, If we were able to reduce the energy significantly in this last year, why are we budgeting such a higher number this time around? And if that is the case, are we looking at any ways of adding renewable energy to try to reduce this cost going forward?

Mr. Chairman, I'm now going to move on to page B-144, which would be the Performance Measures.

The Chairman: [Page] 144, B-144?

Mr. Ben Smith: [Page] B-144. Yes.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, starting at the . . . we're going to start at 1702, Student Services.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: And the percentage of students for whom intervention plans were created with fidelity is 100 per cent. That's what the performance measure says here. So can the Minister please provide how many students required . . . Right? Because it's 100 per cent but 100 per cent of what? What was the total number that led to the 100 per cent who received it?

So now, 1704, which is Preschools.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Can the Minister provide details on the assessments that were done in preschools? Because the indication is that 90 per cent met the established standards for literacy and numeracy.

The Chairman: The target outcome.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Ben Smith: So this seems to indicate that there was only a small percentage of the preschool population that was flagged for needing interventions. Right? So, if the starting point of our education process is doing really well, at this 90 per cent rate,—

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: —it would determine that once they are handed off to primary school, we are actually in a good position. Because this assessment is saying that. So, if we can get some more detail on what that assessment is. And if it is, in actual fact, getting us that level of detail so that we know who is going to need more help, more support, more intervention when they get into the primary school.

Now, Mr. Chairman, moving on to primary schools. So now we are on page B-145.

The Chairman: Yes, page B-145.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, for Primary Schools, 1705.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: The measure[/indicator] says *P4 to P6 achieving targeted growth for reading. Only 60 per cent achievement after a target of 65 per cent.*

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: So can the Minister please give an indication of the numbers? The assessment is looking at three or higher. So what is the number? Like, explain to us what one is, what two is, what three is, how high up does it go? So that we have an understanding. Because the number just says “3”, we don't really know. And I think for the listening audience it would be important to know what that “3”—

The Chairman: What “3” is out of.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. What does that mean?

The Chairman: I understand.

Mr. Ben Smith: And then what percentage is reaching the highest number? What percentage is reaching the lowest number? Because this is simply talking about what is reaching what was the target? And the percentage of people reaching the target was 60 per cent. So, what are those other indicators so that we have the data to assess how the primary schools are actually moving towards the target growth in reading? Which I think all of us will agree is extremely important.

Mr. Chairman, now on to Middle Schools, 1707, still on page B-145.

The Chairman: Yes, the bottom box.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, in here it talks about students who have taken the IGCSE [International General Certificate of Secondary Education] at this stage at Middle School. And it says “Students passing IGCSEs (English and Math),” and it is at 85 per cent.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: My question is, What percentage of students in middle school are taking these exams so that we have an understanding of what portion of the student population is in this category that is getting to this level early and being able to get there at this 85 per cent mark? And at the same time, would it be possible for us to get what percentage took the City & Guild's assessment in middle school. So, once again, it gives us an idea of what percentage of the student population in middle schools are actually taking these exams. Because the performance measure is only on the people in that successful area.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So now we are going to turn to page B-146, and we are moving on to secondary schools. So this is 1708, Secondary Schools. And following on the same kind of line that I was on previously, you know, it says *Students passing IGCSE*. So, what percentage of the student population is taking the IGCSE?

The Chairman: So we are now at page B-146? Yes?

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, correct.

The Chairman: Unit 1708, this is unit 1708?

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Ben Smith: How many IGCSE exams are available to the students? Right? Because some people would have taken those exams in middle school in English and math, so if we could get an indication whether there are multiple other subjects that would then be available to them in secondary schools so that they can continue on that path of success. So, if we could get some more details on that I think that would be helpful.

There's also a line in here that talks about students in Advanced Placement Exams. So, if we could get an indication of the percentage of students in secondary school that are able to take these Advanced Placement Exams, because we have the indication of what happens once they're there, but what portion of the student population is actually having access to these?

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

[Pause]

Mr. Ben Smith: Give me a minute.

The Chairman: Yes.

While the Honourable Shadow Minister is looking at his notes, just to remind the listening public that we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. This afternoon's debate, continuing from this morning, is on the Ministry of Education. Specifically, Heads 16, 17 and Head 41 for the Bermuda College. We are currently hearing questions from the Honourable Shadow Minister for Education, Ben Smith MP, of constituency [8], who was asking questions of the Honourable Minister and former Minister for Education, Diallo Rabain.

Shadow Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I'm now going to move on to [page] B-147, Early Childhood Education. It is 1712. So considering the increase in resources that has been given, why is the forecast of assessments dropping from 600 screenings in 2024/25 to 400 in 2025/26? I know that we have a declining birth rate. Is this an indication that we don't have as many students? Or is it that we found that we cannot reach that higher number, so we've reduced the number that we are actually going to try to get the assessments on?

Can the Minister provide details on . . . even for this past year it was that the target of 600 ended up being revised. So obviously there was a target of 600, it's moved down to 352, and now the new target becomes 400. So just if we could get some information on why those changes happen and what does the Minister think that indicates?

Mr. Chairman, I would also like to know . . . there is a performance measure here for *Targets of gaining knowledge at 50 per cent*. Could the Minister let us know whether this is because there's fewer people that are participating, or they're not completing it. Like how, why is that number at 50 per cent for gaining the knowledge that is being provided? If you could give some clarity on what that is.

The Chairman: This is still a page B-147, business unit 1712, the second box down?

Mr. Ben Smith: Correct.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: And considering that early intervention is going to be really important in making sure that we are giving the support to students on their educational journey, the number seems to be low for the people that are receiving the intervention. I could be wrong, so if the Minister could give us kind of information on that. I know that there have been issues in the past where not everybody is doing the follow-up on the parent's side. And I know that that has been a frustration.

It's part of the overall conversation where even in the meeting that we had with the Reform Unit, you know, we can talk about trying to get our students to the level that is necessary . . . Just a few minutes ago I was talking about the IGCSE. And I know that the Ministry provided information to parents, and I believe it was 120-something people who it should have been available to, and the number of people who actually participated was significantly lower than that number.

So even though part of what we are talking about is trying to give an increase of support, an increase financially, trying to do everything that we can, it is important that we understand that there are multiple steps to this. Our community has to be in agreement and, specifically, our parents are going to have

to make sure that they are doing everything they can to help their student to reach the levels. It is not going to just be the responsibility of the parents . . . I mean of the teachers. It is not going to just be the responsibility of the principals. And it cannot only be the responsibility of the Minister of Education. Everybody's going to have to be part of this. So, as we ask for more support, part of it is that people are going to have to ask for the support and then participate when the support is given.

So, Mr. Chairman, I'm now just going to go to Capital Estimates, so page C-4.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: And it's going to come under . . . it's still under the head of Education—

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: —but line item is 75008.

The Chairman: Education Minor Works.

Mr. Ben Smith: Minor Works.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, would the Minister be able to give us a breakdown of the schools that would be receiving and just an indication of what potential Minor Works are going to be needed at these facilities? You know, as the school year goes through there are certain things that would have been noticed, brought to everyone's attention that certain things are breaking down. It would be just good to have an idea of what are the items that are going to have to be fixed, corrected, so that when the new school year starts those things have happened.

Line item 75152, which is School Safety. Just [that] there seems to be a reduction in this particular number, and I'm not sure whether that's because the funding is actually in a different line item. I just want to know, considering that I think the Minister in another part, another line, actually talked about how we are beefing up cameras and all the rest of it. This looks like it's not giving the support. So, I'm just trying to figure out, is it that . . . Listen, I think that everybody here would agree that we want to make sure that our students and definitely our teachers are feeling safe when they're at school during the day. And so anything that we can give from a technology standpoint, I fully support what the Minister said in the brief about some of those technologies that are being brought in to make sure that our students are safe. But just here, seeing that reduced number, maybe there is something that I'm missing in why that particular piece has happened. And have all schools received updated safety audits? If the Minister can let us know that.

So, line item 75284, School Bathroom Renovations.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Ben Smith: Now which schools will have renovated bathrooms with the \$125,000 that is allocated? Is this a situation where these are problems that have been kind of brought to everyone's attention this year? Or is this just scheduled that happens on an ongoing basis? Are these major problems? I know that one of the schools that is closing had a major bathroom issue which now obviously doesn't become a problem because the school will be closed. But is the Minister aware that there are any issues like that in some of these other schools, and whether a higher number of resources have to be given to make sure that our schools are up to the level that is necessary for our students in the upcoming year?

So, Mr. Chairman, I'm now going to move on to Head 41, the Bermuda College. As the Bermuda College is . . . I think we learned in a debate quite some time ago they are self-sufficient. And it's important they are self-sufficient. And I believe that that's one of the reasons that the Minister did not give a lot of detail on it. And it's not because he doesn't believe in the College, it's simply because it's . . . they are an independent and it has to be that way for a lot of reasons. And especially when we're talking about finances. We went through this process about the auditing process. In order for them to reach certain certifications, they have to be independent from, kind of, government interference. And for that reason, I believe that's why we are where we are with that.

So just looking at a couple of items that potentially we could get some, just some information on, I think some data would be helpful. Which is, are we able to get some kind of performance indicators from what's coming out of the college? We are all excited that we are having our young people have an opportunity to go to Bermuda College. Bermuda College is now . . . it has opportunities for people to get degrees here. And it's lined up with, you know, colleges and universities all over the world now that are allowing our students to continue their education journey. But if the Minister can give us some detail on students entering Bermuda College so as a graduating year goes by, we will see enrolment in the Bermuda College coming out of our private schools. They will be coming out of our public schools. They will be coming out of our home schools. So, if we could get some numbers on where they are coming from into Bermuda College, specifically.

And then if the Minister can give us some information on whether the Bermuda College has put in a system for remedial courses to actually get some of our students on track so that eventually they can go overseas. Because, once again, it's all about how do

we move our students from each step to get them to the end destination?

One of the major factors in the discussion that we had with the Reform Unit was that it's about kind of cutting down on the number of transitions that a student has to go through, through their career. And that is one of the major reasons why the Government is moving towards phasing out middle schools. Because it cuts that down. And when you look at the private education in Bermuda, a lot of times everything is done in one facility. Right? They move from one to the next. So, they've cut down on those transitions. Everything that we are doing right now should be leading to that.

But I think a major question that is going to come out of this debate—and I am going to put this under the *general* education line—is going to be: What is the estimated timeline for this reform to be completed? I know it's a moving target. I understand it's a moving target. But as we are going through it, our students are having to go through the journey with us. So every time an interruption happens . . . I just stated that you're cutting down on transitions. But we're moving students as you close a school which means that sometimes they've added a transition. So understanding that that could have an impact on that student's journey, it would be important for us to do everything we can to clarify, communicate to the population that things are being put in place to cut down on the number of times that that happens.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I'll take my seat and get some responses from the Minister.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member for constituency 8.

Minister, do you wish to address some of those questions, or should I see if other people on the floor have questions first? I'm happy to be guided by you.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Yes, please. Please proceed, Minister, you have the floor.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I will endeavour to answer now. I'm looking at the . . . this technology is just so wonderful.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm looking at the 50 questions that have come from here, from this session this morning. And I will begin.

Mr. Chairman, a question asked was, Has the Ministry tracked outcomes from investments in scholarships? And the answer is, the Ministry tracks com-

pletion and graduation of students who receive scholarships. Longer term outcomes tend to be anecdotal and could be better measured. There was a programme review previously which resulted in refocusing on areas of greatest need. Most of our scholarships are of financial need; however, as the post-secondary landscape and opportunities for students evolve, a fresh programme evaluation is due.

The next question I have here is, Can the Minister provide the breakdown of the number of people receiving scholarships and the different areas to get these awards from? And it has their number from public-private home schools, mature students, et cetera. I do know that there is a very specific scholarship for . . . it used to be called the Mature Student . . . I can't remember the name of it. They changed the name, but it used to be called the Mature Student, and you have to be over a certain age to get that. So that's definitely one specifically for students.

And I will recognise in one of my last acts as the Minister, we put in place the ability for further education awards. We set aside 10 of them to go towards master's degrees, so that was an older cohort of students as well. We also did open that up to students who were doing online studies. So there is, as it is stated there, there is a need to do some more evaluation, probably revised evaluations on that. But here the answer, specifically to your question is, at this time the information is not categorised that way, but it will be passed on to the Minister and that could be part of the evaluation review. It could be an indicator for the demographics, exactly as I just said.

The next question, What are the specific deliverables required for education reform? There is a wide scope of deliverables and the statement of work, inclusive of deliverables, can be found on the MOED [Ministry of Education] website on the Ministry tab and reports. I will say that I was made aware of this just earlier this week. And I was surprised that that had been posted up. So, if you did want to go there and look, the actual IU deliverables and their assessment of what needs to happen within the department, within the Ministry, within our schools to actually move the process of reform ahead, it is actually all listed there. And so, I would encourage [you] to actually just take a look at that.

What feedback has been given and [what] adjustments have been made? A review audit process has been underway now for the last few months. The co-leads of each work stream have presented to the Minister and the permanent secretary, summarising what work has been accomplished to date, acknowledging achievements, identified risk, impact statements for students and teachers, and identifying next steps.

In addition to the presentation from the ERU [Education Reform Unit] co-leads, the Minister is meeting with school transformation teams to gather more insight on what has gone well, what can be im-

proved, and lessons learned. The Minister has also met with school boards and PTA presidents to gain invaluable insights from their vantage point. Principals and DoE [Department of Education] staff will also be provided with similar opportunities to provide feedback. Once this assessment is complete and analysis completed, adjustments will be made.

Grants. Does the revised figure for grants on page B-135 mean that there is a gap or is less support needed? The revised, robust figure of \$3,130 [million] provides additional funding for critical partners of education. External grants ensure that lifelong learning is embedded in the community for our residents.

And the next question is about school attendance. Why was a low number budgeted for? And the answer here: The officers are sitting in business unit 27095 but budgeted for in 27090. This needs to be transferred to the latter business unit. I want to say I think I remember this happened last budget. And so, as you know, sometimes the [Budget] Book will take, I believe, three cycles to catch up fully.

School attendance. How many students had prolonged absences last year? It says here: The information is collected; however, we don't have it at our fingertips. But I am sure that that could be provided at some point in the future, perhaps a ministerial question to the Senate.

Attendance. What is the process when dealing with students with prolonged absences? The first line of contact is the school as they know the students and there is follow-up by attendance officers. School counsellors engage parents to determine underlying problems. Long absences are often as a result of complex issues such as mental health, trauma, family problems, learning difficulties, et cetera. The Ministry is working with the department for an improved strategy, but a holistic approach is needed including with Financial Assistance and DCFS [Department of Child and Family Services]. The issue is beyond just an attendance issue.

Substitute teachers. (Everyone's favourite topic.) Is there an issue in the transition of schools leading to the lack of substitutes available? Teachers who are working in the closing schools are reallocated to fill vacancies across the system. Substitutes are hired to cover long-term absences due to acting positions, reassignments, long-term sick, administrative leaves, and maternity leaves, et cetera. So I believe what we are saying is, those teachers are being allocated to positions. And you would have heard me say numerous times in the past, that although we have . . . education is different now, and it requires much more support. And some of these positions . . . and part of the reason—contrary to popular belief of saying that we just have too many schools—is because it creates so many gaps for so little . . . we have so little students it creates gaps that we cannot fill. So those teachers would have been taken to fill gaps that cur-

rently existed so we can provide better services for the students who are within the schools.

So, again, substitute teachers. As funds for [substitutes] increase every year, should it be anticipated that more money is needed for substitute teachers? And the answer we have here: Staffing schools that have closed or which are closing have been placed in schools where vacancies, and at parish schools that have expanded their staffing. Yearly staffing vacancies are a result of mandatory retirements, early retirements, and resignations. Substitutes are deployed to meet the demand for coverage for reassignments, staff vacancies, staff who are on leave, and to cover staff using negotiated leave entitlements. I'm not sure if . . . again, if you recall when the CBA [collective bargaining agreement] was renegotiated, teachers actually have more personal leave now built into that. And they actually get to carry personal leave over . . . that they don't use.

Substitute teachers. Should there be a reserve of substitute teachers? There is a reserve of substitutes, and these substitutes are either allocated subs, reporting to school on a daily basis, short-term subs and/or day-to-day substitutes.

Again, substitute teachers. How is the substitute problem going to be resolved by the Ministry? The Department of Education is working to minimise the use of long-term [substitutes] by reducing the number of assignments and acting positions. This will essentially free substitutes to be available to use as day-to-day substitutes to provide coverage for schools.

Next question. (I just see the section here.) Are more teachers on admin leave creating the need for more substitute teachers? What would cause admin leave and can admin time be sped up? There is no knowledge that says the demand for substitutes is due to admin leave. And where such issues arise, they could be for a myriad of issues. Administrative leave is a personnel matter and so it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the exact reasons of why persons would be on admin leave. Investigations for admin leave are external and conducted by the Department of Child and Family Services. The time frame cannot be defined, and it all depends on the circumstances of the investigation. I would get that because it was a constant frustration. Some things go really quickly, some things take an extended period of time, unfortunately, depending on the circumstances.

Is mental health of teachers impacting the number of substitute teachers? As a community we need to reduce the stigma for mental health issues. But as mental health is a health issue, this is sensitive, personal information and staff are not required to disclose this information to the department. That being said, staff who need access to services may access services at EAP [Employee Assistance Programme] at no cost.

Substitute teachers. How often and at what level [are] substitute teachers most needed so that a plan can be put in place to resolve these issues? Because absences occur daily, substitutes can be used every day. Additionally, per the collective bargaining agreement, there has been an increase in the number of personal days (which I mentioned) and leave entitlement that teachers are entitled to, resulting in an increase in the need for more substitutes.

Question: Is there any move to increase health insurance coverage for teachers? It has: EAP is at no cost.

Behavioural management. What are [the] additional funds for? Is this [for] salaries only? The additional funds are for training and development for staff and teachers, additional personnel for ET services and salary increases.

A question here on paraprofessionals. What are the differences between a teacher and a paraprofessional? Why do we need so many more paraprofessionals? The difference between a paraprofessional and a teacher is that a teacher has a degree and certification to teach. Paraprofessionals are used to support children. Paraprofessionals are not responsible for teaching but get direct instruction from the teacher on how to support students with what is to be taught.

Paraprofessionals, again. Is there more training for paraprofessionals if they're going to be relied on more and more? Again, paraprofessionals are not responsible for teaching and learning and their role is to provide support for students.

Vision. What supports are provided for students with visual impairments, et cetera. For example, glasses. The system has a peripatetic vision teacher who services students. And for the listening public, peripatetic just means a teacher who moves from school to school.

Hearing. Gilbert [Institute] was the designated school for deaf and hard of hearing. Is the support moving to another school along with teachers with skills such as ASL? The designated teacher provides services for students throughout the system. Again, peripatetic who would move from school to school.

Is there an increase in the areas of disability? There is not an increase in the areas of disabilities, but an increase in the number of students who are being *identified* with disabilities.

Are there any cases where the Government cannot provide sufficient assistance, and if so, what is the system to allow that child to get the support to allow them to progress, i.e., parents being burdened with heavy costs? Student needs are increasing due to more students being diagnosed, especially students with developmental delayed disabilities. Well, I think we will be able to get back to that one. I see that there's some typing going on there.

Educational stores. Does stores need a bigger budget to supply schools? Stores's existing budget

covers basic supplies. As new items are requested, they will . . . the budget will need to be increased. Okay.

Preschool. What is happening with St. Paul's Preschool? Will it be attached to a parish primary school? St. Paul's Preschool will be relocated to Paget Primary in September 2025.

Primary schools. Three school closures. Can the Minister provide details on where those students have moved—another public school, private school or overseas? Most of the students are being transitioned to their choice of school within the BPSS. Only two students have confirmed at this time for private school from the total enrolment at Gilbert and Prospect. Not bad.

Dame. There was a 100 per cent increase in the Dame budget. Can we please get a breakdown of these increases? The increase in this budget will be allocated for consultant services for training and development.

Middle schools. Why are there dollars now for T. N. Tatem when it is closed—\$1.7 million. Page B-140. (A question I used to ask on a regular basis.) This represents staff whose salaries are attached to T. N. Tatem [though] they are no longer [there, they are] in other schools. Just as a quick explanation to the public, Government processes sometimes don't go as fast as we think . . . as we would like them to . . . And there are still . . . [when] you think of it, there are still salaries attached to that line item although those teachers are working in other places. And it's a matter . . . it's literally a paperwork exercise to move them from that line item to the schools they are at now. And until that process is completed, that will continuously show up there. I'm surprised we don't have a . . . still have a Heron Bay one there.

Middle schools. Why was there a half a million dollar budget for Clearwater when the school is closed? Same, that would be the same answer for that.

(Let me see if there was anything else added.)

Senior schools. Are we collecting and assessing data from our senior schools? We collect data via PowerSchool, our student management system. Data [is] collected for grades, courses, credits, GPA, attendance, behaviour, and signature of choice. (And then I have another note here.) Data is being collected via the PowerSchool-related modules, i. e., Attendance in PowerSchool Attendance module. Some senior school data is tracked in PowerSchool Naviance, as well as PowerSchool SIS. We are currently engaged in [PowerSchool] Enterprise reporting and for every building and every student within the BPS.

Currently, reports are being generated on an ad hoc basis, as-needed basis. I can say, if I . . . a point of personal privilege, I can say that as I have a student at CedarBridge. Literally, my phone buzzes if she's tardy, if she's late for class, on a real-time basis. And then it would update and say, *Oh no, she is in*

class. Because if you're not there within five minutes, then you get marked automatically. But there could be something going wrong with the scanner. So, I find that really, really useful that it tracks in real time and I'm able to view that. It also tracks assignments, whether they have been handed in, whether they're late. It updates grades on a regular basis. So, it actually is a really powerful tool that I encourage all parents to take advantage of. Especially on your phone, and you're able to check and see what's going on, on a real-time basis like that.

The Chairman: I was just going to ask, Minister, that's just something you have as a parent, not something you have as the former Minister of Education.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. It is something that I have as a parent—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —and all parents have access to PowerSchool, to Schoology and the like. And you actually get that access when your child starts at the . . . I want to say the preschool level. And that will follow you through until the end of your school . . . your child's enrolment.

CNA. When will national data assessment . . . Okay. I'm still waiting for that one.

CDP, [Child Development Programme] early years. Can we get details on what the increase will give us? Will it increase supports and programmes? There are several key positions that are vacant including supervisory posts of psychologists, screening, programme manager, and early intervention supervisor. These positions are required to lead developing coach staff in the early intervention programme, development screening programme and the assessment programme. Additional personnel are needed to address the existing wait-list for developmental assessment and early intervention. This will increase support, help develop programmes and maintain accreditation standards.

Professional Services. What is the increase for professional services connected to? A big portion of funding for this is for school psychology, Dame, and [the] Child Development Programme [CDP].

CDP Professional Services include outsource services for family counselling and developmental assessments for young children on the wait-list to determine what conditions and diagnosis may present to provide individualised interventions, family support, and future school needs.

CDP Professional Services also include social media campaigns to inform public about services and educate community about developmental milestones, early intervention and CDP services.

The question is: Why is there such an increase in energy? Are we looking at renewable ener-

gy to save dollars? A significant portion of the estimated cost is for the Department of Education's new office location.

On page B-144, Performance Measures. How many students required intervention plans? There are currently 162 students who have an intervention plan across the Bermuda public school system.

Please give details on assessments for pre-school and what level of detail goes into about what students need for interventions? Utilising the Creative Curriculum Assessments, 92 per cent of preschoolers met the standard for assessments for social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

Primary schools. What percentage of students are reaching the highest and lowest numbers for primary school? And that data can be shared later. It's not something that we can pull together right now. (Okay, the answer just disappeared.)

Middle schools. How many students took the City & Guilds in middle school? The number of students in middle school who took City and Guilds for English is 314 and 338 took math.

Secondary school. What percentage of student population is taking IGCSEs? An estimated 80 per cent of our students at the senior level are taking IGCSEs. This will also vary 80 [per cent] to 90 per cent across the three required disciplines in math, language arts and science. And just as a quick add on to that, a requirement for graduation is a pass in math, English language, and science of an international exam. So, it may be IGCSE, it maybe City & Guilds, or maybe something else, but that is a requirement for graduation.

How many IGCSEs are available in secondary school? The IGCSE offerings include English, math biology, chemistry, physics, geography, global studies, French, Spanish, information technologies. And I will add one here because my daughter is sitting her IGCSE in history today.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The required IGCSEs are math, language arts, and science.

Secondary schools. What is the percentage of students who are able to take the AP exams? What percentage of students have access to AP exams? The percentage of students who take AP exams are generally those selected in the top 10 per cent. Once again, access to AP exams are for all students who demonstrate proficiency in AP. Those students are generally those students who are in the top 10 per cent of their chosen AP subject. Again, my daughter just sat her English Literature AP exam.

Early Child Education. Why does the forecast of assessments drop? And we're talking about early child education. Regarding development screenings, the target is 200 per year per individual early childhood screening specialist. The forecast changed due

to the decrease in staff halfway through the year. Additionally, CDP relocated twice in the last fiscal year and the space for providing services to the public has decreased. This performance measure is on pause due to staffing vacancies. And I do think I recall mentioning that it had dropped to 2 ½ versus three in the brief.

If you can provide details on why the target of 600 keeps changing. The 600 is based on 200 screening per staff member. In the early beginning of the year, we had three.

Early childhood screening specialists. One staff member left in the middle so the target was changed. Additionally, our service space has been temporarily changed and has decreased in available spaces from four to two rooms.

Capital estimates. What are the minor works needed for and which schools? We are replacing existing wax floor finishes on non-skid, non-wax vinyl flooring which will reduce operational costs and ensure safety. Ceilings that have also been deemed defective will be replaced with new ceiling grids and ceiling tile. These works were identified during our school building inspections.

Is there a reduction in safety audits? Safety audits are currently being undertaken by the Bermuda Police Service and existing cameras are dated and require updating.

Which schools will have bathrooms renovated? Are these new issues or scheduled improvements? Paget Primary infant block bathrooms to be renovated to accommodate St. Paul's preschool students for September 2025. These issues are improvements.

Bermuda College. Are we able to get some performance indicators for the Bermuda College? Yes, we can have that information. That information can be provided on request.

Are there remedial steps, programmes, at Bermuda College to enable students to get better prepared to go abroad? Yes. Bermuda College has always offered college prep courses across mathematics, English, and the pure sciences to prepare students to engage at college-level coursework needed to complete the associate's degree study.

Since 2020, the college has implemented corequisite courses in mathematics and English. Corequisite courses support acceleration through the prep stage by incorporating preparatory instruction on the college coursework. And just as an add-on to that, all students who attend the Bermuda College are required to take what they call the CD . . . it's an entrance exam that they take which measures your math, how . . . your ability for math and English. And then you would be categorised based on that. And that will determine whether you go into, say, remedial English before you do college work. Or if you go directly into college work. So, they always have that in place to ensure that you are not overwhelmed and

you are at the grade that you should be at at the college. Again, I know I've . . . I know someone who just had to take the test.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And it's . . . because it is also for the dual enrolment programme, because they are coming in younger, they are required to do that as well.

And I believe that was it. I'll scroll back up. I think there was one thing.

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I believe that is it for all of the questions. Ah, wait a minute. Here this one this hasn't been turned to green.

Are there cases where Government cannot provide sufficient assistance? Students' needs are increasing due to more students being diagnosed . . . oh no. That's . . . we are still waiting for the typing on that.

But thank you, Mr. Chairman. I will take my seat—

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —and if anyone else—

The Chairman: We have been hearing from the Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain, former Minister for Education.

There is about 45 minutes left in the debate. Does any Member have . . . I see the Honourable—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Oh, okay.

Yes, I see the Honourable Member for constituency [10]. MP King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just have a couple of questions as relates to the performance measures, page B-141, Current Account Estimates. There is . . . it's documented that the salaries have increased by \$2,287,000. And rightly so. Teachers should be compensated for the hard work that they do to ensure that our children have the best possible education to become productive citizens in the future. I say that to compare the increase in salaries with the performance measures on page B-145, Head 17, business unit 1707, performance measures as it relates to middle schools. The performance measure target is 60 per cent. And I'm having a hard time reconciling that 60 per cent would be their target when we are trying to challenge the children to do the best that they possibly can. So, I'm wondering how we arrived at 60 per cent instead of a higher number.

The Chairman: And MP, that is page B-145—

Mr. Robert King: That's correct.

The Chairman: —business unit 1707, [regarding] middle schools. And the target outcome figure on the right-hand side. Is that correct?

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Chairman: Thank you. Please continue.

Mr. Robert King: I'll draw your attention as well to page B-146, Performance Measure, business unit 1708, Senior Schools. Target outcome [is] 55 per cent. Student scoring is three or higher for writing. Target growth [is] 50 per cent. So, if we are trying to challenge our children, as I said before, to improve, to excel, I'm not understanding how the performance measures would be lower and not, you know, be raised to 75 per cent or something higher so that we are ascribing towards excellence as opposed to mediocrity. Especially when people are being properly compensated.

I draw your attention to page B-147, business unit 1712, Early Childhood—Families who gain, knowledge, skills and tools through participation in Parent Education Classes/Groups. Understanding that these groups and classes are to address the criminogenic risk needs of at-risk families, I'm not understanding why actual outcome [for] 2023/24 is 82 per cent and then drops to 50 per cent for the target outcome for 2025/26, understanding that this is a critical area of need and will impact on the success of children either, you know, being exposed to increased risk of entering the criminal justice system, or excelling and being free of it. Those are my questions and submissions.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to contribute to the debate?

I recognise the Honourable Member for constituency 8.

MP Ben Smith, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I thank the Minister for the answers he provided. To this point, some of the answers made me think of follow-up questions to some of those answers. So, on page B-140, I'm just going to circle back to my question on those T. N. Tatem numbers.

I understand that the Minister pointed out that this seems to be an admin with the book issue and moving the cost, but the school has been closed since 2020, so when can we expect for this to be cleaned up? It shouldn't still be showing up in a book five years later. If that number belongs somewhere else, then it

should be moved to that area. It is . . . we're here to go through these numbers and for T. N. Tatem to have numbers in the millions attached to it, does not make sense in this debate.

So, really, even if we can't . . . to me, either we are going to have a date of when we should see it removed from the [Budget] Book, but I also think that there should be an opportunity for us to know when that money was spent, where is it? If it's not in T. N. Tatem, where is it? Right? Like, we have to be able to reconcile when you spend \$1.3 million, \$1.7 million and the budget line was zero, where did that money go? Like, it is impossible for us to not know where close to \$2,000,000 one year and close to \$1.5 [million] another year has gone. There is no possible way that's in the best interest of the community for us to not be able to know where that money is.

Mr. Chairman, also on page B-140, I just want to follow up on my questions on child development. It seems like the response from the Minister indicated that there were several key positions that are not filled. If the Minister could give us some clarity when the expectation of these positions being filled will be. Considering that this seems to be a critical role, and to not have the people in these positions . . . I believe one of them was a psychologist and, you know, people for the assessments. This leaves a gap that we can't afford to have.

And when you look at the fact that the number was 600 and it was 200 people per person, I guess my next question is, Is that a good number for one to have to deal with 200? Or should we really be trying to move the number, which is now reduced below three, to a number more like five or six so that the workload can be spread, increase the speed of the assessments, so that we can provide what is necessary to these students as quickly as possible so that their pathway to success happens faster. There's no way that we should be talking about that many people missing in such a critical area.

And I know that I've had this debate with the Minister before when it comes to the assessments. I think there is this early intervention that will help a child on its pathway. And one of the things, and this is a bit of a public service announcement, these assessments are available to babies for free. And multiple parents are not taking this opportunity up.

Once again, if the Government is providing the service and the service is free, understand, if your child does not get assessed, they are not getting the support that is necessary. And the earlier the assessment happens, and the earlier you find that the intervention is needed, the support can be given. You can't then blame the system that your child didn't get the support if you didn't participate in the assessment. There are too many times that the child shows up in primary one and they should have been assessed three years earlier and now the work that that teacher has to deal with is significantly higher. And that child

now is set up in a negative spot when really they should have been prepared better if that assessment had been done.

But, Mr. Chairman, one of the questions that I've always asked is . . . that a lot of times those early assessments come under Health. I understand that they come under Health because it's a baby and it's that health issue. But the education outcome is so connected to it, my suggestion, I believe that [at] some point we are going to have to look at making that mandatory. We are . . . we say that it's mandatory for a child to go to school. And we actually mandate what age they have to go to the school up until. But considering that this is having a major impact on a child's development going forward, and now we are finding out down the road that a lot of our young men who are being incarcerated had learning disabilities. They had issues that were . . . that if they had been identified earlier, they might have had the support which might have put them on a different trajectory.

So this could be our opportunity to say, you know what, if parents are not going to be responsible for going in and getting the assessment so that the help can be given, and the country is going to be impacted down the road, we should mandate that they have to get that assessment so that we can give that child the best opportunity for success.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Is there any other Honourable Member who wishes to contribute to the debate?

Honourable Member DeCouto, I actually saw someone standing behind you first. I apologise.

So, it's MP King, Honourable Member for constituency [10], you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just have one more question that follows on from what my colleague was expressing about assessments. Page B-147, Performance Measures, Head 17, Department of Education. Percentage of clients assigned to or eligible for early intervention who receive early intervention services. Actual outcome [for] 2023/24 [was] 100 per cent. Target outcome for the 2025/26 is 50 per cent. And as my colleague said, early childhood education and development is critical. So, I want to understand, and the people of Bermuda want to understand why the target would be less by 50 per cent, understanding that this is a critical area of need.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you. And that's in relation to page B-147 of the Budget Book under business unit 1712, Early Childhood Measures.

Yes, Minister, would it be convenient if we take a further question and then . . . Yes.

Honourable Member for constituency 25, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And certainly, like my colleagues, I am very grateful for this good briefing by the Minister. And it's been very informative. Page B-134, the Educational Reform Unit is budgeted for \$3.925 million. But then if we go over to the analysis on page B-135, we see that professional services is only \$3.378 million. So I'm scratching my head because my understanding was the Reform Unit was in fact consultants. So I would have thought we would have seen at least that much in the professional services. Well, perhaps you could just remind us what the gap in that is, please, Mr. Chairman.

Turning forward to page B-141, the Department of Education has had quite a large jump in the professional services from last year's budget of \$1.4 [million] to \$3.0 million. And if we could just provide a high-level view of what that change is.

Sorry, I'm just doing my flipping around here.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member. If you pause and keep flipping and I'll just address the listening public.

We are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Namely, the Budget Debates. This afternoon's debate is about the Ministry for Education, and we have been covering Heads 17, 16 and 41, albeit not in that order. And we have heard from the Honourable former Minister, Diallo Rabain, and we have heard questions from a number of Members.

And now I give you the floor. The Honourable Member for constituency 25.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I turn to page B-138 and I noticed that the budget for school psychology is going up 50 per cent from . . . or \$449,000. But I noticed that the staff number or the FTE has only gone up by plus one. So again, I would like to understand how those bits connect. And then later down the page, under 27003, Office Accommodation. Again, that number is doubled and I'd like to understand the additional office requirements.

If I turn now, Mr. Chairman, to page B-144—

The Chairman: [Page] B-144.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —the performance measures. And I note the compliance with the fire drill under 1703, and of course, I know when I was in school, we all loved the little fire drill. So if not for the benefit of the students but having had experience with an actual fire and an actual building, I tend to take these things quite seriously. And I hope that . . . I don't really know

what the answer is, but I hope that they can take care of that everybody gets the adequate fire drills so that nobody is injured or worse.

Turning ahead to page B-146, the City & Guilds employability skills certification, under business unit 1708. And I see that the forecast for this year is 80 per cent. I would really love to see the target of 100 per cent. And, you know, we like to think that anybody finishing high school can come out and get a job and, you know, [has] employability. We know employers often talk about interviewing people who don't seem to have the most basic skills for a basic job. Perhaps a short explanation of why that was not 100 per cent.

I appreciate not everything is in the control of the Education Ministry. And then later in that table is students passing Advanced Placement exams with the score of three or higher, which is a pretty reputable score. If I think back a while, 30-plus years, the forecast is 80 per cent. I'm going to assume that that's of students taking the exams. Or is every student at the school's taking Advanced Placement exams? But perhaps the Minister could comment on how many students are in fact taking at least one Advanced Placement exam in the public school system. And I think my other comments were addressed by prior questions.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to contribute to the debate?

I recognise the Honourable Shadow Minister Ben Smith, MP.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I believe there were a couple of questions that I asked that might not have been answered before. I asked a question about what that number "3" means in the performance measures, just so that we have an idea where it says that . . . in the scoring and it says "3." So just [if] we can have an indication of what that means so that we understand it.

And there was a question about the performance measures under preschool which indicated that most of the students seemed to be prepared. Right? So, it would indicate that [the] majority of the students going from preschool into primary school are at the desired level. And then when you look at the performance measures in primary school, there seems to be a drop off. So is this a difference between preschool to primary school? And we would get that by having a better understanding for that performance measure under preschool.

And just quickly on page B-145, just looking at primary schools again. There was in 2023/24, there were some performance measures that would . . . there was percentage of schools achieving their school improvement objective in reading. And at the

time it was 23 per cent. And this was the actual outcome. And then, percentage of schools achieving their school improvement objective for mathematics. And the number was 41 per cent. And then percentage of schools achieving their school improvement objectives for writing was 11 per cent.

But since that point these performance measures have been removed. So, if we could get an indication of how we would get this information now and whether these percentages have actually improved since this actual for the 2023/24. Because these are the questions that parents are going to want to know. They want to know whether they are sending their child to a school in the improvement level that is put as a target. And in a lot of cases there has been frustration that some of the targets seem to be quite low.

But having a low target and having an even lower actual is concerning. So, if we could get some information on whether that data is still collected and, if so, what are these actuals for the last couple of years? And what is being done to make sure that we are doing everything we can to support these students so that these numbers change? Not having them in the [Budget] Book is concerning.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Minister, would you like to address a few of those or should I see if there are further questions out there? I'm in your hands.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Okay. So we'll now hear from the Minister for the Cabinet Office who is the former Minister of Education and is fielding the brief today for the debate on these heads. Thank you.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Who knows, I might answer some questions that are out there already.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: MP Smith, there is another question that was missed that I see here. What is the estimated timeline for reform being completed? As there is a multi-year process, following the review and assessment that I referred to earlier, the Minister will provide more information on that in the future.

[A] question was asked, Why is 60 per cent the target and how did we arrive at this? The answer is, 60 per cent is not the target for student performance. The 60 per cent refers to the percentage of students across schools reaching their goals for reading.

The next question is, Why is the target so low? And answer: our senior schools are comprehensive schools. Comprehensive schools serve a diverse population with a wide range of abilities, backgrounds and needs. Performance measures may vary based on many contextual factors. And I believe it was Mr. King, MP King, that asked that question. I just want to add some additional context. Inside of a school you may have . . . you will have students. You have the high achievers, you have students, and you may have also functioning academics, functioning skills programmes, et cetera. So it would be, in some cases you couldn't just say 100 per cent because students would be in different programmes and some of them it may not be an apples-to-apples comparison when you are talking about just, you know, achievement of the IGCSE sitting. So, I hope that does kind of put some colour to that particular one there.

Families who gain knowledge and skills and tools from participating in educational classes and groups. This performance has been discontinued for two years. We deliver education, knowledge and skills through one-on-one sessions through our home visits programme, at the end of developmental screenings, and through family counselling. There is no staffing dedicated to the parent education classes group. I'm assuming that was a question about CDP.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Follow-up from MP Smith. When is T. N. Tatem going to be cleaned up? [It being] five years later.

The amounts of \$1.7 [million] and \$1.3 [million], as we talked about, are for teacher salaries that have been reallocated to other schools. But for whatever reason, the paperwork says they are still employed under that cost centre. And so, they know where they are, but I'm assuming they won't . . . we can't just pull that out and say, *Well, one teacher* . . . because it may be 10 teachers and they may be at 10 different schools at this time. But I'm sure that is something that could be . . . that information could be provided. Perhaps a parliamentary question could get that for you.

CDP. When will the vacant positions be filled since this is a critical role? This is our priority to fill these critical positions. We have conducted three rounds of recruitment for the early intervention supervisor over the last 18 months. The role is challenging to fill because it requires clinical experience, intervention experience, and supervisory experience. We will continue to conduct recruitment efforts for these key roles.

Again, CDP. Should the number of assessments be spread across existing staff? And the answer here is: A developmental assessment is different from a developmental screening. A developmental screening is conducted by an early childhood screen-

ing specialist for children 18 to 48 months. The screening is designed to determine how a child is developing, strengths, delays, and what intervention supports they may need. The screening also allows us an opportunity to see if families need some support.

Additionally, the screening covers a longer age range so students can be screened up until the age of 4. A development assessment is conducted by a psychologist to gain a better understanding of the function of the child strengths, weaknesses and personalised recommendations. A developmental assessment is provided if the standardised screening indicates further assessment is needed or if there is a referral from a paediatrician.

On the early childhood, again. Percentage of persons eligible for early interventions. Why is this decreasing? The target has decreased because of staffing vacancies; however, CDP staff are working diligently to meet child and family needs. The hope and intention is that the target will be exceeded once vacancies are filled.

CDP. There is only one staff member providing early interventions. Full staffing will be one supervisor and three team members. And I believe you did, when you talked about this, you talked about mandatory screening and the like. And I know this is something that I've heard conversations around. And you know, it comes into this ethical thing of, Can you force someone to take a medical procedure that they may not want? So, it's a . . . I believe it's a conversation worth having, but there could be some tricky minefields to go through that.

Again, early childhood. (Where am I? Okay.) Student services. Why the change of funds for student services? Training and development for mental health support for teachers and staff, for example, CPI and restorative practice training for entire school staff and schools. Also, student services will begin SCERTS training (That is S-C-E-R-T-S. I can't remember what it stands for.) for preschool to senior schools for our students who have ASD and developmental delays.

The question is: Why is the budget for school psychologists doubled but the FTEs have only gone up by one? There has been an increase in consultant services, the ability to get additional services assessed at the senior level. And I know if we go back to the mid—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If we go back to—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: While the Minister's just double checking that answer, we have about 25 minutes or so left in this debate.

Yes, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: You have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I was waiting for the answer to be here but apparently, I know the answer.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The ERU—and this I believe was MP DeCouto. The ERU is actually made up out of staff members. And so, it's become a . . . it is made up out of staff members who have been transferred into the ERU section so that would cover them. The consultant budget is the actual consultants who are helping them with the work. And so, we split up between whatever the Ministry needs for consultants, plus whatever is there for the Innovation Unit. The Innovation Unit is not the ERU. The ERU is an actual entity—

The Chairman: And for the benefit of the public, the ERU is the Educational Reform Unit.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

Why is the budget for school doubled? Oh, and I was going to mention also, MP DeCouto, if you remember back to the mid-term budget adjustments, some of those funds were to go and find external resources because we just couldn't find . . . could not hire fast enough for some of these things. And some of them, MP Smith, was specifically for CDP so they could speed up assessments by going external to find people to do that work. And some of it was school psychologists as well. And also, that covered services that [were] needed at Dame, such as physical therapy, occupational therapy and speech language pathology. So, they can go to external sources for that.

City & Guilds employability skills. The forecast shows 80 per cent of the target. Should be 100 per cent. The current 80 per cent forecast reflects a realistic projection. Again, if you go back to what I said about schools, there might be some students who are not, you know, they're not eligible to take the exam based on the programme that they are in at the particular school.

Students passing AP with a score of 3 [or] higher. The forecast is 80 per cent. I think that was a question of what the number "3" stands for. The number 3 stands for, represents a reading score proficiency.

The Chairman: Three out of . . .

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Three out of . . .

The Chairman: Maximum of five, is it?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I believe it's three out of five.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The 2023/24 SIP objectives. At the time it was 23 per cent and schools for math was 41 per cent, 11 per cent, and now those have been removed. How would we get this information now and whether it has improved since time? It says: A school may set a goal and not achieve that goal; however, they would have missed the goal by 1 per cent or 2 per cent and that will be recorded as not achieving the goal. Schools are . . . (It kind of stopped there.) Schools are focusing on tracking progress.

I will just skip back up to, How many students are taking AP classes? Currently CedarBridge Academy has 30 students taking AP classes. And Berkeley . . .

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: We're searching for the number for Berkeley. The number of students taking AP classes at Berkeley.

Mr. Chairman, that is the answers that I do have now. And I'll take my seat unless someone wants to—

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister Rabain.

Does any other Member wish . . . I see the Honourable Member for constituency 8, MP Ben Smith.

You have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I just go back to page B-141. From the answer that the Minister gave on the increase in energy was based off of an increase of the office building. Just if we could get an indication, is the office space significantly bigger? Is it housing more people? If we could get some clarification of that. Just because of how significant the increase is in the energy bill.

The Chairman: This is page—

Mr. Ben Smith: This is page B-141.

The Chairman: —B-141. And it's the energy line item—

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: —for expenditure. And it was the point that the estimate is \$1.245 million now.

Mr. Ben Smith: Correct.

The Chairman: —Up from revised of \$764 [thousand].

Mr. Ben Smith: And the response that the Minister just gave me, up from page B-145, for primary schools 1705.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: The questions that I asked about those actual outcomes. So, the answer is that they were coming up 1 per cent short and that is what was causing the issue. The question is, If the target was already low and they were coming in 1 per cent short, this number is still just as concerning. And if that is the case, how are we collecting that data? And when will that information be provided to the public? Because these are some of the things that parents are using to make decisions of [the] school that they want to take their child to.

So that indication of how the school is performing, the target that's being set, are they making the target? If you're looking for improvement from one grade to the next, and there is an expectation that they are going to reach that certain level, if they are not reaching that target and what we were seeing in the Budget Book was that they were not reaching that target, not being able to see that information now . . . Once again, I'm going to say is concerning. That data being transparent on what is happening in each of our schools that allows parents to make informed decisions about what school they want to send their child to, I say is extremely important.

On the answer that the Minister gave, and I'm going to go back to B-140, child development 27175. The Minister said that some of the cost is separated because they had to go out and get outside expertise. So, I guess the question right now is . . . While you are still going through this process of trying to find the people to fill the roles, we will continue to have to use outside expertise so that these children are continuing to be assessed and continue to have the services that are necessary. I think you are going to . . . we are going to be in that balancing role until those roles are filled. If the Minister can just clarify whether that will be the case.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Are there any other Honourable Members who wish to contribute to the debate?

I see the Honourable Member for constituency 9 [*sic*]. MP Robert King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Constituency 10, sir.

The Chairman: My apologies. I think I got that wrong last time as well. Yes. It's MP Campbell in [constituency] 9. Isn't it?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, yes.

The Chairman: Sorry.

Mr. Robert King: No worries.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Robert King: Regarding page B-147, performance measures. If I understand the Honourable Minister properly, he was saying that the families who gained knowledge, skills, and tools from participation in parent education classes and groups, that was as a result of the different types of students that were in the learning environment. And so that the 50 per cent was basically a measure of . . . Is that what you were saying?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Okay, well, I'm glad I'm asking then. That's good. Okay. Good. I'm glad.

And to the second part, percentage of clients assigned to or eligible for early intervention who receive early intervention services. If I understand the Honourable Minister correctly, that had been discontinued. I'm hopeful, understanding that it is a critical area of need, that consideration will be used to re-sourcing that. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member for constituency 10.

Are there any other Honourable Members . . . I see MP Smith, again, for constituency 8. Shadow Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I'm just going to go back to page B-146, Secondary School. I asked those questions about IGCSE and I'm very thankful that the Minister gave those responses about the breakdown on what the students are able to take from IGCSEs. And it was a significantly broader range of subjects. So I'm just wondering if the Minister would undertake to elevate how the community sees what is available. I think that sometimes there is a . . . there is misinformation in the community about what is available. And because of that, it sometimes creates maybe a mind-set that is incorrect. So, I asked that specific question because a lot of times it is portrayed that . . . exactly what you see in the [Budget] Book, it looks like it is only math, English and science. So, as the Minister pointed out today, that there was . . . I think his daughter was taking history and had taken English literature.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: I just think it's important that if that is the case that we do all that we can to highlight those

subjects so that, once again, it's also about perception. We never want to be standing to our feet and making our young people feel that they are lesser than. This reform is about giving them the best opportunity. That process, on both sides of the aisle, we are going to work together to make sure that we get to that result. We don't always agree on the journey to get there, but we have to make sure that our young people feel supported, that we all want them to get to that destination.

So, Mr. Chairman, just before I take my seat and allow the Minister to answer those questions, I would just like to take the opportunity to thank all of our educators in the Island for the hard work that they have continued to do. I know most of them are looking to the end of this year to take a well-deserved break. But our educators are the ones who create the opportunity for everything else that's going to happen in this country. We wouldn't have lawyers and doctors and plumbers and electricians if we didn't have fantastic teachers in our schools. And for that reason, I'd like to make sure that we always put them first and appreciate them.

Thank you.

The Chairman: This is not commendations, but no doubt the whole House would be associated with that one.

But does any other Member wish to speak in the debate? We have about 10 to 15 minutes left in the debate. Any other Member wish to put questions to the Minister?

I see none. So, Minister, over to you to finish off with the answers. Thank you. Minister Diallo Rabain, of the Cabinet Office and former Minister of Education.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

MP Smith . . . because I can never remember the numbers.

An Hon. Member: Constituency 8.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: MP Smith, constituency 8. The . . . here . . . it is an addition here, the . . . Wait a minute I was just about to say it and then it got highlighted. So, I want to make sure.

You are speaking of the school data that you were referring to, the 2341. It says the school data is shared internally, but the suggestion that you came up with will be passed on to the Minister for her consideration. Perhaps making that . . . figuring out how that could be disseminated even more widely.

There was a question about . . . And this actually came from MP DeCouto, originally. Why the large increase for the electricity? It says here, the new office space is significantly larger and allows the department to bring the majority of office staff into one location. I know at one point there was some staff

complaining that they actually didn't have an office and they were working out of their car. They would visit schools but when they needed to be somewhere and do something, they actually didn't have anywhere to go. So I'm assuming their . . . the location they moved into—which I don't know where it is. I'll correct that.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Finding people to fill roles will need outside expertise balancing. Yes, it is correct. Many of these roles are hard to fill due to international shortages and may require ongoing contracting services. I can say as the former Minister, CDP has for years been trying to fill these roles and it's just been, you know, interview, interview, interview . . . not suitable, interview, interview . . . not suitable. So the addition of giving them additional funding to, you know, find external sources, you know, it also comes down to—

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Please elevate what the community sees and knows available in reference to IGCSEs and other external exams. I couldn't agree with you more. One of the things that we . . . I believe we do a good job on, but we could do a better job, is actually showcasing what it is that our students are doing within the schools. I was surprised, you know, I always speak about my own personal experience. So my . . . at the end of S2, my . . . my . . . the person I speak of. Because . . . would have sat math, English, physics, Spanish, history, AP English, and then next year she will be doing AP . . . she'll be finishing AP calculus.

And so it is possible to do these things within the public school system, but it's just not something we get out there and people know. But it is possible to do these things. And perhaps we should look at how we can advertise that better. That it is actually there to be done. I mean, when I took a look at the number of courses because . . . and the department does have this list of possible courses. It's huge, you know, of IGCSE-type courses that you could, that you actually can take. And so I would encourage persons to investigate.

And one other thing that I would add as a personal privilege is we also need parents to advocate as well. You had mentioned that during your earlier brief when you talked about, *it's not just the teachers it's our parents as well*. Any of you [who] have been around education as long as I [have], it didn't start when I became Minister. Because I was a Shadow Minister of Education back in when I was a Government Senator. I was the Junior Minister for Education. I've been on the Education Board, the Bermuda College boards and stuff. You'll see our parents are there

at the preschool level. They are there at the primary school level. They wane out at the middle school level. They barely show up at the high school level. And we have to continue to encourage our parents and figure out ways to encourage them to just be more involved in the actual process of moving education along.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not sure . . . I'll take my seat and allow any additional questions because we do have time.

The Chairman: I think you were still to identify the number of AP students. You did CedarBridge and you were going to come back I think for Berkeley. But maybe you—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: No, I said I would await. And it says here we are awaiting their final count so—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —that would probably be something—

The Chairman: —I will see if anyone has any —

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —reached out to—

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to contribute to the debate?

There being none, Minister, I think that that will therefore conclude the debate. We'll finish a touch early. And if I can invite you to move that your heads be taken under consideration.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would be remiss if I did not thank all of the persons who contributed to providing these answers. We have Ania Gilbert; Dr. Llewellyn Simmons; Dwayne Caisey; Giovanni Joseph, the Commissioner sitting with us today; the Policy Analyst Kimberley McKeown; Lisa De Silva, head of the ERU; Ms. Lisa Swan; Sue-Ann Smith; Taneesha Ottley; Terry Cox; Dr. Terrylynn Tyrell; and the Permanent Secretary Ms. Lisa Smith[-Clarke]. Thank you, everyone for assisting us to bring these answers. I think this was a fulsome debate. I look forward to Education continuing to move and go to higher heights as the reform process continues on.

So, Mr. Chairman, if it pleases you, I move that Heads 16, 17 and 41 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the following heads, Head 16, Ministry of Education Headquarters; Head 17, Department of Education; and Head 41, Bermuda College be now taken under consideration.

Is there any objection?

Those heads will now be taken under consideration.

Minister, if you will now move that the heads be approved as printed.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I just did.

The Chairman: You did. I'm sorry. Well, you are ahead of me.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I was ahead of you. Okay.

The Chairman: You were ahead of me.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I will do it again.

The Chairman: Well, if you do it again. Thank you. Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I move that Heads 16, 17 and 41 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Head 16, 17 and 41 all relating to the Ministry of Education be approved as printed.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none . . . Heads 16, 17 and 41 shall be approved as printed.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Education, Heads 16, 17 and 41 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Thanks to the Shadow Minister and to all the other MPs who contributed to the debate.

And I see that MP Famous is now here to take the Chair, and I will bid you all a good afternoon.

MP Famous.

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon to the listening public [and] Members in the House.

We are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are going to be debating the Ministry of Finance, Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58. The Honourable Premier Minister of Finance shall be doing the talking.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good day, Mr. Chairman. How are you?

The Chairman: I'm blessed.

Hon. E. David Burt: That's good.

My flight was delayed so I am fresh off the plane right into the House of Assembly.

The Chairman: Jet lag?

Hon. E. David Burt: We'll make it work.

Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads, Head 10, Ministry of Finance Headquarters; Head 11, Accountant General; Head 12, Customs; Head 28, Social Insurance, Head 38, Office of Tax Commissioner, Head 39, Registrar of Companies; and Head 58, Debt and Loan Guarantees be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: You may proceed.

Hon. E. David Burt: And, Mr. Chairman, if I may note, I will not be doing all the talking as the Junior Minister of Finance will also be presenting some of the heads. So, it will be a joint effort from the Ministry of Finance.

The Chairman: Okay. Great collaboration.

Hon. E. David Burt: That is what we are doing.

The Chairman: The time is now exactly 4:00 pm. This debate is scheduled for four hours of debate.

You may proceed.

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

Mr. Chairman, I will start with Head 10. And then I will defer to the Junior Minister for Heads 11 and 12.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 Budget Estimates for the Ministry of Finance are found in section B of the Estimates Book on pages B-106 through B-132 and in section C on pages C-4 (Capital Development), C-11 (Capital Acquisitions), and C-17 (Grants).

The Finance Ministry comprises seven departments led by the Ministry of Finance Headquarters (HQ) and includes the Accountant General, Customs (in relation to Revenue), the Department of Social Insurance, the Office of the Tax Commissioner, the Registrar of Companies and Land Valuation. Allocations to cover the interest on government debt, guarantee management, the Bermuda Public Accountability Board, Gaming Commission and the Corporate Income Tax Agency are also included in the Ministry of Finance budget.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry has a total staffing establishment of 188 posts, an aggregate current account budget of \$266.6 million and is responsible for collecting \$1.31 billion, or 91.6 per cent of all government revenue. Of the \$266.6 million in expenditure,

\$127.1 million (or 47.7 per cent) is for interest charges, \$100.2 million (or 37.6 per cent) for costs associated with pension and health care for all government workers and war veterans. Leaving \$39.3 million (or 14.7 per cent) for the actual operational spend of the Ministry. So, of course, the budget is very large but most of those things are for interest and also overhead for government employees. A snapshot of key information for the Ministry of Finance is shown on page B-106 of the Estimates Book. Department current account allocations are as follows:

- Head 10, Ministry of Finance HQ—\$11.820 million, an increase of \$4.640 million or 65 per cent. All of this is operational spending.
- Head 11, Accountant General—\$106.5[52] million, an increase of \$24.800 million or 30 per cent of which \$6.310 million is operational and the rest of course is due to the overhead budget falling inside of that line item.
- Head 12, Customs—The Customs Expenditure budget sits under the Ministry of National Security, although the Ministry of Finance maintains responsibility for the Customs Tariff and revenue collections.
- Head 28, Social Insurance—\$2.894 million, a decrease of \$106,000 or 3.5 per cent. All mandated costs for war veterans. And that is the reason for the decrease under that head.
- Head 38, Office of the Tax Commissioner—\$4.3 million, an increase of \$252,000 or 6.2 per cent. And these are all operational overheads.
- Head 39, Registrar of Companies—\$12.52 million, an increase of \$474,000 or 4 per cent. And these are all operational overheads.
- Head 49, Land Valuation—\$977,000, an increase of \$54,000 or 5.9 per cent. This is all due to operational overheads.
- Head 58, Debt and Loan Guarantees—\$127.53 million, a decrease of \$250,000 or 0.2 per cent, of which \$127.10 million is mandated interest on Government debt.

Mr. Chairman, the Finance Ministry plays a pivotal role in the work undertaken to ensure the ongoing stability and prosperity of Bermuda, particularly given the serious local and [global] economic uncertainty currently faced by our country and others around the world. Over the past eight years since this Government took office, you would have noted a recurring theme; that is, the Government's resolve to develop and implement a consistent and considered strategy to diversify and strengthen Bermuda's economy and to support its people, while executing a sound and prudent fiscal management strategy. It is noteworthy, of course, Mr. Chairman, that after many years of deficit budgets, this budget follows last year's budget by delivering a budget surplus. The second

one in a row and, of course, last year's was the first to be achieved in 21 years.

The Ministry of Finance has been a key player in overseeing the execution of this Government's fiscal strategy. The key areas of focus in this strategy are (i) targeted investment and tax policies to enhance economic growth by attracting investment that creates jobs and also reduces the cost of doing business. And you know we have a very successful record of reducing taxes for workers and business in this country.—

The Chairman: I couldn't hear you, Minister. Would you repeat that, please?

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes. Mr. Chairman. I am happy to repeat that because we speak about targeted investment in tax policies to enhance economic growth and I wanted to repeat that this Government has a considered record of reducing taxes for workers in this country and also for businesses, especially small businesses, as there was some commentary that there was nothing in this budget for a small business which would of course forget the fact that this Government has reduced payroll tax on small businesses multiple times since returning back to office.

(ii) making Bermuda's tax system fairer while reducing the tax burden for workers (iii) modernising Bermuda's regulatory regime, which of course we can see has demonstrated success with a continued growth of digital finance and the continued expansion of our international business market. Something that, of course, is not attributed to the Government by the Opposition but without the regulatory planning and the sound work that takes place in the Ministry of Finance, those things would not happen. (iv) maintaining fiscal discipline by meeting, and in many cases exceeding, budget targets as we have done year after year after year after year. (v) and developing and finalising the Corporate Income tax Regime in support of Bermuda's continued commitment to global compliance and transparency.

Mr. Chairman, we have a responsibility to the people of this country to provide the best fiscal and economic management possible. To this end, we will continue to make the necessary decisions—sometimes these decisions are not easy, Mr. Chairman, and also, they are not always politically expedient. But they are required to sustainably grow Bermuda's economy in the long term, reduce the tax burden on workers, and provide the necessary support and services to make Bermuda a quality place to live and also to work.

Mr. Chairman, Bermuda continues to be faced with significant challenges which, if not appropriately managed, can damage our long-term economic security and stability. To that end, the Ministry of Finance budget has been carefully constructed to ensure that the Ministry's in-house team, supported by various external stakeholders and consultants (we will certainly

ly provide more on this later), are able to lead the Government's fiscal and economic policies aptly and responsibly. Given the ever-increasing threats and expanding obligations which Bermuda must address on the international front, ensuring that the Ministry is appropriately resourced and structured continues to be a priority. I am sure I will get to it later in the brief, but it is important to note that recently the Ministry of Finance Headquarters was restructured and previous briefs which would have covered to make sure that we are appropriately resourced to meet all of the various threats and assessments that the Ministry of Finance must do on an annual basis.

To this end, during the past year, reviews of resources in key areas were undertaken, and active steps are already being taken to address identified gaps.

The additional funding required has therefore been included in the cost estimates for the relevant units and departments, contributing to notable increases in some areas, with appropriate reductions in other areas. Key initiatives which will have to be progressed in this year include:

- Banking, tax and pension reform. Something that forms a very important part of the work of the Ministry of Finance. Certainly, we know the work which we are doing on banking reform. We clearly understand and note the work that is being done on tax reform. And you will recall, Mr. Chairman, the Budget Statement spoke very specifically to the matters related to pension reform.
- More targeted debt collection. It is also something of which we have seen recent success and we are going to continue to expand that across the Ministry.
- Enhanced compliance and regulatory oversight, and enhanced adherence to international requirements.
- Enhancing Bermuda's reputation as a global leader in FinTech, digital assets and digital finance by maintaining and developing our robust regulatory framework for digital assets. And you know the success, Mr. Chairman, of what we have seen inside of that area. Of course, in expansion of international business, a responsibility or in response to what this Government has put in place, that has been recognised internationally. And of course, Mr. Chairman, we are regularly treated to provide the Opposition saying that the Government has nothing to do with the growth and expansion of international business; however, if we do not put in place these new policies and frameworks this growth would not happen. (Continuing on that.)
- Support the international work required to strengthen the Financial Literacy of our population. This is something that we have committed

ted to in previous budgets which will help empower people to take ownership of their finances and make well-informed financial decisions.

- Support the work of the Tax Reform Commission to recommend a revised tax framework for Bermuda.
- And finally, the Registrar of Companies will advance implementation of a central register for beneficial ownership, in line with Bermuda's international commitments.

The Ministry of Finance will also continue its internal structural reform for more effective collaboration, operation and management. Within the past budget year 2024/25, the Ministry appointed two Deputy Financial Secretaries, one of which is focused on domestic and economic matters, and the other on international and regulatory matters. The various units and departments of the Ministry will fall under one of these divisions. These divisions are supported by a central unit which assists with finance, administration, and policy support for the Minister. The final structural change is to appoint an internal Director of Policy and Legal Affairs to support the Ministry in all related matters. And there is a significant amount of legal work of course which takes place inside of the Ministry of Finance.

Mission Statement and Key Goals and Objectives Mission Statement

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Finance's mission statement can be found on page B-107, and it is very simple. *Achievement of economic prosperity and to ensure the financial security of Bermuda.*

A very simple mission. In line with this, the Ministry's objectives can be found on page B-107, and they are broadly in line with the objectives from the previous year.

During the past year—Mr. Chairman, can you just excuse me for one second?

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening public and the Honourable Members we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are debating the Ministry of Finance. The Honourable Premier, Minister of Finance, is giving the brief. He has started off on Head 10. And this debate began at four o'clock exactly and will end at 8:00 pm exactly.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, very much, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: We are not in a swamp. I have been flying all day. My feet, you know. Come on now. See.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: We were being nice. You are taking up Doug's time. Be nice. Sorry. The Honourable Member's time. Be nice.

Mr. Chairman, in line with this, objectives can be found on page B-107 and they are broadly in line with the objectives from the previous year. During the past year we were able to move forward in a number of key areas and in this brief, we will highlight the key accomplishments. These include improvement in the collection of tax and pension arrears—(We want to highlight that.)—totalling \$29.5 million, the development and implementation—I should repeat that again. Collection of tax and pension arrears in the amount of \$29.5 million, the development and implementation of landmark corporate income tax legislation, the provision of additional relief to the workers and businesses in Bermuda. As we remember, two years ago we cut payroll taxes for 86 per cent of Bermudians and every single local business, continued compliance with international requirements, the maintenance of strong credit ratings. As we know, our credit ratings continue to be affirmed and continued successful implementation of a sound and prudent fiscal management policy resulting in achieving an estimated surplus in 2024/25 of \$20 million compared to the original budget surplus that was projected of \$210,000.

As we go forward into this coming year, we will continue to build on the strong foundation that has been established with focus on economic growth; maintaining Bermuda's positive reputation as a responsible and reputable international financial centre, executing a prudent fiscal strategy balanced by our commitment to appropriately meeting the needs of the people of Bermuda, while seeking to build a more fair and just society.

I will now speak to the various units and departments that comprise the Ministry of Finance starting with Head 10, Ministry of Finance Headquarters. And as I said, Mr. Chairman, I will defer to the Junior Minister for Heads 11 and 12.

HEAD 10—MINISTRY OF FINANCE HEADQUARTERS (HQ)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry's Headquarters core functions are conducted under Head 10, Ministry of Finance Headquarters which can be found on page B-108. The work undertaken by the Ministry Headquarters is carried out through the following units:

- Policy Planning and Management

- Fiscal Planning and Control
- International Affairs and Regulatory
- Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy
- Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC)

In addition, grants and support are being given to the Bermuda Public Accountability Board, the Tax Reform Commission, the [Casino] Gaming Commission and the Corporate Income Tax Agency.

The Ministry of Finance Headquarters' mission, which is different from the overall Ministry of Finance, of course. But for the Headquarters it is: *Achievement of economic prosperity and to ensure the financial security of Bermuda.*

In discharging its functions under the overall policy direction of the Minister of Finance, the Ministry of Finance HQ seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- A Bermuda that maintains its position as a domicile of choice for international business. Something that clearly, we have been successful in doing.
- A Bermuda where citizens have confidence in Government's stewardship of the public purse. Two consecutive balanced budgets, I think meets that objective.
- A Bermuda where funding and resources are available for key programmes and initiatives. It would see the expansion of funding for health care, investment in social services, security and others. Making sure those resources are made available to the Ministers to execute what the citizens of this country voted for in February.
- Also, a Bermuda where citizens regard Government's policy responses to economic and financial challenges as appropriate and in the national interest.

Mr. Chairman, in seeking to fulfil this mandate, the Ministry of Finance HQ has a [staff] establishment of 19, which is up one from 18 in the prior year, permanent full-time posts as per page B-109 of the Budget Book. Its total budget for the current fiscal year 2025/26 is \$11.82 million, split between operational costs of \$6.20 million and grants of \$5.58 million. Total costs have risen by \$4.20 million, or 64.6 per cent against the original budget but decreased against the 2024/25 revision of \$12.70 million, as you will see in the Budget Book by \$850,000. The noticeable increase in spend from the original budget to the revised estimate is due to an additional \$3.50 million being granted directly to the Corporate Income Tax Agency and an additional \$993,000 being issued to the Policy, Planning and Business Units.

The main driver for this increase is now that the matters related to cyber insurance are also found in this particular head in the amount of \$560,000. A further \$427,000 is to cover the union negotiated wage increases plus the additional head to enable

guarantee management being bought in house. The remaining difference is predominantly due to global tax advice being budgeted within consulting, whereas in the prior year this cost was allocated within the corporate income tax expense. Within the department \$450,000 has been allocated to fund the Tax Reform Commission (via multiple object codes). Funding for the following entities remains the same as the prior year: Bermuda Public Accountancy Board, \$400,000; Gaming Commission, \$800,000; Corporate Income Tax Agency, \$4.78 million; and the Pension Commission, no funding, grants from the Ministry of Finance as they will continue to draw on their cash surpluses.

Revenue Projections

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, a revenue summary for the Ministry of Finance Headquarters can be found on page B-109 of the Budget Book. I am pleased to announce that \$187.5 million has been budgeted within 2025/26 for the first instalment of the Corporate Income Tax which is expected to be received by the Ministry of Finance within the 2024/25 revised estimate. There is an additional \$6.85 million of revenue as the Bermuda Monetary Authority achieved a significant surplus through higher fees and stringent cost control and, of course, more businesses being registered in Bermuda, Mr. Chairman, which of course increases their revenue which means that more revenue can be returned to the public purse to support the ongoing work of the Government.

And therefore, this significant surplus which has been achieved at 50 per cent of the operating surplus net of fines is remitted to the Consolidated Fund. Further, Mr. Chairman, the \$2.6 million in 2023/24 as can be seen . . . it can also be broken down into \$917,000 in re-imbursement costs related to the Morgan's Point project and \$1.7 million relating to legal costs within . . . for the Fairmont Southampton hotel negotiations. And those costs are within Head 58.

Was that clear? You got that, Shadow Minister? Because I just want to make sure you got that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay. Guess he is good. I will move on.

Capital Spend

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the capital spend for 2025/26 can be found on pages C-4 (capital development) and C-11 (capital acquisitions). There are no capital developments for the Ministry of Finance in 2025/26; however, capital acquisitions are budgeted at \$160,000, down from \$866,000 in 2024/25. The majority of this reduction is due to the Ministry not funding the CITA (the Corporate Income Tax Agency)

via a capital grant. Funding for the Corporate Income Tax Agency is via an operational grant which will be supported from income generated from interest on collections and in the short term a loan against this future revenue.

Key Performance Measures

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Key Performance Measures for the Ministry of Finance can be found on page B-110 of the Budget Book.

Bermuda's Gross Domestic Product [GDP], the main measure of economic growth, is estimated to have expanded in real terms between 4.5 per cent and 5.0 per cent in 2024. It is important to note, Mr. Chairman, that follows on the growth that we saw in 2023 which is the highest economic growth of any country in North, South, or Central America. This positive momentum reflects the strength of our international business sector and the continued recovery in tourism, supported by robust job growth, rising employment income, increased visitor arrivals and spending, and continued strong foreign currency earnings.

Looking forward, the Government is prudently budgeting growth of 3.5 per cent in 2025/26, this together with projected revenues from the corporate income tax, will see important metrics for debt and interest ratios reducing in 2025/26, and even further reductions in 2026/27 when at least \$500 million of Bermuda's long-term debt is expected to be paid off and we will see what pans out insofar as collections going forward to see whether or not we will be able to increase that figure to the full \$605 million that comes due.

Cost Centre 20000, Policy Planning and Management

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget estimate for the Policy, Planning and Management unit is \$3.67 million, an increase of \$993,000 or 37.1 per cent over 2024/25. This unit, under the leadership of the Financial Secretary provides advice and support to the Minister of Finance, as well as overall strategic direction, oversight and management of Ministry Headquarters and the departments that comprise the Ministry of Finance.

In addition, this unit manages the administration and other activities associated with the daily operation of the Ministry of Finance Headquarters. It plays a key role in financial accountability of the various quangos, as well as overseeing the general financial and fiscal oversight and accountability throughout the Government. The total staff in the unit is eight persons, one up from the prior year.

The \$993,000 proposed increase in expenditure is primarily related to the points already men-

tioned being insurance, headcount and global tax advice.

The Tax Reform Commission continues to be funded in full by the Ministry in 2025/26. This entity comprises of participants from both political parties, the trade unions, business communities and the third sector. In 2025/26 they will deliver their final report which will be focused on three key areas:

1. Reviewing the implications of the Corporate Income Tax for local and international business. They also have a broader remit to recommend a framework to encourage investment and economic activity in Bermuda through appropriate incentives.
2. Developing a strategy to reduce the cost of living and business operations in Bermuda. This includes evaluating the social and economic impacts of proposed reforms on various demographics and modelling the impacts of revising two larger cost categories—payroll tax and health care—for both individuals and companies.
3. Educate, inform and engage stakeholders to develop their policies and strategies.

Key Highlights for 2024/25 for the Ministry of Finance

Hon. E. David Burt: Key highlights for 2024/25 for the Ministry of Finance are included as follows:

- Coordinating the activities of the International Tax Working group, culminating with the introduction of the matters related to the Corporate Income Tax Agency and additional revisions to Corporation Income Tax legislation that has taken place in the last fiscal year.
- Working with teams to ensure enhanced debt collection. I had spoken about the debt collection metrics earlier.
- Supported the Tax Reform Commission.
- Ensuring more effective administration and coordination of financial and administrative matters in the Ministry.
- Working to ensure even more effective quango and guarantee oversight, which is an important point, Mr. Chairman, that we want to make sure is strengthened.
- Oversight of the Fairmont Southampton [Princess] deal, which was finalised in October 2024, to bring additional beds back to the Island, which will substantially increase tourism revenue. And one thing I would like to point out, Mr. Chairman, is that the Opposition continuously says we spent money on the matter related to the Fairmont Southampton. I think it is important to note that most of those costs were reimbursed and every year the Government is collecting \$750,000 in the form of a guarantee fee which of course is recorded in the Ministry of Finance Headquarters reve-

nue. So, it is important to note that this transaction not only will boost tourism, create jobs, but it is also earning the Government money. Not the other way around. An important fact that we need to note.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Do you yield?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: It is a point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, he yields.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I believe the Premier is inadvertently misleading the public when he says that the Opposition stated that the Government spent money on various things with the Fairmont issue. I believe the Opposition's key concern was that the company that the Government has chosen to support was not able to spend money to pay for the staff layoff costs.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: I am sure there will be robust debate this evening.

Hon. E. David Burt: Far be it from me, Mr. Chairman, to point out that is not a point of order. The Honourable Member will have plenty of time to go ahead, but it is clear that that Member and other persons in the Opposition have said the facts of *give away*, *money spent*, different things and all the rest. It is important for the public to know and Honourable Members that \$750,000 a year will be coming into the Government treasury every year as a part of this deal, which was well negotiated with some of the best advice from lawyers in the jurisdiction and also from other jurisdictions and it is also important to note that most of the costs that were spent were reimbursed as we have seen, as I have just covered inside the Statement. So it is important to note that this is beneficial to the economy and the words around *giving away* and all the rest are not correct.

We will press on and if the Honourable Member wants to press on with that point, I give him advance warning that I will find the quotes from his Honourable Members on that side to make sure that the record reflects exactly what they have engaged in.

We will continue, Mr. Chairman, to talk about things that are being done in 2024/25.

- Managed relationships with sovereign tax rating agencies and assisted in ensuring that Bermuda kept its key sovereign [credit] rating

of A+, a key driver of success for the international business sector.

- Continuing the work of implementing PIPA compliance inside of the Ministry of Finance.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the team who have supported both myself and the Financial Secretary, Mr. Chidozie Ofoego, who joined the Ministry in April 2024 and has successfully navigated the first year in office. Of course, in the Ministry of Finance oftentimes you feel like you are drinking from a firehose, but that is just the nature when you happen to manage an economy that has the best economic performance in the entire North, South and Central America, Mr. Chairman.

For the upcoming year, key projects will include:

- Continue advancement of the Corporate Income tax regime both internally and in partnership with the Corporate Income Tax Agency.
- Work with quangos to further strengthen financial accountability and governance.
- Work with teams to assist in the analysis of costs and to assess the financing options for major projects including health care reform, education reform, and the Tynes Bay Waste-to-Energy Facility replacement.
- Work with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and industry stakeholders to review home insurance regulations and explore policy reforms, a key plank of the Progressive Labour Party's election manifesto.
- Support Chambers to strengthen laws to protect mortgage and lending customers facing financial difficulties, ensuring that banks treat Bermudians fairly in their borrowing practices.
- Continue support for the Tax Reform Commission.
- Support and establish a Sovereign Wealth Fund, an independent body that will invest excess proceeds from the corporate income tax to benefit future generations [of] Bermudians. I would like to repeat that because that work is going to happen.
- Cut red tape by streamlining business setup and operation processes while finalising a "one-stop shop" for registration and licensing to encourage entrepreneurship and local businesses. And of course, Mr. Chairman, that just deals with going to one place rather than having to go to social insurance and payroll tax and somewhere else in order to set up your company.
- Support the Cost of Living Commission and the Ministry of Home Affairs to implement a grocery pricing app to give Bermudians full visibility of the cost of essential goods pricing across the Island while also supporting the

Cost of Living Commission with analysis on reducing the cost of living in Bermuda.

- Manage the budget effectively in light of additional revenues that are forecast from the corporate income tax.
- Streamline customers' requests for duty relief. This is an important mission which I have mentioned previously, Mr. Chairman, because we do pass lots of customs duty reliefs, but these customs duty reliefs can be quite complex for persons to achieve. They often require applications and then gazetting of various notices and we look to streamline that to ensure that the reliefs that we have legislated are more easily able to be accessed. Part of our red tape reduction throughout the Government.
- And also support the important work required to strengthen the financial literacy of our population, helping to empower people to take ownership of their finances and make well-informed financial decisions which is something that I would like to have particular focus on this year.

Cost Centre 20010, Fiscal Planning & Control

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the budget for the Fiscal Planning and Control unit [in 2025/26] is \$589,000 [a 4 per cent increase] which is marginally up on the prior year due to wage increases. Salaries make up over 80 per cent of the Budget Team's allocation [for 2025/26] and provides for a four-person team led by the Budget Director. Congratulations must be offered to our long-serving Budget Director Tina Tucker who after many years as Budget Director has stepped up into the role of Acting Deputy Financial Secretary handling economic and fiscal affairs.

Mr. Chairman, the Budget Team has continued its significant work to manage overall Government expenditures and increase revenues. This work has resulted in the reductions of budget deficits over the past years and enabled the Government to provide additional support to Bermudians and their families. Notwithstanding, we also have been able to maintain or exceed our targets as we move forward in achieving budget surpluses in the future.

Mr. Chairman, the Budget Statement detailed the final performance in 2023/24, which resulted in a \$29.5 million deficit, a \$14 million reduction in the original deficit projection of \$43.5 million.

During last year, in the Budget Statement, of course, Mr. Chairman, you note that I announced that the Government was expecting its first balanced budget in 21 years. And as we stated during the budget presentation the estimate is for a \$19.7 million Consolidated Fund surplus which is \$19.5 million higher than the original projection.

It is important to note, Mr. Chairman, that the 2025/26 budget marks a turning point for Bermuda. For the first time in over two decades, our fiscal planning is no longer going to be consumed by managing deficit after deficit. Instead, we stand today with a budget surplus, a strengthening economy, and later this year, we will expect to receive the first revenue inflows from Bermuda's new corporate income tax.

Continuing to move on and I know that on a broad measure we are dealing particularly with the Ministry of Finance, but I know there were some questions regarding budgeting overall when we are talking about fiscal management and control and budgeting throughout all particular ministries when it comes to matters related to salaries and wages. And it is important to note, Mr. Chairman, that it was erroneous statements in the Budget Reply which spoke to the fact that we are including money in salaries and wages to be spent elsewhere. That is not correct.

In fiscal planning and control, money that is assigned for salaries can only be used for salaries. It cannot be used for anything else. So, money that is assigned and budgeted for salaries does not all of a sudden get used in another place and another space. That is the reason why we have been able to maintain a strict budget control and beat our financial target year after year after year. So it is important to note, Mr. Chairman, that was another misrepresentation by the Opposition. But I am sure that the Shadow Minister may have something to say during his particular comments. But it is important that I point out the facts.

Mr. Chairman, this 2025/26 budget of course consists of further tax reductions to provide relief to taxpayers and increased expenditures to support health care investments for Bermuda's residents. And of course, the main highlights for the budget estimates are that the revenue is expected to reach \$1.43 billion, which is 16.0 per cent or \$198 million above the original estimates for fiscal year 2024/25. And we note the \$118 million increase in current account expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, with all those matters particularly being stated, we are expecting a second projected Consolidated Fund surplus of \$43.3 million which is more than double the surplus that we were expecting for fiscal year 2024/25.

The Budget Team will continue its work to achieve and maintain budget surpluses, through fiscal discipline and financial management. And during the 2025/26 year the unit has set the following objectives:

- Provide support for the open/participatory budget process. This was something that was inside of our election manifesto which I am looking forward to advance this year. And when we talk about participatory budgeting, it is allowing persons in the public to have more say into the budget priorities which form the budget on an annual basis.
- Continue development of budget preparation methodology site. This is a separate website

that has been set up to assist various departments in their budget prep and also by making sure that those particular zero-based budgeting and other things can be entered into this system to make the production of budgets easier.

- Succession planning in the Fiscal Planning and Control Unit which of course is very important, Mr. Chairman.

Cost Centre 20020, International Affairs & Regulatory

Hon. E. David Burt: The budget estimate for the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit is found on page B-108. The budget estimate for this unit in is \$738,000 an increase of \$55,000 or 8.0 per cent over the prior year.

The International Affairs Unit is the lead policy division within the Ministry of Finance Headquarters in relation to the financial services sector and the corporate sector. The International Affairs Unit is organised into two units and one department. The International Affairs Unit primarily formulates policy while the Office of National Anti-Money Laundering and the Registrar of Companies manage aspects of Bermuda's compliance with international standards.

The International Affairs Unit is accountable to the Financial Secretary for the effective discharge of the unit's functions and through the Premier and Minister of Finance to Cabinet and Parliament. The head of the unit, the Deputy Financial Secretary (International Affairs and Regulation), carries out financial services policies primarily through the Ministry of Finance; coordination with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and also with the Attorney General's Chambers and the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee; the Bermuda Public Accountability Board; the Chartered Professional Accountants of Bermuda; the Registrar of Companies; and specialist domestic and global partners. In this way, the International Affairs Unit works to strengthen the financial services supervisory framework and key institutions that enables access to the domestic economy and also the global economy.

Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit operates in response to a broad range of opportunities and risks, which allows the Ministry to contribute actively to a continuous flow of information on potential threats and opportunities to Bermuda and its reputation. Those opportunities and risks are constantly changing.

The International Affairs Unit's plan responds to these challenges through various goals focused on advancing the unit's priorities and reflecting the outcomes the people of Bermuda deserve.

I will now cover those goals:

- Goal 1: To ensure and support the fair, impartial, efficient, and transparent development of

regulation at the national and international levels.

- Goal 2: To strengthen capacity and to secure regulatory solutions to economic security issues.
- Goal 3: To strengthen public diplomacy and support bilateral and multilateral engagement.

Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit is involved in a variety of policy and management areas from regulatory reform and financial stability to anti-money laundering and market access issues at home and abroad. Globally, the International Affairs Unit contributes to international meetings either in person, via the Registrar of Companies or the Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Unit.

The scope of the International Affairs Unit's activities are as follows:

- to support the Minister of Finance and the Financial Secretary in coordinating the financial services regulatory policy initiatives of the Government;
- to oversee the Ministry of Finance component of the financial services legislative programme together with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and the Ministry of Justice
- to provide policy and strategic advice to the Minister of Finance and the Financial Secretary on anti-money laundering policy initiatives together with the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee, pursuant to Section 49 of the Proceeds of Crime Act [1997];
- to provide policy and strategic advice to the Minister of Finance and the Financial Secretary on matters related to transparency, together with financial services and related directives issued by the European Union together with the Cabinet Office, the Brussels Office, the London Office, and EU Specialists; and finally
- to provide policy and strategic advice to the Financial Policy Council together with other domestic agencies and or committees regarding matters related to financial services.

Measures and Indicators of Success

- Full implementation of Budget Statements and Throne Speeches.
- Pledges, promotion of policy approaches at home and abroad that foster a level playing field in the area of financial services.
- Regular and normalised sharing of information affecting the financial services sector at home and abroad.
- Improved processes for registering corporate entities in Bermuda.

Full Implementation of Recommendations made for the Financial Policy Council, and the Fiscal Responsibility Panel Where Appropriate (And I am sure we will get to debate that a little bit later, Mr. Chairman.)

- Improved quality of finance market analysis.
- Timely completion of international assessments, and timely publication of international assessments, where required.

Mr. Chairman, in order to achieve its priorities, and pursuant to the Ministry of Finance's Business Plan, the Unit will undertake the following key strategic ownership goals in 2025/26:

1) Matters Related to the European Union

Hon. E. David Burt: The International Affairs and Regulatory Unit will work with the Cabinet Office, the Bermuda Monetary Authority, the Brussels Office and EU Counsel to coordinate Bermuda's compliance with various EU directives.

This will include the provision of technical and strategic advice on legislative and policy matters. This work also includes preparation for regular visits by the Minister of Finance to meet with key EU stakeholders.

2) Matters Related to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee and Compliance with the Financial Action Task Force International Standards on Combating Money Laundering and the Financing of Terrorism and Proliferation

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit will contribute to and support the implementation of Bermuda's Anti-Money Laundering Strategy together with the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC). This work includes the provision of strategic and technical advice regarding matters related to the Bermuda's compliance with the standards set down by the Financial Action Task Force.

3) Matters Related to the United Kingdom

Hon. E. David Burt: International Affairs Unit will work with the Cabinet Office on matters related to the financial services sector together with the Bermuda Monetary Authority, the London Office and specialist partners. This work includes the provision of technical and strategic advice on matters related to equivalence and transparency including [public] registers of beneficial ownership and the legitimate interest access in accordance with international standards.

4) Matters Related to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (the OECD)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit will work with the Registrar of Companies to coordinate the Ministry of Finance response to OECD assessments as and when required. This includes providing technical and strategic advice on all aspects of Bermuda's corporate and regulatory framework.

5) The Gaming Commission

Hon. E. David Burt: The International Affairs Unit will work with the Gaming Commission to further assess the supervisory framework. As for other sectors, this work is expected to include the provision of technical and strategic advice on the relevant aspects of the regime in Bermuda.

6) The Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation

Hon. E. David Burt: The International Affairs Unit will work with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and the Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation to continue with the development of Bermuda's bank resolution framework.

Mr. Chairman, in [these] ways, the Regulatory Unit helps supervisors and businesses articulate the regulatory, market access and related challenges they face to the Government and to the public.

Mr. Chairman, looking back to 2024/25, the International Affairs Unit was primarily focused on technical and strategic assistance regarding the financial services sector. Additional milestones achieved by the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit in the prior fiscal year included:

- Maintained regulatory stability by ensuring the completion of the Ministry of Finance component of 10 financial services sector Bills and/or statutory instruments including but not limited to banks; investment business; currency/coins and the corporate framework.
- In collaboration with the Ministry of Finance colleagues, provide strategic advice on supervisory assessments and in sovereign rating meetings. This includes participation in technical meetings with rating agencies, government to government meetings with other Overseas Territories together with participation in meetings with the Financial Policy Council.
- As appropriate, the International Affairs Unit provided technical advice on relevant UK, US and European Union matters, as well as assisted in advocacy and domestic and external engagement initiatives. This includes participation in monthly executive and technical meetings with the Bermuda Monetary Authority, quarterly meetings with the Financial Policy Council, or as I said, meetings three times a year with the Financial Policy Council and annual meetings with the Fiscal Responsibility Panel.

Mr. Chairman, the unit's primary role going forward in the next year will be to continue to work with the relevant Finance teams; the Cabinet Office; the Attorney General's Chambers; the Bermuda Monetary Authority; the Gaming Commission; the Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Bermuda

Public Accountability Board to meet Bermuda's domestic and international commitments and to continue to implement the structural adjustments to the International Affairs Unit as outlined earlier in this particular statement.

Mr. Chairman, the salary provision of \$433,500, accounts for 59 per cent of this unit's allocation which covers three posts, an increase of \$19,000 which is due to Union mandated pay increases. The remaining \$36,000 increase in expenditure is necessary to support the cost of external specialists required to assist the Ministry in accomplishing its financial services mandates.

Cost Centre 20030, Domestic Affairs & Economic Policy

Hon. E. David Burt: The budget allocation for this unit is \$306,000. This unit is led by the Deputy Financial Secretary, Domestic and Economic, where, as I mentioned earlier the Budget Direction Ms. Tina Tucker, who leads the Budget Office is currently acting as the Deputy Financial Secretary in this role. This will provide leadership and oversight to the Accountant General's Department, the Department of Social Insurance, the Office of the Tax Commissioner and Customs (as it relates to revenue matters). The team also provides research and analysis of economic and international conditions to help facilitate sound decisions on public policy, fiscal, debt and guarantee management. The unit also manages relationships with credit rating agencies.

Of course, Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that this unit has supported the assessment of several rating throughout 2024/25 and has resulted in Bermuda's ratings continuing to be affirmed by Standard & Poors, Moody's and KBRA. Standard & Poors issued their 2025 report only this week and they have re-affirmed Bermuda's A+ long-term rating and A1 short-term rating with an outlook of *Stable*. Equally of note we are hopeful that Bermuda's already impressive standing will be further upgraded if the economic targets that have been set with the implementation of corporate income tax do manifest as expected.

Once the budget is complete, the Deputy Financial Secretary can turn her attention to the post of successful oversight of domestic and economic matters, support the tax reform work and enhance financial reporting.

Other key initiatives of this particular unit include:

- Continuing to improve the sustainability of the government's pension funds, particularly the Public Service Superannuation Fund (PSSF) and the Contributory Pension Fund (CPF) in an updated framework that allows for progressive contributions. In addition to the proposed change in the contribution structure, adjustments will also have to be made to the other

levers, namely the time that persons can receive or the age of which persons can receive social insurance benefits and also, as we said, contributions as well.

- Working with a leading audit firm who has provided a draft scope designed to assist the Accountant General's department in bringing the outstanding audits of the Pension Funds up to date. We recognise the importance of these particular efforts as part of the wider work on pension reform and sustainability and have taken the decision to enlist additional resources to address both challenges within the current fiscal year.
- Continuing to work on the development of economic models for the forecasting of key economic indicators and Government medium term fiscal data to, among other things, enhance the execution of the government's fiscal and economic management strategy and considerations for the reform of the tax system. We do have very complex models inside the Ministry of Finance, Mr. Chairman, but we are going to look to update those particular models. And we update those models every year in line with the projections that are made and the actual outturns to make sure that those things can be better fine-tuned to give better projections going forward.
- Working with the relevant teams to ensure a more coordinated and effective approach to debt collection. We have stated the successes of which we have seen in this area.
- In conjunction with the Ministry of Public Works, I am sure that the Shadow Minister for Public Works who is not in the Chamber currently, which is fine, but something that he would certainly want to know, is completion of the long-overdue plan for the formation of a Government-owned captive insurance company to further reduce costs and create efficiencies in relation to the provision of insurance for Government assets. Something, Mr. Chairman, that I am particularly bothered that we have not been able to advance to completion but we are going to continue to press to try (hopefully) to get that done this year.
- Working with the teams in the division to effectively progress systems upgrades and digitalisation work to promote more effective provision of tax and pension collections and government services. And of course, the Budget Statement mentions some of the progress that is being made in certain areas of the Ministry on that.

Cost Centre 20100, Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee

Spend Analysis and Employment Numbers

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Office of NAMLC's budget for the fiscal year 2025/26 is \$936,000, an increase of \$57,000 from the previous financial year. The increase is in part due to the increase to accommodate the union agreed pay increases but also to allow for more necessary travel in 2025/26. This budget represents the minimum level of funding required to successfully provide core secretariat services to NAMLC, including Bermuda meeting its financial obligation to the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force [CFATF]. A separate grant of \$415,000 was received in 2024/25 from the confiscated assets fund to progress a range of national initiatives in preparation for Bermuda's upcoming mutual evaluation in 2025/26. The balance as of 31 March 2025 is \$242,243. This balance will be spent in 2025/26. And that balance, Mr. Chairman, represents out of the \$415,000 that was used from the confiscated assets fund to support the work of NAMLC through various ministries as is allowed under the Proceeds of Crime Act.

The salary provision for the Office of NAMLC in 2025/26 is \$536,000, represents 57.28 per cent of the total cost and covers three posts. This is in line with the 2024/25 budget. Mr. Chairman, you will note that on page B-109 the revised headcount stands at two. Recruitment for the post of Junior Legal is now closed and we are assessing the suitability of the candidates who applied. It is hoped that this position can be filled in short order. As already mentioned, the NAMLC office has an increased travel budget of \$30,000 in 2025/26. This is to facilitate participation in several critical overseas conferences and training sessions which will enable the Office of NAMLC to prepare for Bermuda's forthcoming mutual evaluation. Notably the CFATF plenaries in May and November 2025. Provision is also made for Bermuda's annual membership contribution to the CFATF of \$100,000.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (Office of NAMLC) is to provide secretariat support to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee, and to enable the Government to advance its anti-money laundering, anti-terrorist financing and counter proliferation financing policy initiatives thereby ensuring an effective regime. You can see the detailed objectives on page B-107 (objective 10).

NAMLC ensures that Bermuda has a strong and effective regime to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and the financing of proliferation; and the competent authorities within NAMLC assist international counterparts in the effort to address these issues on a global scale through its established coordination, cooperation, and accountability mechanisms.

Hon. E. David Burt: During the prior fiscal year the Office of the NAMLC has continued its critical focus on maintaining and, where needed, enhancing the effectiveness of Bermuda's AML framework through the progress of several initiatives geared towards ensuring that we are technically compliant with the revised FATF standards and ensuring our preparedness for the 5th Round Mutual Evaluation which is scheduled to commence in October 2026. The 5th Round is focused on the effective implementation of AML/ATF and counter proliferation laws.

It is in this vein the following actions were undertaken by NAMLC in the previous fiscal year:

(i) Due to the changes in the FATF standards and also some deficiencies highlighted in our 2020 Mutual Evaluation Report, NAMLC completed a technical and operational gap analysis which sought to identify any gaps within our legislation and operational frameworks.

(ii) NAMLC has also organised and managed the review of the updating of Bermuda's National AML Policy to reflect Bermuda's updated understanding of money laundering and terrorist financing and proliferation financing risks, as well as to reflect the changes to the international standards and best practices. Updates to this policy were approved by Cabinet in November 2024.

(iii) Further, NAMLC has coordinated, managed and updated Bermuda's understanding of its money laundering and terrorist financing risks and the financing thereof are documented in the 2024 Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing National Risk Assessment report. This risk assessment is completed and will be subjected to ratification by Cabinet prior to publication.

(iv) NAMLC procured technical assistance for conducting Bermuda's first Proliferation Financing National Risk Assessment which commenced in January 2025 with work being undertaken with AML/ATF supervisors and competent authorities. The expected completion date is 2 July 2025.

(v) In preparation for the 5th Round Mutual Evaluation NAMLC secured training from the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) for all competent authorities on the revised FATF standards. This training was conducted virtually on 6 February 2025.

(vi) NAMLC developed an internal assessment which focused on the FATF's immediate outcomes and revised technical standards to ensure that Bermuda identifies any gaps within its AML/ATF framework and corrective measures are undertaken prior to Bermuda's upcoming evaluation. An independent reviewer was contracted to ensure Bermuda's written submissions are reviewed against the standard followed by an onsite which took place last week, 5 May through 9 May) which probes further into our AML/ATF framework. The reviewers will then pro-

vide their findings to AML/ATF competent authorities, permanent secretaries and heads of agencies.

Key Initiatives for Upcoming Financial Year

Hon. E. David Burt: NAMLC's focus continues to be to ensure that Bermuda maintains its position as a global leader in the fight to combat money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing. Of critical importance is our 5th Round Mutual Evaluation scheduled to commence in October 2026. This evaluation will focus on technical compliance where deficiencies were identified and those standards with significant revisions which are termed Recommendations Under Review [RUR]. The evaluation is primarily one of effectiveness which requires Bermuda to demonstrate how effective it has been for the last five years since its mutual evaluation in implementation of the FATF standards.

Mr. Chairman, the key national initiatives for which the office will provide support to NAMLC during the financial year 2025/26, the majority will be funded by a grant in accordance with section 55A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1997, are as follows:

- i. Agencies are required to develop an action plan to ensure that all gaps identified are remediated prior to the end of this year to allow time to demonstrate effectiveness. The identification of technical and effective compliance gaps was completed last week for which the final report was produced.
- ii. Continue to coordinate, manage and provide technical leadership in the publication of the 2024 Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing National Risk Assessment and ensure the proliferation financing risk assessment is completed within the timeframe.
- iii. Continued training of NAMLC's senior executives, technical officers, public service executives and responsible Ministers in relation to the revised FATF Standards and Methodology, as well as to expose them to the new procedures that will apply to Bermuda's 5th Round Mutual Evaluation.
- iv. Providing of technical support to the supervisors for the Designated Non-Financial Business and Professions (lawyers, accountants, real estate, high-value dealers and dealers in precious metals and stones) through secondment of supervisory expert to the Office of NAMLC.
- v. Keeping abreast of any further revisions to FATF standards that may impact Bermuda's 5th Round Mutual Evaluation which may require legislative changes to ensure technical compliance.
- vi. Organise and manage NAMLC's review of Bermuda's National anti-money laundering policies to propose updates for the considera-

tion of Cabinet and to ensure that Bermuda's national policy is updated to reflect Bermuda's updated understanding of money laundering and terrorist financing and proliferation financing risks which arise out of the aforementioned risk assessments.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, in order to progress all of these initiatives, and you can see there are quite a few, especially running up to a mutual evaluation, the Chair and Office team will continue to work closely with the National Anti-Money Laundering Cabinet Committee, NAMLC member agencies and other stakeholders.

I wish to at this point in time thank Ms. Cheryl Lister, OBE, who after her time as Acting Financial Secretary and advisor to the Ministry of Finance returns to the position of Chair of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee. Equally, I would like to thank Ms. Kozel Creese, our national co-ordinator who since joining in January 2024 has significantly advanced the department in our coordination work in this particular area.

Cost Centre 20070, Pension Commission

Hon. E. David Burt: Grant of zero, which is a 100 per cent decrease. Mr. Chairman, as a result of significant cash reserves held by the Commission which have grown over the last few years due to the increase in regulatory fees and effective cost control, no grant was allocated to the Pension Commission for this upcoming year.

As we know, Mr. Chairman, the Pension Commission is a corporate body established under the National Pension Scheme (Occupational Pensions) Act 1998. The Commission has responsibility for the administration of the Pension Trust Funds Act 1966 and pension trusts established and administered under this Act.

In 2024 the Commission provided policy advice and guidance to the Ministry of Finance relating to the capping of administration fees charged by pension plan administrators, providing for greater domestic investment opportunities for plan members and first-time homeowner refunds.

With respect to the capping of fees, the Commission is working to introduce the regulations later this year. Government has announced and we of course legislated the fact that there will be limits for defined contribution employer plans, that the fees should not exceed

- 1.25 per cent per year for members with balances over \$50,000
- 0.75 per cent per year for balances between \$25,000 and \$50,000
- 0.5 per cent per year for balances less than \$25,000

With respect to first-time homeowner refunds specific legislation commenced in December 2024 in which members or former members of a defined contribution pension plan or local retirement product who has not attained normal retirement age may apply to the Commission for a first-time homeowner refund for the purchase of a principal residence in Bermuda, by themselves, husband, wife or child.

An applicant under the age of 45 years of age may receive a refund of up to 30 per cent of their pension plan account balance and an applicant who is 45 years of age or older but has not yet attained the age of 65 years of age, may receive a refund of up to 15 per cent of their pension plan account balance to be applied directly toward a downpayment further boosting all the work, Mr. Chairman, that this Government is doing to promote home ownership and as the Junior Minister of Finance said in his presentation last week, *Let the numbers speak for themselves*.

With respect to other areas of responsibility, the Commission experienced a significant year over year increase in the following:

- fielding queries and providing assistance via email;
- 25 per cent lump sum refund applications;
- financial hardship refund applications;
- financial hardship withdrawal meetings; and
- meetings with plan members;

During 2024 the Commission

- approved 409 lump sum refunds compared to 321 in 2023;
- wound-up 54 plans compared to 69 in the prior year;
- registered 117 plan amendments compared to 157 in the prior year;
- approved zero plan trustees in comparison to 15 in the prior year;
- initiated 6 civil actions against delinquent employers and their directors and officers compared to 15 in 2023;
- conducted 365 compliance meetings with employers and plan members compared to 176 in the prior year;
- held 4 compliance meetings with plan administrators compared to 10 in 2023;
- participated in 27 public and/or advisory [committee] meetings compared to 9 in 2023; and
- Completed 6 transactions under the Pension Trust Funds Act 1966 compared to 16 in 2023.

As of 31 December 2024 (based on estimates), Mr. Chairman,

- The National Pension Scheme contained 47,455 Plan Members/Formers Members.

- There was a total of 3,255 Employer Plans, of which 3,240 of them were Defined Contribution and only 15 Defined Benefit.
- The total value of assets under the National Pension Scheme is estimated at \$4.36 billion, Mr. Chairman (that is billion with a “B”).
- There were 498 Self-Employed Plans; and
- \$87,108 of plan assets were transferred to Overseas Retirement Vehicles, compared with zero dollars in 2023.

Mr. Chairman, the National Pension Scheme (Financial Hardship) Regulations 2010 allows Bermudians with a demonstrated financial need to get access to a portion of their private sector pension funds, based on prescribed criteria for hardship. Every year I do provide statistics on this and I will provide these as well as follows.

As noted for 2024:

- Total applications received—169;
- Approved applications—120;
- Declined applications—32;
- Applications pending and/or withdrawn—17;
- Total amount approved for withdrawal from pension balances was \$2,056,304. Which, of course, is a small amount when compared to the \$4.6 billion amount that is there.

Applications Approved by Type:

- Eligible Educational Expenses—69;
- Imminent Threat of Loss of Principal Residence—10;
- Imminent Eviction from Home for Rental Arrears—27;
- Eligible Medical Expenses—10;
- Funeral Expenses—4.

The Chairman: Please hold there, Minister.

For the benefit of the listening public and Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are now debating the Ministry of Finance. The Honourable Premier, who is also the Minister of Finance, is giving the presentation on Head 10. This debate began at four o'clock exactly. It is now five o'clock, so we have exactly three hours remaining.

Sometime thereafter, and within those three hours, the Shadow Minister of Finance will be given clinical questions.

Minister, you may resume.

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

Looking ahead to the current fiscal year with regard to the upcoming fiscal year, the Pension Commission has a number of goals:

1. to continue to review issues and challenges facing the occupational pension plan sector in Bermuda in order to make recommenda-

- tions to the Minister of Finance on further legislative and/or policy adjustments;
2. to improve the understanding and compliance by regulated entities with key regulatory issues;
 3. to introduce a financial awareness campaign on the importance of saving and retirement planning and the important role occupational pension plans play in achieving successful outcomes;
 4. to continue to enhance the Commission's financial independence and sustainability via the identification of additional sources of revenue;
 5. to further the completion of the aforementioned regulations to ensure that the matters that have been legislated by this House are able to be put in effect, specifically with the caps on pension plan balances; and finally
 6. to continue to complete outstanding audits.

2025/26 Projected Revenue and Expenditure Items

Hon. E. David Burt: The Commission's projected revenue for 2025/26 is \$1,350,000, primarily from regulatory fees and collections. The projected total expenses for the year is \$2,000,000, which is salaries for 10 staff members and makes up \$1.6 million of the budget.

The 2024/25 cost estimate is \$1.52 million, an increase of \$540,000. An increase in salaries, and headcount from seven to ten, accounts for \$380,000 of the increase.

The resulting projected position is a net deficit of \$710,000, which will be funded from cash reserves.

Before I move on, Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my thanks to the staff in the Pension Commission for their continued work in the past year.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I will move on.

Cost Centre 20110—Gaming Commission

Hon. E. David Burt: The budget estimate for the grant contribution for the Gaming Commission is \$800,000. This represents partial funding for the Commission. The remainder of their income will be generated by the collection of external fees, primarily from cruise ship operators who apply for permission to open their casinos whilst in port in Bermuda.

The total projected expenditure of the Commission for 2025/26 is \$1.5 million, which is a significant reduction from the 2024/25 budget of \$1.9 million, and a reduction from the 2023/24 budget of \$2.4 million.

The funding will support the Commission in executing the programmes set out in the 2025/26 workplan, which includes continuing to support the resolution of banking services being provided to casino operators and exploring potential new lines of

business for the jurisdiction to ensure that the Commission can be self-funding.

During fiscal year 2024/25, the Commission's focus has been on investigating new lines of business and matters related to corresponding banking challenges. And those new lines of business of course, Mr. Chairman, revolve around sports betting, national broader lottery issues and matters related to online gaming as well.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to the team at the Commission who have generally exercised significant fiscal prudence. We know they come under a lot of criticism. And of course we understand that it is politically difficult to have a Gaming Commission that regulates the gaming sector in Bermuda. But recognising that there are no operating casinos in the country due to the banking challenges, we are continuing to work through these particular matters. And we recognise that they are being funded at a bare level to continue their particular operations and have worked downsized or reduced, including moving officers and making sure that they are being fiscally prudent in that regard.

Cost Centre 20120—Corporate Income Tax, Grant

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, in late 2023, as we all will know, we passed the Bermuda Corporate Income Tax Act 2023. We know that it was a significant achievement representing strong and positive collaboration and consultation with our international business sector. The genesis of this initiative and subsequent work was Pillar 2 of a global agreement reached in 2021 under the auspices of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] and signed by more than 140 countries. This agreement requires a 15 per cent tax to be levied on a jurisdictional basis for in-scope entities and is commonly referred to as the Global Minimum Tax (GMT) Agreement.

The OECD has issued model rules as part of this framework for the implementation of the GMT, and these rules were the foundation for the development of Bermuda's regime to be considered compliant with these requirements. The Act imposes a 15 per cent corporate income statutory tax that will be applicable to Bermuda businesses that are part of a multinational group with annual revenue exceeding €750 million. The Corporate Income Tax legislation came into effect on the 1 January of this year; that would be 2025.

In formulating its position and moving forward with legislation, Bermuda held multiple consultations on corporate income tax administration. The two public consultations held this year (2025) have focused on enforcement and broader provisions relating to the administration of the Corporate Income Tax Act 2023.

Under the new legislation, Mr. Chairman, full-year tax filings for the 2025 tax year will be due in

2026. The first instalment of tax is due for payment in August 2025. As per page B-109 of the Budget Book, this is estimated at \$187.5 million for fiscal year 2025/26.

The administration of the regime will be the responsibility of the Corporation Income Tax Agency [CITA]. This entity was created and enacted in July 2024 after the implementation of the Corporate Income Tax Agency Act 2024. The aim of the agency is to continue to develop and implement an appropriate and effective corporate income tax regime to meet the changing global tax environment. Operationally its primary functions include taxpayer services, return filing and processing, audit and compliance, enforcement and collections, dispute resolution, and law interpretation and International Tax Cooperation.

CITA is being developed on the basis of incorporating the appropriate key structural elements of our well-respected financial services regulator with modified characteristics to take into account the difference in responsibilities between a regulator and a tax authority.

As we know, Mr. Chairman, the Corporate Income Tax Agency has hired an experienced tax professional as CEO at the beginning of 2025. His task is to build out and deliver the strategy for the Corporate Income Tax Agency, which includes the hiring of other employees required to build out and operate the agency.

The Corporate Income Tax Agency has been granted an operational grant of \$4.78 million in 2025/26 (a \$3.5 million or 274 per cent increase) which is in line with the current year spend. Further funding will be required in the current year to support successful implementation of the IT systems and infrastructure and to ensure there are the required staff and related resources. It is envisaged that the Corporate Income Tax Agency will be self-funding in future years through the interest from revenues that they collect, and any additional funding for this year will likely be as a loan against that future expected revenue.

I wish to, Mr. Chairman, thank all of the team in the Ministry of Finance Headquarters, which has been led by Financial Secretary [Chidozie] Ofoego, who as mentioned took on the role in April 2024, and all of the deputy financial secretaries and the staff in the Ministry of Finance, for their remarkable work in supporting the Minister of Finance and the Junior Ministers of Finance in ensuring that we continue to execute these items for the benefit of the citizens of this country.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes remarks for the Estimates of Head 10.

I shall happily defer the podium or microphone to the Junior Minister of Finance for Heads 11 and 12.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister of Finance.

The Chair now recognises the Junior Minister of Finance, Wayne Furbert.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I am carrying the baton on for the Premier and Minister of Finance for Head 11 and Head 12.

HEAD 11—ACCOUNTANT GENERAL

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I now present the budget for the Accountant General's Department (Head 11) which is found on pages B-111, B-115 and C-11.

The Accountant General's Department was established under section 4 of the Public Treasury (Administration and Payments) Act 1969. The department has responsibilities for the administration of the Consolidated Fund, and accounts for and reports on the other public funds which are all subject to their own legislations. The functions and responsibilities of the Accountant General's Department are critically important in the role of governance. The department is key in helping to undergird the financial controls and processes that are in place with respect to the public purse.

The department's mission statement is, *To develop and maintain quality financial reporting, employee health insurance, treasury function, internal control and effective use of technology to aid in decision-making.*

The department is divided into two programme centres, as follows:

1101—Consolidated Fund Administration, which oversees all of the activities of the Consolidated Fund. This is further broken out into six sections:

- Policy Planning and Management—developing long-term goals and strategies in alignment with governmental priorities and general administration of the department;
- Financial Reporting—accounting for and reporting on the Consolidated Fund and the other public funds;
- Compliance and Disbursement—execution of payments for purchased goods and services;
- Revenue Receipting and Treasury Management—collecting and recording of Government revenues including fees and taxes, cash management and forecasting, administration of the investment of the pension funds under management and risk management, and insurance. The total pension funds' investments under management are \$2.76 billion, broken out as follows: PSS Fund—\$613.2 million, and CPF—\$2.16 billion;
- Bank Reconciliation—reconciliation of all Government's bank accounts;
- Financial Systems—management of the Enterprise system supporting the Government's accounting platform; and

- The department also has legislative responsibility for benefits (employee pension deductions) administration.

1102—Fund Administration, which represents the Government's share of employee benefits programmes, namely,

- Public Service Superannuation Fund (PSSF);
- Contributory Pension Fund (Social Insurance) (CPF);
- Government Employees Health Insurance Scheme (GEHI) and administration of the scheme and payment of health claims; and
- Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund (MMLPF).

The department continues to operate at staffing levels below its total complement. Forty-one posts are budgeted in 2025/26, an increase of three heads from the 2024/25 budget. The increase is predominantly down to full year impact of staffing, following recruitment of two key posts to support the audit process. Currently there are five vacancies within the department. Notwithstanding the vacancies, the department persists in efforts to identify efficiencies within its approved organisational structure.

General accomplishments in fiscal 2024/25 are as follows:

- Completion of the online payment portal, one of the first revenue stream utilising, is for the payment of parking tickets.
- Worked with several government departments to increase automation/digitisation of financial processes.
- Worked closely with the Office of the Auditor General and Ministries to complete the annual audit of the Consolidated Fund and progress the audits of the other public funds.
- Delivered scheduled Financial Instructions training in conjunction with the Department of Employee and Organisational Development.
- The Compliance and Disbursement section continues to make vendor payments timely and accurately notwithstanding staffing challenges.
- Treasury functions and other operational service levels were maintained throughout the year.
- As well as these accomplishments, as you will see from the KPIs on page B-114, the department has managed to succeed in 17 of its 18 measures, or a 94 per cent success rate. The only measure that was not achieved was timing of year-end files. This was due to a labour shortage which has now been rectified by the recruitment of two management accountants.

Mr. Chairman, the Accountant General's Department has been allocated a total budget of \$106.7

million for the fiscal 2025/26 year which is broken out as follows:

- Consolidated Fund Administration estimate—\$6.31 million;
- Fund Administration estimate—\$100 million; and
- Capital estimate—\$153,000.

This budgetary allocation represents an increase of \$20.15 million, or 23 per cent above the 2024/25 original estimates—which is primarily due to the additional \$19.3 million of Government's contributions to the GEHI scheme of which \$18 million is part of the Government's investment in health care and a start in funding the recent years of shortfalls from the GEHI Fund. Also, to support the shortfall GEHI rates will be increased for public sector employees and the remainder of the increase is due to the Government's matching contribution.

The 2025/26 Revenue estimate is \$500,000, a decrease of \$1.4 million, or 75 per cent, below the 2024/25 original estimate. This revenue primarily relates to interest earned on the investments in the Sinking Fund.

The Current Account Estimates can be found on pages B-111 and B-112.

Explanation of Significant Programme Expenditure Changes

1101 (PAGE B-111): CONSOLIDATED FUND ADMINISTRATION

(\$6.31 million—Increase of \$342,000, or 6 per cent)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The current year's request reflects an increase of \$342,000, which is primarily reflective of the uplift in salaries from the recently concluded salary negotiations and increases in staffing level from the recruitment for two vacant posts. It should be noted that the items that drive the department's overall expenditures are salaries, technical support maintenance fees for the various software systems used by the ACG and rent for premises occupied at 51 Church Street.

1102 (PAGE B-111) FUND ADMINISTRATION (\$100.24 million—Increase of \$19.8 Million, or 25 per cent)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: This programme represents the Government's cost for employees' benefits. These costs are a function of the number of Government employees and the rates relating to the respective benefits (Employer Overhead). For example, Contributory Pension (Social Insurance) is directly related to the national Contributory Pensions rates of contribution.

As the employer, the Government ordinarily matches its employees' contributions to the PSSF, Social Insurance contributions (CPF), GEHI contribu-

tions (premiums), except for Police, Corrections, and the Regiment, for which the Government pays both the employer and employee share, and the Ministers' and Members' contributions to the MMLPF. Contributions made into the PSSF and CPF are invested to fund future pension payments to vested retired Government personnel. The increase in the 2025/26 estimates for the Government's cost for employees' benefits is primarily reflective of the additional overheads expected from funding increases for PSSF and GEHI contributions and the additional \$18 million being provided to fund the annual GEHI deficit.

The GEHI Scheme has experienced annual deficits in recent years. This year the estimated deficit of \$31 million will be partially funded by an additional \$18 million from the Consolidated Fund. As part of the agreement with the Unions for public sector employees the GEHI contribution rates will be increased by \$600 per year over the next three years to close this shortfall. The Minister of Finance will also continue to review further options for delivering value for money to GEHI to protect the public purse, including the recent measure to ensure that the lowest cost is paid to pharmacies for identical medication.

Capital Estimates

PAGE C-11: CAPITAL FUNDING
(\$153,000—A Decrease of \$127,000)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Technical support and ongoing maintenance will be required in the 2025/26 fiscal year as the Oracle E1 System is continually enhanced to improve the business processes and other important services provided. The department's focus remains on leveraging the latest advancements in JDE E1 to optimise financial operations and drive continuous improvements.

The 2025/26 capital allocation will be used to progress the following projects:

- Implementation of a purge and archive solution for JDE Enterprise I;
- JDE Enterprise One 9.7 update. This update promises enhanced user experience and performance and expanded cloud capabilities; and
- Replacement of office equipment, photocopiers desktop PC, et cetera.

Mr. Chairman, the key initiatives planned for the Accountant General's Department for fiscal year 2025/26 are to,

- continue working with the Government departments to automate/digitise their financial process;
- review and update financial instructions to align with current needs and priorities;
- complete the Audited Consolidated Fund Financial Statements for the year ending 31

March 2025 no later than 14 November 2025; and the

- March 2021 PSSF and July 2021 CPF statements have been submitted to the Auditor General for a full audit. The Financial Reporting Section within the Accountant General's department which is currently staffed with four full-time employees continues to work to progress the backlog on the other funds. The status of the public funds are as follows,
 1. Government Reserves Fund—2024;
 2. Unemployment Insurance Fund—2020;
 3. Government Borrowing Sinking Fund—2016;
 4. Ministers and Members of the Legislature—2015;
 5. Government Employees Health Insurance—2012; and
 6. Confiscated Fund—2010.
- continue to deliver scheduled Financial Instructions training in conjunction with the Department of Employee and Organizational Development;
- timely processing of outgoing vendor payment; and
- 100 per cent of clean health insurance claims paid within 30 days in line with legislation.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my appreciation for the work undertaken by the management and staff of the Accountant General's department under the leadership of the Accountant General, Mrs. Dionne Morrison-Shakir.

HEAD 12—BERMUDA CUSTOMS

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to Bermuda Customs Department Revenue, which is included under the Ministry of Finance. Customs expenditures are included within the Ministry of National Security which will be debated on Monday, 26 May.

Total 2025/26 budgeted customs revenue, shown on page B-116, is \$220 million. This is a decrease of \$18.8 million, or 8 per cent, on the prior year budget of \$239 million. Compared to the 2024/25 revised estimate the 2025/26 budget is a reduction of \$9.8 million, or 4.4 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, world conditions in recent years have caused inflation rates to climb and Bermuda is not immune from its effects. We all know only too well how the cost of living has risen and the anxiety that comes from the economic uncertainty that these conditions foster, and the distress caused when families are forced to make hard choices between one necessity and another. The pain is felt by all but those who can least afford it are hit hardest.

Consequently, it is this Government's goal to lower the cost of living for Bermuda. In doing so, we

are confident that we will not only ease the daily burden of making ends meet but also offer new opportunities for our economic development. One of the major tools that we have at our disposal in achieving this aim is by reducing the costs of selected imported goods by lowering rates of customs duty.

During the 2024/25 financial year, we responded to the cost-of-living crisis by introducing a reduction in the [customs] duty due on fuel used in the production of electricity by 60 per cent. This relief came into effect on 19 July 2024 and from that date up to March 2025 this relief has lowered the fuel cost on the Bermudian electricity bill by \$9.2 million.

During the 2025/26 financial year, we will offer additional wide-ranging reliefs and concessions with respect to parts for motor vehicles, air conditioners, building materials, and further concessions on the fuel used in the production of electricity.

Analyses of the major revenues are as follows.

Customs Duty

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The customs duty forecast for 2025/26 is \$214.0 million which is \$19.0 million, or 8 per cent, lower than the 2024/25 original forecast of \$233.0 million. You will also note, Mr. Chairman, that the forecast of customs duty collected for 2024/25 has been revised down by \$9.0 million to \$224.1 million, based on more recently available information on actual collections of customs duty for 2024/25.

It is expected that customs duty collections will decrease during 2025/26, which compared to the revised estimate of 24/25 is a reduction of \$9.8 million. This reduction is due to an increase in several reliefs which I will outline. Broadly, these reliefs will fall into four main categories designed to lower the cost of living and stimulate economic growth,

- We shall raise the duty-free travellers personal allowance for returning residents from \$200 per person to \$300 per person. Based on prior years' travel, this is expected to ease the collective tax burden on returning travellers by an estimated \$2 million;
- We shall provide wide-ranging reliefs on parts and supplies for motor vehicle repairs, including but not limited to: engines, transmission shafts, gaskets, electrical, glass, belts, tubing, and interior furnishings. We will amend from 35.0 per cent to zero per cent, the customs duty rates associated with 43 tariff codes providing cost reductions of an estimated \$2.5 million; from 25.0 per cent to zero per cent, the customs duty rates associated with 20 tariff codes providing cost reductions of an estimated \$176,000. It is estimated, based on prior years' data, to reduce the cost of repairing Bermuda's motor vehicles by a total of \$2.7 million;

- We shall provide wide-ranging reliefs on selected building materials, including but not limited to: block, stones, glass, plastics, fabrics, wood, metal, chemicals including glues, resins, and paint. Pre-fabricated supplies as well as raw materials for both interior and exterior work. We will amend: from 25.0 per cent to 10.0 per cent, the customs duty rates associated with 429 tariff codes providing cost reductions of an estimated \$4.9 million; from 25.0 per cent to zero per cent, the customs duty rates associated with two tariff codes providing cost reductions of an estimated \$41,000; from 15.0 per cent to 10.0 per cent, the customs duty rates associated with eight tariff codes providing cost reductions of an estimated \$293,000; from 12.5 per cent to 10.0 per cent, and the customs duty rates associated with 44 tariff codes providing cost reductions of an estimated \$325,000. It is estimated, based on prior years' data, to reduce the cost of construction and building repairs by a total of \$5 (I assume that is million);
- We shall also provide reliefs on the imports of air-conditioning units and parts. We will amend from 35.0 per cent to 10.0 per cent, the customs duty rates associated with six tariff codes. It is estimated, based on prior years' data, to reduce the customs duty cost on these items by over \$1.8 million;
- Finally, we shall provide further customs duty reductions on imported fuel used in the production of electricity. It is estimated, based on prior years' data, that this will cut the Bermudian electricity bill by \$1.7 million in addition to the concessions introduced during 2024/25.

You will note that the sum of these reductions is \$13.8 million, compared to the overall reduction of \$9.8 million to the revised forecast. Therefore, within general customs revenue due to inflation and economic growth the department is expecting an increase of \$4 million in total across all areas.

Other Revenue Sources

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Forecasted revenue sources other than customs duty, are expected to contribute a total of \$5.9 million during 2025/26 which, based on our forecast, would equate to 2.7 per cent of the revenue collected by Customs. There is little indication that receipts in these areas will change significantly from the revenue levels received during the 2024/25 fiscal year to date.

Also, within 2025/26 the department of Customs will work with the Cost of Living Commission to analyse duty on essential commodities to look at what else could be added to the Essential Commodities Schedule of their Act, thereby reducing customs duty

that can provide price reductions of those goods to the consumer.

Most importantly within 2025/26 the Customs Department will work to streamline the process to obtain duty relief by making the process more efficient by aligning with industry best practice which will also strengthen compliance. The aim of the project is to ultimately support economic growth.

The customs team will review the administrative burden and processing time regarding duty relief and improve transparency and accountability within the process, all with the aim to reduce the red tape, time, and cost for both customs and the entity requesting the relief.

Customs will therefore be looking at the following;

- Implementing a trusted trader programme—This will enable certain entities to have priority processing, reduced paperwork and lower inspection rates. Eligibility for this programme will be based on historic compliance, volume and financial stability.
- Develop the digital platform for duty relief—This will be a secure, user-friendly portal for applications, with the functionality to track status, enable two-way communication and allow digital signatures.
- Develop delegated approval authority—At present a certain number of requests are approved by the Minister. Customs will seek delegated authority to senior members of the Ministry's headquarters so that routine cases can be handled efficiently. Develop a digital platform for duty relief. Ministerial involvement will be limited to large, strategic, complex cases.
- Simplify paperwork and pre audit requirements—In line with industry best practice Customs will move to post clearance audits for low-risk traders.

Mr. Chairman, the above is, as already stated, expected to reduce clearance times and reduce costs for businesses, large and small, whilst improving government efficiency.

Mr. Chairman, sincere thanks to the Collector Lucinda Pearman and the Customs team for their work in support of Bermuda's economy in this area.

I will now turn this back over to the Premier and the Minister of Finance.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member from constituency 6, in the Bible Belt.

Premier, you now have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

I thank that Honourable Member from the Bible Belt for his assistance, Mr. Chairman.

I am going to cover Head 28, which is social insurance, before I turn it back over to the Junior Min-

ister for Head 38, which is the Office of Tax Commissioner, which he is well familiar with. I will then take the Registrar of Companies and the Head 58 to close out this particular section of the debate.

HEAD 28—DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL INSURANCE

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Social Insurance's Current Account Estimates are shown on pages B-117 to B-119 of the Budget Book. The estimate for 2025/26 is \$2,894,000 which is \$200,106 or 4 per cent less than the original 2024/25 budget. This budget is solely for War Pensions and Gratuities.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Social Insurance and its staff administer the Government of Bermuda's Contributory Pension Fund and benefits to the Second World War veterans.

- War Pensions and Gratuities are 100 per cent funded by the Consolidated Fund;
- Contributory Pension operations within the department are 100 per cent funded by the Contributory Pension Fund (CPF). Expenditures are paid through the Consolidated Fund (CF) and recharged to the CPF in accordance with Section 3(3) of the Contributory Pensions Act 1970.

Mission Statement

Hon. E. David Burt: The mission statement for the Department of Social Insurance is: *We are committed to serving current and future generations by ensuring compliance with the legislation, collecting contributions, and paying benefits timely and accurately, through education, best practices, and the use of technology.*

Department of Social Insurance Vision

Hon. E. David Burt: And the vision for that department is: *To be a trusted and essential source of financial security for all beneficiaries.*

Core Functions

Hon. E. David Burt: The department operates under two main Acts of Parliament to administer the Government of Bermuda's Social Insurance Programme as well as the War Pensions and Gratuities.

1. The Contributory Pensions Act 1970—This is for all employed and self-employed individuals over age of 18 or under the age of 26, in the instance of full-time students who work for more than four hours per week and are required to pay contributions.

There are two major classes of benefits paid out of the fund:

- a) Contributory benefits for old age pension and gratuity, widow's and widower's allowance and gratuity, and disability benefit; and
 - b) Non-contributory benefits for old age pension and disability benefits.
2. The War Pensions and Gratuities (War Service) Act 1947—Under this Act benefits are payable to Bermudian war veterans (or their surviving spouses) who served during World War II. There are currently 58 veterans or their surviving spouses in the programme.

Highlights for 2024/25

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on, Mr. Chairman, to the highlights for 2024/25.

- The department completed the actuarial review for the CPF in June 2024. The actuarial review is required every three years per section 35 of the Contributory Pensions Act, and that was tabled in the House of Assembly on 21 March 2025.
- In September 2024, Contributory Pensions (Amendment of Benefits) Order 2024 was tabled in this House, increasing pension benefits by 2.4 per cent effective 16 August 2024.
- The department adopted recommendations of the Management Consultant Services (MCS) section review and began to implement the following review in the last financial year:
 - o reviewed and updated the documentation of our systems and processes;
 - o reviewed all updated all job descriptions;
 - o began the recruitment process to fill vacant positions to serve the population better; and
 - o these measures have assisted in the improved pension administration and collection of outstanding debt, streamlined operations, and improved the execution of the Department of Social Insurance's mandate.
- The department has continued to maintain effective working relationships with the Debt Enforcement Unit of the Attorney General's Chambers, Department of Public Prosecutions, Department of Immigration, Office of the Tax Commissioner, and the Transport Control Department with respect to efforts to assist in debt collection;
- As part of the Government of Bermuda's commitment to modernise public services, the department successfully launched the following two online services:
 - o In May 2024, the launch of the online service that allows contributors to search for their social insurance number so they no longer have to call the department; and

- o In February 2025, online applications and requests from employers or contributors for services [was launched]. This initiative has streamlined processes, improved efficiency by serving the public through this digital site. This [digital site] can be found at: <https://socialinsurance.gov.bm>.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: The department operates with five main cost centres. The first is:

38000—Senior Management & Administration

Hon. E. David Burt: The Administration Section provides overall direction and management of the department.

The budget estimate for this cost centre is \$2,270,500 which is an increase of \$148,800 from the 2024/25 original budget. This increase is due to the planned go-live in Quarter 2 for our new pension administration system that has been implemented for quite some time, PX3000.

38010—War Pensions & Gratuities

Hon. E. David Burt: The War Pensions section (Budget Book page B-117) administers the benefits to war veterans under the Pensions & Gratuities (War Service) Act 1947.

The budget estimate is \$2,894,000, which is \$106,000, or 4 per cent less than the previous year. The budget is based on 58 war veterans (14 less than the prior year).

Currently, the significant benefits provided under the programme are:

- All veterans or spouses receive a monthly pension of \$1,000.
- Medical benefits are 100 per cent covered. The benefits covered are FutureCare insurance premiums, hospital visits, hospitalisation, all tests at KEMH, air ambulance, and prescription drugs over the \$3,000 covered by FutureCare, moving up to \$5,000 this year.
- Palliative and long-term care are covered up to \$7,000 per month and a \$5,000 funeral grant is refunded to their estate.
- Regular and specialist doctor visits have small co-pays, which are reimbursed by the programme.

38025—Benefits

Hon. E. David Burt: The Benefits Section is responsible for the administration of benefits to members of the Contributory Pension Fund under the various Acts.

The budget estimate is \$499,000, which is an increase of \$9,200 over the original budget for the year, which is mainly just due to salary increments.

Total benefits paid for August 2023 to July 2024, which the Contributory Pension Fund's financial year was \$211,392,900 compared to \$204,408,600 in 2022/23, which is an increase of \$6,984,300 or 3.4 per cent.

In 2023, the total benefits paid were \$175.8 million, or 83 per cent, was paid for Contributory Pensions, \$14.4 million, or 7 per cent paid on Widows' and Widowers' Allowances, Gratuities of \$10.9 million (5 per cent) were paid and \$7.3 million (4 per cent) was paid on Non-contributory Pensions. The remaining \$3.0 million (1 per cent) of benefits paid for the period was for Contributory and Non-Contributory Disabilities.

Those are the items which make up the \$211,392,860 payments from the Contributory Pension Fund.

38040—Compliance

Hon. E. David Burt: The Compliance Section monitors the compliance of employers and employees in accordance with the provisions of the Contributory Pensions Act.

The budget estimate for this cost centre is \$918,900 which is \$114,600 less than the original budgeted estimate for the prior year. This decrease is related to the expected reduction in the number of debt collector local consultants planned for the Department of Social Insurance in the coming year. This is because of work that is going to take place between the Debt Enforcement Unit at the Office of Tax Commissioner working together with the Debt Enforcement Unit in Social Insurance, combining the efforts across these departments in the Ministry of Finance to enhance debt collection with reduced use of external debt collection assistance.

The total debt owed to the CPF as of 31 July 2024, was \$71,478,100 which is a \$36,400 decrease from the prior year. There has been a staff shortage that has impacted on the department's ability to further reduce the debt owed to the Contributory Pension Fund. As I said, we are not only filling those posts but having a better working coordination between the sections in the Office of the Tax Commissioner's Department.

It is important to note that the Attorney General's Chambers Debt Enforcement Unit (DEU) works in close collaboration with the department to assist in the collection of outstanding contributions for Department of Social Insurance. In most cases, the employers at the Department of Social Insurance is unable to contact those who are delinquent over 120 days are then referred to the Debt Enforcement Unit.

38045—Contributions

Hon. E. David Burt: The Contributions Section is responsible for the administration of records and accounts for employers and employees participating in the Contributory Pension Fund under the Contributory Pensions Act 1970.

The budget estimate for this cost centre is \$565,900, which is \$7,000 more than that of the original budget, mainly due to salary adjustments and expected overtime for the implementation of PX3000 pension management system expected later this year.

Total contributions received from August 2023 to July 2024 is \$117,322,000 compared to \$112,622,600 in the prior fiscal period, which is an increase of \$4,699,400 or 4 per cent. It is important to note that contribution rates were not increased. Which means the additional funds is due to the growth of jobs in the local economy.

Comparative Analysis of Current Account Estimates— 2024/25 vs 2025/26

Hon. E. David Burt: This is found in the Budget Book on page B-118.

- Salaries and Wages—An increase of \$138,000 reflects the salary increments across the department.
- Professional Services—The decrease of \$100,600 is primarily due to a decline in war veteran's medical claims and war pension awards due to a reduction in the number of veterans expected to be serviced.
- Receipts Credited to Programme—This amount represents the cost to operate the Contributory Pension Fund initially paid through the Consolidated Fund. As stated earlier, a recharge to the Contributory Pension Fund is made in accordance with the Contributory Pensions Act 1970, Section 3(3). The recharge for 2025/26 is budgeted at \$4,254,300, which is an increase of \$50,300 in the original budget for the CPF over the prior year. As stated, this increase is mainly the result of increased expenditure related to the implementation the new pension administration system.

Activities/Plans for Fiscal Year 2025/26

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to the following activities and plans for the upcoming year.

- Continue to develop a portal to allow employers to view their accounts, pay invoices and submit starters, terminations, and unpaid leave adjustments online.
- The department will continue to participate in various workshops and presentations where they are able to provide clarity to attendees regarding pensions, benefits, and contribu-

tions managed by the Department of Social Insurance.

- As mentioned, the implementation of the updated pension administration system, which is of course necessary to support future social insurance changes which may be implemented.
- Strengthen cross-ministry initiatives to develop supportive strategies to close gaps in legislation to make sure that we better and coordinated debt enforcement across the Ministry of Finance.
- The department is also partnering with the Department of Employee and Organisational Development to encourage persons in the financial industry by creating opportunities in the Department of Social Insurance through the Government Bursary and Trainee programmes.

Significant Process Changes or New Initiatives

Hon. E. David Burt: I have highlighted the significant process changes and new initiatives.

1. The Department of Social Insurance will collaborate with the Ministry of Finance and other agencies to leverage technology for the government's digital transformation, and better aim to identify employers who owe funds to the Contributory Pension Fund and to ensure effective and consistent management of these debts across the government;
2. We are also going to be engaging in a succession planning exercise where current employees will be given the opportunities to be professionally developed and cross-trained. Succession planning will facilitate smooth transitioning when staff terminate service or retire.
3. Further modernisation of the departments technology and operations to better serve the public.

The Public Officers in the Department of Social Insurance are to be commended for their commitment to providing valuable service to the local community and beneficiaries.

I will now, Mr. Chairman, defer to Head 38, Office of the Tax Commissioner, to Junior Minister Furbert.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The floor recognises Junior Minister Wayne Furbert from constituency 6.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HEAD 38—OFFICE OF THE TAX COMMISSIONER

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 38, the Office of the Tax Commissioner (OTC), found on pages B-120 to B-124 of the Budget Book.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the mission of the OTC is to leverage modern technology to ensure taxpayer compliance through quality service and effective enforcement.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: A total of \$4.638 million has been allocated for this head across both cost and capital. This represents an increase of \$87,000, or approximately 1.9 per cent higher than the budget for 2024/25 and constitutes 1.6 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

Mr. Chairman, the OTC is strategically divided into four cost centres, as follows:

- The Administration Team (48000) provides the overall direction and management of the office, which includes strategic planning, staff development, training, and general office support. The budget allocation for the Administration team in 2025/26 fiscal year is \$1.27 million.
- The Stamp Duties Team (48050) is responsible for the administration and collection of stamp duties under the Stamp Duties Act 1976. This includes the adjudication and processing of a variety of legal instruments including, but not limited to, conveyances, transfers, leases and mortgages as well as administering the Primary Family Homestead Designation programme. The budget allocation for the Stamp Duties team for 2025/26 is \$356,000.
- The Audit and Compliance Team (48070) is responsible for ensuring that taxpayers are compliant with the Taxes Acts throughout the life of the taxpayer, starting with their initial registration. The team conducts audits and inspections of taxpayer books and records and is responsible for knowledge management and taxpayer education. The budget allocation for the Audit and Compliance Team for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$912,000.
- The Operations Team (48080) is responsible for collecting and reporting on all taxes under the remit of the OTC. The team maintains taxpayer accounts receivable balances, levies penalties for late and insufficient payments, and is responsible for debt collection and enforcement. The budget allocation for the Operations Team for 2025/26 is \$1.76 million.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Subjective Analysis, Mr. Chairman, is found on page B-121. I will highlight the material object code changes.

- Current Expenditure—\$4.3 million for 2025/26;
- Capital Expenditure—\$335[,000];
- Revenue—\$827 million.

In 2024, we can compare:

- The Current Expenditure was \$4 million, a difference of \$252,000, or a difference of 6 per cent;
- Capital Expenditure—\$335[,000] compared to \$500[,000] in 2024/25, a difference of \$165[,000], or down 33 per cent;
- Revenue—\$827 [million], as I said before, for 2024/25 was \$792 [million], or a difference of \$34 [million], which is up 4 per cent.

Current Expenditure

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Increases in Current Expenditure. The OTC's current expenditure is estimated to be \$4,303,180. This represents an increase of \$252,000, as I mentioned earlier, 6 per cent higher than the budget for 2024/25.

The increase is primarily due to the creation of a Temporary Additional Department Comptroller position which is essential to address the increasing complexity of tax reporting and the resultant workload within the department. The efficient running of OTC is critical in the collection of a significant portion of the Government's revenue and this role will ensure that financial operations are managed efficiently, compliance with regulatory requirements is maintained, and strategic financial planning is enhanced.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Decrease in Capital Expenditure. The capital expenditure allocated for the department in 2025/26 was \$335,000, down \$165,000 compared to the 2024/25 year.

The capital expenditure budget will be dedicated to advancing modernisation and efficiency initiatives within the OTC—especially with respect to the continuing focus on reducing the level of accounts receivables. This includes upgrading the SmartCase debt management tool to enhance debt collection outcomes, streamline year-end reporting, and to develop performance management tools. These investments aim to optimise operational effectiveness and accurately measure operational activity.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Increase in projected revenue. As I mentioned, the revenue is expected to be \$827 million for 2025/26, an increase of \$34.9 million from 2024/25, which is 4 per cent. The material differences in projected revenue are as follows:

- Payroll Tax Revenue is anticipated to increase by 7 per cent to \$621 million. This is expected to increase due to the increase in expected employment numbers—especially in the International Business Sector.
- Corporate Services Tax is projected to increase by 10 per cent to \$5.8 million based on current activity in this industry.
- Financial Services Taxes are projected to increase marginally by 4 per cent for both Bank Services and Insurance Services taxes to \$8.6 million and \$6.1 million, respectively.
- Money Services Tax is projected to rise by 22 per cent to \$435,000.
- Land tax revenue is expected to decline by 5 per cent to \$87 million. As you are aware, Mr. Chairman, we would be reducing the annual base rate from \$300.00 to \$150.00. That is the reason for the decline.
- Projections indicate a 6 per cent increase in the Foreign Currency Purchase Tax to \$32.9 million, attributable to an anticipated rise in foreign currency purchase transactions by residents.
- The Hotel Occupancy Tax has been raised by 29 per cent to \$7.1 million based on industry trends.
- Transport Infrastructure and Cruise Ship Departure tax estimates have been reduced by 9 per cent and 12 per cent to \$10.9 million and \$23.2 million, respectively, based on expected cruise visits this year.
- Stamp Duty on Land Conveyance on sales is projected to decrease by 12 per cent or \$16.8 million based on anticipated activity.
- The outlook on all other miscellaneous taxes remains stable.

Manpower

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The budget allocation for salaries for the department in 2025/26 is \$3.17 million, an increase of \$247,000, or 8 per cent from 2024/25. This salary increase represents 98 per cent of the department's budget increase.

- The OTC had 33 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff budgeted in 2024/25, which will increase to 35 FTEs in 2025/26.
- The two additional positions include the previously discussed Temporary Additional Comptroller and the recruitment of the currently vacant Administrative Support Clerk post. The admin section supports a busy office with

many daily demands and the Admin Support Clerk will work with the Office Manager to ensure that the office runs smoothly.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures, on page B-123, for fiscal year 2024/25 were substantially achieved, and this has led to increases in performance measures for the 2025/26 in several areas, as the department remains committed to continuous improvement. In particular:

Business Unit 48050—Stamp Duties

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: In 2024/25, the Stamp Duties section had a target of 90 per cent for completing the late stamping of instruments that are less than six months out of time within 60 days of receipt. In 2025/26, the section expects to increase its performance for stamping such instruments to 100 per cent.

Business Unit 48080—Operations

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: In the 2024/25 fiscal year, the target was to have 75 per cent of Payroll Tax returns filed electronically. For 2025/26, we are hoping to increase that to 80 per cent of Payroll Tax returns filed electronically.

In 2024/25, the target for the Operations section was to reduce the Accounts Receivable by \$10 million. The section exceeded this goal by collecting \$227 million in tax arrears by continuing taxpayer education, managing payment plans and escalating matters for collection through the courts. It is worth noting that this is a sizeable increase from the prior year where a target of \$7.5 million was set and the department collected \$15.6 million. A most noteworthy increase.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2025/26, OTC will continue its efforts to modernise its technology, to enhance its reporting capabilities and operations to support effective debt collection, improved customer service and successful resolution of taxpayer non-compliance.

In addition, the OTC will implement the following initiatives:

- Reduction of Land Tax for all categories—which I mentioned earlier, from \$300 to \$150, which is a 50 per cent reduction.
- Elimination of the Employee Portion of Payroll Tax on Redundancy and Severance Payments—In line with the 2024 Throne Speech, the Government will eliminate the employee portion of tax on severance and redundancy

payments, which demonstrates the government's commitment to supporting long-serving employees facing unexpected unemployment and income loss.

Conclusion

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I would like to thank the staff of the Office of the Tax Commissioner, and in particular the Assistant Commissioners; Ms. Kim Richards, Ms. Joelene Lindsay and Mr. Antoine Lightbourne. These individuals have been overseeing the Tax Office for the last year and their dedicated service to the Government and to the people of this country should be recognised.

I would now like to move to Head 39.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience we are Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. The Honourable Minister of Finance has taken to his feet and will present this budget. Debate began approximately two hours ago, and we have approximately two hours to go.

Hon. E. David Burt: All right. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I will close out this section of the debates on Head 39 and then I will do Head 58.

HEAD 39—REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES DEPARTMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I now present the budget for Head 39, the Registrar of Companies Department, found on pages B-125 to B-128 of the Budget Book.

The Registrar of Companies has been allocated a total budget of \$12,517,000. This is up \$474,000 (4 per cent) from the previous year.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. E. David Burt: The Registrar of Companies is the Government's third largest revenue generating department and is projected to collect approximately \$75 million of revenue in fiscal 2025/26. Its operations are regulated by several legislative mandates, including, but not limited to, the Companies Act 1981, the Limited Partnership Act 1883, the Exempted Partnerships Act 1992, the Limited Liability Company Act 2016, Overseas Partnerships Act 1995 and Government Fees Regulations 1976. These provide the framework for maintaining the Register of Companies and the timely collection of associated registration fees.

The department is also responsible for the administration of liquidations and personal bankruptcies as well as the regulation of Bermuda's real estate

and dealers in high value goods sectors. The legislative framework for the Registrar's mandate in this capacity is the Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1982, Bankruptcy Act 1989, Bankruptcy Rules 1990, Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Act 2017, Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Regulations 2017 and the Registrar of Companies (Supervision and Regulation) Act 2020, respectively.

Bermuda continues to be impacted by ever-increasing pressures and imposed requirements from other jurisdictions or regions, mounting challenges from our competitors and increasing scrutiny from global and regional standard setting and oversight bodies, such as, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF) and the European Union oversight bodies. This changing landscape has driven the Registrar of Companies' evolution as a regulator and this legislative mandate has been underpinned by the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 and the Economic Substance Act 2018. Indeed, Bermuda's implementation of the Economic Substance regime is closely monitored and reviewed on a regular basis by both the European Union and OECD. Similarly, FATF and CFATF have looked to the Registrar of Companies to enhance its AML/ATF compliance framework with respect to Legal Persons, as well as in the Real Estate and Dealers in High Value Good sectors as the Competent and Supervisory Authority charged with their oversight.

Still in the regulatory lane, Beneficial Ownership (BO) is another evolving space with policy positions emanating from the UK, the European Union, the OECD, and International Monetary Fund and Financial Action Task Force, commitments having been made to both the European Union and United Kingdom. Beneficial Ownership also features prominently in Bermuda's AML/ATF and Economic Substance regimes of which the Registrar of Companies has been designated to oversee.

The Tax Treaty Unit that was in the Ministry of Finance has been fully incorporated within the Registrar of Companies to take advantage of obvious synergies with the Registrar of Companies' economic substance regime as both economic substance and Bermuda's tax treaty and information exchange regimes fall within the broader scope of the OECD's BEPS framework (that is Base Erosion and Profit Shifting) for addressing international tax concerns.

For fiscal year 2025/26, the Registrar of Companies will continue to prepare for the pending implementation of the Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework (CARF) following Bermuda's commitment to commence exchanges under the CARF in accordance with the generally expected timeline of 2027, or if unforeseen challenges arise with commencing exchanges under the CARF in 2027, to commence exchanges under the CARF in 2028.

Mr. Chairman, the Registrar of Companies has embarked on striking defunct companies from the Register in accordance with Section 261 of the Companies Act. Simultaneously, Bermuda continues to attract new businesses with continued registration of new companies and partnerships throughout the past year. It is projected that the total number of companies and partnerships on the register will remain consistent at approximately 16,000,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Registrar's mission is to *leverage technology, enhance the user experience and facilitate regulation, accurate data collection and analysis*.

The department's mission and objectives can be found on page B-125 of the Budget Book. Objectives can similarly be found on that page.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: The expenditure overview, as I mentioned, Mr. Chairman, is up \$474,000 from last year, to \$12,517,000.

The budget for the Registrar of Companies is set out under the following seven cost centres:

- Policy, Planning & Administration
- Finance & Revenue
- Entity Registration
- Insolvency & Liquidations
- Real Estate & Licences
- Treaty Management & Administration
- Compliance

The total current account expenditure, found on page B-126, is as mentioned. The increase of \$474,000 is predominantly due to agreed pay increase. It is important to note that although the overall headcount is increasing from 50 to 59, this cost has been offset by a reduction in professional services as the Registrar of Companies moves toward full implementation of its revised staff structure. As a result, there is no significant change between the budget estimates for the 2024/25 and the 2025/26 fiscal years for the overall department.

Cost Centre 49000—Policy, Planning and Administration

Hon. E. David Burt: Policy, Planning and Administration can be found on page B-126. Estimates of \$5,244,000 is down \$859,000 (14 per cent) from the previous year.

This cost centre includes planning, strategic direction, administration and other activities associated with the daily operation of the Registrar of Companies Department. Information technology, financial and administrative support, budget development, accounting, personnel administration, and general office administration are also included in this cost centre.

The budget decrease of \$859,000 for this cost centre is the result of a reduction in the cost of engaging consultants as the new staff positions are filled.

With the continued increase in personnel, the Registrar of Companies has outgrown its current office space, located at the Government Administration Building. The Estates Section of the Ministry of Public Works has assisted in identifying alternative location for the Registrar's offices, which they are expected to move into within the next few months. It is important to note, if we look back over a few years, there has been a significant expansion of the size and remit of the Registrar of Companies for all the reasons which I have mentioned before, and some of which I will continue to get into as I cover the brief for this particular head.

Cost Centre 49010—Finance and Revenue

Hon. E. David Burt: Finance and Revenue can be found on page B-126. This expense estimate of \$692,000 is up \$27,000 (4 per cent) from last year. And of course, under this is revenue of \$74,866,000 which can be found on page B-127.

Mr. Chairman, the Finance and Revenue cost centre is responsible for the collection of the annual fees submitted by companies in accordance with the Companies Act 1981, the Segregated Accounts Companies Act 2000, the Partnership Act, the Limited Liability Company Act 2016 and the Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Act 2017. The Registrar of Companies collects approximately \$75 million in revenue annually. To ensure adequate controls around completeness, accuracy and timeliness of collecting revenue the section, staff and processes come under the direct oversight of the departmental comptroller.

The estimated revenue for this cost centre, as stated, is \$74,866,000 or 99 per cent of the total revenue of \$75,186,000 anticipated for the department. The balance of the revenue, the 320,000 outside of those particular matters is derived from Licence(s) General in the Licencing and Insolvency cost centre, which I shall discuss shortly.

Cost Centre 49020—Entity Registration

Hon. E. David Burt: Found on page B-126, the Expense estimate is \$1,904,000 which is up \$572,000 (43 per cent) from the previous year.

This cost centre includes persons involved in the registration of companies and the processing and maintenance of statutory and legal documents which must be registered and available for public inspection in accordance with the prevailing legislation.

In 2025/26, the Registrar of Companies will take responsibility for managing and maintaining the Beneficial Ownership Register. The budget increase will be used to pay for salaries of staff currently being recruited for this new activity.

Cost Centre 49040—Insolvency and Liquidations

Hon. E. David Burt: Insolvency and Liquidations, found on page B-126, \$697,000 up \$229,000 (49 per cent) from the previous year, and revenue, as I previously mentioned, \$320,000.

This cost centre is responsible for the execution of court orders to administer liquidations in accordance with the Companies Act 1981, the Winding-Up Rules 1982, and personal bankruptcies in accordance with the provisions of the Bankruptcy Act 1989 and the Bankruptcy Rules 1990. Expenses under this cost centre primarily encompass the salaries of five full-time staff. Other expenses include costs of various professional services (e.g., legal, accounting, contractors, et cetera) in administering court-appointed corporate liquidations and personal bankruptcies. The budget increase will be used to pay salaries of staff who are currently being recruited.

As stated, the estimated revenue for this cost centre is \$320,000.

Cost Centre 49050—Real Estate and Licences

Hon. E. David Burt: As noted on page B-126, \$599,000 up \$27,000 (5 per cent) from the previous year.

This section is responsible for the processing and issuance of licences and permits to exempted, local and overseas companies to carry on business in Bermuda, the processing and issuance of licences to, and the regulation of, real estate brokers and agents, and ensuring industry compliance through active monitoring and enforcement. Expenses under this cost centre include the salaries of six persons.

Cost Centre 49070—Treaty Management and Administration

Hon. E. David Burt: Cost centre 49070 is found on page B-126. This is \$1,503,000 down \$70,000 (4 per cent) from the previous year

Budgetary responsibility for the Treaty Unit was transferred from the Ministry of Finance to the Registrar of Companies effective 1 April 2024. The budget for this unit, as mentioned, is \$1.5 million. This represents a nominal decrease of \$70,000 or 4 per cent.

The work of the unit continues to diversify from the original core activity that led to its creation which was "the negotiation and processing of international tax cooperation on the 'by request' basis."

Mr. Chairman, the Treaty Unit is responsible for ensuring that Bermuda operates in keeping with the common reporting standard for the OECD (known as CRS), the Country-by-Country Reporting (CbCR), standard of the OECD and the tax information exchange of information on the by-request basis of the OECD, the Global Forum's Crypto-Asset Reporting

Framework (CARF) once implemented and any new tax reporting standards of the OECD. The unit negotiates and administers agreements related to the Bilateral Tax Information Exchange with member countries of the European Union, G20, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], and other key countries. The staff of this unit routinely participate in OECD peer reviews of Bermuda's tax-related legal and regulatory frameworks and contribute to the peer review processes of the OECD by reviewing the legal and regulatory frameworks of other jurisdictions and their implementation in practice.

Mr. Chairman, the Treaty Unit in addition to negotiating and managing Bermuda's international tax treaties has also increasingly worked with Bermuda's international business stakeholders to address international tax policy threats. The international business sector continues to be the bedrock of our economy and therefore the work of the Treaty Unit is critical to the protection of this significant sector.

Mr. Chairman, as noted earlier, the Treaty Unit's main achievement in the current fiscal year was to play a key role in Bermuda's response to the emerging OECD global tax standard. The Treaty Unit provided policy advice for Bermuda's input into the G20 and OECD Inclusive Framework work on the Two Pillar Solution and the negotiations which have been occurring on the administrative rules and guidance.

Mr. Chairman, the Treaty Unit's management of Bermuda's compliance to the OECD and European Union international tax policies has become the majority component of the Treaty Unit's work, although the unit continues to negotiate and manage tax treaties and updates to Bermuda's tax treaty relationships when required. The unit is also involved in managing aspects of the threat posed by the EU listing process, which represents a constant but formidable threat.

Mr. Chairman, there are at least five separate but equally volatile doors to EU listing, and those are:

1. EU Economic Substance and Corporate Income Tax regime;
2. OECD Common Reporting Standard;
3. OECD Country-by-Country Reporting Standard;
4. OECD Tax Information Exchange Agreement for exchange of information on the by-request basis standard; and
5. Participation in the OECD Multilateral Tax Treaty.

Mr. Chairman, the Treaty Unit will continue negotiating Tax Information Exchange Agreements and other agreements relating to Tax Information Exchange and associated agreements or negotiate revisions to existing tax agreements so as to maintain Bermuda's tax agreement relationships with member countries of the EU, G20, OECD and other countries.

Hon. E. David Burt: The estimate is \$1,878,000 up \$548,000 (41 per cent) from the prior year.

The Compliance cost centre, found on page B-126, is responsible for ensuring compliance, via powers executed through the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 with other relevant Acts (most notably the Companies Act 1981 and the Economic Substance Act 2018) including ensuring adherence to the filing, registration and other corporate governance requirements of the relevant Acts; to inspect registered entities for the aforementioned purposes and to investigate instances of a registered entity's failure to comply with the provisions of the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 and/or any other relevant Acts.

The Compliance Unit is being enhanced as a consequence of requirements placed on Bermuda by the European Union and the OECD. It is the expectation of these international bodies that Bermuda not only have sufficient people resources to fulfil its compliance requirements but that those people resources have adequate prerequisite skills and training. Consequently, the organisational structure provides two lanes, domestic compliance and international tax compliance with the existing compliance posts being amended along with new posts created to recruit an increased number of technically proficient individuals in both areas. The budget increase will be used to pay salaries for staff currently being recruited.

In relation to training [initiatives] on tax-related matters, there are two that I will cover, Mr. Chairman.

- In fiscal year 2024/25, the additional officers successfully completed assessment training on Beneficial Ownership and Exchange of Information on Request delivered by the Global Forum on Transparency for Tax Purposes (Global Forum). One of these officers is scheduled to assess another jurisdiction's legal and regulatory framework along with other experts in 2025/26.
- For fiscal year 2025/26, two officers are already enrolled in a training programme for the Administrative Compliance Framework for the Common Reporting Standard (CRS) delivered by the Global Forum, while one officer is scheduled to participate in the first in-person Workshop on the Global Forum's Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework (CARF) commitment process and implementation of the requirements.

With this experience and training, Bermuda will continue to build and strengthen its capacity to prepare, respond and adapt to the evolving regulatory environment.

Revenue

Cost Centre 49080—Compliance

Hon. E. David Burt: Revenue is found on page B-127. These figures note that the department is fore-

casting overall revenue of \$75,186,000. This is a decrease of \$1,322,000 or 2 per cent in projected revenue over the original revenue estimate of \$76,508,000 from the prior fiscal year.

Capital Funding

Hon. E. David Burt: I would now wish to turn to the new Electronic Registry System. In step with this Government's modernisation effort, the department introduced its online economic substance declaration platform in May 2020 and implemented its full online registry system June 2021. This system now provides real-time access to publicly accessible company data and has streamlined the registration process.

The Registrar of Companies, as per page C-11, was allocated \$1.2 million in capital funding for expanding the functionality of the system to include the Beneficial Ownership Register, and to provide for other improvements in system efficiency. These improvements were initially expected to be completed in the past year 2024/25. However, some development work has been deferred and the previously approved funding carried forward to 2025/26.

Additionally, \$300,000 was allocated to enhance the functionality of the Treaty Unit's tax reporting portal to include adding fields for customer date of birth and tax identification number.

Manpower

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the department's budget supports an establishment of 59 full-time equivalent positions as found on page B-127. This reflects more than a 200 per cent increase from the 18 estimated FTEs in fiscal year 2017/18. It is important to note that the department itself has more than tripled in size due to the increasing requirements, whether it is economic substance, various matters that are related to keeping up with the standards for our mutual evaluation and now going forward to matters related to tax treaty. And also the matters that are related to the establishment of the Beneficial Ownership Register.

The importance and need for further increases in resources to meet the increasing external threats has already been highlighted. Addressing these threats is critical to protecting key sources of revenue for the Bermuda Government, which in turn allows us to provide services to the public. The department must have the resources to ensure that Bermuda's corporate citizens are in compliance with Bermuda legislation relating to the carrying on of business in Bermuda and from within Bermuda. Additionally, roles that were previously performed by consultants in managing insolvencies and liquidations were converted into substantive posts to generate greater operational oversight, efficiency and cost savings.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: I will note, Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of plans for the upcoming year for the Registrar of Companies.

The department manages and responds to international pressures being exerted on our jurisdiction from various regulatory and other bodies. This has meant that the department had a need to review its organisational structure and resources with a view of staying ahead of various international sanctions that could have detrimental impacts to our local economy.

Moving on to legislative matters, the department is reviewing the legislative framework around several key initiatives with a view to making enhancements. These include:

- Amendments to section 129A of the Companies Act 1981 to remove the requirement for a licence for a Digital Asset Business Act [DABA] licensed companies so as to hasten the incorporation process for select digital asset companies, and amendments to apply penalties for carrying on business without a 129A or 114B licence.
- Second phase modernising amendments to various pieces of legislation administered by the Registrar to accommodate the electronic registry so as to ensure that the legislative framework reflects the department's ability to work in a paperless virtual environment.
- With respect to Bermuda's Economic Substance Regime the department plans to continue their engagement with both the OECD and the EU with respect to level-setting amendments to the Economic Substance Act. Additionally, the department is reviewing possible amendments to the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act 2017 with a view to streamlining the enforcement processes.
- Amendments to the Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Act 2017 to strengthen the AML/ATF framework, streamline the licensing process and ensure a high level of competence amongst licensed brokers and agents by increasing the minimum experience requirements and imposing continuing education requirements to create greater efficiencies, as we want to make sure that we minimise the risk of money laundering through real estate transactions.
- Overhaul Bermuda's bankruptcy legislation to bring the following in line with current international standards: the Official Receiver obligations, reduction of administration of debtor's and bankrupt's estates and the period spent in bankruptcy for debtors and bankrupts before being eligible for discharge.

Further amendments, it continues. As I warned, the list is long.

- Amendments to the International Cooperation (Tax Information Exchange Agreements) Act 2005 and the International Cooperation (Tax Information Exchange Agreements) Common Reporting Standard Regulations 2017 to include the expansion of the competent authority's access to powers to self-identified non-reporting financial institutions to ensure completeness of filing population; to enhance enforcement powers and also to make consequential amendments in line with the amendments to the OECD's Common Reporting Standard.
- Enactment of new regulations under the International Cooperation (Tax Information Exchange Agreements) Act 2005 to codify the Crypto-Asset Reporting Framework.

Still dealing with the workplan for this upcoming year: The Registrar of Companies has laid out strategic initiatives aimed at advancing the real estate sector and ensuring robust compliance standards. An outreach and awareness strategy will be implemented to deepen the sector's understanding of its AML/ATF obligations, coupled with timely licensing reminders to support regulatory adherence.

Preparations for the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force Mutual Evaluation in 2027 are underway, with targeted outreach efforts to ensure the sector is well-prepared for the evaluation. These forward-looking plans underscore the department's commitment to fostering transparency, efficiency and compliance across the industry.

Additionally, the Registrar of Companies has been tasked with designing and implementing the Beneficial Ownership Register and Disclosure framework transitioning the existing register and process from the Bermuda Monetary Authority (BMA) to the Registrar of Companies during 2025/26. This is to end the infamous double-vetting that is taking place in one place in the Registrar of Companies.

The Registrar of Companies will also review and enhance the existing legislative requirements to support these commitments and to ensure alignment with changed FATF recommendations relating to beneficial ownership whilst also building out an Electronic Portal which will allow entities and external stakeholders to access relevant information where appropriate.

These enhancements will streamline the legislative regime through the harmonisation of existing relevant Exchange Control and Beneficial Ownership obligations that reflect the most current FATF recommendations. This will also result in increased disclosure requirements among registered legal entities in the new Electronic Beneficial Ownership Register Portal (eBORP).

Finally, dealing with the work plan for this year, additional technological enhancements are expected to be rolled out by the department by

- the establishment of a new website that will improve user experience and additional automation of applications and requests;
- implementation of the liquidation/bankruptcy module of the registry system which will facilitate online processing of corporate insolvency transactions;
- development of an electronic platform for the receipt of real estate licence applications to enhance efficiencies and streamline processes; and
- effect recommended upgrades and refinements to IT systems to support functionality of the tax information portal and ensure continued compliance with international standards.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to extend my appreciation for the work undertaken by the Registrar of Companies, and the entire management and staff of the department—led by the Registrar, Mr. Kenneth Joaquin. They have made significant progress over the last year for Bermuda on the international front.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, this concludes my remarks on the Registrar of Companies and I will now move onto the final head for the Ministry of Finance.

HEAD 58—INTEREST ON DEBT AND GUARANTEE MANAGEMENT

Cost Estimate

5801—Debt & Loan Guarantees (Page B-132)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget allocation for interest on debt (Head 58) is \$127.5 million. Of this estimate, \$127.1 million represents ongoing debt service costs for the various debt instruments held by the Government of Bermuda, while \$400,000 is allocated to facility fees and other related costs.

This does represent a reduction of \$250,000 (0.2 per cent) from the prior year. That \$250,000 reduction is due to the bringing of guarantee management in house, which was now recorded in the Ministry of Finance Headquarters Budget, as the Fairmont Southampton agreement was concluded in October 2024. Now, important to note: education time, Mr. Chairman. The issuance of guarantees by the Government is not a cost, nor off balance sheet debt, merely a contingent liability. The Ministry only supports a guarantee if its in line with its prudent economic strategy which will advance the economy of Bermuda whilst ensuring there is no cost to the government.

If anything, the issuance of a guarantee can result in additional revenues for the government. Within the terms of the Fairmont Southampton Princess guarantee, Government will receive an annual fee

equivalent to 1 per cent of the outstanding balance of the loan. Hence the \$750,000 revenue projected for 2025/26 listed on page B-132 of the Budget Book. The project is well underway and Bermuda can expect reopening of this iconic building in April 2026 and opening throughout the year.

Mr. Chairman, within the cost estimate on page B-132 you will note that there is nil cost budgeted for Morgans Point and Other Guarantee costs. Any costs that are incurred will be recharged to the relevant entity. (In this case, the Morgans Point Development Company.)

Mr. Chairman, a key achievement in 2025/26 was the launch of a \$50 million mortgage guarantee scheme—well, that was actually launched the prior year, but I am happy to give the updates. At the start of April 2024, Mr. Chairman, 26 mortgages, with a value of \$4.1 million, was covered under the guarantee scheme. As of today, as I think I reported in the House last week during Premier's Question [Period], we have up to 74 mortgages either being closed on, or on their new homes or having receiving approvals as they look for a home. Of the \$50 million facility, \$11.1 million has been utilised to support these 74 applicants. So there is still considerable guarantee headroom left to support Bermudian homeowners, and we can accommodate just shy, if current trends go forward, an additional 300 homeowners. That is right, Mr. Chairman, this Government is delivering on its pledge to build a nation of owners and doing it through the Mortgage Guarantee Program and other matters which were mentioned by the Junior Minister when discussing the Office of the Tax Commissioner. Because it should be noted that we eliminated the Stamp Duty on the mortgage transfers.

Mr. Chairman, there is no further refinancing of the \$3.2 billion of debt until January 2027. However, with the increased revenues from CIT, the Ministry of Finance is looking to reduce the Government's debt position. Within page A-1 of the Budget Book you will note that within the estimate for 2026/27 a repayment of \$500 million is included which will reduce the annual interest rate charge by circa \$18.6 million. Of course, Mr. Chairman, that is a prudent estimate that is put inside there. But if the collections are better than expected we will expect to retire the full \$605 million, and we will conduct a debt management strategy going forward. If it is prudent and makes sense, if there is excess revenues to purchase that on the open market which makes perfect sense, we will go ahead and do that as well. But that will come in due time and possibly things we will be discussing next year during this budget debate.

Mr. Chairman, work is continuing to ensure that entities with loans or credit facilities guaranteed by the Government, are effectively managing their obligations and are appropriately managing their financial affairs. The diligent execution of work in relation to the establishment and oversight of guarantees

is consistent with this Government's commitment to ensuring appropriate and effective risk management, the maximisation of economic benefit and prudent economic and fiscal management while supporting economic growth. And one thing I must note, Mr. Chairman, is that for matters that are related to government guarantees, the Ministry of Finance is currently undergoing an exercise which is similar to the exercise that was undertaken by the former Minister of Finance in 2021, ensuring that government guaranteed debt is given at preferential rates and not at regular commercial rates. And we will be doing the renegotiation of those rates with local banks; in which case they do not wish to reduce their rates we will be seeking and extending the option for external financing as it is important and vital that the government of Bermuda and entities that are being guaranteed by the government of Bermuda are getting the competitive rates, as that is the purpose and portion and appropriateness of a government guarantee.

Conclusion

Hon. E. David Burt: In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, that concludes my presentation on Head 58. I wish to thank all the teams who are part of the Ministry of Finance for their dedication and professionalism. I am ably supported in the Ministry of Finance by the Junior Minister of Finance, Minister Wayne Furbert. And also the Financial Secretary, Mr. [Chidozie] Ofoego.

There have been many challenges faced over the past year but they, the team, have persevered. We continue to press forward, enhancing the number of things the Ministry of Finance is responsible for. This submission today has highlighted the various threats and challenges facing Bermuda. The Ministry of Finance will continue to proactively address these matters to ensure Bermuda's continued stability and security. We remain committed to serving and protecting the people of Bermuda through fiscal prudence and effective management of our resources and extending economic relief where possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier and Finance Minister.

Honourable Members, we are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2025/26. This is the debate on the Ministry of Finance and specifically Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58. We have had the pleasure of hearing from both the Premier and the Junior Finance Minister, Wayne Furbert.

I will now open the floor for anyone else who may wish to speak in this debate.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: But before I do, I will recognise the Financial Secretary, [Chidozie Ofoego,] who is in the Chamber today. Good to see you. Thank you, yes.

[Committee of Supply, continuation thereof]

The Chairman: The Honourable Member for constituency 25.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: You have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Very much appreciated.

And I certainly appreciate the Premier and Finance Minister ensuring we have enough time to ask questions.

The Chairman: We have one hour and 30 minutes left.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is well appreciated. And I know that other Ministers have certainly also done that. It gives us a chance to have a robust debate as the prior Chair indicated.

I will probably start with the Head 58, Debt & Loan Guarantees. I did note that the Premier said that the guarantees are at no cost to the government. But of course, some of them we are earning money on, and I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, no one is paying us money and not getting something in return. And that something is a guarantee of the risk behind those guarantees. It is okay as long as we are taking that risk to attain legitimate policy objectives of the Government. So, I just wanted to provide that gentle correction for the Premier there.

The \$500 million debt refinancing on page C-30. Perhaps the Government, the Minister can explain exactly how that is going to work? Because my understanding is that the debt outstanding, the bond outstanding, in that time is going to be around \$600-and-something million. Are they able to do a partial payment of that? Do the terms allow that? Will there be a penalty? Will they have to refinance the extra \$100 million so they can pay down the whole \$606 [million]? Some detail on how exactly they plan to do that repayment would be welcome. Very much appreciated.

While I am on that page C-30 here, I am also looking at the . . . excuse me.

The Chairman: [Page] C-30?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, page C-30.

The Chairman: Yes. Debt & Loan Guarantees.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am also looking at the hospital guarantee. I appreciate that that number looks very big. If I recall from previous debates, it is not just the principle underlying the loan to the private organisation that built the hospital which we pay. It is also for the stream of all of the interest payments. Perhaps the Minister could refresh us as to exactly what that guarantee is guaranteeing, both the principle and the interest payments being made. Who the guarantee is actually to? Who the interest payments are actually to and who is paying them? That would be much appreciated.

The Chairman: That is the \$696 million figure on [page] C-30.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, under the Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay. Since we are over in the “C”s, page C-30, same page. I notice between this Budget Book and some prior Budget Books, I believe the Sinking Fund decreased during 2023/24 by \$58 million. And in 2024/25 it is projected to decrease by \$42 million. Could the Premier and Finance Minister give us a description of what is the cause of those decreases in the Sinking Fund? That would be appreciated, Mr. Chairman. So, there is that question.

And I might now actually flip and go back to the front of the HQ, Head 10 on page B-107. While I flip through my book, I need to find the appropriate page. I am going to look on the Objectives on page B-107, Mr. Chairman. I notice that one of the objectives of HQ is to develop the framework for the Corporate Income Tax and support and guidance for the Corporate—slight misprint here—but the Corporate Income Tax Agency, I assume (or CITA as we have now taken to calling it).

The Chairman: This is Point 11 in the box of page B-107?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. That is Point 11 in the box on page B-107.

The Chairman: Right.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Could the Minister help elucidate the difference of responsibilities between the Ministry of Finance and CITA when it comes to setting our CIT [Agency] policies? Because from my understanding, we are going to fill that organisation, in fact, with tax experts. If anything, I feel like the guidance would be going the opposite direction, where the tax experts at the CIT Agency would, perhaps, be informing the Ministry.

I am now going to turn the page over to page B-109.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Looking at the revenue. Thank you for the explanation of the BMA profits, Mr. Premier. That was much appreciated.

I am looking at the Corporate Income Tax revenue of \$187,500,000.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Could the Premier and Minister of Finance provide an explanation of how that number was derived? I know in the past he has referred to different estimates. For example, have we obtained multiple estimates to challenge that number so we can stress test it? Because the strength of this budget really depends on the quantity of that number. He did mention payment, I believe in August if, I have got that right, for paying the Consolidated Fund. I also know that in the CITA legislation, the CIT legislation, there is a provision for the Agency to hold back some money for reserves. So, my question to the Premier and Minister of Finance would be, if the \$187.5 million is the amount we are receiving, what is the estimated actual amount that taxpayers are paying? Because it sounds like the Agency is going to hold some funds back.

And I am actually going to refer back to page B-107 and the Objectives, about guidance around the CIT. I know some prior legislation made reference to how the Agency would allocate these payments between a refund reserve fund and the Consolidated Fund. So, perhaps we could be informed if the CITA (I am going to have to get used to saying that now, Mr. Chairman) has perhaps set a specific policy.

The Chairman: It sounds perilously close to the same name for the Cayman Regulator: CIMA and CITA, I think, C-I-T-A might be better.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The CIT Agency. Perhaps I will go with that.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I would like to know if, in fact, the CIT Agency has put in place a specific policy to follow around how to allocate any incoming CIT funds between the Government's Consolidated Fund and refund reserve fund.

Going back to the revenue page B-109.

The Chairman: Right.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: If they do answer how much of the total paid, that would answer my question of

how much of that money is being held back for the refund reserve.

I asked about the policy. I will follow up on that policy. Is there some approval? Is it something that is going to be circulated within the Ministry? Some review of that policy, will it be made public? I would like to know that.

Of that number . . .

The Chairman: The number being the \$187 million?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Of that number, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: How many registered taxpayers are there? Because my understanding is by the legislation the taxpayers are supposed to register that they intend to be paying tax. And perhaps the Finance Minister and Premier can provide some indication of how concentrated the payers are in that number. For example, what fraction of that number will be paid by the top 10 payers? That would help us understand how robust we should feel about that number.

The Chairman: Top 10 payers.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay. I feel like Columbo up here, Mr. Chairman, with all of these papers. Okay.

The Chairman: Well, you have some time.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, I know. Okay.

I am going to turn now to Head 11. Actually, I am going to stick on Head 10, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And we are going to look on page B-108.

The Cyber Incident. Could the Finance Minister and Premier provide a breakdown of where those funds were paid? Who were they paid to and in what amounts? We would appreciate that.

The Chairman: That is line item 20996?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, 20996, Cyber Incident 2023.

The Chairman: In the sum of \$3 million and change.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

The Gaming Commission Grant. Which I guess is now nice and steady. We certainly appreciated the Premier's comments about it. I think I heard that there is actually gaming happening on cruise ships, so perhaps the Premier and Finance Minister

could confirm that I heard that right, that there is actual gaming happening on cruise ships.

My understanding is that there is not any sports betting currently on the Island. We have had some shops, and they have closed. I guess what we want to clarify is . . . we are hearing about plans for future sports betting but otherwise there is no other gaming actually happening on the Island. Just to clarify our understanding there.

The Chairman: That is in relation to the \$800,000?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. To the \$800,000 that is funding the Gaming Commission.

The Chairman: At 20110, page B-108.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. 20110.

The Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The following item on page B-108 is Corporate Income Tax, 20120. If we could have an overview of what it is being spent on. Again, I am just a little confused. The Premier was speaking very quickly, and I could not quite follow everything. If I heard correctly, in the future the CIT Agency will be funding itself. But there was something about a loan. So, should we consider this \$4.8 million that is budgeted a loan that is then going to get back? Or is that perhaps some of the future amounts that are in the budget? That would be good to [get] clarified, exactly which part is going to be a loan, when the loan is being made and when it is going to be made back.

The Chairman: And that is line item 20120 on page B-108.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is correct, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Remaining on page B-108 and moving down to the Subjective Analysis. I see that the salaries for the HQ are up 20 per cent, but the headcount is only up plus-1 per cent. I do know that there have been the salary raises, we have heard quite a lot about that. But that does seem a little bit out of whack. So again, if we could have some clarification on that.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That would be the page B-108, Junior Minister, the Salaries line.

The Chairman: So the top line of the Subjective Analysis box at the bottom of the page.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. That is right. It is the top line.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I thank the Honourable Premier for his brief because I was certainly wondering what this special insurance line is here. Because we also have some insurance lines in other places of the Budget Book, and he has clarified that was for cyber insurance. I think we can all appreciate the importance of that. Could we get an overview of the coverage that we are getting for that? How many limits? How much is the limit that we are getting? How many events might be covered and what is scope of the coverage? What types of cyber losses or risks it would be covering?

I know when you buy this kind of insurance you often get access to some kind of risk engineering from the insurance company, it would be a value add. Could the Honourable Junior Minister or the Honourable Premier and Finance Minister—whoever is going to be picking these up—let us know, are we getting access to any of that? So, for example, has the insurance company sent somebody in to audit? Sent professionals in to, perhaps, audit the Government's IT estate and provide tips and techniques or feedback on how we can harden our cyber posture, as they say? And also, you sometimes have access to event response services that the insurance company will facilitate for you.

The Chairman: And that is the line item four from the bottom on page B-108?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, we are still referring to insurance, because my understanding from the brief was that was cyber insurance.

The Chairman: Yes. Understood. And that is the sum of \$560,000.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is correct.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am going back to CIT numbers in the revenue. page B-109.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And of course we have the Corporate Income Tax on \$187,500. The Premier may not wish to answer this, but if they wanted to give us a preview of what these payments might look like over the next three or four quarters, that would certainly help us understand and draw conclusion about how confident to be about those payments.

The Chairman: I will defer to your math. I am just a lawyer, but I am guessing \$187,500 is one-fourth of \$750,000.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I only say, Mr. Chairman, because if I turn to page A-1, I can see there is a line, line 1(a) for Corporate Income Tax. And there is an estimate of \$600 million in the 2026/27 and the 2027/28.

The Chairman: That is [page] A-1?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Hopefully the Government could give us some indication of how those might break out by quarter, because that would help us figure out how much would get into . . . as you know, our budget years are not aligned on the annual year. So that would help us understand that.

The Chairman: Hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Still referring to the Corporate Income Tax income on that same line. What risk factors has the Government considered around the robustness of that estimate? We know that there has been some feedback from the OECD about our particular CIT legislation. We know that under the Trump Administration to the West there has been a pretty radical adjustment in their stance towards these global minimum taxes. Does the Government have contingency plans in place? How are they thinking about these changes and how should we consider when we try to decide how confident we should be about the estimates for the Corporate Income Tax year.

Still sticking with the HQ, I turn now to the Performance Measures on page B-110.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Is the Government considering adding any other performance measures here having to do with fiscal guardrails? There could be some appetite for that from the public. Especially the management of the Corporate Income Tax.

Turning forward to page B-111 under Head 11, the Accountant General—

The Chairman: Before you proceed, may I just check with the Junior Minister whether you would wish to reply head by head or have all the questions?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will take all the questions.

The Chairman: Fine. Duly noted.

If you could just continue with your questions, then. Thank you.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: You have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I can be flexible so if there is a change of heart we can deal.

Right. Where were we? Page B-111.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The total expenditure has a 23 per cent growth of \$20 million. I know that some of that was covered. The GEHI, the increase in debt was covered. I would like to get the answers to the prior questions about the Sinking Fund because I think some of that was spent on the GEHI. And that would kind of lead me to a question, which is: Why in those years the GEHI shortfall was paid out of the Sinking Fund but in this year the GEHI shortfall is being paid out of a cost centre in the Budget Book. Perhaps if there is some policy that the Junior Minister could refer to, or some evolution of thinking, we would love to understand, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: That is line item 21030 on page B-111?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, 21030, Government Employee Health Insurance. Thank you.

The Chairman: Ok. Yes.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I did hear something in the corner. I know that some people think the legislation is the reason. I note that there is some legislation in place they might be referring to. But this year we have chosen to pay it above the line and so I would like to understand what happened. Yes, I would like them to explain their choice. This is what we are here for. And if they cannot explain their choice, I would find that disappointing, Mr. Chairman. Disappointing.

Let us turn to the Mission [Statement] and [Department] Objectives, page B-114. I am looking at 21001, Financial Reporting. I noted in the prior two Auditor General reports that she was not able to provide a clean opinion.

The Chairman: Right.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And so I would like to understand what the Government is doing to fix that problem so that the Auditor General can have the confidence to provide an unqualified opinion on the reports.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, I have a very specific question with regard to the Auditor General's specific comments about the asbestos and underground tank liabilities not being able to be supported. So, I guess my specific question would be how is the Government going to support those so that going forward they can get a clean audit on our Consolidated Fund? I think that would be a pretty important objective.

Then I noticed that in 2023/24 under business unit 21001 the Auditor statements were not achieved. And in 2024/25, I am presuming that is not a question of time. I am presuming that is a question of this issue with the Auditor General's opinion there.

The Chairman: That is the top box there?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

The Chairman: The "Not Achieved."

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is right, Mr. Chairman. The second row down on page B-114.

The Chairman: Yes, I see it. Thank you.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay.
Now I turn back to page B-111.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Sorry.
Financial Reporting, unit 21001—

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —was budgeted for \$580,000 originally last year but only came in at \$329,000. But this year is budgeted to go up to \$713,000.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: There was quite a lot in the brief but perhaps the Junior Minister could narrow down precisely what was driving those changes, Mr. Chairman, because it does seem quite volatile.

I see 21008 under Financial Systems. Again, quite a lot of movement year on year. I think that was kind of covered in the brief about the various systems and so forth. Clearly, we support anything that helps this department do its job better.

Mr. Chairman, I am remaining on the same page. I am looking at 21100, Consolidated Reporting.

The Chairman: Yes. Still on page B-111.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is correct.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: If I understand correctly, that is the initiative to ensure that we can not only get accounts for the Government's Consolidated Fund, but we can get accounts for all of the various quangos and bodies and so forth that are sort of related to the Government. So, we get a true, all-in picture of our Government's finances. I know that has been an outstanding goal for a long time. I was glad to see \$62,000 last year. I am not sure what that was spent on, on this item 21100.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And now it is going down to \$7,000. I guess I should feel glad there is some money in there that I imagine would be to move this initiative along. But I see one headcount on page B-113, again, for 21100. So, I do not understand how \$7,000 is going to pay for one headcount and how that is going to be enough to move this project along? Could the Junior Minister help us understand what initiatives are being taken to arrive at some full consolidated reporting?

The Chairman: Right.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That would be appreciated.
Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
Remaining on page B-111.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Superannuation Fund. I have to say, I know that the staff and employees of the Government have received raises. We have heard a lot about that. So, I am little confused why we do not really see material increases in the contributions to the public sector superannuation fund. That being item 21010 there.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Because I was expecting to see that go up along with the salaries, Mr. Chairman. I think I have an inkling, but I just want to make sure I get that right. So can the Junior explain that?

I also see a slight decrease in the Contributory Pension contributions. Could the Junior Minister tell us about that? Thank you.

Remaining in the same panel, item 21030, we have the Government Employee Health Insurance. We did hear quite a lot about the increase in costs. I will repeat a question I had a little bit earlier which is . . . Okay.

I do note that we did hear some intimation from the Premier about the cost controls around GEHI. We have heard a lot about the pharmacies and programmes like CORE that have been cut. I guess the question would be, is the GEHI approach to the

prescription costs fully fixed and finished now? Or is there perhaps some evolution that we might see on that? Because I think there might be some kinks for them to work out.

Okay. We discussed the Performance Measures. If I turn to the Performance Measures again, Mr. Chairman, on page B-114 I would suggest . . . actually, page B-115 under GEHI business unit 21030, that there might be a performance measure as to the sustainability of the GEHI fund. Because that seems to be a pretty important outcome that we need to ensure here. So, of course, if you do not measure or follow up you will not get the results, Mr. Chairman.

I think I am ready to move on the next head, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Right. Okay.

We are in the Committee of Supply for consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2025/26. I think we are doing all the heads in the Ministry of Finance, given how many are on the page. I believe it is all the heads.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We are not doing . . . Mr. Chairman, we are skipping Land Valuation.

The Chairman: Oh, we are skipping Land Valuation. All right.

In which case, we are doing Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58. We have heard from both the Minister of Finance, who is, of course, the Premier, and from the Junior Minister of Finance. And we are now hearing from the Shadow Minister, Dr. Douglas De Couto of constituency 25.

I think the preference from the other side is for you to continue with questions.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: And we have one hour left.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Perfect. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

All right, so we are on page B-116 and we are looking at Head 12, Customs. We heard a lot about the customs duty costs, customs duty cuts. Probably there could be instances there where perhaps the Government could consider giving even larger cuts, let us say for low-cost housing. That would be, for example, under revenue item 8007 on page B-116. I would urge the Government to consider that.

I am looking at Yacht Arrival and that would be revenue source 8053. It is not a big number, but we do know that when yachts come in that they are not just spending on port fees, they are also in St. George's, the Town of St. George, they are going out to restaurants, they are buying fuel, they are stocking up on provisions, things like that. I did see that in 2024/25 that that was budgeted at \$82,000, and then

it came in at \$4,000, and is now budgeted for \$12,000. So, I do not understand what is going on with that. Any insight would be welcomed from the Junior Minister, Mr. Chairman.

Moving down to 8115, Customs Service Charges. Again, in 2024/25 this was budgeted at \$852,000, but came in at \$642,000. So that was a pretty large reduction. So, I would welcome some context or information on that, Mr. Chairman.

I am going to move on to Head 28 at this time, Mr. Chairman, [page] B-117. I am looking at the Department Objectives, item 7, *To review legislation, make recommendations for modernisation to the Ministry of Finance*. Have any specific recommendations for modernisation been made? And can we be informed of what those are? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I am not going to . . . I have to be honest. I got a little lost here because the brief started covering quite a few items and I was starting to not necessarily find all of the line items on here. For example, I am looking on page B-118, and there are five different cost centres that have staff, but on page B-117 under expenses, none of those costs have been listed. I do not know if that is just a glitch, perhaps there is an erratum to come for the Budget Book. I know that the Budget Book teams work very hard and are under pretty tight time pressure. So, that is something that I noticed there, Mr. Chairman.

If I do turn to page B-118, and I look under Professional Services, and I look at Salaries, could we be reminded as to what the professional services are, and why they are so high, relative to salaries? I am thinking it was for debt collection that was discussed, but if we can get a specific answer that would be much appreciated.

Speaking of collection, I am going to turn to page B-119, Mr. Chairman, and I am looking under the Compliance Unit, 38040, and their objective is to collect \$4.6 million of debt annually that is more than 90 days late. And the forecast was for \$3.1 million, and revised forecast was \$2.2 million. And their budget forecast is \$3.1 million.

The Chairman: Yes, I see that.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Can we have an explanation as to what changes have been made to let them actually achieve that \$3.1 million? Also, if the objective is \$4.6 million, I am not sure why they are budgeting \$3.1 million. Perhaps the subjective should be \$4.6 [million].

Remaining under that business unit, Compliance, 38040, on page B-119, I think it is pretty viable that they are out there inspecting because we often hear of employers who are not making the deductions. We have heard about that. Or they are making the deductions, but they are not sending money for social insurance, and this is a valuable and important thing, and I would urge all employees out there to check

their paperwork and to make sure that the right payments are being made on their behalf. And, certainly, any employers who are not doing right by their employees I would ask them to sort themselves out and make all of the right payments so that their employees are not left up the creek later on.

But I see the target here, Mr. Chairman, on page B-119 is for 2,600 routine inspections per year. And they forecast 1,800 last year but achieved 1,400. And then they forecast 1,800 a go. The note there says 10 inspections per week per inspector. And I looked at the headcount under Compliance and I have to be honest, that doesn't make sense to me because it only makes sense if never took any holidays. And the actuals came in at about half, so, again, I feel like they almost have to double the number of inspectors if they want to achieve that goal. So again, any commentary from the Junior Minister would be welcomed.

Again, I am sticking with the performance measures, and I think it would be . . . I made the same comment about the GEHI. It would be useful to have a performance measure about the stability or health of that fund. And I think it would be good to have a performance measure for the health of the CPF or Social Insurance Fund here to create the accountability for that.

Mr. Chairman, those are my outstanding questions for Head 28.

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister.

We are moving on now to Head 38, are we?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Flipping a page to B-120.

The Chairman: Office of the Tax Commissioner.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That's right. We are glad to hear about the various initiatives in the Office of the Tax Commissioner. I certainly had to interact with it a few times over the years, and they are often very helpful. One thing that we can say about Government departments is that people often do like to complain, but they have often been very helpful and some departments doing interesting and innovative things. I think we did hear in the brief about some examples of that. So, I would like to thank them for applying some creative thinking and initiatives there.

Remaining on page B-120, and looking at the objectives, the objective was to reduce receivables by \$15 million, and we would like to know how that particular number was arrived at. And then looking at the expenditure summary on page B-120 under Operations, 48080, there is a 12 per cent increase, but no increase in headcount. And I suspect that the answer is going to be about fewer consultants, or something like that. But I would like to have some specific answers on that, Mr. Chairman.

I am turning now to page B-122, Mr. Chairman, and I am looking at the Revenue Summary. I

might have some particularly detailed questions here. The Premier did talk quite a lot about the Government's initiative and changes to the payroll tax structure. I think it would be interesting for the Government to consider moving around some of the payroll tax bands, for example, raising up some of the bands because, as we know, the cost of living is going up. Some people are lucky enough to get salary increases to cover their cost of living. But then it may cause their salaries to go into a higher band. For the employers, certainly, if they are good employers and they are raising their payments with the cost of living, they can actually be penalised by having those raised salaries go up into a higher percentage band. So, I think it would make sense to consider adjusting the bands with the cost of living on an occasional basis.

Another example, Mr. Chairman, to consider. Another huge cost, of course, is insurance. And we know that health insurance costs are going up very, very fast. So, again, here is a case of an employer, let's call it a good employer. The [employer] says, *I want to make sure my employees are not losing money because of the health insurance costs. So, I have grossed up their salaries, so that at the end of the year they are taking home the same amount even after we have paid the increased health insurance cost.* But now that employer is being hit twice; both by covering the cost for the employee and by the taxes on that grossed-up amount. So, again, what the Government might consider, if they are really serious about impacting how these tax . . . and, by the way, Mr. Chairman, information for the people out there, it was the One Bermuda Alliance that first put in place the progressive table of tax system.

So, here is another innovation that I would like the Government to consider. Perhaps look up the net pay that employees are taking, because that would de-couple it from these health insurance rises and things like that. Again, also with the structure, another way that those bands impact us, as many people may know if the employers pay costs at a certain band over \$1 million, then their overall tax rate goes up. So, they are disincentivised across that band and it may cause them to not hire that additional person. Or, if their cost per person goes up, they might fire a person, because, ultimately, they are going to end up paying a lot more tax. So, again, that is another reason why I would urge this Government to consider re-examining the bands. And I do see the Minister of Home Affairs here, so I hope she is taking notes on that.

But let me get back to the payroll tax and my specific . . . that was a suggestion related to comments in the brief. So, my specific question is can the Junior Minister . . . we hear quite a lot about this growth, the \$41 million of growth in the payroll tax. Can they tell us which industries this is being driven from? How much of that is due to estimated number of employees growing versus wage growth? I would be

very interested to know what fraction of that dollar growth is coming from exempted companies—

The Chairman: And that is in respect of the \$621 million-odd at page B-122?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is right. It is revenue source 8017, Payroll Tax.

The Chairman: Yes. I see that. So, where that is coming from.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

Following on, Mr. Chairman, we hear a lot about the CIT. And one of the tenets of the CIT is a thing called “qualified refundable tax credits.” And I am not going to bore everybody with that here. But, companies are going to be paying more tax. And they are looking at that number and they are going to see what are some other things that they might . . . I do not want to say get in return, because that is not how it works, but certainly you know that they might be hoping that payroll tax will go down and there may be some government policies that reduce payroll tax. So, are there any policies like that they are considering in the budgeting of the Payroll Tax numbers, both on page B-122, Mr. Chairman, but also if we turn to page A-1—

The Chairman: Right.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —and you can see the Revenue Estimates out through 2026/27 and 2027/28.

The Chairman: So, top of page A-1? Right at the top.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, projected revenue over the next two years. So, your medium-term outlook, you might say.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay, remaining on this page, back to page B-122, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I note that Bank Services Tax is going up \$311,000. And I would like to understand what the driver is for that.

I also see the Corporate Services Tax is going up 10 per cent. I think I know what the answer will be, but again, if the Junior Minister would confirm their views on how they arrived at that 10 per cent.

The Chairman: So, those are the two line items immediately following Payroll Tax, 8018 and 8019?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, my apologies, 8018, Bank Services Tax, and 8019, Corporate Services Tax.

The Chairman: I'm with you. I just wanted to make sure I am following. Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And I also see the Insurance Services Tax's budget is going up to \$51,000, or 4 per cent.

An interesting note here, of course, Mr. Chairman, is when there is inflation, especially insurance inflation, or inflation linked rises in pay, of course the Government gets better revenue, and it is a little bit off the backs of . . . if you think about the rise of insurance costs, it is a little bit off the backs of employees who are paying these higher costs.

In fact, now I am turning to Insurance Services Tax, 8020.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Of course, if you buy insurance, you pay a 3.5 per cent tax on that. So, as your insurance rates go up you are also paying more tax to the government.

I see, now going down that same table, 8029, Foreign Currency Purchase Tax, and the Government is forecasting a 6 per cent increase, or \$1.9 million. We would like to understand the drivers of that, Mr. Chairman.

Remaining with this table, we go down to revenue item 8049, Cruise Ship Departures. It was budgeted for \$26.4 million, came in at \$25 million last year, and is now budgeted at \$23.2 million, or a reduction of \$3.2 million, or -12 per cent. Is that fewer ships? Is that fewer cruise passengers? And I see a similar reduction on the 8034, Transport[ation] Infrastructure Tax. If I am correct, I feel that is connected to cruise passengers. But I would like the explanation from the Government.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. But now we are looking at the detailed revenue.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

These are questions I could have sent to the Premier early. I did certainly . . . I know some Ministers have been quite friendly and allowed . . . we have had some collaboration, and they have gotten back. And I did write to the Premier a week ago, Mr. Chairman, but he wrote me back about 2:00 pm today, so unfortunately, we were not able to have meaningful collaboration.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I appreciate that he was busy travelling.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: You could have still sent me your questions.

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Now, 8061—

The Chairman: Members.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Chairman, 8061, Land Conveyance—

The Chairman: Still on page B-122.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, we are right on the Revenue Summary. Land Conveyance on Sales. Again, those are predicted down -12 per cent. So, I would appreciate an explanation for that, Mr. Chairman.

Now, we are going to turn to the Performance Measures on page B-123.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am looking at 48080 . . . actually, that is page B-124, and the percentage targets for the various electronic filing. I just want to repeat my appreciation for this department and all departments that are taking initiatives on electronic submissions and stuff. This is more of an observation. I can see, for example, the Percentage of Payroll Tax Returns e-Filed is looking pretty sticky at 75 per cent to 80 per cent. I know that there are some people who will never move forward. That is just how they are. But that remaining 20 per cent to 25 per cent could probably consume a lot of time from the staff.

I am remaining on this cost centre and looking at the effectiveness of collection. And I see the target for monitoring debt payment plans under Effectiveness of Collection Process, 100 per cent of debt payment plans electronically monitored. And it was zero per cent, I guess, this year, but set to 50 per cent. Perhaps that was an initiative that did not quite get off the ground last year. But we will look forward to it.

Remaining within this table on page B-124, the last row, *To increase the number of accounts forwarded to the Director of Public Prosecutions [DPP] for non-compliance*. The forecast for this past year was 10. Of course, we are glad to see that people who are not paying their taxes are being held accountable. I see the target outcome is 100. I hope that

the DPP is going to be adequately able to take on that value. And again, if the Junior Minister or the Honourable Premier and Finance Minister could comment on that, hopefully we will have some good cross-department collaboration.

Mr. Chairman, I think that concludes my questions on Head 38.

The Chairman: Thank you, Shadow Minister. You have approximately 40 minutes left in the debate.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We still have two pages to get there.

The Chairman: Two more heads, yes?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mm-hmm.

Okay. We are looking at Head 39 now, Mr. Chairman, and, again, I certainly was appreciative the Premier's brief. It is really important, and the international situation around the world. I mean, we may be a small place, but we have to have this international level of competence here. And I know that the people within that department are working quite hard. And the Premier alluded to . . . not alluded to, referred to the various amounts of training and education and skill-building and investment there. So, I am very glad to hear that.

I am turning to page B-1—

The Chairman: Mr. Joaquin runs a tight ship.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Joaquin. We must remember Mr. Joaquin.

And I am turning now to page B-126.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And I know that the brief was pretty comprehensive, so I am just trying to make sure that I do not ask a question here that was already answered.

I have a general question. It was alluded to in the brief. I know that we still have exchange control on the books, and that if a certain company fails explicit permission must be sought, and that can sometimes be a little bit of a snag and make their deal-making slow. So, if the Junior Minister, or the Premier and Finance Minister, whoever is going to actually answer the questions, could comment on if they are considering adjusting those laws and regulations to remove that little speed bump.

I am turning now to page B-127, Mr. Chairman, and I am looking at the revenue, and I see that the exempted company tax is budgeted to go down by \$2 million.

The Chairman: Yes. Top of page B-127.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. That would be item 8035. And I would see 8041, Non-Resident Company Tax, which is also going down by \$500,000. So, if can they comment on the sources of those decreases, Mr. Chairman, I would appreciate that.

I am actually going to flip back to page B-125 and the Department Objectives.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Item 5 referred to providing technical advice to Ministry of Finance and other government departments. Is there any specific advice that was given which they can provide an example of? I am also referring to item 11 on the same page. We heard quite a lot about the various tax reporting and the various compliance reporting. Have we actually carried out any country-by-country reporting? Have we submitted any country-by-country reports for this regime yet, Mr. Chairman?

Now I am turning to page B-126 and looking at the Subjective Analysis.

The Chairman: Page B-126?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Page B-126. I see that the salaries are plus 28 per cent. But the FTE is only 18 per cent. Again, this is an example of where I see the gap in those. It does not quite align with my understanding of the amount of the pay rises given to people. So, maybe they would like . . . for example, sometimes I know that we get in a more senior person to fill the role, or people are getting promoted, and they get a higher pay band. I would like to know about that, Mr. Chairman.

Travel. I think we heard a lot about that. And I think we heard about office space, so I would have had a question about rentals. But I think that was answered by the brief. So, I am happy for that. Actually, I will ask this question, because the Rentals line on page B-126 under Subjective Analysis was budgeted for \$250,000. It came in at [\$300,000] and is budgeted for \$430,000 next year. I guess they were supposed to perhaps move into a bigger space or didn't make it and are now moving into a bigger or more expensive space. So that would be my question as to what is going on there, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And now I am going to turn to Performance Measures, page B-128. I am looking at 49080, Compliance. And I am looking at the number of inspections. The original forecast for 2024/25 was 240 inspections. And they arrived at 200 inspections. And if I have got my math right, they did that with 7 staff (turning back to page B-127). But now they are going to 16 staff, but they are only going to go up to

240 inspections. So, some commentary on that mismatch would be appreciated, Mr. Chairman.

I know I have quite a lot of questions out there, and it might take some time for the answers to come to be read out, so I want to make sure we leave time for that, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, you have 35 minutes left in the debate. And I think you have only one head outstanding that you have not asked questions on.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, if there were any of the answers available, I would love to hear them.

I am turning now to the Debt and Loan Guarantees, Mr. Chairman.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I will take my seat; I still have more questions.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: No, no. Don't take your seat.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay.

I think we discussed . . . we actually started going a little bit backwards, so we discussed the guarantees.

The Chairman: We are at page B-132 now?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. And I am actually going to flip over to the back of the [Budget] Book. I am looking at page C-4, Capital Developments of the Bermuda Infrastructure Fund. It had \$2.9 million up until the year end 2024. Can we get a description of what that capital funding was for, Mr. Chairman?

Now I turn forward, still on the red pages. Page C-11, Ministry of Finance, and the top group 76921, Corporate Income Tax, capital grant.

The Chairman: Page C-11, yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: If we could have a brief description of what that is for please. I think I had some other questions, but they were well covered in the brief.

The Chairman: Corporate Income Tax, capital grant, 76921, page C-11.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, that is correct, \$750[,000] originally and then \$1.75 million last year.

Social Insurance, the debt management system, 76925, was \$249,000 estimated, and then came in at zero. There were different things mentioned in the brief, and I probably have got them muddled, so if they could just specify exactly what happened there.

Going back to Registrar of Companies, under the OECD Common Reporting, 76867, the \$300,000 estimate for 2025/26, frankly seems quite reasonable for this kind of stuff. So, is there a standard package that we are just buying? Or a piece of software that you buy off the shelf for that? You know, what are we getting for that money?

Turning forward now, Mr. Chairman, to page C-17.

The Chairman: Yes, Grants?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Grants. I think I did ask about the Corporate Income Tax Authority grant before and how that was going to . . . 6965, and the details about how that was going to operate with the loan.

The Chairman: You did.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I did start with my questions about the refinancing. I did start with my questions about the Sinking Fund. I did start with my questions about the BHB [Bermuda Hospitals Board]. So, at this time I think I will yield the floor if there is anyone else with questions, or there are things to come in.

The Chairman: Yes.

All right. Before we move to the Finance Minister, or Junior Finance Minister, is there anyone else who wishes to participate in the debate?

There being none, Premier, do you want . . . or, Junior Finance [Minister].

[Pause]

The Chairman: Thank you.

Finance Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I am going to try my best to cover the questions that have been asked by the Shadow Minister and maybe we can have time for follow up.

It has been through \$500 million, debt re-finance, explains how it will work, partial payments in terms of well, remember, the debt comes due, you repay the debt and if you have to refinance any portion of it, it is so there is nothing.

A question in regard to penalties, our debt is on the open market as well so it can be repurchased at any time and that is just a determination as to whether or not it makes good financial sense or fiscal sense of which to do so.

There was a question related to the Hospital Guarantee. There was a change with regard to accounting standards which is the reason why, as I explained previously, that number has gone up significantly over the years and they have asked us to include all of the stream of interest payments rather

than just the principal amount. So that is the reason why that figure is there.

Matters related to the Sinking Fund, I think the Junior Minister of Finance provided a very wholesome response to that during last week's general economic debate. So, I am not certain what further questions there are to answer on that one.

On page B-107, speaking about objectives in regard to framework for the corporate income tax and corporate income tax agencies, regarding differences between one and the other insofar as setting policy and guidance. CITA [Bermuda Corporate Income Tax Act 2023] recently let out administrative penalties and associated administrative regulations put out by the Government and the international tax working group that speak to guidance on administrative penalties and associated administrative regulations. CITA will be responsible for future setting policy direction and guidance for the collection of revenue for in-scope entities which will require close liaison with the Government to ensure that the work is aligned with the Registrar of Companies . . . of in- and out-of-scope companies with the Ministry of Finance Headquarters to ensure compliance with our international obligations.

The question comes back to the \$187.5 million, which I have explained on multiple occasions, but I will try to explain again. The estimate that we have for corporate income tax is \$750.0 million and the estimate which has been associated with this year's budget is a quarter of those collections on average. As we know, the matter has been said when we first reported this number that was in last year's Budget Statement. It is an average estimated on the take over 10 years. We take in \$750 million and, of course, we are just coming into a space with this regime so we said that a quarter of those particular funds will accrue to the Government for use. You will see in future years we are putting \$600 million as a figure in those future years. However, it is expected that those figures may be higher, but we are just using conservative estimates inside of the Budget Book and future-looking statements.

There was a question in regard to the Reserve Fund, et cetera. This gets rather technical. I think, Mr. Chairman, it would be far better for us that when we bring the reserve fund legislation to this Honourable House a little bit later that we can get into a discussion on the mechanics of the Reserve Fund, et cetera. So, I hope that is helpful enough for the Shadow Minister, understanding where the \$187.5 [million] comes from. But again, it is a quarter of the \$750 million figure, that is the figure that is being placed in there, so we will see what then obtains.

I think I have also given an answer to the \$187 [million] and what those payments look like for the next three or four quarters. As a reminder, I think 50 per cent of estimated tax is due in August. And then 90 per cent of estimated tax is due in December.

And then the final amount is paid, reconciliation and whatever, is paid at tax filing and persons have up until October 2026 to finalise their tax filing for the tax year 2025.

There was a question with regard to risk factors were robust in the estimates. Has there been feedback from the OECD? The OC was compliant with the OECD framework. We do not envision that there is material risk of this number arising from any ongoing international discussions related to Pillar 2.

There was a question regarding registered tax payers there for CIT. Is it possible to break the amounts down by quarter? Filing for Bermuda constituent entities have until ten days before initial payments to register. And, of course, those initial payments are not expected until August. So, we do not have a figure until . . . we will have a better figure closer to the time. The agency will be able to provide a figure at that point in time, certainly subject to confidentiality. And we are unable to provide information on the concentration of payments at this time.

I think it is important to note that we always regard Bermuda's international sector as just insurance, but we are far wider with shipping and other types of various items. So, we recognise the total muddle that we are modelling at \$750 million, which is an average that is conservative. But we will see and have better data to match with the actual filings that come in when they commence in August of this year.

In regard to payments related to the previous year on the cyber incident, that was to Palo Alto Networks.

Gaming Commission is responsible . . . the question you asked is there gaming on ships. Yes, that was in the Cruise Ships (Casinos) Act 2013, which was passed by the former Government. And regarding other items, there was a Gaming (Transfer of Functions) Act 2021, which governs cruise ship gaming, which is not new. It has been happening since 2013.

In regard to matters related to the betting framework, yes there are changes that are being processed there insofar as a new way to charge taxes rather than the way which is a relatively old-fashioned way where we put a charge on the initial bet. I think this is . . . we are going to change it so that it is done in a different fashion that is like other jurisdictions, which is expected to bring more persons in casino . . . sorry, the Gaming Commission currently has two matters from international companies related to the provision of sports betting under a regulated framework here in Bermuda, partnering with local companies which is something that the Ministry of Finance has stated is necessary as we will not be giving 114B licences for overseas companies to operate gaming on Island and on things because we want to ensure that we actually have local companies who may have been involved in this before to be a part of this. So that is

the stuff that is taking place with the Gaming Commission.

The question in regard to \$4.78 million in regard to the CIT grant, that is a full grant. That is not a loan. In the Budget Statement and also the brief spoke about additional funding that will be necessary in the coming year. And that funding is going to be done from the interest on deposits that the body is going to get. So that is going to be an ongoing revenue stream for them. That is how they are going to fund it. But that \$4.78 [million] is not a loan; it is a grant located inside of this budget.

There was a question in regard to salaries going up, and I do not remember what particular page this was, but it was a question of salaries up 20 per cent in \$427,000—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry?

The Chairman: Page B-108.

Hon. E. David Burt: Page B-108. Thank you for that, Mr. Chairman.

That is one additional position together with salary pay award increases.

There was a question about coverage we have for cyber insurance, has anyone reviewed the IT estate to improve cyber policy. Our reviews are ongoing. I can look to get specifics in regard to our coverage, but certainly coming off the recent cyber incident it clearly was not the easiest thing to procure such. But we continue to upgrade and you will recognise there is record investments insofar as the IT estate for the Government of Bermuda in addition to various funding for national resilience in cyber which will be inside of the Ministry of National Security, and also when we debate Cabinet Office heads you will see additional increases in the IDT budget.

There was a question about whether or not the Government is considering adding any KPIs regarding fiscal guardrails. Those are matters that we will discuss in the future that will come from the Tax Reform Commission. Remember, the Tax Reform Commission was charged specifically . . . and, of course, the Honourable Member will be aware, as he did sit on that particular Commission. But one of the things was to recommend guardrails. And we will wait for the recommendations that will come.

There were also a number of various things and suggestions in regard to changes to payroll tax. And, again, the Government has stated that we are not doing any meaningful changes to the payroll tax structure until we receive the report from the Tax Reform Commission, which is expected next month. So, at that point in time it will be tabled here, and we will have plenty of time to debate those particular matters

prior to the Government deciding which recommendations it may wish to take forward.

There was a question regarding GHI, and GHI not being paid out of the Sinking Fund. This is a possible misunderstanding around this issue. The increase is certainly to the Government's portion of the funds of which we are going to pay. It is important to note that as I mentioned it came to the attention of the Minister of Finance the challenges that were being experienced with GHI when we were comparing Sinking Fund balances and something was not necessarily adding up directly with the matters. Upon examination those matters were being funded out of the excess borrowing account, which is allowable under the law to cover shortfalls in the Consolidated Fund operations. Therefore, those matters are being addressed and are now fully inside of the budget.

The matter related to the Auditor and the clean audit opinion regarding the accounts, I think it is important to note that these matters have changed. We are not the only jurisdiction that has had this particular challenge—there are providences in Canada as well—due to this change with these particular matters. However, the Government has partnered with an external subject matter expert to gain an understanding of further work that is required for this new accounting standard. And working with the external expert we were able to develop a comprehensive model for the estimate of future costs of the extra retirement obligations. The Accountant General has met with the Auditor General to confirm our understanding of the concerns which led to the qualification and the additional work required to address. We prepared a comprehensive plan to address and will continue to work with external experts. The implementation is planned to remove this qualification. But it is important to note this is only on asset retirement obligations for asbestos and other related items. And the challenges that we are experiencing in Bermuda are no different than what has been experienced in Canada where accounting standards, which the Auditor General used, have come from, where there are similar qualifications which appeared in national and provisional accounts in Canada as we try to make sure that we get up to this particular standard.

There was a question of other audited funds not being done, and we have finally onboarded additional management accountants which will help the Accountant General in bringing some of those funds up to date.

There was a question about financial reporting. Original \$580[,000] then came down to \$300[,000] and now up to the original \$580[,000] included a six-month salary for two vacant positions. Recruitments were not completed until close to the end of the fiscal year. For 2025/26, the estimates include the full year salary for those two staff along with the uplift in salaries.

I do note the question about the consolidated fund reporting. That is something that has been a long-established goal. I cannot state when we will actually achieve that goal, as you will recognise from this budget brief the Ministry of Finance has a significant amount of matters of which they are working on. And although that is a priority for some, we want to make sure that we can get our financial systems up and running and expand matters related to our E-1 system as well. But it is a long-term goal and something that hopefully we will achieve at some point in time during this particular Parliament.

There was a question why the funding has not gone up with the Superannuation Fund as much as other areas with the pay rise, the uptake in government pensions as well as the number of employed as the estimate is based off of the current numbers that are employed. And, of course, new persons as well.

The decrease in the contributory pensions 2024/25 estimates for the PSSF and CPF came in below estimates. These estimates in 2025/26 were built out using the 2024/25 actual spend with projected increases for headcount and salary increases.

There were questions that related to GEHI. I want to start with the first rebutting of a falsehood which I know continues to come from the Opposition. CORE was not cut. I want to repeat that again, *core was not cut*. Thank you. That is the first instance.

Secondly, on the matters that are related to what is happening with costs for prescriptions, it is important that GEHI manages other health insurance plans. Members will remember that there was a commitment to amalgamate the administration of GHI, HIP and FutureCare into one to streamline those administrative processes. And what we found with GHI is that there are not the cost control measures that you would find in traditional insurance systems. This particular thing insofar as prescriptions is just one of them. The manager has a number of various recommendations and it is also important to note that GHI is not managed purely by the Minister of Finance, though the Minister of Finance has responsibility. There is a GEHI management committee that has representatives from all of the public sector unions which are part of that and the changes for GHI are discussed with that committee prior to any form of implementation to make sure that they understand because, of course, their employees—oh, sorry, their members are the ones who are primarily affected by changes to GEHI.

There was a question in regard to yacht revenue to Customs. Why is it budgeted at 70 and now dropped if yachts are coming, if not so, why? Yachts are coming, revenue is included in other more specific object line including SRVs, Ships, Customs Service Charges, and like tolls.

Modernisation of social insurance legislation, what is happening? Various pieces of legislation are under consideration to update the Act. Also, the de-

partment is working closely with the Ministry of Finance to stop loopholes to protect the fund from exploitation until full contributory pension fund legislative changes are completed which we are expecting to advance significantly this year.

On the matters related to understanding costs and headcount for social insurance, I think the Shadow Minister asked that. As I explained in the brief, the expenses are there. However, remember, these things are met from the consolidated . . . not the consolidated fund, the Contributory Pension Fund and they are re-charged. And that is why those amounts are stated at zero.

There was a question that was asked in regard to why is the Professional Services amount so high. Those professional services, though imperfect, are all for war pension benefits. So that is where they are reported, under the Professional Services line item. They are not seen as professional services, but that is just the allocation when you are being paid to external persons or service providers. So that is why it is there under Professional Services. And that is for \$265 million.

Questions in regard to the target with debts and numbers, how are we going to get back to the target? The department is in the process of filling vacant posts in the last year. The compliance section is looking to collaborate with other Ministry of Finance departments, as I stated inside of the brief, to better identify delinquent employers. As you know, inside the Cabinet Office, and others we brought on additional data science experts that will be able to link the two systems together by using advanced IT systems which do not require what used to be done where there was significant work that was done. We can now take these data sets and look across the two particular main departments, Office of the Tax Commissioner and Department of Social Insurance, to better identify those persons as well.

A question was in regard to 2,600 inspections per year not managing to hit budget. It doesn't add back to that number, how is that derived? We need to double compliance officers. It is 10 inspections a week, and for 47 weeks, plus an estimate of 250 other investigations times five inspectors takes us to that 2,600 figure that has been mentioned.

Moving on to Head 38, reduce receivables by \$50 million. How is this arrived at? OTC currently has three debt collectors with the estimate of \$5 million collected per debt collector.

In regard to . . . I will get back to you on the question on 48080, a matter related to operations, where it says 12 per cent increase, but no increase in headcount. I just want to make sure I get a correct answer for that to reply back to you, Shadow Minister.

I will just ask for clarification on your question for 48080. Was that specifically just for that line item, and you are asking for the increase? Or was it an overall item? I am happy to yield.

The Chairman: Thank you.

The Finance Minister is yielding, will the Shadow Minister wish to clarify the question posed?

I call on the Honourable Member for constituency 25 to clarify, if you wish.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: No. I am mindful of time, so he can continue.

The Chairman: Duly noted.

The floor is yours, Finance Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: All right, thank you. I will press on.

In regard to change the payroll tax structure, moving the bands, et cetera, we are going to wait for the report from the Tax Reform Commission.

Which industry is this being driven by, and how is this put out? When we talk about payroll tax it is important to note that the \$41 million increase is an increase over the original estimate from last year. But if you look at the change between the revised estimate and the current one, it is a lot smaller figure than the change to the original estimate from last year where our collections were higher than expected.

There was a question in regard to a breakdown in regard to this. Typically, international business receipts form about (let me try to give a figure) . . . international . . . exempted undertakings, not just international business, because they are exempted undertakings. Overall [they] contribute to about 40 per cent of total tax take ups. And then it of course it depends on quarters. Some quarters were higher. Other quarters are typically in line. So, I will call it around between 40 per cent and 50 per cent of payroll tax collections come from exempted undertakings.

There was a question about payroll tax moved forward, why reduction in future years. That was done as stated in the Budget Statement a provision for the Government's stated position that companies that are inside of the framework for corporate income tax will likely have some form of remuneration on those particular matters.

In the matters related to banking, service tax and other types of taxes, those were just on a 2.5 per cent increase based on inflation. Their increase is based on revised figures, not the original figures. So, it can be sometimes confusing when you are looking at the changes from last year to this year, the original figures. But I would encourage the Shadow Minister to also look at the changes to the live figures. They were done on the 2.5 per cent increase which was basically overall inflationary increase there.

I answered that on foreign currency purchase tax. Insurance tax, we had spoken about cruise ship departures King's Wharf is being repaired, and there is less availability for cruise ships to dock. And same thing on transport infrastructure tax, and land conveyance was dropping, estimates were lower based on

actual collections based off 2024/25 of \$16.5 million. But it is also important to note that we have removed the, expanded greatly the first-time homebuyers and also the tax on mortgage transfers. So, in that case and instance that is going to see some money coming out of the stamp duty, but that is fine because we think that the overall economy will benefit due to more activity that is taking place.

There is a section of taxpayers particularly the older [ones] who prefer to pay their taxes ACG cashiers. So, that is why it is being stuck at 75 per cent. I understand we want to continue to move that and over time as we make things easier, we hopefully will see better on that.

Payment plans 100 per cent electronic monitors, what KPIs the actual plan numbers mean. When the Smart cases was live payment plans can be monitored electronically using the AS400 system which is 30 years old. Tax accounts have been reviewed manually reducing effectiveness.

The question in regard to question 44, in regard to increased amounts for public prosecution, target outcome 100 can be . . . you deal with that number, the DPP advised they can manage 10 accounts per month. It is a new undertaking. Will monitor progress and amend if necessary.

Moving on to Head 39, still have exchange controls for company sales and permissions required can be a snag on deals that consider these requirements and laws to make the project more efficient. Change control falls within the preview of the Bermuda Monetary Authority acting as an agent for the Minister of Finance. Permission is required. No change to the control framework is contemplated other than changes for accommodate the transfer of the beneficial ownership register for BMA to Registrar of Companies. It is important to note that permissions underpin our international commitments depending on the nature of business, mergers may require additional reviews and approval by supervisory teams.

Exempted revenue dropping, why? A minor decrease in total numbers of companies some what struck from the Register, the overall percentages in decreases of material. Non-resident tax dropping minor decrease in the overall numbers, some are struck from the register. The overall percentages decreases in material.

What specific advice did the ROC offer regarding given to and . . . the Registrar of Companies oversees the entire corporate registration framework together with various e-compliance frameworks and the Registrar of Companies may provide advice to any matter underneath its remit.

Question 49, tax reporting and compliance will be done on a country-by-country reporting. Country-by-country reporting is not done by us, it is done by the individual companies that form part of this particular thing submitted to the portal and this has been taking place since 2017.

Salaries increased by 28 per cent, but FTIs are not increasing as much, but why? This is due to headcount that was budgeted last year but no vacancy for budget were not in as they were done by professional services and consultants. So it just means the fact that the activities that were taking place . . . I know there was another question in regard to inspections, and we are raising headcounts, but we are not raising the number of inspections. The reality is that those inspections are done by persons who are contracted by Professional Services but will now be done by persons who are in situ inside of the particular Ministry.

Question 51 was a question about rentals and moving, the plan was to move last year. It did not happen, but we are looking to have that done this year.

There are no questions on loan guarantees. We know we have a history of the Bermuda Infrastructure Fund—

The Chairman: Premier, we are in the last five minutes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay, I am trying to . . . he asked a lot of questions.

The Chairman: He did. He did. He did, indeed.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am just trying to go—

The Chairman: Inquiring minds.

Hon. E. David Burt: Ah!

I just want to go through . . . then there was a question in regard to the infrastructure or the capital grant. That capital grant was given last year for a start-up, and additional needs will be met through the borrowing facility that we had mentioned.

There was a question, question 57, in regard to e-initiatives on the Registrar of Companies with capital. The software is already being used. The e-initiative will fund the Beneficial Ownership Register. And enhancements to the real estate liquidations, \$300,000 is budgeted for OECD reporting software upgrades.

And there was a question in regard to the grant for CITA. And that work is going to go to CITA, but also to support for the MOF for work to progress the corporate income tax regime.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Finance Minister and Premier.

I see that the Honourable Member for constituency 25 is on his feet. I think, realistically, you are not going to get any more questions and answers in, but if you want to have a valiant try—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: For the record, Mr. Chairman, I would like to get my question in. I did ask about the number of payers for the corporate income tax, who is registered . . . so I am a bit flummoxed because the Government is very confident in the amounts it is getting but does not seem to be able to tell anybody how many payers there will be. And he also was not able to answer how much of the funds they are expecting will be held off in the reserve.

I do also have a question to ask. He indicated that we, and I am assuming he is speaking of the Ministry, Mr. Chairman, have set the amount that the CO would forward to the Consolidated Fund, but if I understand correctly that is actually under the purview of CITA to actually set. So, if he could perhaps clarify who is making that decision, I would appreciate that, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Honourable Finance Minister and Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: I answered the question. I will repeat it again so that the Honourable Member can hopefully get it this time.

The people do not have to register until 10 days before tax filing. That will be in August. At that point in time, we can provide an accurate number based on the question of which he asked.

In regard to estimates which have been made, it is important to note that country-by-country reporting, which has been taking place since 2017, is reported to the OECD. The OECD has these figures. The OECD has shared these figures with us. Those figures have been shared with the Tax Reform Commission. That is the reason why we are confident in regard to projections which have been made.

I would hope the Shadow Minister would stop trying to undermine this matter related to the conservative estimates that have been made—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. E. David Burt: —there has been significant—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Chairman, point of order.

The Chairman: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Honourable Premier is imputing improper motive, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chairman: All right.

Well, I thank you both. To the Honourable Finance Minister and the Honourable Shadow Minister. And, indeed, the Junior Minister as well, MP Furbert.

That concludes our debate on the Ministry of Finance.

Honourable Finance Minister, if you would like to move your heads, please.

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

I move that Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Honourable Member it has been moved that Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none, Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58 are approved.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Finance, Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: Honourable Finance Minister, would you like us to rise and report progress?

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

I move that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none, we shall rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply rose and reported progress and asked for leave to sit again.]

[Timer chimes]

House resumed at 8:01 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, Members. It has been reported that the Committee [of Supply] rose and reported progress and sought leave to sit again.

Were there any objections to that?

There being none, we shall move on with the Orders of the Day. I understand that we are doing Orders 2, 4, and 5. And so, with that said, I call on the Minister of National Security to present his Bill.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good evening, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025 be now read for the second time.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025 be now read for the second time.

Are there any objections?

There are none. Continue, Minister.

BILL

SECOND READING

EXPLOSIVE SUBSTANCES AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to present for the consideration of this Honourable House the Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025, a Bill that seeks to modernise our legislative framework to reflect the practical realities and professional standards of today's pyrotechnics industry in Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, under the current provisions of the Explosive Substances Act 1974, fireworks display permits may only be granted to public officers acting in their official capacity, municipal corporations or hotel managers. While this structure was originally intended to ensure proper oversight and safety, it has become outdated and unnecessarily restrictive in practice. In effect, trained and certified pyrotechnicians must rely on eligible third parties, such as a government official or hotel manager to apply for and collect a permit on their behalf. This introduces unnecessary bureaucracy and inefficiency into what should be a straightforward process. It also places an administrative burden on public officers who are required to perform duties unrelated to their primary responsibilities such as collecting and relaying permits.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the amendment proposed in this Bill will allow for fireworks permits to be issued directly to trained and certified pyrotechnicians who are employed by licensed pyrotechnic companies.

An Hon. Member: Good idea.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This adjustment preserves the existing oversight mechanisms. Permits will still be issued only after the Commissioner of Police consults

with the Chief Fire Officer and coordinates with the relevant agencies, such as Air Traffic Control, Marine and Ports, and the Environment and Natural Resources [Department] will continue as required. This is not a change in safety policy. It is a change in administrative efficiency that removes intermediaries from the process while maintaining all existing controls.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this amendment enables a more streamlined and modern permitting process. It reduces the Government's administrative burden and supports the responsible professional operation of the pyrotechnic industry. At the same time it allows individuals and event organisers greater flexibility in contracting services for public and private celebrations such as weddings, community events and national holidays.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members are advised that as part of the consequential amendments the fee for the issuance of a fireworks permit has been revised from \$300 to \$500. This adjustment reflects the need to more accurately cover the administrative costs associated with the review, approval, and oversight processes which are critical to maintaining public safety and regulatory compliance. This is the first rate increase for fireworks permits since the fee was implemented in 1976.

Madam Deputy Speaker, these amendments are modest, sensible updates that reflect the evolving needs of both the public sector and private event organisers, while supporting the safety and professionalism that the use of fireworks demands. I therefore commend the Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025 to this Honourable House for Honourable Members to debate.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Bill entitled Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Members of this Honourable House and the listening public.

Myself and Members of the Opposition wholeheartedly support this legislation. We think it is a good piece of piece of law, and it can actually pave the way for some employment, future employment, for Bermudians in this field.

A couple of questions or concerns that I have with the legislation as drafted, understanding the nature of the explosive substances, it being inherently dangerous, I am wondering if there is a consideration of provision for indemnity insurance in the Bill and also some considerations in respect of environment to ensure that the environment, both land and sea, is protected.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Bill?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

I just have one question arising from the Bill and I actually took the liberty of raising it with the Honourable Minister in advance. The question is really this: The fee is going up for the permit. And, obviously, we know about this new fireworks business and we all want it to succeed. Why do we want it to succeed? Because when tourists come to Bermuda what better thing to have as an event than fireworks? So, we want to see this Bermudian business get off the ground and succeed and flourish.

So, with that in mind, my question to the Honourable Minister is this: If the fee for the permit is going up from \$300 to \$500, what are we going to do about whether he has to have a permit, or the business has to have a permit, each and every time? Because the legislation as currently drafted in section 10(3) of the primary Act suggests that there has to be a new permit issued every time with the date and the location of the fireworks. And I hope that is not the case, because if we are really going to a business off the ground where we see fireworks three, four, five times a month, maybe more during the high season, I think it would be prohibitive for the business to have to meet a cost of \$500 on each and every occasion.

So, I did ask the Honourable Minister if he could confirm that there will in fact just be a fee for this business, and not a recurring fee for each and every event, and I welcome the clarification.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, do you want that question answered in Committee? Yes?

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am entirely in the hands of the Minister as he prefers.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this Bill?

I recognise the Member from constituency 12. Member, you had the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, and thank you, and good evening to colleagues and listening Bermuda.

Just one basic comment. Just the other day I got home, and I heard fireworks going off. And I was not quite sure where it was coming from at first, which led me (when I was reading through this particular Bill here, this amendment) . . . I was just wondering . . . there is no line item here so in Committee it would not

make any sense, but it is a question of . . . are they with fireworks licences, let's say to a hotel, are they required to gazette the fact that they are actually going to have fireworks?

The reason I asked that question is that my neighbour has a dog. When those fireworks go off, he went foolish. All right? And I thought *what in the world is going on?* And I could hear this thing, bang-bang-bang—I didn't know it was fireworks going off. I guess, God forbid, if someone may have a pacemaker or something that shocks them and pushes that thing off, well, it would be nice if it was gazetted.

But I did not see anywhere in the legislation that it requires a gazetting or making an official notice that there will be fireworks in, I don't know, Tucker's Point or up at South P, when it gets up and going, or Hamilton P, for that matter. So, it would be nice to be able to know. I couldn't find it anywhere in the legislation at all were it mentioned that.

But I will say again that from the last time the legislation came, I am so happy to see that. That we have the opportunity and our young local who is responsible . . . pyrotechnics and making sure that this stuff is well organised. So, we are all behind this. I guess just what we want to make sure is that the red tape is being cut out here. That is an extremely important thing, and I see the sense of what the Minister is attempting to do.

So, we are in full support. We do not want to belabour it. But maybe just have a few questions out.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Bill?

I recognise the Member from constituency 15. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would just like to take a small moment to speak in support of this Bill that my honourable colleague the Minister of National Security has brought.

This Honourable House will recall that maybe about a year ago when I sat in another place that we actually brought forward, obviously it came to this place as well, a Tourism Investment Order. And this was the very first, this particular business. Well, I do not think we are talking about a particular business, but there was a particular business. I think it's the only one in Bermuda that does that—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, Swan Pyrotechnics. It's the only business that we bought a Tourism Investment Order. And it was the very first in the category of attractions. And it was supported by both Houses at the time.

And I know that the way it was written previously is that every single time that he wished to put on a fireworks display at any establishment he had to . . . I think the law was written where it had to be an MP, or it had to be some . . . somebody . . . it had to go through a manager. It was a very arduous process, and very long.

So, I just want to speak to this Bill and show the support that this Government continues to have in this area because it does come under attractions. And as we are trying, then you will see in what is to come later this evening, as we are trying to further invest in the tourism product in Bermuda, I think that anything we can do to make this process smoother for the entrepreneur, as well as the individuals who want these fireworks, is definitely a positive thing. So, I'd like to speak in support of my colleague.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this Bill?

Recognising no others, Minister, you may reply.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to thank all of the Members who have participated, in particular the Member from constituency 15 who ably supported me and the Government's initiatives.

Madam Deputy Speaker, if I may, the first question from the Member for constituency 10, I think it was about insurance. For clarity, all pyrotechnic companies have to have insurance. So, they have to have insurance for their business.

The second question for . . . and actually the second question [asked by the Member for] constituency 10 about the environment and whatnot, as I said in my brief, the Police Commissioner confers with the Fire Chief and Marine and Ports and other relevant agencies. So, all of that is covered in the exercise of the Commissioner of Police dealing with the Fire Chief and the other . . . and whoever else.

For the Member from constituency 22, he asked about the fee. First of all, when he said that the fee hasn't been increased since 1976, so it is going from \$300 to \$500, what I must say is that the fee that the pyrotechnics people charge for their service, this fee is a relatively minimal administrative fee.

So having said that, Madam Deputy Speaker, if no one else has any questions or comments, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill entitled Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025 be committed.

I call on the Member from constituency 22 to take the Chair.

[Pause]

The Deputy Speaker: I do not—

House in Committee at 8:17 pm

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

EXPLOSIVE SUBSTANCES AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Chairman: Members, we are now in Committee of the whole House for consideration of a Bill entitled [Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025](#).

I call on the Minister in charge to proceed.

Minister, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Chairman, I would like to move all four clauses.

The Chairman: It has been proposed that the Minister move all four clauses at once.

Any objections?

No objections, please do.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Clause 1 provides the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends the principal Act by repealing section 10(1) and replacing it with provision to allow for a new category of person to whom a fireworks permit may be granted—certified [and trained] pyrotechnician employed by a pyrotechnics company—and to allow for consultation between the Commissioner and the Chief Fire Officer regarding the grant of fireworks permits.

Clause 3 amends the principal Act in section 11(8) by deleting the reference to the Government Fees Act 1965 and substituting it with the Government Fees Regulations 1976, so as to provide a more accurate reference to the Statutory Instrument wherein the fees payable for a licence or permit are prescribed.

Clause 4 provides for the consequential amendment to the Government Fees Regulations 1976 increasing the fee for a fireworks permit from \$300 to \$500.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Is there any Member who wishes to speak to the Bill in Committee?

There being none, Minister.

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

I now move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: Yes. If you would move the clauses first.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I would like to move that clauses 1 through 4.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 4 of the Bill be approved.

Is there any objection?

There is no objection. Clauses 1 through 4 are approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 4 passed.]

The Chairman: Would you like to move the preamble?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: it has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Is there any objection?

There is no objection. The preamble has been approved.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Is there any objection?

There is no objection. The Bill will be reported to the House as printed.

[Motion carried: The Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 8:20 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

EXPLOSIVE SUBSTANCES AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Deputy Speaker: It has been reported that the Bill be accepted as printed and that there were no objections. There being none, that takes us on to the next Bill.

I call on the Minister for Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Good evening.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the draft Order entitled the Tourism Investment (Hillcrest Boutique Hotel) Order 2025, proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for

Tourism under section 3 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017, together with the written agreement of the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section 5 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the [draft Order entitled] the Tourism Investment (Hillcrest Boutique Hotel) Order 2025 be considered.

Any objections?

There being none, Minister.

DRAFT ORDER

TOURISM INVESTMENT (HILLCREST BOUTIQUE HOTEL) ORDER 2025

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The purpose in bringing this [Tourism Investment \(Hillcrest Boutique Hotel\) Order 2025](#) before this Honourable House is to enable the grant of tax relief to the developer investing in the tourism product, Hillcrest Boutique Hotel, Hillcrest Boutique Hotel, Ltd., which is in the national economic interest of Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to invite this Honourable House to take this Order under consideration. The Hillcrest Boutique Hotel Ltd. is a Bermuda company incorporated on 8 October 2024. The hotel is the former Aunt Nea's Inn, which was built in the 1770s and was the first guest house in Bermuda to accept non-White guests during the period of segregation. It was purchased in July 2023 and was renovated and redesigned to create 14 suites, nine king suites, one additional king suite, one bachelor suite, two queen suites, and one cottage suite. The new amenities include a heated saltwater pool, a six-person hot tub, sauna, indoor and outdoor lounge with firepit, gym and a massage room.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in February of 2025, the Hillcrest Boutique Hotel came into the hotel inventory, and was placed on the tourism accommodation inventory as an inn with, as previously mentioned, a total of 14 units accommodating a maximum of 37 guests on any given night.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the staffing model of this inn includes housekeeping services provided by a local company, a hotel operations and distributions manager, an experiences manager, and a live-in maintenance manager.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members will note that the Hillcrest Boutique Hotel has been awarded the full terms of relief allowed by the legislation, which is, full relief from customs duty for 15 years from the operative date of the Order; full relief from hotel occupancy tax for 15 years from the hotel's opening date; and full relief from the employer's share of payroll tax for 15 years from the hotel's opening date; full exemption from land tax for 10

years starting from the sixth anniversary of the hotel's opening date.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members will note that exemptions from land tax is subject to the hotel's confirming in years 6 through 15 that 70 per cent of the hotel's staff must be Bermudian. Further, Madam Deputy Speaker, exemption from the employer's share of payroll tax is subject to a management training programme for Bermudians that is in operation at the hotel which is verified by the Department of Workforce Development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Hillcrest Boutique Hotel pairs timeless elegance with modern sophistication. It offers guests a private, tranquil, deeply comfortable home away from home with every modern amenity at affordable prices.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I conclude as I began, this Government's support of this tourism product is in the national economic interest of Bermuda. Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to recommend this Order for the support of this Honourable House. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Do any other Members wish to speak on this Order?

I recognise the Member from constituency 30. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you so much.

Right off the top, obviously, I want to extend our support from the Members of the Opposition for this historic property.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I do not support the East End for Cup Match, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I do support economic activity and tourism investment for them, and I hope to see this stimulate more activity in the East End of the Island.

We also want to take time to note the history of the property and how important that is for the tapestry of Bermuda and for the tapestry of the East End.

I just have two small questions: Obviously, this will have to be done in collaboration with multiple ministries, but I would just like to know if we can get a bit of an update on the multiple moving parts of getting Bermudians into hospitality. So, we see the 70 per cent requirement for Bermudians, and I just know that we have a signature school, or a signature programme that does hospitality. We have seen some Workforce Development moves that have gotten some folks in. But if the Minister could endeavour to just get a bit of information for us at a later time (I don't expect him to have that tonight)—

The Deputy Speaker: You have to speak to the Order.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: But just to see how we can ensure that that 70 per cent is able to be covered by every hotel that is getting that particular stipulation because we have passed a few in this Honourable Chamber, and every single one is going to have to have 70 per cent and eventually we need to make sure we have the Bermudian workforce to accommodate that.

Also, along with the Workforce and Development checking the management programme, just a bit of clarity on that. How will that check be done? And how can we verify that Bermudians have been given a chance. Not necessarily specifically for this hotel, but just to that stipulation in general.

With that, you have our support, Minister.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak to the Order?

I recognise the Member for constituency 2.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am very happy for the Minister to present this Order today. I am in 100 per cent support of the Hillcrest Boutique Hotel coming onstream. It is a property that I am very familiar with from Mrs. Trew Robinson, who I happen to know. And when I came to St. George's to open the golf course in 1985, Trew Robinson's guests used to come up to that property, our property, to enjoy our amenities. And Ms. Robinson was a very consummate hotel proprietor, and a very elegant person she was.

I want to also . . . when her son, a former Member of Parliament, Deloy Robinson, took the property. He was a former chairman, I believe, of the Bermuda Tourism Board when he was a Member of Parliament at that time. Nothing that was unprecedented, because I think I have mentioned before that persons in the House like DeForest Trimmingham and other Members, Kitson, I think, and other Members of Parliament were also chairmen of the Tourism Board as well over the years. So, there is nothing uncommon because we have an interest in the hotel industry and have a contribution to make in the industry that they are familiar with and that makes ever so much sense.

The history of Aunt Nea's Inn, dating back to [Sir] Thomas Moore, the great poet, and all of the stories that one could tell that inspired that poet's work lent its name to the romance of St. George's which is filled with it. And what a wonderful area it is, if anybody is familiar with Old Maids Lane. If you are not, I suggest you take a walk through those alleys and experience the wonderful aura that it presents.

Certainly, the history of the connection between persons who owned the property and politics is not lost on me. Ms. Trew Robinson, as I said, had a son who was in this very House. But before him, she

had a son that sat in this House as well, Cecil Clarke for the Progressive Labour Party, her son also.

And it is not lost on me that the current proprietor's mother was a Premier of this country who actually introduced me to the other House in 1998. And her aunt as well sat in this very House. So, there are certainly connections with that property, and it certainly speaks to why it would be ahead of its time and open its doors to all and sundry and lead the way to make sure that fairness existed even when it was not legislated as so.

And while I am speaking about the amenities, the great addition to St. George's, let me just remind everyone in this country that St. George's is leading the way in hospitality. I have written papers in recent years to tell you that in St. George's we are the complete destination. And I am going to go as far as to say [that] anyone that knows St. George's knows that Tucker's Town is in St. George's. So, [it is] in St. George's Parish, and we claim parts of Hamilton Parish as well—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —because when you look from The Loren and you work your way past Tucker's Point, which is Rosewood, when you go to Mid Ocean Club (you have got two golf courses there), when you go around the corner you pass Tom Moore's Tavern (not so dissimilar to the Tom Moore that would have written those poems inspired by Old Maid's Lane), and you would hit Grotto Bay. I have hit four hotels already, and I am coming across the bridge.

You have an airport that you rely on in the parish of St. George's.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Right? You would go a little bit further if you ventured over to St. David's. You would get lost in another world. But you go across that wonderful bridge that soon will see pavement—beautiful pavement from the Minister of Public Works and [Environment]. He has promised that before Cup Match we are going to get some beautiful asphalt there to lead us into St. George's when we claim the Cup. And I am here to tell you—

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —that in St. George's now—

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —in St. George's now you have three hotels—three hotels on St. George's island. Three hotels in greater St. George's. That is six hotels, three golf courses because—

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —they renovated—

An Hon. Member: And no Cup.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —because they renovated St. George's golf club with the building of St. Regis hotel. And I—

An Hon. Member: Where's your Cup, Kim?

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —I am getting to that.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I am here to say you have got the flagships of forts in Fort St. Catherine. And you have the greatest example of volunteerism in this country taking place with the restoration of the different forts, like in St. George's—Fort Albert, Fort Victoria and the like.

And I want to say a special thank you to friends of St. George's for that work of volunteerism, clearing out that debris. It is easy to blame the Government for all the casuarina trees that occupy all the forts, but it takes a great spirit of people to go and roll up their sleeves on weekends, give up their time to make it possible for us to have greater tourism products. Let that be an example up and down this country for people to roll up their sleeves and be volunteers to help us get better. And in St. George's, we are leading the way with those six hotel properties east of—

An Hon. Member: Thank you, OBA.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Bermuda! Because we could have done like the OBA did when a contract was given to develop the waterfront. That same Minister that said, "Thank you, OBA," was the first person to come and pass a Bill to do retroactive. We did not do that on the airport. And we did not do that for St. Regis. We embraced it notwithstanding the concerns we raised. And that is the difference [with] this responsible, elected-three-times PLP Government that I am proud to have been a part of.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Now let me just say this. Because so much good is happening in the east, it is only fitting that my new skipper who we have leading St. George's will bring the Cup, so all those visitors will come in greater numbers this July to see us lift this Cup.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. But on a serious note—

[Laughter and general uproar]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —on a serious note, you know, persons tease me because I talk about golf.

An Hon. Member: No, you do not.

Another Hon. Member: No, no.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —and I make no apologies for talking about golf, as I do sailing, because I come from a sailing family as well as golf. And I come from a fishing family. And I come from a farming family—all parts of making Bermuda what it is. And it ties into that beautiful spirit that we see demonstrated down there at the new Hillcrest Boutique Hotel, another example of a Bermudian-owned product in St. George's, just like Grotto Bay—Bermuda-owned. This property is Bermuda-owned.

You know you talked about that beautiful pool that they have there. Those young people who swim, who represent Bermuda, may have had an inspiration in that because the children of the proprietor are some of our top swimmers. I believe my cousin Ben Smith can attest to that. That would inspire. So, as we go there with our Minister responsible for sports and culture and the like to inspire these young people, this is what the investment in Bermuda's youth does. It inspires those with resources.

So, I am encouraging all in Bermuda who have the money, stop complaining about what we do not do and roll up your sleeves like the friends of St. George's to make it possible for greater investment to happen around the country like it is happening in St. George's. It just cannot happen in the old capital and our greater St. George's community. We are glad it is. And that is the spirit that is going to bring us the Cup because we have a winning combination going.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And let me tell you this. When those owners of the superyachts that have come to Bermuda in greater numbers—

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: We knew it was coming. We knew it was coming.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —when those owners of superyachts decide that they are going to come and spend a couple of days, there is a good possibility that they might take up all of the rooms of that one proper-

ty because they can walk right down. And if they put their superyacht in the harbour or if they leave it at port and be a part of that experience and go back up there . . .

And you know what? When people come in that atmosphere, they can enjoy not only the property that they are staying on [but] the wonderful people that make St. George's. They might see a Neil Paynter having a birthday party and stuff as the last captain of *Legend* did—*Black Pearl*, actually. Or they might see Brutus and have little cocktail. Or they might see me and go down to Wahoo's and see Alfred and Geza. That is the beauty of St. George's. That is why it is showing the rest of Bermuda the way to go. We have got it all—

An Hon. Member: Except the Cup.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Except the Cup. And just like when we did . . . And just like . . . And . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: But I just want to say how proud I am to be here today to support the Minister in this historic boutique hotel which adds to . . . In that St. George's island . . . again we have three hotel properties. The St. George's Club Hotel, the St. Regis hotel, and the Hillcrest Boutique Hotel—and right at the foot of the hill, those beautiful steps that lead up to another hotel, not too dissimilar to what would have happened 100 years ago when we certainly lead the way in tourism. And it is starting to lead the way because you are seeing it right there in St. George's. I just named it.

I did not even tell you that we have the capacity to hold the boutique cruise ships. There aren't as many. Many did not believe 20 years ago that we needed those cruise piers up in Dockyard because the ships were getting bigger, but they are starting to bring out some nice smaller boutique ships.

So right there in St. George's where this boutique hotel, this investment, is taking place, there is still room for other persons to follow suit of this wonderful entrepreneur and their family that have invested in St. George's. And thank you to the Government for being a part of helping them. And if there is anything more we need to do, I want them to know that they can reach out to their Member of Parliament, [the] wonderful lady or myself, or in fact you Madam [Deputy] Speaker because I think some of those names I may have mentioned might have been related to you in some sort [of way]. So that is my contribution for today to support this wonderful order.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. I could have let you go on all night because you were speaking about the best of Bermuda, St. George's.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: But even though I did not have the clock on, I was watching was watching the clock. I do want you to know that.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member, for your contribution.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 9. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I was the Minister when the current owners first came to the table, and they only had a plan. But they clearly expressed that they were looking to act on this plan immediately. So, we were more than pleased to support it then, and we are more than pleased to support this Bill that follows from their actions to complete this project.

It was built in 1770s, as the Minister said. It is now rejuvenated into a 2025 property that fits in with the elements of St. George's. It is much needed in the area of tourism in Bermuda. Madam Deputy Speaker, 37 guests does not sound like much, but it is 37 more guests that we can host than before this property was finished. It is also presenting jobs, which is important as well.

And so, I support this, and I do have a couple of questions for the Minister. And if the Minister knows, I would like to know the percentage of staff currently who are Bermudian and whether there are plans to have a management trainee programme in place if there is not one in place already.

And there is always a risk following the previous speaker, but for those who do not know where the Hillcrest Boutique Hotel is located, I am in agreement with the previous speaker in that when St. George's wins the Cup, I think we should march it from the field to Hillcrest Hotel.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Order?

I recognise the Member from constituency 12.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Another East Ender.

The Chairman: Member, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Another blue and blue.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I am going to lead off from the Honourable Member from constituency 2 in saying that it is great to see investment into the hospitality industry, as the Shadow Minister also said, and that they just might run into the Honourable Kim Swan. I believe that they will be aptly appreciative of a gentleman like this with a lot of history. One thing I can say [is] he has his history down. He does not forget it. And that is a gift, definitely a gift.

What I will say is I have not always been complimentary to the 15-year concession. And as we move on in time, I must say when I look at this property, Hillcrest, and when I look at the new owner—and I do not mind saying her name, Veronica Daley [Gordon] . . . Of course, as the Minister said, [the] Honourable Member from constituency 2, this is the former first female Premier in Bermuda, Pamela Gordon Banks. And so, the investment in this property is huge, actually. It had some troublesome times.

To see what has been done with it, I would encourage every single Member in the House that we, and maybe jointly . . . Let's go down and enjoy the facilities there. You know many times we are looking for somewhere to go, and we can find ourselves easily at Hamilton Princess or some of the other places, The Loren and the like. But let's go down now and support the Gordon family. Let's go down and support them with this here and enjoy some of those facilities.

I must say—I will say—I hope that the Honourable Member Kim Swan might even encourage them to some kind of miniature golf there. He loves his golf.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And I will concede and say that maybe the concessions of 15 years are working, you know. I always get worried about the government coffers and whether or not when we are giving these concessions that we are actually going to see some benefit from it. But for this young lady to come home, because I know she was living abroad—I have had chats with her before—and to see that she has come home to . . . And I believe [she is] a former attorney, in fact, who is changing careers now to go into the hospitality industry. That is huge. That says a lot. And I am grateful that probably we have one less lawyer on the Island because we have so many now.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: But again, I want to say that St. George's actually . . . And I want to agree with

the Honourable . . . the Junior Minister for Tourism that the East End is flourishing when it comes to the hospitality industry as he mentioned. We have got the St. Regis going, [a] brand new hotel. We have got The Loren—brand new. We had the renovations at Tucker's Point Club. Even Grotto is doing massive renovations, and we will be talking about that in the next Order that will come up.

But I want to go back to the fact that this is a local family who is taking the time to invest its time and money into something, which I cannot give enough accolades to.

And we, 36 of us, all of us, should find a way to the east. I know for you Somerset people it is a problem, but you know we drive up to Somerset. I . . . You know what? [Madam] Deputy Speaker, the first time that I went to Somerset I was six years old. I knew about it, coming from St. David's. Heard about it, but I had never been up there. And the only reason I went up there was because my dad was playing Cup Match. Right? That was the only reason I wound up in Somerset because otherwise everything was in St. George's. All the shops that were in town were in St. George's. When I was a kid, I did not have to come to town. And the fact is, St. George's people are very respectful, meaning St. David's as well. When we went to town. You know it, Madam Deputy Speaker. You had to dress up even when we went [to] Somerset. We used to go up to the beach in Somerset. We had to dress up. So, I am saying to you for this Cup Match, you Somerset people, when you come down St. George's, *Dress up!*

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Okay? Because I want you to know what it feels like to lose. The last time that we had a back-to-back win, it was because we had a Cannonier, St. George's Cricket Club, coach. Go back and look at it. All right?

Now, I know that Hillcrest will be excited. And what I want to say about Hillcrest is this. When you come down from Somerset—because we already live in St. George's—you had better find yourself a room down at Hillcrest for the weekend. Support this woman because [of] the money that she has put into this; we need to support it. Okay? *We need to support it.* So, you Somerset people, do the right thing. Rent a room.

I do not even think the Minister has rented a room from there. Yes, he did say that the beds were comfy and all of that. I know. I do not think he has been in one yet, but he did say it. I want to know that the Minister has taken a couple of his ministerial salary dollars and entertained a room at Hillcrest.

Thank you, Madam [Deputy Speaker].

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to the order?

I recognise the Premier from constituency 18. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am mindful that you are in the Chair, so I will do my best to not get thrown out. But there is a whole lot of delusion inside of this Chamber today. And I do not know how we got from—

The Deputy Speaker: You definitely need to be mindful.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: And I do not know how we got from Hillcrest to all you perennial losers lamenting the fact that you might lose again this year. However . . . Sorry.

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem.

But allow me to speak to the particular topic at hand. And clearly as Tourism Investment Orders are given jointly between the Minister responsible for Tourism and also the Minister responsible for Finance, it is important that I certainly speak. It goes without question that, clearly, I support this. Or else it would not have made it through the Cabinet to be here. But the reality is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that everything that has been said thus far in relation to Hillcrest—not in relation to delusions from persons who want to talk about Cup Match—are spot on, Madam Deputy Speaker, because I know that I was at the official opening with you and other Members. And the reality is that the transformation that Ms. Veronica Gordon has managed to make at that particular property is incredible.

Now, I happen to have the fortune of knowing Ms. Gordon for quite some while, and I know about her ability to transform projects into things that look extraordinary. And there is no question that what has been done at Hillcrest is extraordinary. It is a beautiful property. It is without question an addition to the Olde Towne, but it is also the recognition that if you put in place the types of legislation that are necessary to support investment, investment will come. And so, I know that he is no longer the Shadow Minister of Tourism, but the Shadow Minister of Public Works and Engineering, the former Premier from constituency 12, MP Cannonier . . . I will take it as saying that he has now admitted that he was wrong in opposing the extension from 10 to 15 years.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order. Point of order. Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. I gave admittance to the fact that it might be working.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: He is misleading the House. The verdict still stands as to whether or not it is working.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you, Member.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Deputy Speaker, there is no misleading! He said, *Yeah, you know, I was not on board with this 15 years; but now, you know, it might be okay.*

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: But it is interesting.

I want to remind [us of] the history because it is important. And as of course as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker, I do not intend, you know, to be at this place for much longer. But the reality is that there are going to be Members who are here longer than us. And it is important that they remember the lessons of history. And as was stated in the Tourism Investment Order debate or when we amended the Tourism Investment Act 2017 to increase the maximum concessions to 15 years, I gave persons the history of that.

And the history of that was that we were at five years for hotel concessions. The Bermuda Tourism Authority in 2017 had recommended us going to 15 years, and through the regular process of institutional inflexibility and worry inside of the Ministry of Finance in regard to tax concessions and funds not coming to the Government, the decision was made to go to 10 and not to 15. And as I said at that point in time when we debated that Act, it was a mistake. And having to do it again, we should have gone with the full 15 years that was the recommendation at that time. And I just mention that to state that it is important as there will be persons here. I know the Shadow Minister, you know, who did . . . you know, hopefully hangs on to his seat next time around, but he might be around for a bit

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, but I am being honest because I am not trying to be pejorative, but he is a young Member. And I am sure that he intends on being in politics for a while, and what I am saying is these are important lessons. It is important that we recognise and understand.

So that was an error from the Finance Ministry's perspective that has been rectified now currently. But I think that it is also important that we recognise and understand that if we do not put the incentives in place that persons will have in other jurisdictions . . . And again, I remember here we are fighting over 10 or 15 years when other countries have 20 and 25 and some higher. So, it is important that we keep that in context.

Now back, of course, Madam Deputy Speaker, to Hillcrest. The work that Ms. Gordon has done is exquisite. It is a wonderful property. I will echo the sentiments of other Members who said people should go visit it, take it in. It is truly a sight to behold, and of course, I had already inquired and asked about their bookings over the Cup Match holiday. As you know, I always have people who are visiting. And apparently, they are already booked out and full, but you may be able to inquire still. But it is an absolutely beautiful property. And congratulations to Ms. Gordon.

I will say one thing. I do apologise that this has taken the amount and length of time that it did. The Minister may not have stated that there were some administrative challenges in pushing this ahead. This is not the standard of which we should be about. And so, I know I have expressed my apologies to Ms. Gordon directly. I know the Minister has also expressed her apologies. I want to make sure I say this in this public space. Nonetheless, the Tourism Concession Order will pass today. It will go to the Senate; it will pass there. And the just due for the investment of which has been made in beautifying that project will be rewarded with the support of Honourable Members in this Chamber and in the other place.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member wish to speak to the Order?

No other Members?
Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to just thank the entire House for their comments and support on this Tourism Investment Order for the Hillcrest Boutique Hotel.

And if I can just add a bit to that, I have been to Hillcrest twice now and met with Ms. Veronica Gordon. I have had two tours of the property and, *No*, to the Member from the other side. I have not spent any time there overnight yet.

However, I will say this that just this week we got confirmation that the Secretary General and CEO of the Caribbean Tourism Organization had confirmed her visit to Bermuda to experience our Cup Match. So, she will be coming. And the next question when individuals say that they are going to make a visit to Bermuda is, *Do you have any recommendations?* And

immediately we did reach out to Ms. Veronica Gordon just to ask and say, you know, *Is there any availability?* because as you would know everyone has been talking about Cup Match. It is the ideal location to just walk across the street and enjoy the Cup Match Classic to watch the Cleveland County players who play for St. George's do well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Like that. There you go, Mr. Vice President. I got that one in.

But with that said, we did get word back from Ms. Gordon that, you know, she does have availability, and she would love for the Secretary—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Pardon?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And she would love for the Secretary General and CEO of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, who we have a very good relationship with, to come and experience this property.

And so, it is a beautiful property especially, as I said in the brief, the amenities that have gone into that and every single detail. I do encourage everyone if they get an opportunity to make an appointment with Ms. Gordon so that you can see the pride that she has in the work that she has put in and the planning and, you know, as they call it, a labour of love into what she has put in this property. So, I am happy to hear that it has the support of all and just to answer some of the questions that were asked by the Honourable Shadow Minister of Tourism, the Honourable Member.

One of the questions was about how will we know that there is a management training programme for this and other properties? The Government's Tourism Regulatory and Policy Unit that does come under the Ministry HQ will work with the Department of Workforce Development and with all hotel representatives to determine the components of such a plan. So that is a relationship that is very much tied when it comes to these.

How will Government know that 70 per cent employment is achieved? Each hotel under this is required to submit a complete list of people employed at the hotel. This list includes details regarding the number of Bermudians versus the number of non-Bermudians employed, and from this the percentage of Bermudians employed will be determined. And the Office of the Tax Commissioner is required to verify this submission. And I have had word that as of current right now, 100 per cent of the employees at Hillcrest Boutique Hotel are indeed Bermudian.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, I would just like to put that on the record for this debate, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, we are again happy to hear the support of the entire House for this. And as has been said by the Honourable Premier and the Honourable Member from constituency 12, we do wish Ms. Gordon much success in this endeavour.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Would you like to . . . ?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would move that the said Draft Order be approved and that a suitable message be sent to Her *[sic]* Excellency the Governor.

The Deputy Speaker: *His* Excellency.

Hon. Owen Darrell: His Excellency the Governor.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, Minister, it has been moved that the Draft Order be approved.

Are there any objections?

No objections, so a message will be sent to the Governor of its approval.

Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Tourism Investment (Hillcrest Boutique Hotel) Order 2025 was approved.]

The Deputy Speaker: Minister, I think you have a second Order to do.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Absolutely—

The Deputy Speaker: You have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you very much.

And this one is along the same line and length, since we are talking a lot of cricket this evening. And this one—

The Deputy Speaker: It's not in St. George's.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And this one is the Tourism Investment (Grotto Bay Resort and Spa) Order 2025.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that consideration be given to the Draft Order entitled the Tourism Investment (Grotto Bay Resort and Spa) Order 2025 proposed to be made by the Minister responsible for Tourism under section 3 of the Tourism Investment Act 2017 together with the written agreement of the Minister of Finance in exercise of the power conferred by section five of the Tourism Investment Act 2017.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

It has been moved that the Tourism Investment (Grotto Bay Resort and Spa) Order 2025 be considered.

Are there any objections to that? There being none, Minister, continue.

DRAFT ORDER

TOURISM INVESTMENT (GROTTO BAY RESORT AND SPA) ORDER 2025

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The purpose in bringing this [Tourism Investment \(Grotto Bay Resort and Spa\) Order 2025](#) before this Honourable House is to enable the grant of tax relief to the developers investing in the tourism product Grotto Bay Resort and Spa, Grotto Bay Properties Limited, which is in the national economic interest of Bermuda. I am pleased, Madam Deputy Speaker, to invite this Honourable House to take this Order under consideration.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a key element of success in business is investment in the product to ensure it is always fresh and serves to meet the demands of customers that the business aims to serve. Madam Deputy Speaker, the hospitality business is no different. Destinations, hotels and attractions that seek to trade only on reputation can often lose their edge proving to be more of what they were than what they need to be. Success in this aggressive and competitive tourism marketplace demands that every affiliated tourism business consistently stays at the cutting edge. Madam Deputy Speaker, the Order before the Honourable Members represents that kind of investment in a product proposed to be made by a key tourism site in Bermuda.

As I indicated to this Honourable House on tabling this Order, the Grotto Bay and Resort and Spa is an iconic property located in the east end of the Island. The current owners have taken the foundation laid by their predecessors and have determined to grow the status of the hotel to meet the true luxury standard befitting its location. There have been upgrades to the property already, and I am pleased to have had the opportunity to visit the hotel on more than one occasion on the invitation of J. P. Martens, the Managing Director of the resort.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you would have noted that I actually did an international radio show from the panoramic views of the Grotto Bay just this week.

Madam Deputy Speaker, phase one of the two phases of development began in September 2023 and was completed in November of 2024. It included expansion of the Hibiscus [South] Dining Room and Palm Court, creation of the new Hibiscus [East] Dining Room, the new Panorama Lounge—a rooftop lounge located on top of the Hibiscus East Dining Room—and an expansion of the resort's beach via the crea-

tion of a new beach terrace, which has seating for an additional 100 guests. Phase two will consist of the construction of 53 additional guest rooms, expansion of the hotel kitchen, and the construction of a new sewage treatment plant to meet the demands of the larger hotel.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members will note that the terms of the Order are consistent with the Tourism Investment Act 2017 and provide the relief sought for a period of 15 years. That relief is set out in clause 3 of the Order and again is consistent with the principal Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to invite the attention of the Honourable Members to clause 4 of the Order that sets out the important means by which hotels qualify for the exemption from the employer's share of payroll tax and the exemption from land tax. Respectively, a management training programme and 70 per cent Bermudian workforce is required.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I hereby advise the Honourable Members that currently at Grotto Bay, 73 per cent of the workforce is indeed Bermudian.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would echo comments I have previously made in this House with respect to [the] Tourism Investment Act [2017]. The relief provided by the Act is not just available to hotels. The schedule to the Act sets out how new and existing restaurants can qualify for relief and likewise how an attraction, which we spoke about earlier, can also qualify.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government's goal is to create the conditions that inspire investor confidence at every level of the tourist economy sparking a desire to invest and reinvest as we continue to see the recovery of tourism for Bermuda.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to recommend this Order for the support of this Honourable House.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Would any other Member wish to speak on the Order?

I recognise the Member from constituency 30. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, [Madam] Deputy Speaker. I appreciate it, and I just also want to say we also welcome and support this—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: We welcome and support this, and you know—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: —it is something that I think unifies both sides of the Houses—that we want to see the tourism industry grow. We want to see investment in tourism attractions and properties.

And I have to say that hearing the Minister read that brief, it is very great news to hear [there are], as you know, 73 per cent Bermudian workers and also 53 new rooms. Any increase in rooms is a benefit to not only the economy but also to airlift and to all manner of things that benefit Bermudians who are working in the industry. So, the more people we can service, the more people we can house, is a benefit to the economy.

So, I want to congratulate the owners, and also, I think it shows a good amount of faith in the owners of this particular property to reinvest in their property, to expand it. And you know, we have to give kudos where kudos are due. You know, when you see an expansion like that, it does show confidence, you know, in the industry.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, I will say, as the Minister well knows, I do not mind bowling pace, but sometimes you have to bowl a little spin. Right? And this is why Somerset keeps the Cup. Right?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, just letting you know. So—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: [Madam] Deputy Speaker, I will state . . . I will leave that there because I know where you . . . I know.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: With your indulgence.

We had a robust debate on [an] additional Order before this that is pretty much identical in the concessions. We have had the debate on that, so I will not rehash it. [I] just [want] to say that we support that. Well done to the owners, and good luck going forward.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this Order?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you.

Just as I adjust my St. George's blue-and-blue colours here on the microphone, let me just comment by acknowledging the fact that Grotto Bay, for more than 50 years, has been Bermuda-owned. I know I used to hear tidbits about Grotto Bay. Many folks would know that I grew up around the family of the late Ralph Owen Marshall who was a director there. I do know that the uncle of the Member sitting next me was a director there, Mr. Dowling. And I was trying to think of Mr. . . . We know him as "Buster."

An Hon. Member: Randolph Dowling.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Randolph Dowling was the director there. His son is "Dr. D". Right?

The Deputy Speaker: Henry, Henry.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: He carried forth the family interest. I can recall in my early days going to St. George's when I came back to Bermuda working in Tucker's Town that his nickname (because St. Georgians have a lot of nicknames across Bermuda) . . . Mr. Bourne, Puzzy Bourne was very much involved in the property development in St. George's. There is a street named after him in my constituency, Bourne Drive, connected there as was my mentor. The Honourable late Terrence Brannon from the 40 Thieves Club was very much connected with the development in the earlier days of Grotto Bay. It has remained Bermudian owned and operated and has grown in strength to strength.

Before I had medical issues over the past 13 months, [I] brought a group of influential people in the golf business. And one of the five hotels that I brought persons from the UK to stay at the Grotto Bay—these group of ladies from the UK. One of them actually just came back again and spent 10 days. [She] just left today on the flight there.

And I have been told by other hoteliers that Grotto Bay has a tremendous reputation in the United Kingdom. Many people come to Grotto Bay from the UK because it has developed a reputation. And that is important, you know. People talk about orders, different types of marketing here and there, but there is no marketing like good word of mouth. When you have a good reputation, people who like you go back and tell their friends.

And I have said it more than once because I have lived it. I worked it. I am old enough to be able to speak from a historical practice of the industry to know that relationships are the cornerstone of tourism. And, you know, I knew Grotto Bay when Mr. David Boyd was the general manager in the early 1980s when I first came back and worked at Castle Harbour under Pierre Rollinger, one of my mentors. But before that at Belmont under Peter Rosary.

And the one thing that the current principal managing director has done . . . I saw it. About a year ago, I drove up to Grotto Bay in the morning to pick up one of my friends who was a guest there. And who was out front sweeping the cigarette butts? The managing director. Now, in modern day . . . What did they used to have up at the Princess that I objected to vehemently? That profiling thing, that test you used to take to get a job at hotels. That profiling test—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Member, speak to the Chair, please.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I was just seeking some guidance. Sorry, Madam [Deputy Speaker]. I should have asked you, because I am sure you would have known the answer. But the Honourable Member worked there. It was a test that you had to take to get a job in the hospitality industry. And there were persons who spent their whole life serving who would not pass it because it was a profiling test.

I am telling you, that manager at that property that we are providing concessions for was operating old-school style. He saw something there. He did not wait to find a manager or whoever was out front to admonish them. He made sure . . . Did what? It disappeared first before he dealt with it—old school. I took a picture of him. You know what I shared? Another general manager friend of mine. I shared. I said: *That is old . . . That is how I learned. That is the answer I would give. Solve the problem first.* Right?

And when we are looking to give concessions, it is no wonder that persons are raving about Grotto Bay because of that panoramic dining room they built up above. You can look over St. George's. That is enough for a person to want to come on a vacation right there to have a view looking right down into the town of St. George's and the town clock, all the way up in Hamilton Parish. Hamilton Parish never looked so good until they got a perfect bird's-eye view of St. George's.

An Hon. Member: Hmm.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And then you can turn around and look the other way and look across at Dockyard.

I am here to tell you that the investment that was put into Grotto Bay has been incremental. You cannot do it all at once. But you see the growth. And the beautiful thing, one of the pillars of the National Tourism Plan—AGILITY is the acronym—is local involvement. One important key of the “L” in the AGILITY, *local* involvement, is the local participation and buy-in into properties.

Grotto Bay operates on what I call a quasi-all-inclusive where persons . . . I put persons there. And we are going to play at St. Regis. And I am picking up people at Cambridge Beaches. I am picking them up at Newstead, and we are on our way down. And the Grotto Bay people said, *Look. Don't come before I can get my breakfast* because they have that beautiful all-inclusive breakfast. It reminded me of the days when you had the MAP plan that included your breakfast. And they do a great breakfast. But try to get up there on a weekend.

That is a property where now I see the tennis courts have car parks. That car park is not for the visitors, you know. And the hotel is packed too.

And do you know the beautiful thing about the hotel and the additional rooms? When Howard University came to Bermuda in January of 2023 into 2024 to train the aquatic team at the pool that was very controversial, which Minister Glenn Blakeney and Premier Ewart Brown saw to it that it went through, they stayed there. And they travelled throughout Bermuda. And they participated in sports tourism.

I remember the Minister hosted them up at Bermuda National Stadium for a reception and embraced them. And I think a few—one or two—Howard University alumni (here, you know) may have come and seen him. [They] probably [have] got the largest alumni association in Bermuda. And so, when you talked about sports tourism, when you talked about cultural tourism, you saw Howard University. They embraced Grotto Bay to be able to go up to National Stadium.

The Walk to Calvary just took place in St. George's (right?) over Good Friday and has now become a very cultural tourism type of event—over 30 years there. Mrs. Furbert and those who cultivated that. I mean, just by coincidence she worked at Grotto Bay in the concierge area for decades [and] now is doing the Walk to Calvary, and what hotel did they partner with? Oh, Grotto Bay.

Grotto Bay has a reputation already in Bermuda and around the world. And so, as a consequence, they get a good report from persons who are already familiar. And as I mentioned, the report that they get in the UK is already speaking volumes for itself. So, I think it is outstanding that we see this type of investment.

And you know, once again we are in the east, and I am telling you. We might have to go independent down there because we have got it all. We can fly in. We can cruise out. We have a great selection of hotels in St. George's in the greater East End. We have got three golf courses. We have got tennis. We have got it all.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We have got the wonderful restaurants. And you know, we can play Cup

Match against St. David's because a lot of them play for Somerset anyway.

But in all seriousness, this is outstanding. It is really outstanding, and I think that the fact that these two properties, these two Orders are from Bermuda-owned companies

An Hon. Member: Now you are talking.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We have heard people come here in this budget say, you know, *Bermuda companies*. What are you doing for Bermuda companies? Tonight, these Orders are two Bermuda companies that have been around.

I know that a lot of my friends, Bermudians, have got some capital. You know, we can make our fortunes happen. It is time to invest in Bermuda, too. And I am calling on folks to follow the example lead by those pioneer Bermudians who made it possible for Grotto Bay to be here in the first place.

Those who may have left the hotel industry to move into the condominium industry, because I have said many times, I can name the hotels from all the way up in Somerset to St. George's, [the] properties that were once Bermuda-owned and Bermuda-connected that went (and some of them not) that went towards the businesses and office space and condominiums.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Not tonight. But you know they exist. And some of them, like a Lantana, like a Sonesta—

[General uproar]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —like an Elbow Beach, are still there for us to realise even greater investment.

And whilst I finish on this particular topic, let me say this. For those persons who are out there saying that there is nothing happening when we are talking about hotel concessions, I was here when we introduced ones for what? A hotel built on some of the property that my family once owned that was compulsory acquired, the Southampton Princess—the largest investment in a hotel property in Bermuda's history. Right there where the cycle shop was, was owned by Emily Burrows Hall, my great-grandmother, my grandmother's mother. And I am here to tell you that in the interest of why that property was compulsory acquired in 1969 thankfully she was represented by the late Lois Browne-Evans. And she said to me: *You know, I went 'round to those boys down there and told them*, Now you guys know a lot better than that to take that poor widow's money. And she got them seven times the amount that they were trying to offer. She

told me that. And of course, she had seven children—seven, eight children—so they had to split it up.

And I am just here to say that that property I think is about \$400 million. Do you know when I first came to this House, Madam Deputy Speaker, the budget in 1998/99 was about \$400 [million] to \$500 million, the budget that we made then? I have got the [Budget] Book right here. I have got it right here.

The Deputy Speaker: Tie it back to Grotto Bay, Member.

An Hon. Member: I am. We are talking about Grotto Bay during the budget.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And so, the investment that is taking place here today some 26 years later (right?) ties into the fact that this PLP Government—

Some Hon. Members: Yes! Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —is still making it happen.

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: So, I am here to support the Order that has been brought by the Honourable Member from up there in constituency 15 here for the Grotto Bay hotel in the national interest. *In the national interest*. It is not just for those persons in his constituency who may work there. It is not just for the constituents of mine who work there. It is in the national interest. It is for the good of all of us. And so, when we say out there that people read that Bermuda is going to [do] this and that and some type of Aunt Myrtle's handbasket, it is not true—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —not when you can see that Bermuda-owned properties are invested, not when you can see that there are Bermudians who care enough to clear out the forts, not when you can see that this Government can see to it that the Southampton Princess is being renovated, not when you can see that [The] Waterlot is getting reservations throughout the Island and overseas for people to be there. You are seeing Bermuda on the up and up. The glass is half full now. And Cup Match is coming back to St. George's this year.

An Hon. Member: Yeah!

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the Order?

I recognise the Member from constituency 9. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. On this side of the aisle when the Government does a good job—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Vance Campbell: That is right. We share the responsibility on this side.

An Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. Vance Campbell: When the Government does a good job, we are not afraid to compliment them.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Vance Campbell: This is a Bermudian-owned property as has been mentioned. It is a personal favourite of mine. I spent quite a few vacation times down there celebrating my kids' birthdays. The last of those was last July when we celebrated my daughter's quinceañera, which is a big deal on her Latin side.

This is a continued evolution of that property. I was the Minister when they first brought those plans, so it is great to see those plans continue. The first phase is done, and they are moving on to the second phase. This brings additional rooms—much needed rooms—additional amenities, [and] jobs. That terrace bar has a fantastic view. It is, I believe, going to be difficult to get reservations up there, particularly during the summer months. You may be having to book six months out, which is great for them. This is a great improvement of our local offerings in the tourism area, and it is something not only for our visitors to enjoy but locals as well.

And my final point is this wonderful escape that Grotto Bay is and will be as a result of this recent spell of renovations and additions. It shows the flexibility. This and the previous Tourism Order, show the flexibility of the Tourism Investment Act [2017]. And that it is not just for larger properties. It is for medium sized and smaller properties as well. So, I am pleased to stand here today and support this in support of our Shadow Minister. And I thank the Minister for bringing this to the House.

Thank you, Madam [Deputy] Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this Order?

I recognise the Premier from constituency 18.

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

Of course, as the Minister said, this here required concurrence from the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance supports this. But let me just add a few more items of context because I think it is important that you recognise the significant sweeping measures of which Grotto Bay is doing—the expansion of rooms, the significant renovation. I was there this past weekend for Mother's Day with my mother and my wife and family, and it was lovely to see what they have done there. Others have commented on the new upstairs, the terrace, the different things. And so, I echo what the Honourable Member from constituency 2 has said, that we are supporting our tourism products. We are seeing the investment. We are seeing the confidence in our tourism product. And this is the result of the work of which Government has done, pressing ahead despite challenges including those that may come from the Opposition of warnings. The reality is that we are on the right path, and we are seeing the benefits of this.

I want to echo one further thing that the Minister has said for those persons who are listening because it is important to recognise that the Tourism Investment Act [2017] does not just apply to hotels whether large or a small. It also applies to restaurants and other matters. And so, it is a challenge for us as I know that we continue to promote that. We continue to work the BEDC, the Chamber of Commerce, and others. And it is a challenge that we have not seen many of those come through. The reality is for restaurateurs that if you are upgrading, building something new, you do get customs duty concessions. You do get payroll tax concessions in the exact same way because we want to create additional activities, and we have put those things in place to ensure that the investments can be made, so that we can see more of those things come to fruition and those investments happen.

So, I would like to congratulate the Minister again, [to] congratulate the team at the Grotto Bay hotel. I know I saw one of the shareholders on my flight out on Tuesday, and they were asking, *Well if you are not in the House, how is my Tourism Investment Order going to get passed?* And I said, *Well I will be back on Friday, and I know we are doing it that day.*

So, the reality is we will continue to work to support our tourism industry just as we will work to support our other industries in the country. But it is fantastic what they have done there, and of course, this has the full support of the Ministry of Finance.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

There being none, I recognise the Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And I would like to say thank you to all who have spoken in support of this Order.

I would just like to add to the experience that I have seen. When I first became Minister of Tourism a few years ago, one of my first engagements was actually at the invitation of the Managing Director, Mr. J. P. Martens. And we went down, and there was a lot of construction going on. He said, *Listen. This is the plan that we have.* And he showed all of the construction that was going on. And I mean, it was . . . There were people everywhere, whether it be carpenters, whether it be masons, you know, interior decorators. It was a beehive of activity.

And to go back over the months, many people, more and more individuals, are having Christmas parties there. I know the Bermuda Hotel Association had their Christmas lunch there. All of the general managers of the hotels get together up on that panorama view. There were individuals getting what they call consultations about weddings that were going to happen. I dare go as far as to say that although this is definitely going to be an upgrade to the tourists who come and stay at Grotto Bay, I can tell you that as far as the local events space that might be the place to be this summer for weddings, for different smaller conventions that are happening.

And I walked through there just this week. As I did say, I had an engagement there speaking on an overseas radio station, and even though I had been there a couple of months ago, every time I go you see the investment has gone a step further as to what they have opened up. I mean, it is fresh. It is modern. And it is definitely the place to be. Apparently, Monday nights are the time to be down there at the Grotto Bay resort.

I am not sure if the Honourable Member from constituency 2 has been down there yet. He is not paying attention to me.

An Hon. Member: Twelve.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, [constituency] 12. Sorry. [Constituency] 12 has been down there yet on a Monday night, but it is definitely the place.

But with that said, [I am] happy to see that this and these Tourism Investment Orders are doing what they were intended to do. And that is to invest in new properties. And the definition of a new property is if 50 per cent of the overall investment or the value of the hotel is going into the renovation, then you call it a new property, so—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —there are many more to come.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: There are many more to come. You can see up and down this Island what this Tourism Investment Order has done to many of the hotels that are here, many of the hotels that are doing renovations, and some future hotels that will be doing building starting from scratch.

So, with that said, Madam [Deputy] Speaker, I move that the said draft Order . . . do I move it now?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I move that the said draft Order be approved and that a suitable message be sent to His Excellency the Governor.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the draft Order be approved, and a message be sent to the Governor.

Are there any objections to that?
There being none, so approved.

[Motion carried: The Tourism Investment (Grotto Bay Resort and Spa) Order 2025 was approved.]

The Deputy Speaker: I believe that those are all of the Orders that we are doing for today, so I do think that we have to have the third reading of some of the Bills that we did today, or the one Bill we did.

Minister for National Security.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Deputy Speaker: Any objections?
There being none, so moved.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

EXPLOSIVE SUBSTANCES AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: Are there any objections?
No. It is indeed passed.

[Motion carried: The Explosive Substances Amendment Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

The Deputy Speaker: I believe that that covers all matters.

Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that this Honourable House do adjourn until Monday, May 19 at 10:00 am.

And I am informed that one of my Members wishes to speak.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we adjourn until Monday, May 19 at 10:00 am. Are there any Members who wish to speak to the motion [to adjourn]?

I recognise the Member from constituency 11, I believe it is. Member, you have the floor.

POPULATION SIZE

Mr. Christopher Famous: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

With your permission, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to read something from *The Royal Gazette*.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Permission granted.

Mr. Christopher Famous: And I quote, Madam Deputy Speaker. "Here is the short version—you can't grow the economy with a shrinking population; you can't reduce the cost of living with a shrinking population; and you can't properly fund healthcare and pensions with a shrinking, [ageing] population." Honourable Doug DeCouto.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher Famous: All right. Madam Deputy Speaker, Dr. DeCouto seems to be echoing a lot what others in his party and other entities are saying repeatedly, *We have to increase the population*.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Can I finish?

The Deputy Speaker: Speak to the Chair, please.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Yes, please. That is not the argument right now, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce recently had their AGM where the talk about population was brought up. Recently this week the Bermuda Economic Development Cor-

poration in collaboration with the Urban Development Authority held the first Bermuda Infrastructure and Development Summit where again population came up. So, here is my thing, Madam Deputy Speaker. As a country, we have to have a serious, a sincere, and an honest conversation about population because you cannot just come to people and say, *Yeah, we need to increase the population*, when a vast majority of your population is struggling to pay mortgage, struggling to pay increasing rents. We cannot tell—I do not know—great stories and say why increasing the population is going to lower the cost of living because it is not. All right?

We also have to ask ourselves, *Where are these people going to work?* We cannot just say we need a population increase. Well, where are they going to work? They are not just going to fly in and say, *Hey, we are here*. Are they working in hotel? Are they working in IB? Where are they working? There has to be that serious conversation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, most importantly, the question is, *Where are they going to live?* Presently anyone can go on FaceBook or PropertySkipper or anybody, and you see the (I am going to use the word) near extortionist rates that some landlords are charging. So where is this increase in population going to live? If we bring in 5,000 more people, first of all we have got to figure out where they are going to work. Once we figure that part out, where are they going to live? And that is the conversation that we all have to have. Separate the partisanship. Separate the he said, she said. Where are they going to live?

So, I will put it to the Honourable Members within this whole House that with balance in our caucus in your caucus, we need to have this conversation because our people, no matter what their melanin count is, are suffering from extortionist rates when it comes to rents, number one. So, if and when we have a significant population increase, they are going to suffer more. That is the reality.

The Government has recently in the budget dropped the construction tariff down to 10 per cent. That is a necessary thing because in order for people to build, the price has to come down. The only way the price is going to come down, Madam Deputy Speaker, is . . . I should not say *the only way*. One of the main ways for the price to come down is for people to go away and buy their own stuff.

I had to buy a part for a shower, Madam Deputy Speaker, earlier this week for one of my tenants. I went there. They said: *Okay, look. Here is the part. It is \$160, but we will give you a break, drop it down to \$132*. Something told me, *Look it up online*. That same part cost \$27 away. That is 400 per cent to 500 per cent increase that some items are being put on building properties.

So again, I say thank you to the Premier and others who have dropped down construction-related costs, duties, because back to the point that Dr. Doug

DeCouto and others have said, if and when we have a population increase, we have to figure out where [they can] live.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does anyone else wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

TOURISM OPPORTUNITIES FOR BERMUDA

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you, Madam [Deputy] Speaker.

Ever so briefly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I appreciate what my colleague just had to say with regards to population, but there is a way that we can create increased population in Bermuda. And I am going to share it. Between October 15 and May 15 each year, hotels are collectively probably less than 50 per cent occupied. That is opportunity. That is perishable inventory, just like if you do not eat your bananas and you do not make banana bread, you have to discard those bananas. We have unsold inventory, and when the Southampton Princess is completed, we will have more rooms to contribute to that unsold inventory.

I am here to say that the opportunity for Bermuda in tourism is not in the months between May 15 and October 15 that are relatively already doing well. That time period could very well be saturated with the right efforts. But I am here to tell you the opportunity. And how do you get more people here? You replicate things that take time.

I mentioned on more than one occasion the Howard University coming here with their team to swim. I have mentioned before the century-old Newport Bermuda Race. Those came out of relationships, not government relationships, you know, relationships with interested organisations and individuals in Bermuda that carry forth. I know from what I speak because I have lived long enough to have started several events that continue on today, and some of them involve the same people loving Bermuda enough to make sure that they kept them going. Those do not happen immediately. You have to work at it. I mentioned the Walk to Calvary that took place over the Easter vacation. That event now is starting to bear fruit as [a] cultural tourism event. Cup Match and County Games present opportunities albeit in the summer months.

We cannot allow ourselves to just say and be negative about the period between October 15 and May 15. I have certainly done enough research and been around, been mentored by people who would be 115 years or 120 years [old] today, to know that Bermuda was once a winter destination.

I know that Bermuda was built on the backs of very solid relationships between persons at the top of

the economic food chain and policymakers around the world. There is no secret why Bermuda would have been chosen around the time of World War II to host some of the shakers and movers with Churchill and Eisenhower choosing to be in Bermuda. Long before then they would have known about Bermuda because what? William Taft, a president of the United States would have been in Bermuda. Woodrow Wilson would have been a frequent visitor. Samuel Clemons would have been a frequent visitor. You know, places like Newstead and the like have history. You go there. You will see the pictures on the wall depicting those times.

The St. George's Club Hotel, just above the St. George's Hillcrest Boutique Hotel that just got opened, would have been there in 1917. The golf course would have been built in 1920 and 1924 to provide tourism operations. The golf courses would have been there in the 1800s, brought here by the military. We have been a participant in sports tourism.

People used to come to Bermuda. Bermudians used to travel over there and make relationships. Fairylands had a golf course back in 1927. The first pro that came there came from Vancouver. How would someone way out in Vancouver know to come to Bermuda? Because people in Bermuda had relationships with people in Vancouver. There was no tel-ex machine. There was no telegraph; there might have been a telegram back then. There was no iPhone. There was no WhatsApp. There was none of that. It was relationships.

And I am here to tell you there are some things that are the old-fashioned way because you can use all the digital things you could want, [but] once they get in Bermuda, it is the relationship between those of us here in this Island, whether they come from somewhere else to work here . . . And that is a story for another day of how we can educate people, and we are trying to educate people on what is it [like] to be in Bermuda. Right?

We have to ensure that they are met and treated really well. We have to make sure that we have transportation available when they leave that restaurant at night, have a wonderful meal, and do not wait 40 minutes. We have to make sure that we provide the service. We have to make sure that we can communicate around the industries to make sure that people are here. And the same ones of us that may have criticised building a cruise pier in Dockyard 20 years ago are certainly happy we have one today.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I hear the Honourable Member talking about overruns, but I do not hear the Honourable Member saying thank you for having the cruise piers in Dockyard, for having two cruise ships in there because persons would want to be proud of saying when I am talking about being for Bermuda. I have

said in this House long before that Member came in this House that we all are here and love Bermuda.

An Hon. Member: Correct.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We all love Bermuda, but sometimes you have to learn how to give Jack his jacket. And I know the Jack I refer to. I know the Jack, the Jack whose shoulders that you stand on, Jack Tucker. That party over there stands on the shoulders of Jack Tucker. I have no qualms talking about Jack Tucker. I actually presented the National Hero. I was the one that presented the national hero in honour of Jack Tucker. I knew his secretary who came here and then owned a hotel. Oh yes. Been trained by a lot of folks.

But I am here to say is that sometimes we have to learn how to operate outside of our innate partisanship for the national interests as was said when it came to Grotto Bay, for the national interests when it came to the Hillcrest, for the Southampton Princess, in the national interests when persons were trying to tickle us up and tell us we should not invest in it, that concessions were this, that, and the other. For the national interests, this Government is doing its utmost to make sure this country is workable for all people in it. That is why you can have this young Premier today invite people around for the digital conferences that take place and be invited overseas to give input, because this Government is working in the interests. And that is why that Opposition has gone to the polls and finds itself in Opposition—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And it has to learn. I am going to invite it to do what I did.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: No. I am going to tell you. When I became a UBP Senator for the first time having been up in this House for over 25 years pining about being here, when I was an Opposition Senator for nine years, the first thing I did was study the only Opposition that existed in this country, the Progressive Labour Party. And I studied the speeches of Dame Lois Browne-Evans. I studied the speeches of L. Frederick Wade. I studied the speeches of Austin Thomas. I studied the speeches of Eugene Cox. And I learned how to provide budget debates that did what? What my friend Brutus You would know Brutus, the Honourable Member who said to me: *Come with solutions. Do not come every week criticising the Government. Come with solutions.* I learned that from the PLP. I learned sitting opposite to Cal Smith in another place.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: No! I am telling you come and be truly Bermudian by sometimes learning that the PLP is not the enemy when it comes to doing financial things for the betterment of the country. That is what I am telling you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: No.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: No. I . . . You know, sometimes disingenuous people are blatantly obvious.

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Members, I cannot hear the person who has the floor. Thank you. Turn it down.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I will . . . I just want to say in the spirit of that. I want to say thank you to the Opposition tonight for embracing the hotel investment [Order] that came forward. I want to say thank you, but in the spirit of—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: But in the—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Honourable—

The Deputy Speaker: Honourable Member, I cannot hear the Member on his feet speaking, so . . .

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I think—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Deputy Speaker: Let's keep the undertones to a minimum, the lowest decibels possible.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I am here to say that it is easy to see the disingenuous actions—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: —because, you know . . . No, I was not able to make a contribution earlier in the debate. I do not play at that that sometimes your part is a little bit dry so that you can make a contribution at the right time. But I am here, and I am talking about earlier in the week.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I am here to share with you, Madam Deputy Speaker, that you are seeing a Bermuda where people overseas are looking at Bermuda with a lot more optimism than we are prepared in amongst ourselves because we are too busy being partisan. All right?

If we want to see hotel properties developed in Lantana, as I do, if we want to see the development of Morgan's Point that was left to us on the eve of an election of 2017 like I do in the community that I grew up, we can do it together. There are persons over that side that walk with people who I know that have money. If you are out there saying everything on a Friday of how Bermuda is bad, you are going to feel somewhat off if you are staying around . . . When I first came, Milton Scott always used to say a lot can slip between the cup and the lip at the cocktail parties. But if you spend your time talking bad about the Government: *The Government is this. The Government is that*, you might turn off a potential investor in one of those properties in Sonesta, at Lantana, at Elbow Beach. Well, Elbow Beach is now looking a lot better than it did before. I forgot about Elbow Beach, you know. Oh my, my, my.

And I am here to say that an Opposition can be responsible. And I am trying to help it because you know before I close my eyes and go to sleep for the very last time, I want to see a buoyant Bermuda right across the board. And it matters not to me if the Honourable Member from constituency 12 is the one who is hobnobbing with someone and causes a property to be developed under this Government. It matters not to me if it is the Opposition finance spokesperson who says something positive about Bermuda in a circle that he might be in that causes someone to invest in a property like Morgan's Point.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Well, I live in hope that maybe, that it may happen because the same Bermuda that we all profess to love is going to take some love for Bermuda to be able to put aside the partisanism to be able to talk in your circles that can cause Bermuda to have some investment. We cannot—

An Hon. Member: Practice what you preach.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Practice what you preach? I practice what I preach every single day. I will use my last dollar as I have done to help this country. If anybody wants to go and audit my accounts, I have invested in this country with money I do not have and I cannot . . . you know . . . I should. But I do because I love this country, and I am causing you to do likewise. Yes, and that is good if you do.

And I am here to say this. People talk about the housing problem in Bermuda, and I have talked about volunteerism tonight. If we can pass concession orders (not reflecting) in this House for two Bermuda-owned properties . . . I am old enough to remember when the Condominium Act came to Parliament for the very first time in the early 1980s. No, I was not in Parliament. I was going to a caucus every week, listening. I ran in 1983. The Condominium Act came in 1981. Around that time is when you start seeing people move away from having hotels and turning them into condominiums up and down the country. That was the type of exodus away from the hotel industry. And the same persons who are saying, *We need more people* . . .

What I am here to say is this. If you want more people, invest more money into more houses for Bermudians, too, because when I was coming up, the people who were in the housing business were not the Government although Quinton Edness and Colonel Burch are the two leading builders of housing on the Government. Right? Two separate Governments. But before that Benny Rego and John Swan were leading the charge and building private housing up and down this country. And they were not building from the Government perspective. They were doing it for the private sector, private industry.

So, the private industry does not want to invest in Bermuda like a Grotto Bay and Mrs. Daley has done so, Gordon Daley has done so. But yet, we are complaining that the Government is not doing it with everything.

And like I said, when I came to this House in 1998, the Government budget was about \$490 million in expenditure. And now we have returned to a situation where the Government has now committed to earning more than it is spending, which is a good thing. But the money invested in the Southampton Princess today far exceeds or is equivalent to what the national expenditure budget was in 1998/99. Yes, it is called inflation, but you cannot sneeze at \$400 million in 2025. You cannot sneeze about it, but there are those of you who wish that it never happened because it happened under this Government, and that is the problem.

An Hon. Member: Nonsense.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: It is not nonsense. Let your actions—

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, [Madam Deputy] Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: I am not sure if the Honourable Member really intends to mislead the House, and I do not know exactly who he is talking about. But he certainly is not talking about anyone in this Honourable House.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you, Member. Member, you have two and a half minutes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you very much. I did not call any names, but I see a lot of people getting exercised.

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I mean, I did not . . . I did not see any Honourable Member Jache [Adams] getting exercised. I heard Members calling a point of order. I did not call any names, you know. But you know, if the shoe fits, you can wear it.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I am not saying be nice. I am not saying be nice. I am not saying be nice.

This is the amount of time I got when I was doing a Budget Reply in 2007. I got two minutes, so I understand two minutes very well.

Dr. Brown, I feel like they are listening. I remember two minutes very well. I did not give them that.

I would just like to say, Madam Deputy Speaker, I believe truly that this country can grow tourism in the winter. It is an opportunity begging. It is an opportunity that is real. You do not have to build another hotel in order to . . . You just have to make people realise the potential this country has in our winter months. And it is going to take those of us on both sides.

And especially as an industry person, there is nothing better than to be directing visitors to where they need to go, helping them get to the restaurant and the like, helping them to navigate around Bermuda. We can do more of it in the wintertime, but we have to believe that Bermuda is a great place to be in the winter. And there are many people that do not. It is easy to gravitate towards what is easy. It is hard to do what is necessary sometimes. It is hard. But we can do it. We have what it takes to do it. And that is why I will continue to talk about 15 October to 15 May. Because now is the time to be promoting for 15 October to 15 May of the following year and beyond that.

Thank you and have a blessed evening.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak? I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

DOING MORE FOR BERMUDIANS IN A MEANINGFUL WAY

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise for no other reason but to give the listening public some variety based on what is being said here this evening. For no other reason than that.

I thought we were going to go home early. But that is not going to happen, unfortunately.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no.

So, we are asked to consider that the glass is half empty or mostly full or that we have a glass in fact. But the point is that yes, we are very happy about the hotels that . . . well, Southampton Princess is going to be built. I am not sure when, because when you drive past, you don't actually see anything that's being done.

An Hon. Member: Drive up the hill.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, if you can get there, right?

[Laughter]

Mr. Robert King: I don't see any construction vehicles on either side, but it is going to happen. I mean, the paperwork's being signed, and we are happy about that.

Grotto Bay and Hillcrest, absolutely, we are happy about those things. And on the other side of things, it is a fact that we need more people here. And we need to take care of those who are already here as well. How do you grow a population if people are leaving because of the cost of living? These are facts.

The Minister of Labour and Economy, accepts that we need to create 8,000 more jobs so that more is being paid into the economy than is leaving. Permanent resident's certificates are not going to create generations of Bermudians—status or otherwise. But it is going to be a step in the right direction. Because basically we have two crises. One speaks to the issue of young persons dying, by knives and by guns, and we also have a population crisis which has a direct impact on the cost of living and the trickle-down effect for, you know, life in general here.

When we are talking about the ability to go ahead and provide housing for this community, absolutely, we need to take into consideration the needs of the haves and the have-nots, the two Bermudas, three, whatever it is because of the vanishing middle

class that has been created under the current administration.

What we have to do is accept responsibility for the part that we have played and as the Government of the day for . . . ever since 2017 and before, played a big role in the reason why we are in the state that we are today. Not all of it bad.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Not all of it bad. But the point is when you are looking at . . . from the part that I am especially concerned about is the crime and the deaths of young Black Bermudian males. And what is being done to reduce that in a meaningful way.

We have had discussions in the budget debates about education and the need to provide for our kids. But we are also seeing measurements that do not actually relate to success. They are just numbers on a page which do not actually inform the decisions that are being made about the current generation and the generation afterwards.

We spend so much money on professional services, but not on the kids themselves who require the help.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: I know that the Honourable Member has a challenge listening, but I know that we had an entire debate presented by the Minister for the Cabinet Office. Questions from that side talked about professional services and the professional services line items—particularly in regard to counselling, intervention and all the specific things of which he is talking about.

So he cannot say that we are spending money on professional services and then complain that the money that is being spent on professional services is to do the exact intervention items of which he is lamenting that the Government is not doing. He cannot have his cake and eat it too.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Member, you may continue.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you for that.

So, the point is kids need a solid education, and we are spending a lot of money on recommendations made by consultants and these signature schools—eventually they will be built. Eventually the people will be moving into them.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Minister?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The man is absolutely misleading!

The Deputy Speaker: “Member,” Member.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Member is absolutely misleading.

We opened two signature schools at the Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy and we will be opening a third one at Sandys Secondary School. He cannot say . . . he cannot stand there and say *eventually* signature schools will be open. It is absolutely false, and he needs to withdraw that remark.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, I think you have heard the Minister say that signature schools have actually been opened.

Mr. Robert King: Multiple.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: So the educational system is humming along nicely, and the kids are all right. That is not the case. But I will continue.

So, there are some steps being made in the right direction. Absolutely. There is much work to be done.

When we are talking about housing, how do you explain that statements were made about that place in South Shore by the former Minister of Public Works, who said Black folks . . . they don't want to have Black folks on South Shore. Then it is going to be a hotel. And then they say, *Well, those houses aren't gonna be for you*. But that is okay. That is okay. When it was supposed to be affordable housing—

Mr. Christopher Famous: Point of order. Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order, Member.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Christopher Famous: There is no discrimination. If you've got the money, you can rent it.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: There is no discrimination. And yet, when we look at the history of that property . . . statements were made that one would consider would be

prejudicial, based on race, and that certain folks should not be on South Shore. Essentially what has happened is the current policies under this administration have effectively ensured that not too many Black Bermudians will be there.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: No, it is a fact.

[The Premier rose]

The Deputy Speaker: Is this a point of order, Premier?

An Hon. Member: What is wrong with you?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

An Hon. Member: Jesus.

The Deputy Speaker: You have the floor.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: I will offer the Honourable Member a chance to withdraw, because, by implication, he is trying to say that Black Bermudians cannot afford these things, which is not correct. And he needs to withdraw it.

I know he is trying his best. But he might not actually realise how offensive and prejudicial that very statement is, precisely the fact when there are Black Bermudians who have come to me and who are renting places at Bermudiana Beach. Taxi drivers and others.

The man needs to withdraw his remarks.

The Deputy Speaker: The Honourable Member.

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is crazy—

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, Member, I would ask that you withdraw that comment, please.

Member, I need you to withdraw that comment.

Mr. Robert King: Fair enough. I withdraw that comment.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: What I will say, though, is that it was meant to be affordable housing, and then it changed to a hotel and now it is a place that is—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: —luxury apartments.

The Deputy Speaker: Talk to the Chair, please.

Mr. Robert King: Luxury apartments, which when we were hearing about the extortionist rents that were being charged, that is exactly what is happening there on the South Shore. There—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: I think the Honourable Member should look up the definition of extortion—and stop referring to market-based rates and the definitions and reasons why those things were stated, unless the Honourable Member would like us to underwrite further monies from the Consolidated Fund for that place.

The Honourable Member needs to understand what the definition of extortion is, please.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Please use consideration in how you phrase some of your comments. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Oh. Absolutely. No problem at all.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Indeed, right? And that is why we are here today.

So the point is: many good things are being done, especially with the hotels that are coming online with the refurbishments and stuff, absolutely. And we also need to understand that in terms of the social problems as it relates to, as I said, crimes—serious crimes—need to be addressed in a meaningful and strategic way.

Many promises are made in this House about doing certain things and then when you drill down trying to get specifics on what the strategic plans are with timelines, deadlines and specific allocations of resources . . . well, you know, it is under consideration. These are things that are going to happen in the future, but nothing specific and tangible in terms of how we are going to achieve these aims.

How do you explain that we are paying \$16,000,000-plus for a Casino Gaming Commission and we *still* do not have a casino? That money would be better spent to perhaps offset the cost of the Bermuda College or some of the other areas of need.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: So basically, it is just a cost centre that we are paying for people to work and nothing substantive has come out of it.

We need to do better for the people of Bermuda. We need to do it in a meaningful way because they deserve it.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion [to adjourn]?

No other Members? I recognise the Premier who wishes to speak.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I have no comments for this evening. I think we can adjourn.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh. Thank you.

The House is now adjourned.

[Gavel]

[At 10:11 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am Monday, 19 May 2025.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
19 MAY 2025
10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 9 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, Members.
Let's start with prayers.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

[Gavel]

The Deputy Speaker: Be seated.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

The Deputy Speaker: The minutes of 16 [May 2025] are to be deferred.

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Deputy Speaker: His Honour the Speaker will be absent from today's proceedings again.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PETITIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Deputy Speaker: [There are] none.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: It doesn't exist—no papers.

**CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY
SPEECHES**

The Deputy Speaker: One second . . . I recognise the Member from constituency 13.
Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like congratulatory sentiments sent to the Loyal Hill Community Committee. Yesterday, we had the pleasure of their annual Bermuda Day celebration that happens the Sunday before Bermuda Day. The Loyal Hill community came together during the COVID-19 crisis to celebrate Bermuda Day when things were disrupted during that time. And since that time, it has grown from strength to strength.

Madam Deputy Speaker, anyone that did join would have been celebrating with the rest of them as they have a parade, they had some young ladies dancing. They had music playing. They also gave out prizes. You had the Mr. and Mrs. Loyal Hill and congratulations to Mr. Delroy O'Brien and Joan Elizabeth Davis who were Mr. and Mrs. Loyal Hill. You also had the Queen of Loyal Hill, Miss Helene Benjamin. I also want to say thank you to all of the persons who participated. The Devonshire Ultimate Star Twirlers, Wolves Sports Club, One Body in Christ Movement, Place's Gombey's and of course the highlight of the event is the annual go-kart race off the top of the hill—which thankfully we did not see anybody crash as we have seen it in the past. But we—Josh Masters, George Benjamin, Kareem Easton, Desmond Woolridge and Marvin Woolridge who participated in the go-kart race. Live entertainment was by the Working Title Band, and we also had music by DJ Peppy.

So, hats off to the organisers George and Renee Benjamin, Dennis O'Brien, Shannette Easton, Juanita Easton, Carla Emery, Tianna Stevens, Oshandah Lightbourne and Desta Ascento. So, con-

gratulations to all of them for continuing to keep that alive and well up at Loyal Hill again.

Secondly, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to give congratulations to Dellwood Middle School for their performance of *Chosen*. It was last week Friday and last week Saturday at Dellwood Middle School cafeteria. It was a performance written and directed by the principal Trina Cariah and anyone that did attend, you would have seen some phenomenal performances by our middle school students as they did a dance and song display representing all that is good about what is happening with our youth. And I had encouraged anybody who could have attended to absolutely go and see that when it did perform last week, Friday and Saturday.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

I recognise the Member from constituency 33. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise today to pay tribute to Hilton Wingood, who passed recently. A historic figure for his being a part of helping to integrate the Bermuda Police Service and all the Sandys MPs and I am sure many other Members would like to be associated with these remarks. A trailblazer, a ground breaker, a person who served this country and his community with distinction. And I think as a constituent it was interesting because I first met him as a constituent and one of the things about Mr. Wingood he loved to share history. He loved to talk about his experiences. So you had to dedicate at least an hour if you were going to sit down and talk with him. But it was always an hour well spent because you came away learning more about the things that those who came before us sacrificed and what they did to get ahead, particularly serving the Bermuda Police Service. My condolences to . . . his family.

On a more positive note, I would like to wish a happy belated birthday from 17 May to the former Premier of Bermuda, the Honourable Dr. Ewart F. Brown, JP, MP. I am sure many Members would like to be associated with that. I wish him peace, long life, happiness and justice.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I just wanted to congratulate Mr. Donville Yarde, on his retirement from the bailiff's service. I

had the distinct pleasure of joining Mr. Yard, his family, his church family and his colleagues at the Church of God of Prophecy this Sunday, where he was celebrated. Mr. Yarde . . . I obviously won't be able to do it justice in this brief moment, but he had a long career as a police officer. He had been a boxer and had a long and impactful career as a bailiff. And he was lauded. He was particularly called out for his professional, steady way dealing with people. You know, you could imagine, Madam Deputy Speaker, a bailiff's job is a tough job, and you are working with people in some tough situations, and he was lauded for how he approached that. He had a fabulous turnout, and I think that speaks to how he was respected by his colleagues. And so, normally Madam Deputy Speaker, retirement is thought of as time to rest and put the tools down and it was made quite clear by Mr. Yarde that he would just be taking a water break and moving on to some other work that is very important to him. So I would like to send my congratulations to Mr. Yarde. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak? I recognise the Minister from constituency 15.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to rise this morning to offer congratulations to one of my constituents. He goes by a government name of Wayne Raynor, [Jr.] but his stage name is Fire Wayne. And just recently Fire Wayne received continued international recognition for the work that he is doing in the music industry, especially in the in the genre of Soca music. Fire Wayne was recognised on an international radio show, the Greg Hill (morning) Show, which is broadcast to millions of listeners in the New England area. And while they were in Bermuda, we did have the opportunity to go on their radio show, and they asked about music in Bermuda. And one of the former Super Bowl champions Jermaine Wiggins recognised Fire Wayne for his music. He said he's been listening to Fire Wayne quite a bit and he said that he was going to make his other 100 visitors to the Island also listen to that music.

So, I just want to congratulate Fire Wayne. Most of you would know. He comes from the H&H family, lives there at Granny's House on Glebe Road. And, you know, he said in the social media post as well that you never know who is listening to your music, and you never know how far your work is going to go. And I think it's fitting to congratulate him in this Heritage Month as we lead up to Heritage Day this Friday to congratulate him and all other local creatives that are doing work in this Island and putting Bermuda on the map. And I want to encourage him and others to continue and that even when they think they may have saturated a market that their music is going far and wide and putting our Island on the map.

So, congratulations again to Wayne, Fire Wayne, and thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Is there any other Member who wishes to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, and Members of the House and the listening public.

First of all, I want to associate myself with the comments made by Minister Diallo Rabain regarding Loyal Hill. They do an incredible job there. The sense of community spirit and they definitely demonstrate the best of Bermuda. It was unfortunate that I wasn't able to attend this year with my 92-year-old father-in-law who went last year and had an absolutely incredible time. So, excellent job and I hope that that continues.

On a sombre note, I offer condolences to the family of Vera Ellison, who died peacefully in her home on 12 January, and there's going to be a home-going service on 28 May at St. Mark's Church. It's understood that she touched many lives in the 98 years that she was on this Earth. Thank you

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Minister from constituency 4. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I would like to take the opportunity to send congratulatory remarks to the students at Francis Patton School, who last week I had the opportunity to attend their Leadership Day—and I will associate Minister Diallo [Rabain] with these remarks. Every year Francis Patton has a Leadership Day. This year's theme was "Leadership Through Collaboration" and so collaboration with community stakeholders. And so, they invited persons from the community to come and see how they run their leadership programme. And they are actually the only school in the Caribbean who has been recognised by the Franklin—I might get the name wrong. Minister? Covey?

An Hon. Member: FranklinCovey.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes. FranklinCovey in their leadership skills being, I think, accredited as part of that programme. And what . . . I had the opportunity to see with each and every year level and interesting Francis Patton being one of our parish schools going up to Year 8, which was interesting to see, but they all had the opportunity (each class) to come up on stage and share what their educational goal was. There was

a class goal that each class had and how they were going to accomplish it. And also, the outcome of that particular goal. They also gave us the opportunity to go around the school and visit the classrooms. It was definitely an open book, an eye opener for those persons who were visiting to see how the school has been situated and operated and changed differently to accommodate for Year 8 students. But also, the engagement of the students in the classroom. And so, I encourage if anyone has the opportunity to attend France Patton's Leadership Day that you do so. It was a great collaboration, and I want to thank the staff and the students of Francis Patton for offering the opportunity and congratulations to Francis Patton for their Leadership Day.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Thank you and good morning to you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like for a suitable congratulatory letter, if possible, sent to the East End Ministerial Alliance on the annual Walk to Calvary, which is held at the Good Friday, but it's turned into a week-long cultural tourism event. It has been established now over 30 years. I would like to single out, in particular, Ms. June-Ann Furbert, Mr. David Trott, who appeared on two occasions on the radio with me on "Tourism in Focus" because they get many folks coming here from overseas, now interested and staying at Grotto Bay where they are partnering. And they are very thankful to the Minister responsible for Culture for participating in that as well. And Reverend Joyce Hayward, whose commentary during the event is outstanding. And of course, the role which Reverend Cyril Simmon has taken over my dearly departed friend Brother Wainwright out there. He does a great job. So, kudos to them.

And also like to congratulate the great snooker team from RAA and I know I have . . . there are one or two snooker players that hail in this Honourable House. I am sure they would want to be associated with me singling out Kenya Trott. I think that Member Deputy Leader De Silva is a very accomplished snooker player and would recognise the greatness that is coming out of St. George's with Kenya Trott, Kyle Williams, Keino Zuill and Aaron Bean winning the Keen Cup. And may that be another signal that victory is in the air for us in St. George's as we move towards those months and looking forward and encouraging all to participate in the upcoming long-distance race. And I am singling out ahead of time . . . I am sure my bias for Gladwin Lambert up there and that the *Melody* might be successful. Thanking him in advance for his

participation in sailing. I do support my cousins from Somerset Bridge and Death Valley all day, every day and—Whale Bay.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 26. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and good morning, colleagues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to send congratulations to the Bright Temple A.M.E. Church of Warwick. I had the privilege yesterday of attending their concert which was the theme . . . a Heritage Day theme, in fact, "Take Me Back." It was a very enlightening concert. They actually also honoured three ambassadors . . . music ambassadors of Bermuda in the like of Ms. Olney Bean, Calvin Busby and Mr. Keith Lee, who we all know are strong advocates of gospel music in Bermuda.

Now Madam Deputy Speaker, I am a continued spectator of concerts and in fact, my favourite concert is Beres Hammond's concerts. But this concert in particular yesterday left me very high and blessed, so it started my week off well and I certainly feel that we should send congratulations to the Bright Temple because it's something that I think they will continue on an annual basis during Heritage Month.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak? I recognise the Member from constituency 11.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I want to associate firstly with the remarks for Loyal Hill, Devonshire. We always stick together.

Madam Deputy Speaker, unfortunately, over the last two weeks, we have lost two young Bermudians through . . . one through an industrial accident and one through something else. I want to firstly give condolences to the family of Thomas Jones of—I will associate Paul Wilmot, sorry, Honourable Member, Paul Wilmot and Honourable Member Tyrrell.

Mr. Jones was an electrician by trade, but he was a fun guy that everybody loved. I want to give condolences to his mother, Ms. Pinky Bailey, his father, Mr. Kevin Bailey, and the Bailey clan altogether and the Jones' clan. I associate Minister Diallo Rabain. For others of us who were—I must associate the whole House . . . because Dr. Doug DeCouto wants to be associated.

The other young man, Madam Deputy Speaker, was Miguel Walker. Some people may not know

him, but they would know his stage name. His stage name was "Pepsi." He was one of Bermuda's foremost DJ selectors for Genesis and Magnum Force, part of our culture is dancehall music and he was one of those who put his heart and soul into entertaining our people at peaceful parties. The weekend before we pass all the "sound boys" in Bermuda, they came together to put together a benefit to raise funds for him. Unfortunately, he passed. But it speaks to the ethos of . . . part of who, as we celebrate Culture Month, we have to understand—associate Reverend Dr. Bishop MP Leroy [Bean] and Paul Wilmot, again. But it speaks to who we are as a people, dancehall or reggae, is part of our culture. And Pepsi was an integral part of that culture in Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 27.

Mr. Paul Wilmot: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Paul Wilmot: I—

The Deputy Speaker: Member, can I ask you to do one favour? Can I ask you to switch to—

Mr. Paul Wilmot: Not a problem.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

[Pause]

Mr. Paul Wilmot: My apologies.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Paul Wilmot: I would like to certainly give my condolences to the Wilson family on behalf of constituency 27 for Earlston Malcolm Eugene Wilson, [Jr.], a good friend of mine who has passed.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Continue. That's it? Oh, okay. Thank you.

Mr. Paul Wilmot: Yes, Madam.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, right.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak? There being none . . . I think that finishes congratulatory and obituary remarks.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE*[Ms. Linda Smith, Chairman]*

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

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

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE DEPUTY
SPEAKER****APOLOGIES**

The Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the first Orders of the day, but before I do that, let me give apologies that were sent from [Honourable] Member Dickinson, [Honourable] Member Emilygail Dill and from the [Honourable] Premier. They did send apologies for their absence today.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Deputy Speaker: We are now going to the resumption . . . we are going to resume in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure [for 2025/26].

May I have the Minister . . . yes.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

*[Pause]**[Crosstalk]*

House in Committee at 10:26 am

Bermuda House of Assembly

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY**ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE
FOR THE YEAR 2025/26**

The Chairman: Good morning, Honourable Members and members of the listening audience. We are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94 and 99 are now to be debated. I call on the Minister in charge, the Honourable Jason Hayward, JP, MP, Minister of the Economy and Labour, to proceed.

Minister, you have the floor.

*[Desk thumping]***MINISTRY OF ECONOMY AND LABOUR**

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, I move Heads 44, Ministry of Economy and Labour Headquarters; 14, Department of Statistics; 27, Immigration; 29, Registry General, 60, Workforce Development; 94, Economic Development; and 99, Department of Labour be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, before I commence, I would just like to thank the Ministry of Economy and Labour team and all the department heads and public officers who have diligently worked to execute on the agenda of the Ministry of Economy and Labour and the departments underneath that department.

I believe that the Ministry has served the community well. We have a proven track record of execution on an annual basis. We publish the work that we have actually done to progress the lives of businesses and Bermudians as a whole and improve the quality of life of those individuals. And so, I will go through the budget heads. I will outline the work that has been done but also outline the work that will be done with the allocated funds that we have been provided within the Ministry.

Today I had to determine what was the tack I was going to take regarding this particular debate. I was wondering whether or not I take a page out of the previous Minister's book and read extremely slow for four hours and leave him with two minutes to answer questions, or whether I engage in a fluent debate. My style is to engage in a very flexible, fluent debate. And so, to the Honourable Member, I will leave sufficient time to ask questions. If I am unable to answer the question I would like for the Minister to indicate which questions were not answered after the debate, so I can provide them with the relevant information.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

HEAD 44—HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. *[sic]* Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget for the Ministry of Economy and Labour for the upcoming fiscal year 2025/26. I am sorry, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the overarching mission of the ministry is *To drive economic growth and job creation*. The Ministry seeks to achieve this mission through its six departments, which are the Departments of Statistics, Immigration, Workforce Development, Economic Development, Labour and the Registry General. The Departments are led by the Ministry Headquarters, or Head 44, whose mission is: *To establish effective policy that helps foster the expansion of jobs and economic growth*.

Overall, a total of \$27,585,000 has been allocated to the Ministry for the upcoming fiscal year, which represents an increase of \$1,891,000 from the previous year. The increase is due largely to the addition of the Registry General to the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

I will begin today's budget presentation with the Ministry Headquarters, Head 44, which is found on pages B-171 through B-174 of the Budget Book.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, a total of \$1,075,000 has been allocated for Head 44 (Headquarters) for the 2025/26 fiscal period. This represents a reduction of \$126,000 or 10 per cent compared to the previous year. The Headquarters budget is 4 per cent of the Ministry's total budget.

Madam Chairman, Head 44 is comprised of two business units: 54060 Administration and 54210 Immigration Appeals Tribunal. In fact, the bulk of the Headquarters' work is funded under Administration, which drives policy and legislative developments, and oversees the Ministry's six departments. Specifically, Headquarters' objectives are to provide oversight of

- the Department of Workforce Development for the implementation of the Youth Employment Strategy and Workforce Development Strategy;
- the Department of Labour to promote harmonious labour relations;
- the Department of Statistics for the timely distribution of data and other relevant statistics;
- the Economic Development Department to implement economic growth initiatives and the Economic Development Strategy;
- the Registry General in the accurate recording of vital records and the protection of intellectual property, and
- to continue to implement immigration reform by providing oversight of process improve-

ments, policy and legislative changes, and information technology system upgrades and enhancements.

In addition, the Ministry Headquarters manages the Office of the Minister, provides strategic leadership to departments, and appoints and oversees 10 boards and committees.

Madam Chairman, this work of the Ministry Headquarters is conducted under business unit 54060 Administration. In the upcoming fiscal year, this will be \$1,055,000. This represents a decrease of the business unit's budget by \$121,000 compared to the previous fiscal year. This reflects the discontinuation of funding associated with the cost-of-living responsibilities of Consumer Affairs—a section which was briefly part of Ministry Headquarters in 2024/25.

Manpower

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the Headquarters has a staff of five: a Comptroller, an Office Manager, a Policy Analyst and two Special Advisors to the Minister. The team is led by the Permanent Secretary (however, the Permanent Secretary's salary is accounted for underneath the Cabinet Office budget). Due to the nature of Headquarters' work in supporting the Minister and researching and developing policy, the bulk of this Head's budget is dedicated to salaries. Overall, salaries account for \$575,000. Other significant items of expenditure are professional services at \$260,000, travel at \$121,000, and advertising and promotion at \$60,000.

Business Performance

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, enabled by this team, in the past year the Ministry Headquarters met the majority of its performance objectives and delivered numerous policy and legislative initiatives. Specifically in 2024/25, the Ministry completed a number of strategic and Throne Speech initiatives that together improve the lives of Bermudians and set the Island up for greater economic development.

Madam Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year 2025/26, the Ministry is set up to deliver on the Throne Speech initiatives that advance the Government's agenda to enhance the lives of the people of Bermuda. With the Ministry's priority being to "drive economic growth and job creation," continued progress on the initiatives of the Economic Development Strategy will be equally the driving force behind our work programme working in conjunction with other Government departments and agencies.

In fulfilment of the Throne Speech and Strategy initiatives, we anticipate the development of a National Entrepreneurship Strategy, launch of a new Job Board, and continued execution of action plans to support economic diversification and sustainability.

Madam Chairman, I want to end my presentation by thanking the staff of the Ministry Headquarters who were all instrumental in the delivery of the Ministry's priorities and initiatives. The Ministry of Economy and Labour has a small but excellent team of professionals and our achievements this past year are a testament of their hard work.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 44, Ministry Headquarters.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

And we now proceed to Head 14.

HEAD 14—DEPARTMENT OF STATISTICS

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 14, the Department of Statistics, found on pages B-175 through B-178 and C-12 of the Budget Book.

Mission

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the mission of the Department of Statistics is: *To produce and provide statistical information for data-driven decision-making for Bermuda.* The department seeks to fulfil its mandate by delivering quality data that aligns with international standards and best practices, to facilitate a culture of evidence-based decision-making for policies and programmes. As such, the Department of Statistics' objectives are as follows:

- raise the Department of Statistics profile through improved accessibility to statistical data and information utilising innovative digital tools;
- ensure the collection, compilation and production of statistical outputs are based on the most current international statistical methodologies, standards and best practices by using data quality frameworks;
- operate a transparent and citizen-centric department by improving the understanding and use of statistical data and information; and
- engage in targeted external and internal training and development to build the statistical capacity required to sustain a high-performing department.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, a total of \$3,358,000 has been allocated for this head, which represents an increase of \$816,000 from the previous year and constitutes 12 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. This change is due primarily to an increase in the amount budgeted for salaries and wages, and for professional services required for the processing of the 2024 Household In-

come and Expenditure Survey and preparations for the 2026 Population and Housing Census.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Statistics comprises six business units as listed on page B-175:

- 24010, Censuses and Special Surveys
- 24015, Administration
- 24020, Core Statistics & Publications
- 24025, Core Annual Surveys
- 24055, Census and Survey Research
- 24065, Household Expenditure Survey

Madam Chairman, in the past year, the Department of Statistics had nine vacancies due to retirements and officers pursuing other opportunities. The department has updated the job descriptions and working with the Department of Employee and Organisational Development to fill the vacant positions. Recruitment for two Statisticians is in progress and the recruitment for three Assistant Statisticians and four Statistical Officers is anticipated to begin in May of this year.

Madam Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of the Current Account Estimates of the Department of Statistics is found on page B-176. Please allow me to highlight the material [object] code increases and decreases:

- Salaries—increased by \$388,000, or 20 per cent, because of an increase in the number of full-time equivalents (FTEs) after adjusting funding in line with the 2022 Management Consulting Services operational review recommendations and the negotiated salary uplifts.
- Wages—increased by \$139,000 due to hiring temporary in-office staff to assist with the 2026 Population and Housing Census preparations.
- Advertising and Promotion—increased by \$10,000 to fund advertising via newspaper, radio, online and other promotions for the 2026 Population and Housing Census.
- Professional Services—increased by \$270,000 to hire interviewers for the 2026 Population and Housing Census pre-test and a consultant to assist with processing the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.
- Materials and Supplies—increased by \$7,000, or 12 per cent, due to an increase in office supplies and printing costs associated with preparing for the 2026 Population and Housing Census

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, I am pleased to report that most of the revised forecast performance measures for 2024/25 were achieved.

Madam Chairman, before commencing my analysis by business unit, it is important to note that comparisons are not like-for-like for the following reason: Funding for the Labour Force Survey was shifted from business unit 24055 to 24025.

Madam Chairman, I will now present my analysis of expenditure by business unit.

Business Unit 24010—Censuses and Special Surveys

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for conducting the 2026 Population and Housing Census.

A total of \$152,000 has been allocated to Business Unit 24055—Census and Survey Research Unit which represents an increase of \$152,000. Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase was for Object Code 4275—Temporary staff with an increase of \$139,000.

Business Unit 24015—Administration

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for the management and administration functions of the Department of Statistics.

A total of \$839,000 has been allocated to Business Unit 24015—Administration which represents an increase of \$204,000, or 32 per cent, from the previous year. Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase was for Object Code 4110—Salaries—Bermuda Public Services from the previous year due to the negotiated salary uplift, partial funding of the Statistical Systems Manager post and additional funding allocated to the Senior Statistician position where a job description review anticipates a salary uplift.

Regarding progress on the performance measures, indicators. The indicator to raise the profile of the Department of Statistics with improved accessibility to statistical data through innovative digital tools:

The revised Target (2024/25):

- i. One monthly social media post
- ii. One monthly messaging apps
- iii. One quarterly online news ad
- iv. One annual newsletter

I am pleased to report the outcomes for 2024/25. The outcomes are actually:

- i. Twelve monthly social media posts
- ii. Twelve monthly messaging apps
- iii. One online news ad per quarter
- iv. One newsletter per year called “By the Numbers”

Business Unit 24020—Core Statistics and Publications

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for providing economic statistics relating to the growth of Bermuda's economy, retail sales and the

production of goods and services via monthly, quarterly and annual surveys.

A total of \$910,000 has been allocated to Business Unit 24020—Core Statistics & Publications which represents an increase of \$72,000, or 9 per cent, from the previous year. Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase was for Object Code 4110—Salaries—Bermuda Public Services from the previous year due to the negotiated salary uplift and converting one Census and Survey Clerk position to a Statistical Officer position.

Regarding progress on the performance measures, the indicator was 100 per cent of all outputs will undergo a formal review to ensure that the collection, compilation and production are based on the most current international statistical methodologies. The revised target was 100 per cent and the outcome, I am pleased to report, is 100 per cent.

Business Unit 24025—Core Annual Surveys

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for providing employment statistics, labour force [statistics] and inflation rates via monthly, semi-annual and annual surveys. A total of \$584,000 has been allocated to Business Unit 24025—Core Annual Surveys which represents an increase of \$218,000, or 60 per cent, from the previous year. Within this business unit, the largest absolute increase was for Object Code 4110—Salaries—Bermuda Public Services from the previous year. This budgetary increase was due to the negotiated salary uplift, a net gain of one partially funded Assistant Statistician post and the Census and Survey Clerk position being converted to a Statistical Officer position.

Regarding progress on the following performance measures, the indicator: Target response rates for major statistical surveys.

The revised target for 2024/25:

- i. Labour Force Surveys (Spring/Fall)—80 per cent;
- ii. Economic Activity Survey (annual)—72 per cent;
- iii. Balance of Payments (quarterly)—93 per cent; and
- iv. Household Income and Expenditure Survey (ad hoc)—24 per cent

I am pleased to report that the outcomes were that the Labour Force Survey exceeded its target at 86 per cent; the Economic Activity Survey was on target at 72 per cent; the Balance of Payments was on target at 93 per cent; and the Household Income and Expenditure Survey exceeded the revised target at 46 per cent.

Business Unit 24055—Census and Survey Research Unit

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for maintaining a core level of research capability for the department. It also provides data from population and housing censuses, trade statistics, environmental statistics, vital statistics (births, deaths, marriages and divorces) and population projections. In addition, this business unit conducts ad hoc surveys and produces reports on the survey results.

A total of \$551,000 has been allocated to Business Unit 24055—Census and Survey Research Unit which represents a decrease of \$4,000 or 1 per cent. This reduction was due partly to the Labour Force Survey budget being shifted from business unit 24055 to 24025 and the budget transfer being offset by salary increases and the negotiated salary uplift.

Within this business unit, the greatest absolute increase was for Object Code 4110—Salaries—Bermuda Public Services from the previous year because the business unit had a net gain of one partially funded Assistant Statistician post, the Census and Survey Clerk position was converted to a Statistical Officer position and the negotiated salary uplift.

Regarding progress against performance measures, I report that the indicator Process International Trade Statistics on a monthly basis for use in the production of key economic indicators such as the Gross Domestic Product and Balance of Payments.

The revised target (2024/25) was data processed monthly. The outcome was: Processed 11 months of data by the end of the fiscal year.

Business Unit 24065—Household Expenditure Survey

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for conducting the Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

A total of \$322,000 has been allocated to Business Unit 24065—Household Expenditure Survey which represents an increase of \$174,000 or 118 per cent compared with 2024/25. Within this business unit, Object Code 5265—Consultancy Services—Overseas accounts for \$208,000. This is for professional services for processing the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

Madam Chairman, the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey is of national importance because it is the only statistical activity for collecting private households' expenditure and income patterns and levels. This data is used to update the "market basket" of goods and services and household expenditure weights to compile the Consumer Price Index. It also will indicate the overall living standards of Bermuda's residents.

Madam Chairman, the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey was launched in January 2024. The Department of Statistics disseminated letters, brochures and pamphlets to each sampled household outlining the importance and scope of the survey. Data collection was expected to last for one

year to capture variations in seasonal expenditure patterns and income levels. Due to a poor response rate, the Department of Statistics is continuing data collection for the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey until December 2025. It is important to note that for the selected households, participation is mandatory, and the department looks forward to the cooperation of participants this year.

Achievements

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, despite resource constraints, the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey began on schedule. I would like to thank Dr. Jahni Smith, Senior Manager and Statistician and the Household Income and Expenditure team for their dedication and unwavering commitment to the survey's successful launch.

Throughout the year, the Department of Statistics continued to produce its standard publications and produced the first issue of "By the Numbers" newsletter in March.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, if we look at the Capital Acquisition for the Department of Statistics on page C-12, we will see an amount of \$198,000 which has been apportioned in this year's budget. These monies will be used to support the online 2026 Population and Housing Census preparations and to replace a desktop computer.

Manpower

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, as seen on page B-176—Employee Numbers, there are a total of 27 FTEs in the department for the upcoming fiscal year, which is an increase of five from the 22 FTEs in the current year.

This enhances the department's capacity to perform effectively and in a timely manner. These FTEs are for the positions of one Statistical Systems Manager, two Assistant Statisticians and two additional FTEs are for temporary staff who are required to assist with preparations for the 2026 Population and Housing Census.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, for the upcoming year, the department will continue the data collection for the Household Income and Expenditure Survey and preparations for the 2026 Population and Housing Census. In addition, the department is committed to leveraging technology to develop standardised and streamlined solutions to automate and validate labour-intensive processes. This will improve timeliness of reporting.

Madam Chairman, the department will conduct the necessary censuses and surveys and collect administrative data to produce the following core publications in the upcoming fiscal year 2025/26:

- Monthly: Retail Sales Index and Consumer Price Index;
- Quarterly: Balance of Payments and International Investment Position; and Gross Domestic Product by Expenditure;
- Semi-Annually: Labour Force Survey Report, and,
- Annually: Bermuda Digest of Statistics; Bermuda Job Market Employment Briefs; Employment Survey Tabulation Set; Annual Gross Domestic Product; Information, Communication and Technology Profile; Environmental Statistics Compendium and Tourism Satellite Account Report.

Madam Chairman, the department conducts ad hoc surveys, provides survey samples and undertakes in-depth research and analysis of data. In addition, the department provides statistical advice and professional consultancy in the collection, processing and analysis of data for Government departments. Furthermore, the department fulfils statistical data requests from local and international organisations.

Madam Chairman, let me take this opportunity to thank the dedicated staff at the Department of Statistics under the leadership of Director, Mrs. Melinda Williams, for their continued commitment to the Department's objectives.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 14—Department of Statistics.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Just to remind the listening audience that we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26 and the Minister in charge, the Honourable Jason Hayward JP, MP, Minister of Economy and Labour, is outlining the heads for us. And we will now move on to Head 17 [*sic*], which is Immigration.

Please proceed.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, I believe that is Head 27.

The Chairman: I'm sorry. Head 27, yes. Sorry.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Thank you.

HEAD 27—IMMIGRATION

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 27, the Department of Immigration, found on pages B-179 through B-183 and C-12 of the Budget Book.

Mission

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the mission of the Department of Immigration is: *To facilitate economic growth and to protect the future of Bermuda for the benefit of Bermudians, residents and visitors while protecting our borders.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the total projected expenditure for the Department of Immigration for 2025/26 is estimated at \$6,867,000, reflecting an increase of \$629,000, or approximately 10 per cent, compared to the 2024/25 budget. This increase is primarily attributed to the regrading of several job descriptions within the department, as well as an increase in the software maintenance contract for the border management system.

Madam Chairman, the material changes of the Subjective Analysis of the Current Accounts Estimates, as compared with the 2024/25, can be found on page B-180 and are as follows:

- Salaries—increased by \$679,000 (18 per cent), primarily due to the re-grading of several vacant positions necessary to facilitate the recruitment and filling of roles.
- Professional Services—decreased by \$713,000 (75 per cent) due to the reduced need for contracted consultants, which addressed the backlog of applications and other staffing requirements; and these consultants are being replaced through recent recruitment efforts.
- Repair and Maintenance—increased by \$639,000 (63 per cent), primarily due to the higher cost of the annual software maintenance contract for the border management system, which is essential for the protection of Bermuda's borders.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the total revenue for the 2025 fiscal year is projected at \$18,627,000, which represents a decrease of \$3,023,000 or 14 per cent.

The most notable revenue changes compared to the original 2024/25 estimates are detailed on page B-180. These changes are as follows:

- 8285 Work Permits—Work and Reside: based on actual revenue collections from the past two fiscal years, the revenue projection has been revised downward by 64 per cent to provide a more accurate and realistic forecast.
- 8286 Work Permits—Appeals: the projected revenue from appealed applications has been aligned with actual revenue collected in the past two fiscal years; with an increase of 67 per cent estimated to collect \$120,000 in revenue.

- 8287 Work Permits—General: recent trends show a higher revenue collection of general fees, including those for add-ons such as advertisement extensions, permit amendments late fees and others. As a result, the estimated revenues increased by 56 per cent.
- 8293 Residence Fees—revenue estimates were reduced by \$59,000 compared to 2024/25 [projections], reflecting actual revenues collected during the same period. Additionally, the dissolution of the One Year Work from Bermuda residential permits, effective 28 February 2025 is expected to decrease revenue for the 2025/26 fiscal year.
- 8301 Status and Naturalisation[—Other]: as the anticipated changes to the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956 (BIPA) regarding Permanent Residence Certificate applications were not finalised, the estimated revenue has been reduced by 63 per cent or \$1.5 million, which was the predicted revenue for the previous fiscal year.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, funds allocated for Capital Acquisitions for 2025/26 totalled \$379,000, as detailed on page C-12. This amount will support the initial phase of work to towards digitalisation of Immigration systems and application processes, as well as the replacement of small office furnishings.

Manpower

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the Department of Immigration resources will be used to effectively and efficiently deliver the day-to-day operational requirements of the business and key policy priorities. The department has a team of 50 staff carrying out its four major areas of work, as follows:

Section	People
Corporate Services	12
Personal Services	12
Compliance	18
Finance and Administration	8
Total	50

Hon. Jason Hayward: I should note this team processes more than 14,000 applications annually, of which approximately 70 per cent are related to work permits. The department handles over 100 different types of applications of varying complexity. I highlight this, Madam Chairman, as the extent of the volume of work handled by the department is often lost on the public. We are committed to digitising and automating all of our processes which will improve service output

and add transparency, reflecting a win-win for our clients and the department.

Business Unit Performance

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the department's performance outcomes against the performance measures are listed on pages B-182 and B-183 of the Budget Book.

37010 Corporate Services

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for processing 14,000 applications, referenced earlier. The Corporate Services Manager, Industry Relationship Officers and Customer Service Representatives liaise directly with employers to review and make recommendations for each application. While the backlog of applications was reduced in 2024/25, delays continue to occur with respect to issuing work permit documents. The section continued to provide timely notifications of approvals and on the occasions when work permit documents were required to assist with travel, i.e., for first-time applicants and visa controlled nationals, permits were immediately printed and issued.

37020 Personal Services

Hon. Jason Hayward: As its name suggests, this business unit liaises directly with the individual customer for applications relating to travel documents, the acquisition of Bermudian Status, Naturalisation as a British Overseas Territories Citizen, Permanent Resident's Certificate applications, issuance of related certificates, permissions to reside, seek employment and attend school, and letters for spouses of Bermudians. Key staff in this area include the Personal Services Manager, Client Services Officers, and Customer Services Representatives.

The volume of passport applications continues to be high with peak periods resulting in larger volumes. Generally, applications were processed between 11 and 20 weeks. Of significance, with the reinstatement of the BMU code in April 2024, there was little to no uplift in passport applications by existing passport holders who wished to obtain a new passport with the BMU code.

The temporary staff continued to provide invaluable assistance for the processing of spousal letters, and Permanent Resident's Certificate applications. Naturalisation as a British Overseas Territories Citizen saw a significant decrease in the processing timeline—from six to nine months to three to six months. The new targeted processing time for 2025/26 is six months (page B-182). In 2024, the department, in conjunction with the Deputy Governor's Office, processed over 550 Naturalisation applications, an increase of approximately 316 from 2023.

37030 Compliance

Hon. Jason Hayward: Under the leadership of the Compliance Manager and two Principal Compliance Officers, Senior Immigration Inspectors in the unit are assigned to both Immigration headquarters in Hamilton and the L. F. Wade International Airport. The unit continued to undertake investigations for potential breaches of Immigration law, regulations and policy. The penalty process for breaches against the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956 follows the guidelines in sections 71A and 71B.

The unit also began random assessments on Permanent Resident's Certificate holders to ensure that holders were not absent from Bermuda without the permission of the Minister, for a period of two years or more; this is in accordance with the section 31D of the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956.

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During the past fiscal year, the following cases are on record: as it pertains to General investigations, there were 104 new general investigations of which 61 were completed.

As it pertains to Civil Penalty investigations, there were 60. There was one that has actually been completed and seven which are awaiting a decision for civil penalties. Enforcement Site Visits—we conducted 30 site visits. And when we say *site visits*, this is where a complaint may come in, in terms of somebody working not according to policy or working without the relevant applications. And so, you can see that once those complaints are made, we do make on-site visits to make sure that persons are in compliance.

And then Deportations—there were actually nine deportations which were executed in the last fiscal period. And deportations can arise from a number of circumstances. One may be where an individual has been incarcerated for criminal activity and upon incarceration the department works with the prisons and the Governor's Office for immediate deportation of that individual so that they are not reintegrated back into our economy. And the other would be pertaining to persons who may be residing in Bermuda illegally and there is a reluctance for them to leave on their own.

As it pertains to Permanent Resident's Certificate Holders' absence . . . absentee assessments—there were 220 assessments conducted. Less than five were absent for two years or more without the Minister's permission. And so, Madam Chairman, there is a requirement in law that if one obtains a Permanent Resident Certificate, they must not have periods of absence from Bermuda without the permis-

sion of the Minister. That is because we do not want to issue people residency who are not actual residents in Bermuda. And they may be using the residency for other purposes. And so, we had been doing ongoing assessments, not just for Permanent Resident Certificate holders, but also for Resident Certificate holders and we found for the most part, persons are compliant. Where persons are not compliant, the department will write a Natural Justice letter to that individual and ask for clarification as to why they may be absent. We may have had somebody who has also passed away overseas and as a result are no longer in Bermuda. But those occurrences are extremely rare.

37040 Finance and Administration

Hon. Jason Hayward: This business unit is responsible for the department's accounts, budget, financial records/reporting, annual budget preparation, administrative support services, personnel administration functions including recruitment, and Work from Bermuda applications. The unit is overseen by the Finance and Administration Manager.

In the past fiscal year, there were 18 vacant posts. Recruitment was the main focus throughout 2024/25 and prior to the end of the fiscal year, of the 18 vacant posts, 12 suitably qualified applicants were selected. Given the need for approvals by the Public Service Commission and the Governor, contracts were issued and signed on 30 April 2025.

Major Policy Changes

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the following policy changes have either already been made or will be made before the end of fiscal 2025/26.

Prohibition of Entry Order

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, as a reminder, the Prohibition of Entry Order seeks to ensure that tourist visitors and residents of Bermuda have ready access to the US, UK, and Canada through commercial air service. During the past fiscal year, the Order was updated twice. As the requirements by the UK, in particular, continue to evolve, amendments to the Order are highly likely. In addition to this, the Department of Immigration will continue to enhance local visa requirements, ensuring there is a reasonable balance between securing our borders and the ease by which travellers can be landed in Bermuda.

Work From Bermuda Initiative

Hon. Jason Hayward: This initiative concluded on 28 February 2025, after allowing remote workers (which we also refer to as digital nomads) and university students to work and study remotely from Bermuda for four years. Since August 2020, the programme at-

tracted approximately 1,800 participants, with around 250 individuals applying to extend their stay.

Notwithstanding the cessation of the Work from Bermuda initiative, applicants can transition to a multi-year residency permission which, if granted, will give them the ability to remain in Bermuda for up to five years. Applications for residency must be submitted between one and two months prior to the expiration of the Work from Bermuda certificate.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Jason Hayward: During fiscal year 2025/26, the Department of Immigration will progress key action plans

Digitalisation. Madam Chairman, work is well underway to implementing a system that ensures that digital transformation is a reality for all of the department's applications. In March 2025, the Senior Management Team visited Bahamas Immigration for the purpose of gathering information about their Identity Document Management System (IDMS). A possible vendor has been identified to carry out the work and a formal proposal, including costs and timelines for key deliverables is expected by June 2025. Following approval of the proposal, work to design the new system will begin in earnest. It is expected that the design and implementation will be done in phases with the first phase comprising work permit applications. Key elements of the system will include: a dashboard that will be accessible by employers and individuals, so that they can readily see where their applications are in the process; tracking of email communications between the department and clients; and a seamless payment gateway, to name a few.

Work Permit Policy. The timely processing of work permit applications is vital to business sustainability for many companies throughout Bermuda. Equally, a clearly defined Work Permit Policy makes processing almost effortless. To this end, the Work Permit Policy is currently being enhanced so that it is clearer, leaving little room for erroneous interpretation, and more user-friendly. The new policy will be implemented by summer 2025.

Madam Chairman, in conclusion, I would like to thank the dedicated members of the staff at the Department of Immigration under the leadership of Dr. Danette Ming, Chief Immigration Officer and Ms. Marita Grimes, Assistant Chief Immigration Officer, as well as the Chairman of the Board of Immigration, Mr. Scott Simmons, and the Immigration Appeal Tribunal headed by Ms. Charlene Scott.

Madam Chairman, the H. M. Customs Department continues to work closely with the Department of Immigration to administer border controls at the L. F. Wade International Airport and at our seaports. As such, I would like to thank the Collector of Customs, Mrs. Lucinda Pearman and her team for the

work they carried out for the Department of Immigration during 2024/25.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 27, the Department of Immigration.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Do you want to take a little break for some water? And then we can proceed to the next head, which is Head 29, Registry General.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

HEAD 29—REGISTRY GENERAL

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 29, the Department of Registry General, found on pages B-184 through B-187 and C-12 of the Budget Book.

The Registry General is responsible for maintaining civil registrations and providing public access to such records. Under the [general] direction and control of the Minister of Economy and Labour, the Registrar General exercises his statutory functions and is assisted by such public officers as may from time to time be authorised by the Legislature.

Mission

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Department of Registry General ensures the preservation of vital and general records and the protection of intellectual property rights. This is achieved via the maintenance of a reliable system for the storage of public records, access to those records and provision of an efficient registry service which supports the registration of every birth, death, adoption, domestic partnership and marriage in Bermuda. The Registry General is also responsible for facilitating the registration of chattel mortgages; the registration of trade unions, professionals and charitable organisations; the granting of intellectual property rights such as trade and service marks, patents and designs, and advising on copyright and related rights; and assumes all administrative responsibilities with respect to the registration of Country Code Top Level domain names for Bermuda (.bm).

Madam Chairman, to meet these objectives, the department has four business units as shown on page B-184 as follows:

- Business Unit 39000—Administration
- Business Unit 39010—Intellectual Property Registration
- Business Unit 39020—Property, Professional and Organisation Registration
- Business Unit 39030—Births, Marriages and Deaths

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the current account estimates for Head 29, Registry General, can be found on page B-184. The Registry General has been allocated a total of \$1,944,000. This represents a net increase of \$143,000 or 8 per cent from the amount allocated in the original budget for the financial year 2024/25.

Madam Chairman, the budget estimates of \$1,944,000, allocated to the Registry General, will allow the Registry to provide the core services mandated by the law. The allocation of \$835,000 to the [Administration] Business Unit 39000 will ensure that the infrastructure and proper resources are made available to facilitate the efficient and timely registration of all professional bodies, intellectual property, organisations, vital and general events occurring in Bermuda during this fiscal period.

The \$652,000 allocated to the Intellectual Property Business Unit [39010] will allow that section to register or renew the registration of domain names, trademarks, patents, and designs; and maintain the existing registration systems for intellectual property and .bm domain names.

The department will continue to meet its output measures as it registers documents relating to charities, professional bodies, chattel mortgages and other legal transactions with the \$148,000 allocated to the Property, Professional and Organisation Business Unit 39020.

The \$309,000 allocated to the Births, Marriages and Deaths, Business Unit 39030, will ensure that all these [vital] events occurring in Bermuda will be registered.

Madam Chairman, the most significant variances in the estimated budget are further explained on page B-185 as follows:

- An increase of \$153,000, or 10 per cent, in Salaries. The increase is a result of negotiated uplifts between BPSU and the Government.
- A decrease of \$22,000 in Travel represents a decrease in the amount of money allocated for business travel, for anticipated attendance at CFATF Plenary meetings in preparation for the next Mutual Evaluation in 2027; and to attend training sessions arranged for IP staff at the UK IP Office and the Trinidad IP Office.
- An increase of \$9,000, or 8 per cent, for Repairs and Maintenance. This is largely due to the increase in cost for quarterly cleaning of the Search Room to remove mould and dust, due to the modified level of cleaning required.
- An increase of \$8,000 or a [36] per cent increase for Other Expenses. This represents a slight increase in money allocated for other operational costs (that is, for bank charges and commissions).

Revenue

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, on the revenue side, page B-186, the Registry General expects to realise \$2.2 million in revenue during 2025/26. The most significant amounts are explained below.

- \$70,000 is expected from Charity registrations.
- \$220,000 is expected from Trademark applications.
- \$270,000 is expected from Trademark registrations.
- \$370,000 is expected from Trademark renewals.
- \$216,000 is expected from .bm Domain Name registrations.
- \$260,000 is expected from applications for Birth Certificates.
- \$120,000 is expected from Marriage Licences.
- \$120,000 is expected from Maritime Marriage Licences.
- \$37,000 is expected from Marriage Ceremonies.
- \$90,000 is expected from Marriage Certificates.
- \$70,000 is expected from Death Certificates.

Manpower

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the manpower estimates for the Registry General, as outlined on page B-186, are 20 full-time posts. Within the department four of those posts are vacant.

It is anticipated that the two vacant Trademark Administrators, the Customer Service Representative, and the Charities Administrator posts will be filled by the beginning of the upcoming fiscal year. The Registry General consists of the following four sections:

- 39000 Administration, seven staff;
- 39010 Intellectual Property, six staff;
- 39020 Property, Professional and Organisation Registration, two staff; and
- 39030 Births, Marriages and Deaths, five staff.

Performance Measures

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the department's Performance Measures are outlined on page B-187. Although the department is operating with three key posts currently vacant, and posts filled by temporary relief staff, members of the Registry General team continue to work hard and are dedicated to achieving these goals.

The department is responsible for discharging duties conferred under a total of 36 Acts and Regulations which govern the operations of the Registry General. The main function of the department is to ensure the efficient and timely registration of all intellectual property rights, vital and general events occur-

ring in Bermuda. All sections of the department met the performance targets in 2024/25.

Madam Chairman, the capital acquisition for Head 29, Registry General, can be found on page C-12. The Registry General has been allocated a total of \$336,000. This represents a net increase of \$237,000, or 71 per cent from the amount allocated in the original budget for the financial year 2024/25.

Madam Chairman, \$26,000 has been allocated for new office furniture and equipment for the department, and \$310,000 has been allocated for the acquisition and installation of a new technology-based registration system for the IP section.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, in the upcoming year, the Registry General will execute the following initiatives:

- Implement the amendments to the Registrar-General Recording of Documents Act 1955 and relevant legislations (i.e., Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949) by acquiring a new technology-base system to provide for a Voluntary Register and enable the processing of applications for the registration of vital events (i.e., births, deaths, marriages) of Bermuda's citizens that occur outside our jurisdiction.
- Amend the Registration (Births and Deaths) Act 1949 (the "Act") to (a) make provision for an adult to alter their name in the Birth Register, which will provide an alternative option for an individual person to change their name as opposed to the current process via a deed poll; and (b) to ensure that members of the public cannot obtain a birth certificate of someone else without their consent.
- Bring into effect the new trade mark legislations (i.e., Trade Marks Act 2023, Trade Marks Regulations 2023, Government Fees (Trade Marks) Regulations 2023, and the Trade Marks (Customs) Regulations 2025); amend the Patents and Designs Act 1930 to introduce two standalone legislations (i.e., a new patent act and new design act); amend the Copyrights and Designs Act 2004 to implement a voluntary registration scheme for copyright work.
- Continue with application to the UK Government for the provision of key intellectual property international treaties (i.e., the Paris Convention, Madrid Protocol for trade marks, Patent Cooperation Treaty, and Hague Agreement for designs) to be extended to Bermuda.
- Modernise the IP section's technology-based registration system to operationalise the new IP legislative or legal framework.

- Digitisation of vital records and general registration business processes by leveraging advance "Software as a Service" (SaaS) solutions that will efficiently and safely promote online business transactions on any device and from anywhere in the world.

Madam Chairman, the Registry General Department remains committed to delivering the various projects, with plans to have the new systems operational during the upcoming fiscal year. I also want to add, Madam Chairman, that you will see a lot of activity in this particular House regarding the work we are doing in trade mark and some public promotion around the work we are doing in trade mark. There has been substantial work done in that area even to increase our capabilities of having a first-class trade mark regime and protecting intellectual property. I know that the Shadow Minister knows a bit about this because he assisted with some of the work carried out to advance the trade mark framework when he was on the government benches and I thank him for that work.

Madam Chairman, I would like to express my gratitude to the team and dedicated staff members of the Registry General Department, led by Mr. Aubrey Pennyman, as they continue to take a proactive approach to ensure Bermuda remains relevant and comparable with its global partners.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The next head up for debate is Head 60, Workforce Development.

Minister, proceed.

HEAD 60—WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 60, the Department of Workforce Development, found on pages B-188 through B-193 and C-13 and C-19 of the Budget Book.

Madam Chairman, the mission of the Department of Workforce Development is *To develop a resilient workforce, to provide a sustainable and stable community.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: A total of \$4,519,000 has been allocated for this head, which represents an increase of \$305,000 from the previous year and constitutes 16 per cent of the overall Ministry budget. This represents a budget increase of 7 per cent year over year and is largely a result of a supplementary increase to provide \$140,000 for increased Apprenticeships and \$70,000 for Hospitality Training Opportunities.

Additionally, the department has been granted a capital expenditure of \$16,750 for upgrades to the training room computers for client usage.

Madam Chairman, the Department of Workforce Development comprises three programmes as noted on page B-189: 6001 General Administration, 6003 Career Development, and 6004 Training.

Madam Chairman, Programme 6001, General Administration is responsible for the overall management and administration of the Department of Workforce Development. For the past three years I have had to report that . . . for the past three years, the Department of Workforce Development has been understaffed; however, today I am pleased to report, the department is fully staffed in all sections.

One of the roles that was onboarded was the Systems Support Officer. This role has been vital to enhancing the client experience at Workforce Development. Over the past year, the department has advanced digital transformation to enhance its services to the public. A key achievement has been developing and enhancing the department's website, which now serves as a central hub for all resources. The website integrates programme applications, training schedules, success stories, and digital guides, making it easier for stakeholders to access relevant information. department intake forms have also transitioned to a fully digitised format, allowing for seamless submission and processing. Course attendance is now digitally tracked, reducing paperwork and enhancing accuracy.

Programme applications for initiatives such as the Summer Internship Programme, Summer Employment Programme, Learn Through Experience Programme, Employer Participant Request, Skilled Trades, and Graduate Apprenticeship Programme are now available online.

National Occupational Certification processes have been streamlined by digitising Industry Assessment Panel (IAP) and Occupational Advisory Committee (OAC) assessments and implementing a public National Occupational Certification Registry. The introduction of an online submission and approval system for trainee/apprentice timesheets and weekly logs has increased efficiency and reduced errors.

To highlight departmental achievements, a dedicated section on the website now showcases success stories and event highlights. A digital department calendar has been integrated to provide better planning and access to training course schedules. Comprehensive how-to guides have been developed to support stakeholders in navigating various digital platforms. Another significant advancement is the successful implementation of a new client information database that [has] replaced the previous system, offering enhanced data management capabilities.

Madam Chairman, Programme 6003 Career Development is comprised of Career Development Administration 70300. This programme is responsible

for developing Personal Employment Plans and Case Management as a result of client assessment, core soft skills training and employment readiness training. The Career Development Section has successfully executed a range of impactful programmes during the 2024/25 fiscal year, with a strong focus on youth engagement, workforce readiness, and digital modernisation.

Notable initiatives include the expansion of youth employment pathways through the Learn Through Experience, Summer Employment Programme, Summer Internship Programme, Graduate Apprenticeship Programme, and public-private partnerships such as Shake Your Future with Bacardi Limited. Additionally, the team piloted a targeted On-the-Job Training (OJT) component within the legislated Personal Employment Plan (PEP) framework for Financial Assistance clients. Strategically, the Career Development section has restructured its spending priorities to amplify investments in Youth Development and Employer Partnerships, expansion of programmes, job board management, client assessment and case management.

Madam Chairman, Programme 6004 Training, provides administrative support to the National Certification and oversight of the Apprenticeship Board activities such as the apprenticeship programmes, professional designation training programmes and the national certification of the designated trades. Under the governance of the newly created National Certification and Apprenticeship Board (NCAB), the training and certification programme has had much success in implementing training programmes in high demand industry-driven occupations and advancing National Certification. The Board's primary objective is to oversee and ensure the quality, relevance, and efficiency of training and apprenticeship programs in Bermuda.

There was an adjustment of the number of persons awarded certifications from 300 to 125 persons; however, the number of persons sponsored for industry certification and training courses increased from 200 to 232. The number of apprentices increased to 52, with 10 due to complete their multi-year apprenticeship programmes during this calendar year 2025. Thirty-four Bermudians were awarded NCCER Core industry certification.

Additionally, 26 multi-year scholarship recipients are studying at overseas institutions in the US, Canada, UK and the Caribbean and 10 one-time Technical Vocational Education Training award recipients are studying in "short course" programmes of no more than 12 months either online or overseas.

The Skilled Trades Apprenticeship Training programme has 12 Bermudians in the first of a three phase, two-year apprenticeship programme. There were 50 local sponsored trainees studying at Bermuda College and other local educational institutions and 11 sponsored trainees studying at overseas institutions. Increased industry stakeholder engagement

with [cross]-ministry and external business and employers in various high-demand occupations to 37.

Through the innovative approach and implementation of offering micro-credential courses [(short-term units of learning)] 25 Bermudians were able to re-tool, [upscale] and earn certificates in their respective apprenticeship programmes.

Madam Chairman, the department successfully launched a pilot On-the-Job Training Programme in partnership with Financial Assistance [and] the Bermuda Post Office, providing Personal Employment Plan participants with hands-on experience and soft skills training. All participants were offered long-term employment, helping them transition from Financial Assistance. One participant shared that the programme gave them a renewed sense of purpose and structure.

Madam Chairman, it is important to note that we determined that the way in which we were going about assisting persons on Financial Assistance, where we made them just simply go out and do mandatory job searches was not producing the results that we required in terms of those individuals becoming employed. And so this House, under the leadership of this Government changed the legislation to ensure that the Workforce Development was a feature of those persons, able-bodied, on Financial Assistance. We called the tool Personal Employment [Plan] (PEP) where we assess where people are, we work with the team to develop the competencies and the capabilities of those individuals to prepare them for opportunities of work.

So, the On-the-Job Training programme was an initiative that was launched by the Department of Workforce Development to support individuals on financial assistance. The first three persons of that cohort were able to go into the workplace, share their value, and what the department is actually reporting is that based off of the work that was actually done, persons were able to secure employment as a result. And so they went from being able-bodied persons on financial assistance to persons who now have a source of income. And this just goes . . . bodes to when we put the resources in place to work directly with individuals we can achieve the outcomes that we actually desire.

To address the need for more Bermudians in the hospitality section, the department launched the Learn Through Experience Programme—Hospitality, an eight-week initiative combining professional development and paid work experience. One participant credited the Hospitality programme with helping them secure their first job and boosting their confidence.

The team also managed the Summer Employment Programme and the Summer Internship Programme, placing 180 students in career-aligned roles across sectors. Additionally, the department continues to award scholarships based on financial need and workforce demand in key areas such as hospitali-

ty, health care, trades, financial services, and emerging technologies.

Madam Chairman, over the year we have realised a number of success stories from our training programmes. We have had an extremely robust training calendar. I would like to highlight that we ran a Butcher Apprenticeship Training Programme. In June—it actually started in 2022. Those persons in January of 2025 have completed the programme and are now fully employed as butchers, which is something extremely positive.

The department also ran the Heavy Truck Driver's Programme which enabled 34 Bermudians to earn their heavy truck licences and complete certificates. The section also ran the Skilled Trades Apprenticeship Training Programme. The department also ran the Mentorship Apprenticeship Programme.

Appliance Technician Repair Safety Training Certificate. The National Center for Construction Education and Research (NCCER). Solar Photovoltaic Certificate Programme. The National Certification, Apprenticeship and Professional Development programmes as well as the National Occupational Certification programmes.

This department has touched, and this section of this department has touched the lives of hundreds of Bermudians in the last fiscal period, providing them with the vital skills which are needed to allow them to excel in the current and future world of work

Oftentimes these stories that go . . . over shadowed as it pertains to the work that the Government is doing and the Department of Workforce Development is doing, ensuring as to the work that we are doing to put people on pathways to success. I think that the work that we are doing and the work that we are outlining with the funds that this department does receive highlights that we have had a huge focus on investment in people. When we say we have touched the lives of dozens of persons, we are talking about hundreds of individuals who have benefited from the support that we have provided for investment in people.

I think that this combined with our ability to expand jobs in the economy allows greater levels of opportunities and Bermudians to position themselves to take advantage of those opportunities.

Madam Chairman, for the 2024/25 period, the department made amendments to its performance measures to better align with current workforce demands. The team examined the existing performance measures to ensure they meet the criteria of being Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely [(SMART)]. Although there are a few new performance measures, there are some measures of which to take note.

There were 683 persons seeking the services of Workforce Development in the 2024/25 budget period. The department was able to refer 199 persons for jobs. Let me repeat that, Madam Chairman, be-

cause I think that is significant. *There were 683 persons that sought assistance from the Department of Workforce Development.* Some persons unemployed. Some persons who may be on Financial Assistance. Some persons who are employed and looking to upgrade their skillset. Some persons who are underemployed and looking to transition to a new job. But this department was positioned to service that volume of individuals. Additionally, the department referred 199 persons for jobs. That meant employers contacted the department directly or via the job portal as a requirement of a work permit application and we were able to refer 199 individuals for jobs in that fiscal period.

I want to use this opportunity to inform members of the public that you must register with the Department of Workforce Development to seize these opportunities. And so when persons say that in the past, they may have not had a positive experience with going into the Government department and securing jobs or capacity to build and support, I would say that based off of the statistics, the department is well poised to service persons who are seeking assistance.

The department hosted a robust monthly employment skills calendar of courses; this programme exceeded its projected target by 46.33 per cent, with a total of 439 participants compared to the initial projection of 300. And so that was additional 439 individuals who took advantage of the Department of Workforce Development monthly training schedule that we put out for the public.

While intake and training participation numbers have shown strong performance, job placement results remain significantly below target. I want to reiterate that the department is not an employment agency; however, the team does provide wraparound services for clients as they seek employment. The department set a target of placing 100 clients; it fell short by only placing 55. Additionally, the percentage of completed Personal Employment Plans (PEPs) reached only 64 per cent, falling short of the 80 per cent target. This is due to clients disengaging from the process and having other social factors that have delayed their PEP progress.

The department set a target of 40 per cent of clients who were referred who secured employment and the department ended the year at 39 per cent. Additionally, 78 [per cent] of persons report having improved skills three months post taking a class with the department. I think that is an important statistic. We train and we develop persons to position themselves for jobs. Not everybody will secure a job directly after the programme in which they engaged. But they are better positioned to take advantage of opportunities when they exist. It is not all the time that there is a one-to-one alignment between somebody being trained and the job opportunity being made available. And so that one-to-one relationship doesn't exist. But I believe that the department set out to have at least

40 per cent of persons who will engage in their training programmes, become fully employed and the department reached the threshold of 39 per cent. I am sure that the Shadow Minister will accept that the department has met its target of 40 per cent for training and development and ensuring that we transition persons into the workplace but also understand that there is a level of complexity to get persons employed after they have been trained.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, as we look forward to the upcoming fiscal year and beyond, the Department of Workforce Development objectives for the fiscal period 2025/26 can be found on page B-188 and read as follows:

- Continue to implement the Youth Employment Strategy focusing on increasing educational and vocational training opportunities tailored to high demand industries and supporting youth in their transition from education to employment.
- Expand Apprenticeship and internship placements available to Bermudians; with a focus on engaging young people in skill-building experiences.
- Strengthen employer partnerships for youth and apprenticeship placement.
- Increase engagement and communication with Bermuda's young people.

In the 2025/26 fiscal period, the Department of Workforce Development is poised to expand current programmes and implement new initiatives to make a significant impact on the Bermuda's workforce.

The plans include the development of a new Job Board to replace the existing system, providing an improved platform for job seekers and employers. Enhancements are also being made to the digital employer referral process to facilitate efficient referrals. Furthermore, the security vetting process is being refined to ensure compliance and operational efficiency.

Youth engagement will be scaled by expanding the Graduate Apprenticeship and Learn Through Experience programmes.

Furthermore, the department is exploring innovative micro-courses designed to offer efficient and targeted certification pathways in various trades, ensuring a nimble response to the evolving needs of the workforce in Bermuda. These initiatives collectively reflect our commitment to nurturing a skilled, adaptable, and future-ready workforce.

Madam Chairman, the department is heavily focused on ensuring that we reposition ourselves for high-demand occupations and skilled trades and the work in these areas continue.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 60—Department of Workforce Development.

At this time, I would like to thank the team at the Department of Workforce Development, led by Director Malika Cartwright, for their commitment to supporting Bermudians as they navigate through Bermuda's career landscape.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Honourable Members and members of the listening audience, we are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26. We are now in debate, and we call on the Minister in charge, the Honourable Jason Hayward, JP, MP, Minister of the Economy and Labour to please proceed.

We are moving into Head 94 which is Economic Development.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, can you just give an indication as to the time that the debate commenced?

The Chairman: The debate commenced at 10:27.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Okay, thank you.

HEAD 94—ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 94, the Economic Development Department (EDD), found on pages B-194 through B-197 and C-19 of the Budget Book.

Mandate

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the mandate of the Economic Development Department is *To advance the sustainable growth, development, and diversification of Bermuda's economy*. It does so by

- facilitating, creating, and implementing policies to support the Bermuda Economic Development Strategy 2023–2027;
- in collaboration with industry stakeholders, positioning Bermuda as an ideal test market for innovative products and industry development;
- identifying the jurisdiction's market fit, clearly communicating its message, and driving opportunities that lead to economic activity;
- processing various Land Licenses and Incentives for Job Maker applications in a timely, efficient, and professional manner;
- facilitating opportunities for technology education, mentoring and training, and support for e-entrepreneurship; and
- helping create a more attractive regulatory environment for business and enhanced

communication between the Government of Bermuda and the private sector.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, the subjective analysis of the current account estimates of the Economic Development Department is found on page B-195 of the Budget Book.

A total of \$8,623,176 has been allocated for this head, which represents an increase of \$196,815 from the previous year. This budget constitutes 31 per cent of the allocated budget for the Ministry as a whole.

This budgetary allocation includes the total current expenditure for the Economic Development Department, which is estimated to be \$2,054,424 for 2025/26, as well as two grants. The grants comprise an allocation for the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (the "BEDC") in the amount of \$2,338,752, and for the [Bermuda] Business Development Agency (the "BDA") in the amount of \$4,230,000.

I will present to this Honourable House the budget briefs for each of these grantees separately, after I present the budget for the Economic Development Department ("EDD"). And so, to be clear, there are three major areas of funding. One will be for the Economic Development Department and then we provide two substantial grants which exceed the funds that we provide to the Economic Development Department to the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation and to the Bermuda Business Development Agency. So included in this budget brief, I will also provide clarity on how that grant funding is actually allocated.

But the three units comprise the substantial investment that we put into economic development in Bermuda and ensuring that we have a sustainable and robust economy that is able to expand and create further job opportunities. Additional to that, these are the departments that are responsible for diversifying our current economy and I'll highlight the work that is actually being done to support the diversification and growth of our economy.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, through the Economic Development Act 1968, the Incentives for Job Makers [Programme] allows companies to apply for and obtain the concession of having their senior executives exempt from needing a work permit. These are persons responsible for the continued presence of jobs for Bermudians in Bermuda. Successful applicants are exempt from needing a work permit, and their family is granted permission to reside with them.

In 2024/25, the Incentives for Job Makers Programme earned the Government \$400,000 in rev-

enues, reflective of 20 successful exemption applications. This represents a slight increase in successful applications from the previous fiscal year.

Looking into the next fiscal year, 2025/26, the EDD remains committed to promptly processing applications for Incentives for Job Makers. The EDD has engaged with stakeholders to update and enhance the efficiency of the process, aiming to reduce the processing time for each application.

Madam Chairman, the Alien Land Licensing Programme, as detailed in Part VI of the Bermuda Immigration Act 1956, aims to protect land in Bermuda for ownership of persons who possess Bermudian status by—

- a) requiring restricted persons to have licences to hold or acquire land in Bermuda and preventing them from appropriating it;
- b) requiring trustees to have licences to hold or acquire land in Bermuda for the benefit of restricted persons and preventing them from appropriating it; and,
- c) preventing corporations from acquiring or holding land in Bermuda, unless they do so in accordance with legislation.

The Alien Land Licensing Programme includes applications by restricted persons to hold or acquire land in Bermuda, to let their Bermudian properties, to take a mortgage or charge on land, as well as to apply for deferral certificates.

In 2024/25, the Alien Land Licence Programme earned the Government over \$350,000 in application fee [revenues] reflective of 159 Land Licence applications received. Additionally, the Programme earned over \$5.7 million in 44 landholding charges received.

Manpower

Hon. Jason Hayward: When we look at the staffing of the Economic Development Department, Madam Chairman, the department is comprised of seven full-time posts, which is one Director, one Administrative Assistant, one Senior Officer, one Senior Development Analyst, one Analyst, one Senior Regulatory Analyst, and one Concierge

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Programme 9404—Research and Legislative Support

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, during the year, the EDD made substantive progress in strengthening Bermuda's Family Office Solutions Framework, collaborating with the Ministry of Economy and Labour HQ, the Ministry of Finance, the Bermuda Monetary Authority, the Registrar of Companies, and key industry stakeholders. The framework is to offer comprehensive support for ultrahigh-net-worth families, en-

suring asset protection, legacy preservation, flexible governance, and integrated lifestyle services.

This initiative underscores Bermuda's commitment to providing a stable, compliant, and competitive environment for family offices, reinforcing the Island's appeal to international investors.

The EDD also contributed to Bermuda's legislative modernisation efforts, and specifically to the passage of the Companies and Limited Liability Company Amendment Act 2024, which removes the requirement for ministerial consent for leasing property for employee accommodations. This reform streamlines business operations while maintaining Bermuda's regulatory integrity. Additionally, ongoing work includes the introduction of public benefit companies and the simplification of private trust company regulations, as well as easing administrative burdens, further enhancing Bermuda's attractiveness as an investment jurisdiction.

Key legislative changes include the Trusts Exemption Amendment Order, which simplifies the regulatory requirements for Private Trust Companies by eliminating the need for Ministerial consent when adding trusts. Furthermore, the EDD supported the Government's review of industry-proposed amendments to Bermuda's Trustee Act 1975, which would allow trustees to align investment strategies with contemporary family values, including responsible and sustainable investing. This review is ongoing. The upcoming Benefit Entities Bill to support the introduction of public benefit companies is another forward-thinking initiative designed to facilitate impact-driven corporate structures, enabling businesses to achieve financial returns while delivering positive social and environmental outcomes.

Madam Chairman, in 2025/26, the EDD will continue advancing key legislative efforts, including the Family Office Solutions Framework and the rollout of the Maritime Business Permitting System. In the future, these Research and Legislative Support performance measures will be rolled into those of the next programme, Analysis and Policy.

Programme 9403—Analysis and Policy

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, over the past fiscal year, the department's Analysis and Policy Division has primarily focused on engaging with the community, composed of employers, investors, partners, educators, as well as learners, primarily in the various fields of emerging technology.

1. Publishing Articles and Editorial Content. Once again, the EDD exceeded its target for this performance measure by making more enhanced use of its social media channels and other tools. The department uses both traditional media and social media throughout the year to keep the public informed of its work, aware of its initiatives and projects, and

invited to benefit from its offerings. It also uses well-known magazines and journals to increase awareness of its activities. Looking ahead, the EDD plans to continue sharing updates with the various media outlets so the public can stay informed about its efforts and accomplishments.

2. [Completing Stakeholder Engagement Initiatives.] The EDD continues to support innovation and workforce development through strategic collaborations that extend to digital literacy, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship, and emerging technologies. The EDD advances local talent and positions Bermuda as a global hub for technology and innovation.

- a. Cybersecurity 101. The EDD awarded a grant to cover hacking techniques, malware, and defence strategies through hands-on training. Plans for future sessions are underway.

And so, what I am doing right now, Madam Chairman, is just highlighting the initiatives that the Economic Development Department has actually executed on as it pertains to capacity building through stakeholder engagement enforcing strategic partnerships. And so, you can see that we have executed on cybersecurity training with CyberSmarts pilot. We also support the Annual Business Awards in the technology category through the BDC. The EDD funded three innovations sprints, which include projects like Genomics [NFT] and Digital [Medical] Twin. We also assisted with the funding of the Technology Leadership Forum and with summer internship. We initiate community offerings and skill and capacity development activities such as the FinTech Training Programme. We run monthly FinTech webinars.

And also, the EDD was very instrumental in the Bermuda Coders Initiative. The Bermuda Coders Initiative is a three-year programme that offers free digital skills for all residents. It was launched with support from the UAE and through it, participants can earn certifications and enhance Bermuda's tech-readiness and workforce development goals.

Looking ahead to the 2025/26 fiscal year, the EDD remains focused on delivering ongoing business services initiatives and projects. This includes continued support for the growth of emerging sectors. The department is also committed to boosting and promoting the value of Bermuda-based talent—highlighting the skills, experience, and professional networks that [local] workers bring to incoming investors and employers.

I think what is important is that we make the appropriate connection between the way in which the world is evolving in technology and ensuring that we invest in the human capital so that we have inclusive growth in Bermuda. What we do not want to see is we have emerging sectors, we have emerging use of technology, and we do not see the equal integration of

the human capital development in our community. And so what EDD is doing is striking an appropriate balance in terms of promoting new industry, promoting the utilisation of technology but also ensuring that we invest in the people of Bermuda to bring them along the journey with us.

Programme 9405—Concierge and Engagement

Hon. Jason Hayward: The EDD's Concierge and Engagement Services Division provides assistance to international businesses that choose Bermuda as their preferred jurisdiction to domicile. The services provided benefit the overall economy by allowing the efficient inward flow of investment into Bermuda. And that is an important feature of the value proposition of Bermuda. When persons are looking for places to domicile they are also looking for soft landings and the EDD is well poised to provide the support to ensure that the person gets the personal services that they require, that they can engage in an efficient and effective manner with government departments that they require, as well as ensuring that the capital that they wish to invest in Bermuda goes directly into the corporate structure that they set up as well. So, kudos to the EDD for the work that is being done in that particular area.

I think it is important to recognise that there is high demand for companies to domicile in Bermuda. If you look at the statistics that the BMA puts out, you will see that there is an increase in licensing in a number of categories. And so, there are companies that are still seeking to domicile in Bermuda. We are held in high esteem as it pertains to our regulatory environment, especially in the area of digital assets. And there are a number of companies who are looking to domicile in Bermuda as well. As those companies are seeking Bermuda, they are also seeking clarity on the process of having boots on the ground and the EDD plays a very significant role in bridging that particular gap.

Madam Chairman, by streamlining and expediting government processes, the EDD helps shorten the time it takes for new companies to set up and start operating in Bermuda which allows for faster job creation and revenue generation—and that is the aim of that concierge service—to ensure that the capital is put to work in a very efficient and effective manner.

Madam Chairman, I invite Honourable Members to note these initiatives are a testament to Bermuda's ongoing activities as it pertains to economic diversification. The EDD is responsible for ensuring that we have full execution of the items within the Economic Development Strategy.

I would like to let the Shadow Minister know that my team is currently working on reports for the first strategic priority areas underneath the Economic Investment Strategy. We will clearly outline the progress that is being made in that particular space. And

so, if he wants to reserve questions regarding that, I will defer those to when those reports are submitted. It is my aim to submit those reports in this House, in this particular session, on an ongoing basis.

But what we want to do is ensure that they are presented in a clear manner. What I just don't want to do is just highlight 50 initiatives that we are executing on. What I want to do is put it in an organised manner so that persons know how the strategic initiatives in the Economic Development Strategy are actually being executed on in an individual level and that the work that we are doing directly aligns with that particular initiative as well.

BERMUDA ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (BEDC)

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, a quango under the Ministry of Economy and Labour. The grant, through the Economic Development Department, can be found on page C-19 of the Budget Book.

Madam Chairman, the mandate of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) is to oversee the operations of the Economic Empowerment Zones (EEZs), to provide financial support and technical advice to small- and medium-sized businesses, to manage the operations of outside vendor markets, and to managing vendors and issuing vending licences. The organisation's key objective remains to assist the Government in encouraging economic growth for Bermuda's local small- and medium-sized businesses.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Jason Hayward: A total of \$2,238,752 has been allocated as a grant for this quango for 2025/26, which represents no increase from the previous year.

The total current expenditure for the BEDC is estimated to be \$5,344,000—

[Pause]

The Chairman: Is that correct, Minister?

Hon. Jason Hayward: No, no. What happens is . . . it's a number that is written and the wording of that number. And so, I thought I would cheat and just read the wording of the number, and the word number is actually not correct. And so that messed me up a bit. So, I'll go ahead and just read the actual number—

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jason Hayward: —which is \$5,344,252.

[Pause]

Hon. Jason Hayward: So overall, that is just is a decrease of \$421 million, or 7 per cent, compared to 2024/25. This decrease is due primarily to the reduction in anticipated revenues as there will be no increase in the Government grant, there will be less carryover funds from 2024/25, and revenues from fees for services will be less.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Jason Hayward: The BEDC has carried over \$2,000,000 into 2025/26 for major capital investment projects and initiatives aligned with the Government's Economic Recovery Plan and economic development goals. Specifically, investment in the development of the Vertical Farm project to facilitate food security, lower food cost, develop farm co-ops, and create jobs in a newly evolved area of the agriculture industry.

Manpower

Hon. Jason Hayward: For all it achieves, the BEDC is a relatively small and agile organisation. There is a staffing complement of 18 [full-time posts].

I think what is most impressive about BEDC is the work that it actually does. If you are a small- or medium-sized business in Bermuda, there is no doubt that you are well aware of the services of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation. And if you were not aware, I would like to highlight some of the services that they do provide. But when we look at business advisement and engagement, the BEDC conducted over 625 client meetings in 2024/25 providing confidential business advice tailored to entrepreneurial needs.

This is important to note. When we look at 625 client meetings in 2025, we talk about the number of engagement and touch points with Bermuda's actual entrepreneurs. These services received a 92 per cent satisfaction rating from exit surveys. In addition, 219 business visits were conducted in 2024/25 through weekly walkabouts within the EEZs enhancing support for local enterprises and promoting connectivity. Twelve businesses opened in the EEZs bringing 21 jobs to the market.

And so, I think it's important when we look at this, there is a great appetite for entrepreneurship and small business development that we ought to continue to highlight. Without getting into the weeds of debate about doom and gloom, I want to say that the numbers actually reflect that there is great interest in expanding business offerings in Bermuda. There is confidence in our economy and persons are seeking out assistance for their ideas.

What we want to do is ensure that we have our entrepreneurship ecosystem that supports our budding entrepreneurs, and that is the work that the BEDC is primarily doing. When we talk about 12 businesses opened up in EEZs, we are talking about 12

businesses in either the small Somerset village area in the town of St. George's, or we are talking about in North East Hamilton, and 21 new additional jobs created. I think that is a testament to the work that is done to strengthen support for persons in those areas. But that is only a fraction of the jobs that are created outside of our economic empowerment zones.

The BEDC has provided financial support and approved 24 microloans, providing \$687,000 in financing to local micro-, small- and medium-sized enterprises. BEDC also supported clients and maintaining financial stability while managing its loan portfolio. And so, the BEDC just doesn't issue loans to our entrepreneurs, they also provide ongoing support. And so, it's kind of our nurturing environment.

I had the pleasure of touring Economic Development corporations in the East Coast of the United States and the majority of the small businesses that start up in those citizen states survive as a result of incubator and accelerator programmes providing the necessary support. And I think that this is what we're talking about. When we have a support of entrepreneurship ecosystem, we are talking about these things sometimes in the microloans and the additional support that organisations like the BEDC provide.

In 2024/25, the BEDC received 733 payments on microloans and interest totalling \$531,000 which includes 35 business owners paying off their loans fully to BEDC.

So, what does that tell us, Madam Chairman? That actually tells us that persons are being supported. They are in a position where they're paying back their loans and we had 35 businesses who would have obtained loans from the BEDC, whose loans are fully paid off in the last fiscal period. And so that kind of talks to a testament of the business survival in Bermuda.

We would hear stories that businesses are closing down on an ongoing rate, but what we see is that persons are able to make their financial obligations and also to the extent where they pay off their loans as well. I think what's also important is that the BEDC continues to increase the membership on its business register. And its membership on its business register increased by 333 entrepreneurs or 15.4 per cent in 2024/25 and it currently has a total registration of 2,528 registrants.

Madam Chairman, 72 per cent of the new members identify as sole proprietors and 15 [per cent] as vendors, and 62 [per cent] were registered as starting a new business. So, 62 per cent of the 333 new business registrants were starting a new business. That is well over 150 new small- and medium-sized businesses that have been started in Bermuda in 2024/25. I think that is encouraging. It shows a level of resilience, but it shows that Bermuda does have an entrepreneurship spirit, and we need to find better ways of unlocking the potential that the residents of Bermuda actually have. But I believe that these num-

bers are a clear testament that there is confidence in the economy and persons are opening up business and they are seeking support to do so.

The Chairman: If I could be excused for just a second, Minister.

We are currently at 12:27 pm. The house normally breaks for lunch at 12:30 pm. I don't know whether you want to move on to the next heading or you've got some of this you want to continue or . . . I just wanted to make you aware of the time.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Chairman, what I will do is I will ask for us to break for lunch and when we return from lunch, I will finish this head, which would include the BEDC and the BDA. I will have one final head to produce and then we can engage in meaningful debate with the Opposition thereafter.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

The Honourable Minister has made a motion that we break for lunch.

Any objections? If not, the House is adjourned until 2:00 pm.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:28 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:01 pm

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon to the Honourable Members and listening audience. We are now in the Committee of Supply for the further consideration of Estimates and Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26, the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

The Honourable Jason Hayward, shall now proceed.

HEAD 94—ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT DEPARTMENT

[Continued]

2024/25 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, before the lunch break, I was highlighting the accomplishments of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, or organisation, which champions economic growth and the entrepreneurial spirit in Bermuda. I was highlighting the expansion of businesses which were seek-

ing their services and the level of support that they actually provide.

I do want to add that in the Economic Empowerment Zones [EEZ] the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation has facilitated the progress of potential residential and mixed-use developments in the newly established South East Hamilton EEZ, as well as in the EEZs in Somerset, St. George's and North East Hamilton. This is happening underneath the remit of the [Urban] Development Authority, a body that was developed to attract investment in those zones. Certainly, what we are aiming to do is ensure that we have an increase in our housing inventories, and we want to incentivise investment in our Economic Empowerment Zones so that they can be vibrant communities.

The BEDC continues to support community events and markets throughout the Island. On average there were roughly around 40 vendors and 1,000 attendees, when we start to talk about the Court Street vendors markets that were put on, as well as other vendor programmes and markets that were put on throughout the Island. We see over 100 businesses at times participating in these particular events. So, there are alternative types of businesses outside of brick and mortars, and we do have a large, active, vibrant vendor population within Bermuda.

A programme that I am extremely proud about is the Enterprise Bermuda Incubator and Accelerator. This flagship programme nurtured 22 entrepreneurs in 2024 delivering intense one-on-one mentorship training and resources.

Mr. Chairman, earlier I spoke about the valuable contributions that incubators and accelerators make in the survival of small businesses and how they nurture and unlock the entrepreneurial spirit that exists within our economy. BEDC also offered four-week courses in 2024/25. There were 96 participants who took courses on Entrepreneurship 101, Mindset 101, and QuickBooks 101. BEDC also held 11 seminars and webinars with over 500 participants equipping entrepreneurs with the skillsets for business success. Again, these numbers indicate that there is a robust pipeline of persons seeking to expand their entrepreneurial endeavours in Bermuda.

BEDC also looks to inspire the future, and the Youth Outreach [programme] is something that is also commendable. In 2024/25 the BEDC engaged with over 930 students in both private and public sector organisations. Programmes at Warwick Academy and Dellwood Middle School introduced "Kidpreneurs" to foundational concepts including business planning [and] entrepreneurial mindset. We also had participation at various career fairs such as the Berkeley Career Fair and "Wave of Opportunity Pitch Competition" finals which had 225 attendees.

In the BEDC they continue to ensure that they have the appropriate exposure to international experiences, allowing companies to scale beyond Bermuda

shores. We also put workshops on to support the development initiatives within our local sports clubs. We had a scheme where we looked to utilise underutilised commercial kitchens for small business owners so that they can have a cost-effective culinary space. And that will foster the growth and innovation of their particular businesses. [That also included] subleasing kitchens to entrepreneurs. And those entrepreneurs generated \$42,500 in revenue in 2024/25.

The Economic Development Corporation also has a "Mind Your Business" radio programme with over 500 hours of content reaching 3,364 viewers on their platform. We continue to celebrate Global Entrepreneurship Week, and in 2024 we engaged with 1,100 entrepreneurs and stakeholders. We've also extended strategic partnerships. That was all the work that we've done in the previous fiscal period.

Mr. Chairman, in the 2025/26 fiscal period, we will develop a robust National Entrepreneurship Strategy for Bermuda. We believe that entrepreneurship is one of the most important drivers of job creation and economic growth. It is crucial that we develop vibrant, formal, small and medium-sized businesses in Bermuda. And I think that the energy we are going to place on developing and executing a National Entrepreneurship Strategy will demonstrate that this Government has [set] out its priorities clearly as it pertains to the support that we're going to provide for entrepreneurs.

We are also mandated with executing cooperative legislation as an alternative to traditional business models, but cooperative business models are business models that are used effectively worldwide. There are cooperatives in almost every industrial section. I think when we look at cooperatives in Bermuda, we look at it from a shallow standpoint in terms of we look at a cooperative grocery store. But there are a number of cooperatives that you can have in almost every industrial sector. It can also help with our housing inventory, if people want to come together in a cost-effective way and have housing cooperatives and things of that nature. But what we want to do is we want to ensure that we have the proper framework in place for persons who want to engage in cooperative activity to effectively execute on those ideas.

We have worked to streamline the registration process for entrepreneurs, so this is what we will be moving forward with in 2025/26, making it easier for persons to register as an entrepreneur and move from a concept stage into the actual execution of their business plan.

And it should come as no surprise that the BEDC is currently partnering with an organisation for large-scale vertical farming in Bermuda. We want to ensure that we utilise technology and innovation in our agricultural sector. We want to ensure that we have options for greater levels of domestic food security. We see a shrinking agricultural sector on an ongoing basis. That is a trend that we do not want to see con-

tinue. We want to maximise our capacity to ensure that we have a stable and sustainable food supply. The large-scale vertical farm is only one element of utilising technology and agriculture. That is part of a greater integrated agricultural strategy.

But in conclusion, Mr. Chairman, I think it is clear for all to see that based off of the budget that was actually provided to BEDC they have done a phenomenal job with the work they have actually executed on. BEDC's initiatives to empower entrepreneurs and revitalise communities has contributed significantly to Bermuda's economic resilience throughout 2024/25. BEDC has demonstrated unwavering commitment to innovation inclusiveness and growth. The team is led by the Executive Director Erica Smith. And I believe that this department is truly poised to drive greater impact in 2025/26, building on the successes that we have seen in 2024/25. I think this House can collectively agree that the work that BEDC is doing is money well spent.

This ends my presentation of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, but I'll move on to the next.

BERMUDA BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AGENCY

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Bermuda Business Development Agency [BDA] transitioned into an Investment Promotion Agency. They have been allocated a budget of \$4,230,000, and that can be found on page C-19 in the Budget Book. The BDA was founded in April 2013. It was designed to operate independently as a private-public partnership dedicated to driving inward investment and supporting sustainable growth for Bermuda. They have a number of flagship events that they host domestically on a yearly basis that we can certainly see the promotion of brand Bermuda and expose international guests to our value proposition.

But I would like to highlight more specifically some of the work that they will be doing in 2025/26 and some of the work that they will be . . . that they executed in 2024. Under the enhanced IPA [Investment Promotion Agency] framework the BDA has adopted a data-driven approach to prioritise specific markets and sectors where Bermuda holds distinct competitive advantages with a particular focus on the United States, Canada and the UK, the BDA is actively advancing five key pillars:

- **High-Net-Worth (HNW) Services:** Which includes the Economic Investment Residential Certificate, Family Offices and Trust.
- **Technology:** Which includes Digital Assets, Insurtech/FinTech, Regulatory Sandboxes, and Compliance.
- **Financial Services:** Which includes Asset Management, Hedge Funds, Insurance-linked Securities (ILS), and Fund Administration.

- **Insurance & Risk:** Which includes Reinsurance, Captives, Climate Risk Solutions, and Life and Annuity Products
- **Infrastructure:** Where we can see greater emphasis on hotel development, housing, sub-sea cable projects, and space and satellite ventures.

By focusing on these priority sectors and key international markets, the BDA is positioning Bermuda to attract high-quality investment that directly supports the Island's broader economic development goals. This approach enables the BDA to channel resources towards the most promising opportunities, fostering innovation, stimulating job creation, and enhancing Bermuda's global competitiveness. By aligning its efforts with clearly defined pillars, the BDA is not only diversifying the economy but also strengthening its resilience ensuring long-term sustainable growth that benefits businesses, residents and the wider community.

Mr. Chairman, as articulated the BDA has transition to an investment promotion agency. This transition marks a significant step forward in how Bermuda attracts, supports and retains investment. In 2024, the BDA completed Phase 1 of this transformation which focused on strengthening its internal foundation. This included a detailed benchmarking analysis to assess Bermuda's global position, a review of key industries to identify growth opportunities, enhancement to our organisational structure, and upgrades to our data system and customer relation management tools to improve investor engagement.

The BDA is now progressing through Phases 2 and 3 advancing in parallel. In Phase 2 they are focused on building the tools, technology and team to support a more proactive and competitive investment strategy. Staff have participated in target training and development initiatives. Phase 3 centres on the implementation using refined market data to guide outreach, deepening engagement in priority markets and embedding a performance-led approach across functions. The transformation reflects our commitment to delivering measurable outcomes enhancing Bermuda's global competitiveness and securing sustainable, long-term economic growth.

Mr. Chairman, while the BDA transitions to an Investment Promotion Agency it has been busy also focusing on the key strategic focuses of the previous year. And I don't believe that we've seen a compromise in the capabilities of the organisation as it has gone through its transition.

And as a result, they have a long list of key achievements for 2024/25 fiscal period. [These achievements were:]

Economic Investment Residential
Certificate Programme (EIRC)

- We saw the Economic Investment Certificate Programme surpass the \$500 million in direct and associated investment mark.
- We attracted high-net-worth individuals through a streamlined concierge-style process.
- Supported economic growth via investment in real estate infrastructure and job creation.

Google's Nuvem Subsea Cable

- The BDA played an instrumental role in securing Google's new transatlantic cable connecting Portugal, Bermuda, and the United States.
- Supported the development of Bermuda's submarine cable legislation and global digital infrastructure.
- Enhanced Bermuda's connectivity, supporting FinTech, Digital Assets, and innovation-driven investment.

And so, it is one where the initial investment is from the company but then there is also the subsequent value-added from that where we see the rest of the country and the rest of our business community able to capitalise off of that.

Bermuda Risk Summit 2024

Hon. Jason Hayward: They continued to host the Bermuda Risk Summit 2024 which is actually a flagship event of the BDA. That continues to have direct economic impact, and they estimate around \$2.5 million of direct economic impact. But then what we do is we have ongoing impact in terms of companies who are seeking to domicile in Bermuda, having a better understanding of Bermuda's business ecosystem, having a better understanding of Bermuda's value proposition, and coming to the decision that they may want to domicile their company in Bermuda to take advantage of our regulatory environment, to take advantage of our very sophisticated business environment, our legal system, as well as operating in a safe, secure, politically stable jurisdiction.

London and Middle East Business Development Tour

Hon. Jason Hayward: The BDA continued his work in London and the Middle East in terms of development.

WAIPA Membership

Hon. Jason Hayward: And they also joined the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies [WAIPA] which ensures that they keep up with global best practice standards.

Trust Law Reform

Hon. Jason Hayward: There is work in trust and law reform as well as global business development and stakeholder arrangements and a number of events throughout the world. This department has been extremely active, and I'm pleased with the work that is actually being executed by this particular agency. From an economic development standpoint what you have seen me layout is a comprehensive and robust set of activities that improve our business environments, seek to attract investors, but also leads to ongoing continued growth and development.

Global Business Development and Stakeholder Engagement

Hon. Jason Hayward: When we have a business sector that is expanding, I think the proof is in the pudding as it pertains to the Government's investment in economic development agencies that lead to us changing laws and also us having companies aware of what Bermuda has to offer and landing those companies on our shores.

There are some who support the notion that somehow economic development happens on its own without any intervention by the Government and as a result there should be no credit from the Government taken in those particular spaces. But that couldn't be farther from the truth. The truth is we have dedicated agencies which are set up to support economic growth, economic development, the retention and the expansion of industry in Bermuda.

These achievements reflect the BDAs unwavering commitment to driving strategic sustainable growth for Bermuda. And I would like to thank the team of the BDA, led by the Managing Director Kendaree Burgess, for their commitment to advancing Bermuda's future.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation on Head 94, Economic Development Department.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

For the benefit of the listening audience and the Honourable Members in the House, we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

Honourable Minister Jason Haywood of the Ministry of Economy and Labour has finished his presentation and—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Oh, you have got another head.

HEAD 99—LABOUR

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I will now present Head 99, Labour.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jason Hayward: This can be found on pages B-198 through B-200 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Department of Labour is, *To provide services to support and foster positive employment relations and harmonious industrial relations within Bermuda in alignment with international best practices.*

A total of \$1,199,258 has been allocated for this head, which represents a reduction of \$72,650 from the previous year. This head constitutes 4.35 per cent of the total budget allocated in the Ministry. This change is primarily due to a reduction in funds allocated for staff and accommodation rentals for the department. It is anticipated that the department will be fully staffed in the second quarter of the financial year resulting in the reduced salary allotment and accommodations rental funds required for the full complement of staff. And so that basically says, Mr. Chairman, that we have prorated the funds so that we anticipate scaling up and we recognise that we did not need the total amount of funds for the entire fiscal period.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated for the Department of Labour provides for operational oversight that guides the Labour Relations Officers and the Labour Inspectors to ensure that existing policies and procedures are adhered to and that the department's operations are aligned with the current legal framework and international best practices. Currently the department oversees the certification and decertification of unions in the workplace, investigates and conciliates employment, labour and wage-related complaints, in both the private and public sectors, while also ensuring the statutory minimum hourly wage rate.

The department promotes dispute resolution and prevention as well as employee engagement management by offering free and unbiased training and workshop opportunities on its own and in conjunction with other Government departments, quangos and private organisations such as the Department of Workforce Development, the Human Rights Commission, the Bermuda Health Council and the Women's Resource Centre.

The department also provides guidance and conciliation services regarding various employment matters from the receipt of an employment or minimum wage complaint through to the settlement or referral of the same to the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal.

Mr. Chairman, the department is continuously reviewing ways to strengthen wage protections and recently made changes to the Employment Act 2000 to increase the [severance] allowance for long-serving employees from 26 weeks wages to 32 weeks wages. Further amendments to the Act were also made to

safeguard the leave entitlement of employees who receive the minimum hourly wage rate as a part of their wages.

Mr. Chairman, \$130,000 is allocated to the operation of the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal which is responsible for the hearing and adjudication of unresolved employment and labour-related disputes. These funds are also allocated for the use of the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal to defend against judicial review proceedings should the need arise.

The department has allocated \$16,600 for the continued training of current staff and the training of new staff in dispute resolution and the labour inspection which may consist of overseas, virtual and local vendor training. The department aims to utilise such training to resolve matters through conciliation and reduce the number of complaints referred to the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal for adjudication, improve legislative compliance and strengthen harmonious industrial relations.

As we look at Manpower, the department currently has an establishment of 10 full-time equivalents which consists of the Director of Labour, the Labour Relations Manager, Office Manager, three Labour Relations Officers, three Labour Relations Inspectors, and a Tribunal Coordinator.

With the transition from a section within Ministry Headquarters to a department and the decrease in the complement of staff from five substantive post holders to three in the 2024/25 budget year, the department has been working diligently with DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] to recruit for the following positions: a Labour Relations Manager, two Labour Relations Officers, three Labour Relations [Inspectors] and one Tribunal Coordinator. It is anticipated that recruitment for the above-mentioned posts will be completed by August 2025.

And one would ask the question regarding the reduction of staff, but we did also in that fiscal year have a number of individuals were seconded into the Ministry of Labour to assist with our staffing complement so that we could continue to effectively execute the work that needed to be executed on. So, while it was not mentioned in the full-time equivalents, I would not want you to ask, *How are we carrying out our mandate with the reduction of staff?* Because we did get assistance from other departments to ensure that the Department of Labour remains staffed up so that it could carry out its duties.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Jason Hayward: When we look at Performance Measures, I am pleased to report the department's breakdown of activity as follows:

There were 812 employee and wage-related dispute inquiries lodged with the department. I am

going to repeat that, Mr. Chairman. There were 812 employee and wage-related dispute inquiries lodged with the department—638 were consultations and 174 were filed pursuant to the Employment Act 2000, the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 2021 and the Employment (Minimum Hourly Wage Entitlement) Act 2022.

What that means is that people continue to seek the services of the Department of Labour as it pertains to their rights under the laws of Bermuda. We will do a better job in the 2025/26 fiscal period to promote worker's rights so that they are abundantly clear and their employers are abundantly clear. But we still have 174 of those complaints or those inquiries that led to those individuals filing disputes.

The Department of Labour provides a fundamental and critical role in assuring that the standards that are set out in our laws are maintained. I can't underpin the importance of ensuring that we have the necessary labour protections in place to protect the workforce in Bermuda. We want to believe that we operate in a world where people will simply do the right thing and that is not the case. We have laws in place, and we have enforcement in place because we find out that at times there is intervention required from the Government to support the workers of this country. And by us indicating that we are even strengthening the Ministry, the Department of Labour by number one, removing it from just a unit and giving it its proper prestige as a department as well as ensuring that it has the appropriate staffing complement speaks to where the Government is investing in ensuring that the workers of Bermuda operate in a harmonious work environment but that their rights are actually protected and that they can get adjudication in a timely manner for their complaints.

A further breakdown of complaints filed and investigated by the department

- 81 pertaining to terminations;
- 30 pertaining to wages;
- 11 pertaining to constructive dismissals; and
- 52 complaints regarding lay-offs, maternity leave, vacation pay, redundancy pay, overtime pay, union certification and collective bargaining agreement procedures.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Jason Hayward: In the upcoming year, Mr. Chairman, the department will continue to offer seminars, workshops and presentations to employer and worker groups and individuals to broaden their understanding, reduce employment and wage-related complaints and ensure that they feel supported. To achieve this the department will continue its collaboration with partnered stakeholders and Government departments.

The department will also continue to evaluate the effects that legislative changes have had on the working population and keep abreast of international best practices to ensure that our national legislation is up to date, and the protection of employee rights remains at the forefront.

And so, the Employment Act, [Mr.] Chairman, I view as a breathing document, a living, breathing document. And you should anticipate ongoing changes to the labour standards that support the workers of Bermuda.

The department will continue to provide support to the Labour Advisory Council and the Wage Commission, in its pursuit to recommend a living wage for Bermuda.

The Department will continue to liaise with the UK Office and keep abreast of the happenings within the International Labour Organization to ensure compliance with the various conventions and recommendations critical to the advancement of labour rights within Bermuda.

The department will continue its close relationship with other Departments of Labour within the Caribbean region through the exchange of ideas, information and experiences to promote innovation, accelerate problem-solving and boost productivity.

The Department of Labour will collaborate with other relevant departments and stakeholders to advance equal pay for equal work legislation and prioritise policies related to raising the retirement age.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Department of Labour, led by Director, Gabrielle Cann, as well as the members of the Employment and Labour [Relations] Tribunal, for their hard work. As the Department of Labour continues to provide excellent service to the people of Bermuda and deliver in accordance with their mandate, their dedication to maintaining balance within the world of work is noteworthy. Their commitment and effectiveness necessitate the highest level of recognition.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation on Head 99, the Department of Labour. And with that I conclude my presentation on the 2025/26 Budget of the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

For the benefit of the listening public, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Honourable Minister Jason Hayward has finally concluded his presentation for the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

And I now invite others to take the floor.

The Chair recognises the Honourable Vance Campbell from constituency 9, Smith's West.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I also would like to thank the Minister and his members of staff on an extremely comprehensive brief. I feel that the Minister had a camera in the room when I was formulating my questions. So, I think that our—

The Chairman: Are you saying that all of your [questions] have been—

Mr. Vance Campbell: I didn't say that. I didn't say that.

[Laughter]

Mr. Vance Campbell: No, but the brief was quite comprehensive, and I have no problem in saying that.

I will ask some questions that were probably already answered, but bear with me if that is the case. In any event, I believe it is worth hearing the answer again. It is extremely difficult to monitor your questions and hear everything the Minister says, so in some instances, I only received . . . or managed to note part of the answer.

So, I will begin on page B-172 with the Ministry of Economy and Labour Headquarters. I will start with the mission statement which says, *To establish effective policy that helps foster economic growth and the expansion of jobs*. My question is, How has the number of people leaving Bermuda, i.e., emigration, especially of Bermudians impacted the economic growth and the expansion of jobs in the local economy, first and foremost, and (b) in the international business area?

My second question is very similar, again, still on page B-172, mission statement. It is very similar to the first question, but if we can get some understanding as to how has the ageing population of Bermuda impacted economic growth and the expansion of jobs (a) in the local economy and (b) in international business?

This is more of an observation than a question. I did note in objective number 4, on page B-172 the addition of the word "timely" in there. And I was wondering if there was any consideration to add the word or words to the effect of "accuracy" as is located in department objective number 6 on the same page.

We can move down to the General Summary on page B-172. I did note, and it is a simple, it looks as though the headings were not adjusted on that particular—

The Chairman: The Chair recognises the Minister who is going to give clarity.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Yes, the Ministry did submit a revised schedule with the corrected headings to the Budget Office, and so that has been corrected. My apologies. I do have it notated here that there needs

to be changes in terms of the General Summary dates that are in the Budget Book.

So, when we approved the pages and the heads, we just asked for the necessary amendments to be approved as well.

The Chairman: Is that clear enough for you, MP?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Yes, I figured that was it. There are a lot of pages in this book, so things will be missed. But the main thing is, I believe the numbers were correct underneath. We were able to figure that out.

Moving down to the General Summary. This is under business unit 54010. It says, Consumer Affairs. It had a revised estimate for 2024/25 of \$250,000. Am I correct in . . . I thought I heard the Minister say that this was in relation to the cost-of-living unit—I may not have the exact name correct—that was transferred briefly into the Ministry and out again.

If we can move to the Subjective Analysis on page B-173, looking at Salaries. There is a reduction of \$65,000 with the total budget estimate of \$575,000. I missed the Minister's explanation of this. So if he doesn't mind repeating that, it would be much appreciated. And I am not complaining when Government reduces an expense, so don't get me wrong. That is not necessarily a bad thing.

The budget estimate for Travel, still on page B-173, has an increase of \$38,000 or 46 per cent. I was just wondering, again, a breakdown as to why there is this anticipation of increased travel. We go down to Communications, I am not exactly sure, I know a lot of times Communications is more than just cell phone and landline for the company. But I see, again, a decrease of \$7,000 in this area. I am just wondering if there was a simple explanation for that. Again, not complaining when Government saves money.

Again, if the Minister can provide the explanation, looking at Advertising and Promotion. There was a 50 per cent reduction in that. There is a lot going on in the Ministry Headquarters. I am not sure if a lot of the activity that rests outside of the Headquarters, but within the Ministry is actually the promotion and advertisement of that is done at Headquarters, so an explanation for the reduction of 50 per cent in the Advertising and Promotion.

Professional Services on page B-173. This also dropped by \$40,000 or 13 per cent from the 2024/25 original estimate. It is also \$285,000 less than the revised 2024/25 number. Was this as a result of a contract reaching completion or was there an anticipation of engaging a consultant that did not happen? Or did not happen as early as it was anticipated?

If the Minister can advise, how many consultancy agreements, service contracts that the Headquarters has, and what they are for and the individual

value of each and what is the start and finish date of each?

If we go down, still on page B-173, also a question on the Consultancy Contracts and Service Agreements. Are any of these included in budgeted salaries? I know that—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, if I can just ask the Member to clarify that question. It is not clear on what is [being asked] as it pertains to whether or not the consultancy funds allocated in the budget under Consultancy . . . Is the Member asking whether or not it is also included under Salaries? Or whether or not consultants are included under the Salaries line item?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Well, particularly, I am . . . the scenario as it relates to that portion of the question, that asks if anything is in Salaries, particularly, I am thinking of a scenario where a consultant is hired specifically to fill a role because of an employee not being onboarded or being out for whatever reason for a lengthy period of time.

Again, on page B-173, Materials and Supplies. My question around this is more what goes into Materials and Supplies. I tend to think of stationery and supplies. But there is also, it would seem no real correlation to the number of employees and what goes into Materials and Supplies, so just some clarification on that.

If we can look at some of the Performance Measures, move on to page B-174. And I look at the first thing under business unit 54060, the revised forecast for 2024/25 was moved down from 100 per cent and this is percentage of Throne Speech initiatives completed during the fiscal year. That was moved, the revised anyway was moved, from 100 per cent to 60 [per cent]. And we are looking at 100 per cent. Again, just asking, is that something that can be accomplished or is it slightly optimistic to believe that 100 per cent will be completed during the year?

And if I could back up one second to page B-173, I would just like to know, as far employee numbers, how many of the anticipated five, or the estimated five FTEs are posts that are filled versus funded but unfilled, and are there any unfunded unfilled posts in the Ministry Headquarters?

Back to the Performance Measures on page B-174, again, under business unit 54060 Administration. I am looking at the Performance Measure that states the variance approved, between approved estimates and actual current account expenditure for the Ministry of Labour, the original 2024/25 forecast was plus or minus 5 per cent. The revised for 2024/25 was plus or minus 10 per cent and the target outcome for 2025/26 is the plus or minus 10 per cent. I see this as a relaxation of the target but, again, that is without having intimate knowledge of what actually may have or what portion of the expenditures in the Ministry are prone to fluctuations that would warrant this shift. So if

the Minister can provide some clarification on that it would be much appreciated.

And moving to business unit 54210 Immigration Appeals Tribunal, there are two performance measures, percentage of tribunals held and number of immigration tribunals still outstanding at the end of the period. I just need clarification from the Minister, is this a target of just having three tribunals or anticipating having three tribunals a year? Or is this actually three tribunals that are anticipated to be held and completed?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Just seeking clarity on the question. The numbers that are in the Book are either two or zero. The Shadow Minister mentioned—

The Chairman: The numbers in the Book are—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Are either two or zero being outstanding. And the Member mentioned three. I don't know where the number three came from. So, if he can reference that in line with what we have set out in the Performance Measures that are in the [Budget] Book.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Okay. I may be overthinking this but under Percentage of the Tribunals Held, it says 33 per cent and then the next performance measure say Number of Immigration Tribunals still Outstanding. So, if 33 per cent are held and two are still outstanding, that would mean the total starting with would have been three. But my question is, Is that three actual tribunals or the anticipation of maybe having three tribunals a year based on the needs or the matters that are brought before the Ministry Headquarters? Does that help, Minister, to understand that?

[No audible response.]

Mr. Vance Campbell: Okay.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, I may wish to come back to [Head] 44, if you don't mind, if I come across something in my notes that I may have missed, but at this particular time I would like to move to Head 14, the Department of Statistics. And I will be starting on page—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: If I can ask the Honourable Member whether he wishes to do it head by head so we can deal with these substantive questions on this particular head before moving to the next head. This will enable us to keep up with the questions, and it will also allow me to provide clarity on some of the questions he may have posed. I think it is just functional if we can do it head by head. It allows us to better track the questions and provide the clarity that the Honourable Member would like.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, you have an offer on the floor.

Mr. Vance Campbell: I have no problem with that. Whatever is going to get us the answers and get the listening public some understanding of what is behind the numbers. But I believe I may have some colleagues who may be looking to speak as well, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay. So, for the benefit of the listening audience the Minister has made an offer to allow the answers to be given head by head and the Honourable Member from constituency 9 has accepted that offer.

Mr. Vance Campbell: With the understanding that if I have a question later on I can come back.

The Chairman: It is the Opposition's debate, Member. You have one hour and five minutes.

Minister, do you wish to proceed with some answers for this head?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the Honourable Member for his questions. When I look at the questions posed there around our population numbers and how that impacts the expansion of jobs, what I would say is [that] despite any notions regarding our population numbers, the facts remain that Bermuda's economy is continuing to grow year over year. When we look at the quarterly numbers, the economy continues to grow, and we do see an expansion of businesses and expansion of jobs both in the domestic sector and what we would consider to be international business. Overall, there has been job growth, IB job growth is up. Unemployment is actually down. So, I do not believe that it is having a significant impact on sustainability as it pertains to that particular question.

The next was in reference to our ageing population. This Ministry has gone out in front of this and put out a position paper as it pertains to our ageing population and the impacts it will have on our economy if not addressed. I would say an ageing population does have an impact on the sustainability of any economy worldwide. You cannot detach the two. But what I would say is that we haven't seen signs of criti-

cal trends heading in the wrong direction. And so we still have economic growth which I believe is robust and sustainable. We still have an increase of jobs.

What we are going to find is challenges regarding a labour shortage that we may have in workforce mirroring, which means matching the supply of labour and the demand of labour within our economy. The Ministry of Economy and Labour has also put out a position paper regarding the retention of our local workforce. And in that particular paper we talked about skillset shortages and labour force shortages and so there will be a heavier requirement on expatriate labour to fill some of the jobs that exist within our economy.

But the Ministry is also looking on retention policies. How do we train persons who have turned the age of 65 within our workplace? I don't support the notion that once one turns the age of 65 they expire from the workplace. And as a result, the Ministry is looking at that. I do take note of the question, or the comment the Honourable Member made regarding timely and accurate. We can accept that the data we put out should be timely and accurate. I think accurate is a given in that particular sense. And we would not want to just focus on the timeliness of the data. But it is not a substitute for us not having accurate data, it being timely. I think they run hand in hand. There is no . . . it makes very little sense to have timely data that is not actually accurate. And that is something that I do not support.

As it pertains to Consumer Affairs, up until September 2024, well, from the previous September 2024 to February 2025, the section of Consumer Affairs was underneath the Ministry of Economy and Labour. And that section would also receive supplemental funding in the mid-year review and the Minister of Finance made additional allocations. As a result, inclusive of the Cost of Living Commission would have been all of the funds associated with the Consumer Affairs Department which now lies underneath another Ministry.

The reduction of salaries in B-173, the reduction of \$65,000 of the total budget. The decrease has to do with the transition of a post to the new Department of Labour.

Under the line item on Head 44, under the object code description of Travel, the Honourable Member asked about travel activity. I would say that as the Minister responsible for Economy and Labour part of my role and responsibility is to go out to the world and promote Bermuda's value proposition. Having a Minister as part of the delegation oftentimes has a greater level of impact to those who are promoting Bermuda. And they often aim to include the Minister for a number of reasons. Number one, to attract the top brass of a company to be in the meetings that they actually are requesting, but it also provides speaking engagements. And then we also want to expend economic cooperation agreements with other nations around the

world. And so there will be a requirement for the Ministry of Economy and Labour to remain on the road.

The BDA has a full calendar of events as it pertains to its action on the road. Not all of the events require the attendance of the Minister, but there are events that require the Minister's attendance. And [this] also affords the Government speaking engagements in front of the right people at the right time. And so, when we start to talk about expanding the Ministry and competing, when we look at . . . we start to talk about other jurisdictions, eating our food, they have very aggressive strategies. And what we cannot do is rest on our laurels and believe that everybody understands and knows Bermuda's value proposition. So, there is need for the Minister and staff, not just the Minister, but staff within the Ministry of Economy and Labour, to be on the road as well. And so that is why you see an increase in that particular travel budget.

We are able to better budget for travel now than in previous years, the reason being is we have had proactive meetings with the BDA who now have laid out a full calendar of events in a timely manner which would allow us to budget for those particular events. Additional to that, if we have flagship events where there is an expectation that the Minister attends, whether it be the RIMS Conference where Bermuda still coins itself as the *Risk capital of the world*, we want to move as it pertains to putting a framework in place for our digital economy. We are viewed highly in . . . as a well-regarded regulatory jurisdiction for digital asset companies.

If we move past the notion that this is an area where it is populated with crypto fanatics, we now see large-scale institutional investment going into digital assets with reproval companies and reproval individuals associated with those companies. And so we are competing with jurisdictions around the world. We are competing in the area of trust. We are competing in the area of high-net-worth individuals. We want to be extremely competitive to attract funds, the fund management businesses back to Bermuda. We were the leaders of, or the inventors of the first Modern Captive. Bermuda had a marked position surpassed by none in the captive industry, but what you have seen is that position abate. And we cannot continue to allow persons to, what we say, *eat our lunch*. And if we want to ensure that we maintain our level of competitiveness, we need to be on the road.

And so, the Minister attends a fraction of overseas engagements, but it is extremely useful for those who are promoting Bermuda as a jurisdiction to have the Minister as part of the delegation, leading the delegation at times and speaking directly with counterparts overseas for economic cooperation but also being a front-facing ambassador and advocate for Bermuda.

The Communications budget did decrease by \$7[,000]. But what you will see overall is that the overall Ministry budget has decreased. And so, not-

withstanding you see increases in some areas. They had to be offset by decreases in other areas. And so, this is a matter of prioritisation. And what we said is that we will lean on DCI and other agencies more for communication where they have the capacity and the Ministry can draw down its budget in that particular area and strengthen its budget in other areas, which I just articulated, like travel.

The Honourable Member also highlighted the reduction in Advertising and Promotion. And I think that now that we have restructured BDA we can now lean on the BDA for heavier advertising and promotion. Where we had some challenges with that in the past, I think that the Ministry had a desire to increase our global impact and as a result we allocated funds to ensure that we got Bermuda's message out there. Now that the BDA has transitioned into the Investment Promotion Agency then they can take on more of the heavy lifting regarding advertising and promotion as well as the Economic Development Department. I would also like to say that the individual departments have marketing and promotion budgets within their departments as well and we will lean on those department budgets as much as we possibly can.

When we look at the Professional Services decreasing by \$40,000, this was another area in which we determined that we were going to transition to ensure that we met the budget ceiling that was set per Ministry. And we had allocated funds in that particular budget to do a full study regarding emigration. That study has now been completed and so we do not need funds to repeat that study again. I would say that when you look at the Ministry's consultancy budget and consultancy agreements and contracts, we had none. What we did do is we set funds aside for where we may need consultancy for legislative support. And so, what we said is that we have a number of departments that may need consultancy in terms of broad Throne Speech policy initiatives. And as a result of that, instead of trying to determine which department gets the funds, we said to ourselves, *We will put in place the consultancy funds in the Ministry to support those Throne Speech items and then support the relative departments*. And so Honourable Member Campbell, the Ministry of Economy and Labour does not have any active consultancy contracts. I think that may be music to your ears, as well, Mr. Chairman.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, the Honourable Minister Jason Hayward has explained why his Ministry has reduced costs.

Continue, Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member asked what was included in the meagre \$31,000 for Materials and Supplies. And so the department needs to operate and that includes general stationery sup-

plies, office supplies. In the olden days it may have been used to purchase tea and crumpets for government departments, but we now have Keurig machines, and they support the pods that go into the particular machine but also water, printing, business cards, dishwashing liquids, the pens required for the Minister to sign documents, the ink that goes into the printers—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I believed I looked into the cabinet and there were trash bags that were purchased as well. And so those are the general items that fall under office material but . . . I want to progress so I don't take up too much time on this.

Also, when we look at the revised forecast in the Performance Measures, when we look at Throne Speech initiatives and you see 60 per cent, that was 60 per cent not because we didn't believe we could not execute on our Throne Speech initiatives but some of these initiatives were shared with other ministries and departments. So, we can do our portion of the work, but the Throne Speech initiative would not be fully complete if it relied on the Ministry of Finance to execute on those particular items. We can now say that where we have Throne Speech items that are solely reliant on the Ministry of Economy and Labour, we have reviewed those items, and we can move that benchmark to 100 per cent and we are confident that we can execute on our particular items.

When we look at the variance of 10 per cent, when we contracted the budget we said that we may have reduced line items a little bit too much to meet the budget ceiling, Honourable Member Campbell, and as a result this gives us greater flexibility to move money when required, understanding that the overall budget has been reduced. So I think it is a matter where we tightened up our belt, but we are also allowing ourselves to effectively operate rather than tightening up our belt and then we cannot move money where it may be required.

When we look at the Immigration Appeals Tribunals, which are actually outstanding, this is legacy items. The way in which I explained it is that you would have had a person who made a complaint. When we are trying to form a tribunal to adjudicate that complaint, we cannot get in contact with the respondents. At times our respondent may or may not have left the Island, or they have dropped the matter, notwithstanding that they made the complaint. And so, we will try to work this year to close out those particular items and that is why you will not see two listed in the 2025/26 outcomes.

All positions are funded and filled in the Ministry of Economy and Labour with the exception of one special advisor who is allowed for the Minister under law.

Mr. Chairman, I believe that is the answers to the majority or all of the questions that were asked by the Honourable Member and I will ask him to continue on with questions for the remaining heads.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Honourable Member, you can resume your robust questions.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I ask your permission just to ask one follow-up question of the Minister based on one of his answers. Do I have your permission?

The Chairman: You have 45 minutes; you can ask all the questions you wish.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Okay. The Minister when providing the explanation for Professional Services indicated there was a study completed on emigration. When can we expect to hear what those results are?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I expect to table a report in Parliament in this session explaining the results of the emigration study and making it clear the factors which are considered when persons want to leave the Island, for persons who have left the Island, what were the driving factors around that, and from their standpoint what is required to change in order to entice them to return back to Bermuda as well.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Minister.

I would like to move on to Head 14, Department of Statistics. I will start on page B-175, looking at the Department Objectives. Please, Minister, forgive my ignorance when it comes to statistical tools. But in objective 1, it talks about utilising innovative digital tools. And when I see the word *innovative* that means something that is fairly recent to the market. Are we talking about a tool specifically designed? Or are we just talking about using the modern technology changes that we see on a regular basis when you talk about these innovative tools? And if it is a specific set of tools related to statistical information, then has the procurement process commenced and if so, do we have any idea what they will cost? And in what way do they improve accessibility to statistical data and information? And if we are not using these tools and we are moving in that direction, will the transition to these tools cause any delays or interruptions in the publishing of key statistical reports?

Still on page B-175, objective 2, I am not sure, again, Data Quality Frameworks. The target says *Ensure the collection, compilation and production of statistical outputs based on the most current international statistical methodologies, standards and best practice by using data quality frameworks by March 2026.*

Again, is that a specific set of data frameworks to the Department of Statistics? And what are we using now if the target is to use those by March of 2026? How much would it cost? Again, will the transition to these tools cause any delay in publishing key statistical reports?

So, if I could go down to objective number 4, on page B-175, it talks about engage in targeted external and internal training and development to build the statistical capacity required to sustain a high-performing department by March 2026. My question around that is, Have the training and development needs already been identified? And I ask that question in particular because the training budget on page B-176 is the same as 2024/25 original. So there has been no increase in the training budget, but I see that as . . . [objective] number 4, as one of the objectives. So, I am just trying to relate to the budget being the same and the need to . . . or the objective to increase or have this targeted external and internal training.

If we could move down on page B-175 to the General Summary, and I would also refer to page B-176, the Full-Time Equivalents, business unit 24010, Census and Special Surveys. This is classified under monthly to annual surveys. And we have an increase of \$152,000 under business unit 24010 versus the original 2024/25 budget. I am just wondering, again, the Minister may have explained this, but I may have missed it. So, just an explanation for that increase of \$152,000.

Business unit 24015, the Administration. That budget estimate is \$204,000 more than the 2024/25 original. Is part of that due to the additional full-time equivalent that is listed on page B-176? If not, what is the reason?

Business unit 24020, Core Statistics and Publications. The budget estimate is \$72,000 more than the 2024/25 original. Again, an explanation from the Minister would be great. Again, he may have mentioned this, as I said when I began.

We look down to business unit 24025, Core Annual Surveys, and the budget estimate is \$218,000 more and I believe the Minister mentioned that this was due to the salary uplift and a partially funded position. If I could just get confirmation on that.

So, moving on to business unit 24055, where the budget estimate of \$551,000 is \$4,000 less than the 2024/25 original. I believe, again, the Minister said there was a shift in budget allocation that was partially offset by salary uplifts. If the Minister can confirm that, that my understanding was correct.

And we go down to business unit 24065, Household Expenditure, again remaining on page B-175, under the General Summary. Household Expenditure Survey, the budget estimate is \$174,000 or 118 per cent more than the 2024/25 original. Again, confirmation that this is to do with the Household Income and Expenditure Survey 2024.

And Professional . . . and the consultancy contract related to that. Just a quick question for the Minister, has this commenced? And when is the anticipated completion date?

If we could move to the Subjective Analysis on page B-176, Salaries. We have a budgeted amount for 2025/26 of \$2,331,000 which is \$388,000 or 20 per cent higher than the 2024/25 original. I believe the Minister said this is to do with the increase in the number of full-time equivalents and the uplift, a combination of the two. I require confirmation on that.

I did have a question on the wages, but the Minister explained that the budget amount of \$139,000 for 2025/26 was to accommodate temporary staff related to (I believe) the census or one of the surveys. I am happy with that.

The Professional Services, the budgeted amount is \$515,000 versus \$245,000 original 2024/25 budget. That is an increase of \$270,000 or 110 per cent. And if I am correct in my understanding, and I just need confirmation from the Minister, this was to do with the hire of individuals to conduct interviews. No? Well then, I definitely would like clarification on that.

Also, as I asked under the previous head, are there any . . . what are the number of consultancy agreements at the Department of Statistics? What is each for? What is the value of each and what is the start date and finish date of each?

We are still on page B-176, the Office Rental is \$161,000 which is the same as the previous year. I would just like to ask the Minister if this space is a shared space with other parts of the Ministry and if so, do the other parts of the Ministry share in the rent expense? I am just trying to determine how scattered the different components of the Ministry might be.

Just moving on to page B-177 . . . sorry. Before we move on to page B-177, page B-176, did I hear correctly when we are looking at the full-time equivalents, I have a note here that there were nine vacancies in the past year due to retirements. Is that . . . did I hear correctly on that? How many of these posts on page B-176, Employee Numbers, are filled versus funded but unfilled? And are there any unfunded, unfilled positions in the Department of Statistics?

Moving to Performance Measures on page B-177, business unit 24010, Censuses and Special Surveys. Can the Minister explain why under Performance Measures for this business unit, if we look at business unit 24015, Administration, we have a performance measure of improved accessibility to statistical data through innovative digital tools, this has been discontinued. There was a target of a 15 per cent increase in 2023/24. I am just curious as to why this is no longer a target. It would seem that you can always increase accessibility, at least up to 100 per cent.

In the next column, Raise the profile of the department. Some of these are, obviously, if you are

... some of the ... the quantity of posts. I am just wondering why in some of these instances there is only post. Is it one post per month? Are these monthly reports? Or monthly items that you are reporting on, hence it makes sense for one per month? And the same, one per quarter, one per year, are these things like the newsletter is one per year? Is that because you only produce one newsletter a year? I am not sure why it wouldn't be more if you do produce the newsletter, for example, more than one a year.

And I will pause there for now, Mr. Chairman, so that Minister and his staff can respond.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I thank the Honourable Member for his questions. When we look at the questions which were asked, especially around Innovation and Consultancy, I can advise that the Department of Statistics does utilise digital tools and certainly we have engagement for consultants for the purpose of optimising the process for statistical outputs like the consumer price index. While this process actually began in earnest in 2024/25 fiscal year, we have gone through a process of robust tasking and verification in place to ensure that there is no lapse in data outputs. And so we are doing ... what we can do is a standard way of compiling data along with the digitised or the new way of utilising tools to ensure that there is accuracy. And additionally, utilising digitisation for the online census that we seek to embark upon.

The Department of Statistics works under the National Data Quality Assessment Framework, which is a standardised metric of determining improving data quality within statistical agencies. It comes at no cost, and it adds additional verification layers for publications to improve the efficiency. When we look at the training, the training budget does not have any increase. But when we look within where training actually emanates from, as an associate member of CARICOM the department has access to the online in-person training sessions. Some of these are free while others are in-person. In the case where they are in-person, the department benefits from a mixture of funded opportunities and self-funded opportunities and so we find that statistical officers are actually sponsored to attend overseas training. And so, it is a mixture, so not all of the training burden is placed on the department by being an associate member of CARICOM. We get to take advantage of the training opportunities provided. We often engage in these training sessions across various areas and work programmes, at least one per month.

When we look at the business units, I just want to confirm that most of the Honourable Member's assumptions were correct regarding the uplifts that he actually stated. I will provide the clarity. So for business unit 24010, Censuses and [Special] Surveys, we see that \$152,000 has been allocated, which is an increase. Most of that will be allocated towards tempo-

rary staff for the conducting of the Census and Survey information. When we start to look at business unit 24015, there is an increase of \$204,000. The increase is due to the public service increases, the salary uplift and also partial funding of a statistical systems manager and additional funding to allocate to the senior statistician position where the job review anticipates an uplift. And so those are there ...

I am going to jump to the targets and the [Member] did ask about the one-monthly social media post, one monthly messaging app, one quarterly online notice and one annual newsletter. I will state that we have exceeded those targets, and I did indicate that we did have 12 monthly social media posts, 12 monthly messages, one online notice per quarter, and we did execute on the one newsletter.

When we look at the Core Statistics, there is an increase of \$72,000 and that is for the negotiated salary uplift plus the conversion of a Census and Survey clerk position to statistical officer post.

And then when we look at the Core Annual Survey, 24025 and the uplifts associated with that. Yes, it has to do with the salary increases but also a partially funded assistant statistician for the Census and Survey clerk positions.

When we looked at the Census and Survey research unit, we see a decrease of \$4,000 but that is offset between what we would consider the budget being transferred and salary increases and the negotiated salary uplift. In addition to that, we will also partially fund an assistant statistician, and we did have a post conversion in that particular area.

And when we look at business unit 24065, the Household Expenditure Survey was not due to temporary staff but it was due to the professional services for processing the 2024 Household Income and Expenditure Survey. So, we do need specialist assistance with the processing of the collected Household Income and Expenditure Survey, and that is where that line item, that increase ... That satisfies two questions in one, Honourable Member, as you did ask in terms of professional services, what was that uplift associated with?

When we look at the Performance Measures and the removal of the Performance Measures, the exercise that I asked the staff to actually go through is identifying performance measures where they make sense and whether or not performance measures need to be removed. And so, we looked at the associated goals and determined whether or not the performance measure made sense and in line with their goal. It made sense not to just have performance measures for performance measures sake. What you now see is the beginning of a revision of performance measures. Moving forward what you will actually find is those actual performance measures you are going to have revisions on an ongoing basis because the performance measures will actually reflect not just standardised performance measures but what is re-

quired to execute on the objectives that the department has set for that particular fiscal period.

I think I answered in terms of data quality and assurance and that is just an ongoing exercise that we do in terms of ensuring that we have incorporated international best practice. There was a specific question regarding contracts. We did have a management service contract which was an internal contract. And it was from the 1 September 2020 to 31 August 2023. No, no, I'm sorry. The rent was paid to Gibbons Management Services Limited. That is a contract that we do have for rent. The Department of Statistics is the sole department in that particular office.

And then there is another contract which is from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. That is an \$84,000 contract and that is to develop standardised and streamlined solutions to automate and validate labour intensive processes. Like I said, in terms of the CPI and other areas where we are looking to incorporate technology and that is with Info DaticsTech

There are currently 14 substantive staff and five temporary additional staff. All vacancies are now due to retirements and others are due to officers pursuing other opportunities. So not all of those vacancies were as a result of retirement.

Some of those positions that we had were unfunded positions and now that we are open for recruitment, we are actually funding those positions, so you see the reverse. We did not have vacant, funded positions that we didn't utilise. We had vacant unfunded positions that are now funded.

Mr. Chairman, I think that answers the vast majority of questions that were asked. I ask the Member to proceed with his questions.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Honourable Member, the Chair suggests you be succinct in your questions.

[Laughter]

Mr. Vance Campbell: Just one quick question before we move off of Head 14. It is at the bottom of page B-177. The last Performance Measure, Target response rates for major statistical surveys. We have some target outcomes. I just want to know how these targets compare to the results achieved in other jurisdictions, if the Minister knows.

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: That is a question that I will endeavour to get the answer for the [Member]. I don't think he has provided my team adequate time to do jurisdictional reviews of survey response rates.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Yes, Minister. Your brief would have been quite helpful. I could have sent my question in advance, you know.

Anyway, I do appreciate . . . we joke. But the brief has been extremely comprehensive.

Moving on to Head 27, Immigration. We are on page B-179, the mission statement. It says, *Facilitate economic growth for the benefit of Bermudians, residents and visitors while protecting Bermuda's borders*. I don't see . . . and perhaps it is just hidden in the language of the department objectives. I don't see where there is an objective to facilitate economic growth. Perhaps it is, like I said, hidden in the language as it refers to many enforcing and providing advice and that sort of language. Maybe it is hidden in there rather than explicitly stated.

If I go to the General Summary, the business unit 37010. For now, what I am going to do is skip over to the Subjective Analysis on page B-180. Again, let's go to Professional Services. The budget estimate for Professional Services is \$236,000, a decrease of \$713,000, or 75 per cent. I believe the Minister said this is as a result of the reduced need of consultants who were hired to assist with the backlog in work permits, or applications in general. I'm not sure which one it was. If we could get clarification on that. And what was the total sum of their contract? When did it begin and when did it end?

Still on page B-188 under Revenue, we note that there is a \$66,000 budgeted amount for Penalties. And I am wondering if that is the anticipated revenue based on the announced sort of zero tolerance policy that the Minister announced on April 22 at a press conference. I know in the Government's Budget Statement it spoke, the Minister spoke, under Economy and Labour that the reform measures were related to (if I remember correctly) English proficiency and layoffs. I believe today in his brief the Minister may have mentioned another area of reform. I can't remember exactly what it was. I think it had something to do with digitisation and maybe expediting using that digitisation to expedite the processing of work permits. I am happy to be corrected on that.

So I guess my other question to the Minister is we now have the report on emigration, when . . . the report, or we have the survey completed, once we have the report in a final state, when do we . . . or [when] does the Minister think we will start addressing some of the items outlined in that report so that we can reverse the effects of the emigration? So that they do not become . . . or do not reach the point where they may have an impact on the experience that potential investors and international business [have] in a negative way.

With that, Mr. Chairman, I take my seat.

The Chairman: Minister, please proceed, with succinct answers.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I will do, understanding time.

As it pertains to the department's objectives, emigration is a natural feature whether it be the tour-

ism business development or economic development. It goes without stating that emigration is a critical lever to ensuring that we have a sustainable economy. And as a result, while it is not stated as an objective, it is embedded in those principles of economic development.

I would also state that the revision for the reduction of the professional services budget, I indicated that we have transferred the activities from temporary staff to full-time staff members where we were able to undertake successful recruitment. As a result, that would be the substantial reduction in that particular budget.

I would say that the \$66,000 that was budgeted for Penalties is a conservative estimate of what we will receive based off of us ensuring that persons are adhering to our immigration policies. And I want to stress that we put immigration laws and policies in place for them to be adhered to and there are penalties in place, and we ask employers and employees to conduct themselves in an orderly fashion to ensure that we do not have to move down a place of penalties.

As it pertains to Immigration Reform, I do not want the [Member] to confuse immigration reform with the reform that we are doing to the Work Permit Policy. And so the first . . . some of the changes that you spoke about earlier have to do with changes to the Work Permit Policy regarding language requirements and layoffs. The overall immigration reform is much broader than that and it includes enforcement, it includes digitisation, and it includes using immigration as a lever for greater levels of economic activity.

The Chairman: MP, you still have another five minutes of questions.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to move to Head 60, Workforce Development. I have two questions in this area. One being, What were the issues with the old Job Board which led to its . . . I believe it has been shut down, Minister, or is going to be, and replaced. What will the expected improvements be?

With some of the scholarships that are offered, the scholarships, if we go to page C-19, we see Scholarships, 6866. Are these scholarships to overseas entities or is it scholarships for local opportunities for . . . and what is the . . . for this amount here, the budgeted amount of \$400,000. What is the number of scholarships that will take care of? And what are the obligations to the scholarship recipients? Are there some obligations for them to return and work for government? Or anything along that line?

Yes, that will be it, Mr. Chairman, for this head.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, the Job Board was monolithic, meaning that it only had capacity to

post jobs and have people apply for jobs. What we are going to integrate is a more dynamic system that will have additional features which allows for more information regarding occupations in all industrial categories. It would have the education requirements. It would have the experience requirement. It will provide a complete career path trajectory. It will have testimonials from members who work in that industry. Also, it will be embedded with training programmes. The functionality will be much greater than the current functionality of the Job Board. So, it is a complete enhancement of the product that we currently have.

As it pertains to scholarships, overseas and local scholarships are provided. We provide 4,000 scholarships. The scholarships are primarily based off of high-demand occupational categories. We did state that part of the reduction of local workforce was that we would transition into tying scholarship awards to that person's ability to return to Bermuda and work after a seven-year period. We still think it is important that people get overseas training.

There are currently 34 individuals who are on scholarships. And we do not have stipulations, but we are going to move to an area where there are stipulations as it pertains to persons coming back and working in our local economy.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Mr. Chairman, with the remaining . . . what is it? A minute that I have? Is it a minute?

The Chairman: You're wasting it. You're wasting it.

[Laughter]

Mr. Vance Campbell: Moving to Head 94, Economic Development. I noticed that there is under unit 9405, business unit 104120, Concierge Services. There is a zero budgeted amount for the Concierge Services. And I may have missed it, but has this service been absorbed into one of the other business units? I do note that under programme 9405 on page B-197 there still exists the performance measures. So, I am just wondering if that was the reason why there is zero, because it was absorbed into another area of the [concierge] service.

Hon. Jason Hayward: That assumption is correct. It was absorbed into Administration.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Time? Okay.

The Chairman: You have literally 30 seconds.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thirty seconds.

The Chairman: Make it succinct.

Mr. Vance Campbell: I will spend that time, again, thanking the Minister for his comprehensive brief. And

also, his members of staff who I am sure contributed greatly to that. I wish I had more time—and this is no fault to the Minister. He was generous in the time that he left—to get into the detail of some of the work that is being done by the BEDC and the Bermuda Business Development Agency. But again, thank you to the Minister and the members of his staff. Thank you.

The Chairman: That concludes the debate on the Ministry of Economy and Labour. The Minister will now move his heads.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94 and 99 and be approved as . . . there were amendments that were required to be made. So, should I state “as amended”?

The Chairman: Yes, please.

Hon. Jason Hayward: As amended.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94, and 99 be approved with amendments. Are there any objections to that motion?
No objections; agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Economy and Labour, Heads 44, 14, 27, 29, 60, 94 and 99 were approved as amended.]

The Chairman: That concludes this debate, and we will now have another.

The Chair will now change to the Honourable Member Linda Smith, from constituency 31, Southampton West Central.

[Pause]

[Ms. Linda Smith, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Honourable Members and the listening audience.

We are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. In the Ministry of Health to be led by the Honourable Kim Wilson, JP MP. The heads today are Heads 21, 22, 24, and 91.

Minister.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I would like to move the following heads, namely Head 21, Ministry of Health Headquarters; Head 22, Department of Health; Head 24, Hospitals; and Head 91, Health Insurance be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, before I begin I would like to pay homage and extend my gratitude to the hard-working men and women at the Ministry of Health as well as the quangos that are associated under Health, namely, the BHB and the Health Council for their continued hard work and dedication, particularly as they assist in the Government's initiatives in moving Bermuda forward and creating healthy people and healthy communities.

Madam Chairman, with the assistance of those persons who I have just thanked I will endeavour to provide a very comprehensive brief, that hopefully will provide assistance as well as clarification to some answers to questions that may arise.

I note that previously all four of these heads had received a five-hour time period. Last year was the first time that it was reduced to four and it did not provide for sufficient time for me to complete the detailed brief, which is very lengthy because it is a very big Ministry. However, I will undertake to provide any unanswered questions to my Honourable Member who sits opposite to me following the conclusion of this day.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Health Estimates of Revenue, Expenditure, Performance Measures and FTEs [full-time equivalents] are found on pages B-149 through B-170 of the Budget Book. The Capital Development and Acquisition estimates are found on pages C-5 and C-12 of the Budget Book. And the Grant Estimates are found on pages C-18 and C-19 of the Budget Book.

Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Health has been allocated a total of \$245,440,000 for the fiscal year 2025/26 for its headquarters, the Department of Health, Hospitals and Health Insurance Department.

HEAD 21—MINISTRY OF HEALTH HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, today I am pleased to present the budget for the Ministry of Health and its departments and quangos starting with Head 21, the Ministry of Health Headquarters. And Madam Chairman, that can be found at pages B-150 through B-153 of the Budget Book.

Mission

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, the mission of the Ministry of Health Headquarters is *To make Bermuda healthier by improving accessibility to quality health care services.*

The Head 21 budget reflects the efforts of headquarters to create a health system that is financial sustainable and operationally efficient in meeting the health needs of the population.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, a total of \$15,634,000 has been allocated to Head 21 Headquarters for 2025/26 which represents an increase of 52.0 per cent or \$5,332,000 over the budget of the fiscal year 2024/25. This constitutes 6.4 per cent of the total budget allocated to the Ministry of Health.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Health Headquarters is estimated to generate \$28,000 during the 2025/26 fiscal year, down from 61 per cent from the \$72,000 in revenue in the previous fiscal year. This reduction is attributed to a smaller projected number of registrations for doctors during the 2024/25 fiscal year.

General

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, I will now address the first programme under Head 21, General.

Line item 2101, General. Madam Chairman, the programme 2101, General, comprises 15 FTEs. The programme's total budget found at page B-150 of the Budget Book is \$13,398,000.

General Administration

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Of that \$6,923,000 has been allocated to 31000 General Administration. This represents a 74 per cent or a \$2,923,000 increase compared to fiscal year 2024/25. The General Administration budget covers expenses associated with the day-to-day operations of the Ministry including the Accounts Section and the Project Management Office (or PMO) for implementing universal health coverage (UHC). For the UHC a total of \$462,000 has been allocated for human resources within the PMO. And Madam Chairman, hereinafter I will refer to the Project Management Office as the PMO and Universal Health Coverage as UHC.

A total of \$462,000 has been allocated for human resources within the PMO including a director, project manager, business analyst, and executive assistant. Additionally, \$1,238,000 was allocated for the operations of the PMO, including the engagement of subject matter experts, marketing and communications.

Line item 31000, General Administration. Madam Chairman, the Government is committed to the creation of an equitable, integrated and sustainable health system that prioritises the health needs of the population. To this end, the Ministry of Health in collaboration with its key partners and stakeholders is leading the multi-year journey towards delivering universal health coverage. Universal health coverage seeks to ensure that all people can access essential health services without encountering financial hardship. This requires continued efforts to strengthen

primary care services for health promotion, disease prevention, and early detection and management of health conditions before they become more costly to treat.

Achieving UHC also requires a system-wide transformation that aligns health care delivery with the principles of accessibility, affordability and quality. Madam Chairman, this includes leveraging data to drive evidence-based decision-making, investing in health care workforce development and integrating services across sectors to ensure continuity of care. As Bermuda's population ages and we continue efforts to address the burden of chronic diseases, the health system must adapt to meet evolving needs whilst also maintaining fiscal responsibility. The Ministry of Health remains focused on long-term reforms that will support healthier communities, reduce disparities in health outcomes, and build a foundation for a stronger more resilient health care system.

Madam Chairman, health care in Bermuda remains amongst the most expensive globally. Persistent inefficiencies, inequalities and access and disparities in health outcomes underscore the need, the urgent need, for reform. The implementation of UHC is intended to address these issues by closing coverage gaps, improving health system performance whilst reducing fragmentation, and ensuring the financial sustainability of health care through international best practices. In this regard, the UHC project management team has been coordinating several work streams of projects in consultation with key stakeholders to achieve the following:

- The mapping and redesign of integrated care pathways for diabetes, chronic [kidney] disease and mental health for coordinated and patient-centred care.
- Drafting an actuarial model of a core benefits package to meet population needs.
- Modelling of a single payer to reduce fragmentation and improve the affordability of care.
- Development of population health metrics.
- Assessment of health workforce gaps.
- Drafting of a national patients Bill of Rights.
- Development of a multimedia campaign to keep the public informed of UHC updates; and finally
- Drafting of national clinical standards for common chronic diseases.

Madam Chairman, these foundational efforts represent critical steps in the long-term transformation of Bermuda's health system. By aligning clinical, financial and operational elements, the Ministry of Health aims to ensure that health services are not only more accessible but also more equitable and effective.

Madam Chairman, as we continue the multi-year journey of implementing UHC, our commitment

remains clear: To ensure that every resident of Bermuda has access to the diagnostic treatment and medications they need when they need them without encountering financial hardship. In alignment with this vision during the current fiscal year the Ministry of Health will begin the first phase of UHC implementation by enhancing the benefits offered under the Health Insurance Plan. And here and after I'll refer to that, Madam Chairman, as HIP, and FutureCare.

As part of this initial phase, both plans will be expanded to include an annual preventative doctor's visit and increased prescription drug coverage provided at no additional cost to the policyholders. These enhancements reflect our commitment to prioritising prevention and ensuring that essential health services are accessible and affordable for all. Under these improvements active policyholders will gain greater access to routine care helping to detect health concerns early and manage chronic conditions more effectively.

In addition, there will be an increase of \$2,000 in annual prescription drug coverage for both plans, raising HIP's total benefit coverage to \$3,000 and FutureCare's coverage to \$5,000 per year. Access to prescription medications is a cornerstone of effective health care particularly in our fight against noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and heart disease, conditions that are regrettably prevalent in our population and contributed significantly to long-term health complications and health care costs. Ensuring that individuals can afford and obtain the medications they need without delay or financial hardship is critical to managing these conditions and preventing avoidable hospitalisations or deterioration in health.

Madam Chairman, recognising the growing health care needs of our senior population the Ministry of Health is also actively reviewing options to broaden specialist coverage under the FutureCare plan. As individuals age, they are more likely to require ongoing management of complex and chronic health conditions such as cardiovascular disease, arthritis, diabetes, and neurological disorders that often necessitate access to specialised medical expertise. Expanding access to specialty care will not only improve individual health outcomes but also provide more timely interventions and can prevent complications, reduce hospital admissions, and limit the need for emergency care. This approach supports a more proactive and coordinated model of care that emphasises continuity, early detection and appropriate treatment. The Ministry of Health will continue to explore this approach with the aim of empowering seniors to live healthier, more independent lives, supported by the services and resources they need to effectively manage their health conditions.

Madam Chairman, these changes represent a significant step forward in strengthening our health care safety net, improving health outcomes, and reducing out-of-pocket expenses as we move steadily

towards a more equitable health care system. As we move forward with the first phase of UHC implementation, the Ministry of Health recognises that the involvement of health care providers is essential to the success and sustainability of health care reform. The Ministry is therefore committed to continued engagement with health care professionals through the relevant forms coordinated by the UHC Project Management Office. Providers are vital stakeholders in the delivery of health services and their expertise, experience and frontline insights are critical to shaping a system that is both effective and responsive to the needs of the population. By working in partnership, we can assure that service delivery models are practical, well-supported and aligned with the goals of improving access, quality and outcomes across the health care system.

Madam Chairman, in the coming weeks the public can expect the launch of a comprehensive communication strategy that will provide pertinent information on the overall vision, key concepts, and progress on specific initiatives under UHC starting with the HIP and FutureCare enhancements. This strategy, Madam Chairman, will ensure that individuals, families, health care providers, and other stakeholders are well informed about what UHC means for them, how it will be rolled out, and how it aims to improve access, affordability, and quality of care. The UHC Project Management Office will continue fostering transparency, encouraging dialogue, and building public trust as we work together towards a stronger, more equitable health care system.

Madam Chairman, the PMO will continue to play a central role in guiding the financial and structural planning necessary for the successful implementation of UHC. This includes overseeing the actuarial analysis, cost projections, and fiscal modelling required to support a cost-contained sustainable and phased rollout. These technical assessments are essential to ensuring that decisions are evidence-based and that resources are allocated efficiently to deliver the greatest impact.

Madam Chairman, in the current fiscal year the PMO aims to present to the Cabinet a comprehensive set of options for their core benefits package comprising essential health services that are aligned with the most pressing health needs of Bermuda's population. Modelling for the package has already begun and careful consideration of cost-effectiveness to ensure that the package will deliver the greatest benefit for each dollar spent. The objective, Madam Chairman, is to define a set of services that are accessible to all residents, promote prevention and early intervention, and reduce the long-term burden of diseases.

Additionally, the PMO will outline the proposed structure and operational functions of a single-payer system which is intended to streamline administrative processes, centralised funding flows, and max-

imise efficiencies within the health care system. This approach reduces duplication, complexity and fragmentation while still allowing residents the freedom to choose their own health care providers. Most importantly, single-payer systems have been shown globally to improve health outcomes by eliminating barriers to access and fostering a more coordinated and proactive model of care. These key decisions will serve as foundational steps in building a more integrated, equitable and financially responsible health care system for Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, the PMO will also support the Ministry's efforts to draft the legislative framework needed to guide the critical components of achieving UHC, such as stewardship and governance, health care service delivery, health care financing, health workforce, health technology, and digital health information systems. These components are the critical building blocks for effective health system reform. Such reformation cannot be achieved in the absence of partnership and strategic collaboration. Therefore, the PMO will continue to validate technical outputs and build consensus on key policy and operational elements of UHC by continued collaboration with the Clinical Senate and forums for health financing, health advocacy, health insurance, and health providers to advance key milestones needed for successful UHC implementation for Quarter 3 of 2025/26.

This collaborative approach ensures that the legislative and policy framework are grounded in the realities of Bermuda's health system and reflect the insides of those delivering and receiving care. As progress continues, these partnerships will be instrumental in identifying practical solutions to implementation challenges and building the broader support needed to sustain reform over time. Ultimately, the success of UHC will depend not only on sound policy and legislation but also on the strength of the relationships and the trust built throughout this process.

Mental Health

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Health continues implementation of the 2024 mid-year budget in the amount of \$2.29 million on a comprehensive programme of mental health support initiatives. To date, Madam Chairman, targeted investments have been made in raising community awareness of mental well-being, building community capacity for support, and continuing engagement with adolescents for prevention, early intervention, and community-based care.

The Acute Adult Mental Health Integrated Pathway and the research led by Daniel Cavanagh and his team on youth mental health were instrumental in identifying key recommendations that have driven the priorities of mental health investment. Challenges such as anxiety, stress, violence, and substance abuse have placed immense strain on our

health care services, schools and community organisations underscoring the urgent need for sustained and comprehensive mental health support. In response, the Ministry is leading efforts for youth-focused mental health first aid training, establishing a national mental health advocacy organisation and enhancing support for community members to identify and support persons who may be experiencing a mental health challenge.

Madam Chairman, by investing in programmes that promote prevention, early intervention, crisis response, and mental health awareness we aim to reduce the long-term impact of untreated mental health conditions. Organisations such as Age Concern Bermuda utilised its grant to establish a comprehensive programme focused on improving the mental well-being of older adults. The initiative aims to raise awareness about the mental health challenges seniors face and provide educational opportunities to equip individuals with the knowledge and tools to address these issues. The programme targets older adults, their families, informal caregivers and professional caregivers.

Madam Chairman, the Family Centre utilises its grant to strengthen its intensive counselling services which focus on early detection and intervention for mental health challenges in children and teens, age 4 to 18 years of age. These free services include screening to identify at-risk youth and offering intake or referrals to appropriate agencies. The programme provides a safe space for children, teens and families to heal, build coping skills, and address trauma, emotional and social challenges.

Madam Chairman, funding for the Women's Resource Centre was used to support its comprehensive, therapeutic services programme which includes individualised counselling, community support groups, and mindfulness and wellness activities. The initiative addresses the critical gap in mental health services for uninsured and underinsured women experiencing mild to moderate mental health conditions. Without access to publicly funded care many of these women face significant challenges in daily life, including employment and parenting, often leading to reliance on social services. This collaboration with the Ministry of Health aims to expand access to essential mental health support, promote emotional well-being and foster long-term empowerment and resilience as well as self-sufficiency.

Madam Chairman, among men, the key barriers to mental health seeking are financial hardship, social stigma, and the belief that seeking help undermines masculinity. These factors often lead men to delay care until they are in crisis. To address this, Madam Chairman, funding to the Men's Access to Support and Counselling, or MASC, is being used to support expanded outreach and support for young and adult men for mental health services. By removing financial barriers, particularly for those who are

uninsured or underinsured, the initiative promotes earlier intervention and supports long-term mental well-being. The investment is also aimed at shifting cultural attitudes towards men's mental health encouraging openness and fostering emotional resilience.

The Bermuda College Foundation which is responsible for fundraising and stewardship of donations to the Bermuda College has taken a proactive role in supporting student well-being, recognising that the long-term sustainability of Bermuda College depends on the health and success of its students. The Bermuda College Foundation is committed to fostering both academic and personal development of students including mental wellness. With its funding, a professional team will be established to drive action in the areas of prevention and early intervention, stigma reduction, and mental health literacy, improved access to services for youth and families, and advancement in research and policy.

Madam Chairman, a central focus of our efforts is expanding access to counselling, therapy and crisis intervention services. By increasing the capacity of these services, we can ensure timely care for individuals facing emotional distress, crisis situations, and long-term conditions. This expansion will reduce wait times and ensure that underserved populations have equitable access to necessary mental health support and resources.

In addition to enhancing service delivery public education campaigns will continue to play a role, and a key role at that, in reducing the stigma surrounding mental health. These campaigns will encourage individuals to seek help without fear of judgment ultimately leading to higher participation in mental health screenings and early intervention programmes. And by addressing concerns early we can help prevent more severe mental health challenges from developing.

Madam Chairman, the appointment of a mental health programme coordinator has been instrumental in managing these initiatives, fostering collaboration, and ensuring the efficient use of resources. Looking ahead, one of our key goals is the establishment of a national mental health coordinating and advocacy entity. This centralised body will oversee mental health awareness, education, and policy coordination simplifying the navigation of the mental health system and ensuring that individuals can easily access the support they need. Progress is already underway with the development of a national mental health website and the identification of the right leadership will be crucial to the acceleration of these efforts.

Madam Chairman, this month the Ministry of Health officially launched Mental Health Anti-Stigma Month, dedicated to opening minds, shifting narratives, and bringing mental health out of the shadows. Under the theme, "We are not an Island." The campaign emphasises community solidarity and the im-

portance of mental well-being. Throughout the month a series of events are being facilitated in partnership with several community partners including youth workshops, public forums, community art projects, therapy dog sessions, and training opportunities. These activities are designed to foster dialogue, build empathy, and create safe spaces for individuals to seek support.

And as I pause, Madam Chairman, because it is, like I said, the month of May launched the Mental Health Anti-Stigma [Month] campaign, a lot of schools and other organisations jumped onboard. And even in today's newspaper, Warwick Academy did a series on "Buzzing with Wellbeeing," (B-E-E). And their logo was a bee. And they did a drive-in event. They had a Grub Day to raise awareness towards Amber's Wings, which is an organisation that supports mental health. And they had a BEE Kind event. Bee Kind to You. Bee Kind . . . Beelieve in Yourself, and [You] Beelong Here. So, we're trying to encourage other members of the community to recognise the importance of mental health awareness, and in particular, to do things to break the silence and reduce the stigma. So, kudos to Warwick Academy.

Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation on business unit 31000, General Administration.

Grants Administration

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now, Madam Chairman, to 31015 Grants Administration. I'm turning now to page B—sorry page C-18, which are the Grants. And it outlines the Health Ministry's grants to various agencies that deliver critical frontline services supporting public health and social assistance, as well as a grant dedicated to health education initiatives. The total budget for this business unit is \$5,849,000. And these grant funds are allocated as follows, Madam Chairman:

- \$3,000,000—for the Lady Culpit Compassionate Association (or the LCCA). And that's to cover overseas medical care for uninsured and underinsured persons.
- \$1 million—for the Bermuda Health Council.
- \$100,000—for Age Concern to operationally support the activities focused on raising awareness, and providing learning opportunities related to the mental well-being of older adults as part of the previously mentioned supplementary and mental health initiative
- \$120,000—for the Family Centre to assist with the delivery of counselling services delivered at no charge to families in Bermuda with children between the ages of 4 and 18 years old. Also, as part of the supplementary mental health initiative.
- \$100,000—for the Men and Masculinity Support Centre of Bermuda (or MASC) to provide

counselling and support services for men as part of the mental health initiative.

- \$570,000—for the Bermuda college foundation in support of mental health initiatives to establish collaborative and sustainable suicide prevention initiatives, to reduce risk factors, and increase factors that are preventative, protective, and promote resilience. This is also part of the supplementary mental health initiative that I spoke about a few moments ago;
- \$100,000—for the women's Resource Centre to assist with programmes that support women in poverty and transition by providing access to therapeutic services with individual counselling, community support groups, mindfulness, and wellness activities, and support services—including access to housing and food, employment and educational support. And this is also part of the mental health initiative.
- \$63,000—for the Sexual Assault Response Team (or SART) to provide comprehensive support to survivors of sexual assaults.
- \$105,000—for the Dr. Barbara Ball Public Health Scholarship; and
- \$691,000—in other grants.

Madam Chairman, the LCCA has been an integral part of the Bermuda community since 1932. Since the 1950s it has been supporting residents who required overseas medical treatment that is not locally available. Today the LCCA manages the Patient Overseas Financial Aid Programme assisting individuals with limited or no financial means to access necessary care abroad by helping them to identify appropriate solutions. This support is particularly important in exceptional cases where a patient is responsible for medical treatment that costs more than \$50,000.

Madam Chairman, the Dr. Barbara Ball [Public Health] Scholarship is given in honour Dr. Barbara Bertha Ball who was the first born Bermudian woman to practice medicine in Bermuda. And every year the Ministry of Health awards the scholarship to Bermudian students with proven financial need who wish to pursue careers or professional development in public health. This year awardees received scholarships between the sum of \$6[,000] and \$9,000 each in support of continuing their university studies. This scholarship supports students and studies in various health care disciplines that directly address Bermuda's public health priorities.

It reflects the Government's commitment to building a stronger health care workforce, an essential component of both the Bermuda Health Strategy 2022–2027 and the Universal Health Coverage [UHC] agenda. Investing in the next generation of doctors, nurses, allied health professionals, public health leaders, and care workers is critical for addressing the Island's growing and complex health needs. With an

ageing population, a high burden of chronic disease and ongoing challenges in mental health, long-term care and primary care access the demand for skilled health care professionals is only increasing.

The Ministry of Health will continue efforts to encourage scholars to pursue health careers especially in underserved and high-demand areas because it is vital to us building a resilient health system. These students are not just recipients of support, they are future care givers, future innovators, and future advocates who will shape the health and well-being of the nation for generations to come.

Bermuda Health Council

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The Bermuda Health Council. Madam Chairman, I want to highlight the work of the Bermuda Health Council. It's a quango under the Ministry of Health. In these dynamic times for Bermuda's health system, the Health Council has emerged as one of Government's most strategic partner agencies, bridging expertise with execution, policy with people, and innovation with prudent fiscal discipline.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Health Council remains committed to ensuring quality, accessible and cost-effective health care for all residents. And the Bermuda Health Council is a major part of the engine driving critical transformation in our health system. With a legislated mandate to regulate, coordinate, and enhance the delivery of health services, the Council plays a crucial role in driving key regulatory functions, enforcing compliance measures, and supporting system-wide reforms that aim to improve health outcomes and financial sustainability.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, Expenditure Overview.

The Bermuda Health Council's budget for fiscal year 2025/26 totals \$4,833,000, excluding potential capital expenditure and reflects a modest increase of 5 per cent over last year's allocation. Despite a confirmed operational grant for the new year matching the past few years of \$1 million, the Council remains committed to executing its crucial functions with discipline and impact. As such, the Council is expected to operate this fiscal year at a deficit and will use various efficiency mechanisms and revenue-generation options during the year in an effort to be budget-neutral.

The key areas of expenditure for the Bermuda Health Council are as follows:

- Payroll expenses in the amount of \$3,171,000 reflecting the retention of core talent and targeted use of subject matter experts. This includes the expected new hire to meet critical project demands.
- Building expenses in the amount of \$431,000 to ensure secure and functional infrastructure

for operations. And this accounts for the increase in building rental payments.

- Operational expenses in the amount of \$260,000 to support digital modernisation, stakeholder outreach, and compliance activities; and finally
- Professional fees in the amount of \$858,000 to enable the strategic use of consultants in actuarial modelling, regulation health technology, and data analytics. This is in support of UHC and other system-strategic reforms.

Madam Chairman, it is important to note that funding needs originally identified for capital investment in corporate IT infrastructure, disease registry development, and progress on digital platforms will be paused only if new revenue opportunities emerge. This adaptive approach ensures fiscal prudence whilst maintaining readiness to scale key innovations when financially viable.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The Council projected revenue for 2025/26 stands at \$4,549,000 marking a 1.19 per cent increase from the prior year. And the major sources of revenue include, Madam Chairman, Government Operational Grant in the amount of \$1 million; Mutual Reinsurance Fund in the amount of \$2,978,000; and Licensing Registration Contract and Programme Service Fees in the amount of \$570,810.

The Bermuda Health Council will continue to diversify and strengthen its revenue streams through partnerships, strategic grant applications, and targeted services delivery—both locally and if available abroad. For example, there are other countries within the region that are at different stages of UHC implementation that may benefit from the Health Council's expertise. The pursuit of revenue generation options ensures that no opportunity is missed to advance health reforms, support innovation, and build sustainable infrastructures locally by way of additional funds.

Positioning and Priorities

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, a drug's formulary plays a critical role in managing medication costs by guiding the selection of clinically effective and cost-effective treatments. It supports negotiations for better pricing and helps balance coverage with affordability ensuring that patients have access to essential medications. Meaningful engagement with key stakeholders, including health care providers, pharmacists, patients, and other relevant experts is essential in developing a formulary that reflects the health needs of the population. And in this context the Bermuda Health Council has held five Pharmacy and Therapeutics Committee meetings and coordinated with four local medical experts to inform decisions on

the inclusion of cardiac, pulmonary, and diabetes medications.

Madam Chairman, significant progress has been made to date as the Council has introduced 64 essential medicines on the Bermuda drug formulary with over 164 unique doses. Additionally, the Council has proposed a reduction in the pharmacy dispensary fee from \$42.50 by 17.6 per cent to \$32.00, along with the proposal to cap the mark-up of the landed cost of formulary medicines at 25.0 per cent to enhance price control. Finally, the Council has transitioned drug application processes to the Asana system for preliminary approvals and renewals and has developed a formulary education plan to engage and inform stakeholders. These measures reflect our continued commitment to working with the relevant stakeholders to improve medication affordability and ensure equitable access to essential treatments for the Bermuda population.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Just while we take a very quick break, just to repeat that we are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/[26]. We are hearing from the Minister of Health, the Honourable Kim Wilson, JP MP. And we are under Head 21 right now, which is the Ministry of Health.

Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you.

Moving forward, the Bermuda Health Council remains . . . (just a minute) committed to ongoing stakeholder consultation on the proposed pricing structure for the drug formulary. A key priority will be the establishment and standardisation of processes for the pricing and procurement of formulary medicines to ensure consistency, transparency, and cost-effectiveness. Additionally, the Council will prioritise updating the Bermuda Health Council Drug Formulary Regulations of 2021 to strengthen its mandate particularly in relation to the monitoring and evaluation of the formulary's performance and impact. To support its educational mandate, the Council has also developed a formulary education plan aimed at increasing awareness and understanding among internal and external stakeholders in sharing informed participation and effective implementation.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Health Council continues to be at the forefront of modernising our regulatory framework, driving digital health transformation, and elevating evidence-based and strategic accountability and transparency across the health system. Through its convening power it has brought together insurers, providers, policymakers, and patients to create smarter solutions for today's most pressing health challenges. Today these health challenges are broad, ranging from health professional regulatory

administration, long-term care and the development of care pathways, to procurement optimisation, legislative review and more.

Over the past year the Council has made significant strides in modernising the regulatory framework, enhancing digital licensing, and improving compliance enforcement. Key achievements include

- continued operation of a blockchain-enabled online credentialing system for health professionals streamlining registration and renewal process;
- strengthening the kidney transplant coordinator programme, noting that during fiscal year 2025, the kidney transplant coordinating team progressed an agreement with the United Kingdom to expand our options for accessing cost-effective, quality transplant centres that have the potential to save over \$100,000 per transplant episode;
- enhancement of health business licensing and compliance enforcement ensuring adherence to regulatory standards;
- refinement of regulatory oversight for health insurers, ensuring compliance with mandated coverage requirements and patient protections;
- advancement in data collection and system monitoring ensuring better access to information for policymakers and the public;
- stakeholder engagement infrastructure and development in preparation for the implementation of universal health coverage;
- health technology assessments for a more rigorous evaluation of new medical devices and treatment options; and
- public education and health system awareness campaigns to improve public knowledge about health care access and patient rights.

Madam Chairman, although its scope of work is extensive, the Council consistently demonstrates timely financial transparency by closely collaborating with the Auditor General and producing *unqualified* audited financial statements year after year. The Health Council's annual reports and financial statements are completed through fiscal year 2023, the fiscal year 2024 is in progress, and the fiscal year 2025 documentation is being organised. The Health Council's highly skilled and experienced team of 25 continues to have a successful paperless office with most information-sharing occurring electronically.

The Council is enhancing its IT tools to improve efficiency and cost-effectiveness for the Government and the health system. It recently began managing a project to upgrade the central repository and online directory for health and social care ser-

vices using artificial intelligence to improve system navigation for residents.

In the upcoming fiscal year the Council will continue advancing the historic initiatives while placing greater emphasis on expanding UHC, improving health service provider oversight, and refining the digital credibility system to streamline health care workforce management. More specifically, the planned and continued projects include

- The development of the helpinghub.bm as a centralised health care directory to help residents easily access a database of health services, businesses and professionals.
- The advocacy for the adoption of a patient's Bill of Rights to ensure transparency, fairness and protection for all health care consumers.
- The onboarding of additional health care professionals for the expansion of the digital credentialing system to streamline regulatory monitoring.
- The strengthening of accountability measures to improve quality, safety and financial sustainability through hospital oversight and governance enhancements.
- The strengthening of oversight of the businesses of health service providers to ensure that they are safe, effective, responsive and caring and well led.
- The strengthening of policies and monitoring frameworks for residential care and nursing homes for long-term care regulations and support.
- The expansion of the use of digital systems for better integration, safer data sharing, and improved continuity of care.
- The use of advanced predictive analytics through actuarial modelling to improve financial planning and evidence-based policy decision-making.
- The establishment of a clinical research repository to support medical research and international collaboration, including the sharing of regional genomic related research data.
- The fostering of collaborative and collaboration with local and international partners through public-private partnerships to drive innovation and system improvements.
- The expansion of UHC implementation efforts through the development of policy frameworks and strategic implementation plans for health financing reform.
- The provision of workforce development and internship programmes for skill building among emerging professionals in the health care and health system administration sector; and
- The continued enhancements of the integrity of health system data sets to support evi-

dence-based decision-making, health care planning, and financing.

These priorities are not just tasks. They are strategic levers to create a healthier Bermuda. The Health Council seeks to remain a cost-effective agency that delivers real value for public investment.

Madam Chairman, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to the outgoing board members from the 2024 calendar year for their dedication and contributions to the Bermuda Health Council. Their expertise and guidance were invaluable in advancing the Council's mission and driving important health system reforms.

I would also like to sincerely thank both returning and new board members for their commitment to the Bermuda Health Council. Their expertise is vital in advancing the mission of the Council and improving health care regulation, access, quality and sustainability.

Madam Chairman, the board members of the Bermuda Health Council for the fiscal year 2026 are as follows:

Dr. Sylvanus Nawab, who is the Chairman; the Deputy Chair is Dr. Nicola Paugh; the board members are Dr. Darrien Ray; Dr. Myra Virgil; Dr. Nicola Paugh; Dr. Samantha Scott O'Bannon; Mr. Andrew Simons; Ms. Ariana Caines; Ms. F. Ann Daniels and Lucia Pendleton and Ms. Lauren Bell.

Ex officio members include, Madam Chairman, Dr. Ricky Brathwaite who is the CEO of the Bermuda Health Council; Dr. Shaun Ramroop who is the Chief Medical Officer; Mr. Chid . . . the FS, financial secretary—Sorry. The financial secretary for the Ministry of Finance—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Pardon. Chidozie Ofoego. Thank you.

And Keechia Tuckett who is the Permanent Secretary for the Ministry of Health. And on behalf of the Ministry of Health I thank the Bermuda Health Council for its continued collaboration and commitment to transparent, equitable and evidence-based decision-making in the interests of the people of Bermuda. Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation on line item 31015, Grants Administration.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

We are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We have just moved from Head 21, moving on to Head 22, the Department of Health.

Minister, if you'd like to proceed.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, I will. Thank you.

Corporate Services

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Corporate Services, 31020.

Madam Chairman, the estimated budget for Head 21, Corporate Services Unit is \$626,000. This unit encompasses the core leadership and strategic planning functions of the Ministry of Health. It includes the policy directorate which is responsible for the formulation, coordination, and evaluation of health policies and legislative frameworks. In addition, it comprises the staff members who work directly with me, as the Minister, providing critical support in decision-making, stakeholder collaboration, and communication of government priorities. The senior management team also forms an integral part of this unit offering executive oversight and guidance in the development and implementation of health policy, regulations, and national strategic initiatives. Together this unit ensures that the Ministry remains responsive, evidence-driven, and aligned with the broader goals of health system reform and service delivery improvement.

Madam Chairman, this concludes my presentation of business unit 31020, Corporate Services.

National Health Emergency

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Moving now to 31997, National Health Emergency.

Madam Chairman, for the 2025/26 [fiscal year] there have been no budget allocations for the National Health Emergency unit representing a 100 per cent cost-savings, compared to \$82,000 previously allocated for Health Disaster Coordination. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Health has significantly strengthened its capacities to manage public health risk and emergencies. Through the development of a robust system and a national public health emergency response plan, the Ministry has positioned itself to respond more effectively to future challenges. With a focus on building back stronger, the budget allocation for this unit has steadily declined since budget year 2023/24, as response capacities have grown in resilience. Having stronger preparation and response systems in place, allows the Ministry to better allocate funds to critical areas of service delivery and long-term health system improvements.

Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation on the business line item 31997 National Health Emergency. This completes my presentation on all the business units under programme 2101, General.

Madam Chairman, I will now present the second programme, Head 21, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer.

Office of the Chief Medical Officer

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, I will now present the second [programme under] Head 21, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer, [2102]. The expenditure overview is as follows.

The estimates of expenditure and revenue for the FTEs for programme [2102], Office of the Chief Medical Officer (OCMO) under Head 21 are found on pages B-150 through B-152 of the Budget Book. It's total budget for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$2,236,000 which funds three business units, namely: 31030, Health Care Registration and Regulation; 31040, Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit; and 31050, Port Health. The office consists of 13 full-time equivalents.

Madam Chairman, the OCMO, has a pivotal role in safeguarding public health through regulation, oversight and strategic leadership. Its key mandates are

- registration and regulation of health care professionals;
- pharmaceutical drug control;
- epidemiology and surveillance;
- statutory public health responsibilities; and
- health, emergency planning, resilience and response.

Health Care Registration and Regulation—31030

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: An allocation, Madam Chairman, of \$853,000 was made for the health care registration and regulations business unit. The Office of the Chief Medical Officer oversees the registration and reregistration of medical practitioners and the regulation of pharmacies in Bermuda. It also provides administrative support to the Bermuda Medical Council, with the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) serving as its executive officer. The office ensures compliance with best practice clinical standards, manages patient concerns and upholds the quality of medical and pharmaceutical care. Additionally, it administers the Professional Conduct Committee for Medical Practitioners.

Madam Chairman, over the past year, the section has effectively administered a range of professional services to Bermuda's health care sector. This includes managing the registration of over 200 medical practitioners, holding full registration and processing more than 250 controlled pharmaceutical drug licence applications. These efforts ensure compliance with regulatory standards and contribute to the maintenance of high-quality health care services on the Island. The registration section consistently meets its performance targets by maintaining accurate health care professional registries and providing essential support to statutory boards in their registration and complaints handling responsibilities. This ensures that only qualified professionals are authorised to practice thereby safeguarding public health and enhancing the quality of health care services in Bermuda.

The OCMO's role in safeguarding public health through a range of statutory and regulatory functions is invaluable. These responsibilities encompass advising government departments on health-related matters, facilitating legislated health functions

and supporting the essential regulatory work of statutory boards and councils. Additionally, the OCMO serves as Bermuda's public health focal point acting as the primary communications channel for health-related information from regional and international authorities such as the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization, the United Kingdom Health Security Agency, and the Caribbean Public Health Agency. Collaborations with these international partners provide Bermuda with access to facilities for developing and training public health professionals. Furthermore, these partnerships support and implement strategic plans and offer technical assistance for the prevention, mitigation and management of public health emergencies, including preparations for disaster management and extreme weather events.

Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation on the business unit line item, 31030, Health Care Registration and Regulations.

Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit—31040

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit (ESU), Madam Chairman, has been allocated \$842,000 for fiscal year 2025/26. The ESU monitors the prevalence of infectious diseases and select chronic noncommunicable diseases on the Island to mitigate their spread and impact. The unit also collects data from health care providers and laboratories conducting investigations into unusual disease occurrences. Integral to its functions, the ESU implements contact tracing and case management to prevent and/or control potential disease outbreaks.

Madam Chairman, in November 2024, Bermuda faced a significant public health challenge with the emergence of a measles outbreak. The two cases linked to international travel marked the first cases of measles since 1990. The ESU team successfully coordinated the national response, working alongside the Department of Health, health care professionals and community stakeholders. The ESU ensured the outbreak was successfully contained.

The ESU and the CMO also worked with international partners at the United Kingdom Health Security Agency, the Caribbean Public Health Agency and the Pan American Health Organization to ensure the national response was effective. The ESU undertook activities including rapid case identification, contact tracing, public awareness and a period of enhanced surveillance. The outbreak was declared ended in February 2025, and the response of the ESU team was described as impressive by international public health agencies.

In the wake of these measles outbreaks and these cases, the ESU will conduct an after-action review in May 2025 and this will focus on evaluating the response efforts, identifying gaps and opportunities for improving preparedness for any potential future out-

breaks. In 2024/25, 97 per cent of communicable disease investigations were initiated within the established time frames by ESU.

The Chairman: Minister, could you please just confirm what page you're on at the moment?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: I am reading from . . . excuse me. Line item 31040, which is on . . . [page] B-150.

The Chairman: Yes.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Do you have it, Madam Chairman? Page B-1540 [sic]?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Sorry, [page] B-150, line item 31040, Epidemiology and Surveillance.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: You are welcome.

Yes, line 31040, the Epidemiology and Surveillance Unit has been allocated \$842,000 for fiscal year 2025/26. The ESU monitors the prevalence of infectious diseases and select chronic non communicable diseases on the Island to mitigate their spread and impact. The unit also collects data from health care providers and laboratories conducting investigations into unusual disease occurrences. Integral to its functions, the ESU implements contact tracing and case management to prevent and/or control potential disease outbreaks.

As I indicated previously, Madam Chairman, 97 per cent of communicable diseases were investigated and initiated within the established time frames, as set by ESU. The ESU team regularly conducts community health surveys to assess and document the health status of Bermuda's population. One such initiative, which you have heard us speak about in this Honourable Chamber, is the STEPS to a Well Bermuda survey. This survey aims to provide a comprehensive snapshot of risk factors for chronic non-communicable diseases, like diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers.

The data collected from these surveys are instrumental in shaping public health priorities and informing strategic planning for the future. By understanding the prevalence of various health conditions and risk factors, policymakers can develop targeted interventions to improve the overall health of the population. The findings from the STEPS survey will also support Bermuda's ongoing health system reform efforts. In this regard, the ESU team will continue to lead the STEPS survey and anticipates completing the data collection process in 2025. Their efforts are

crucial in ensuring evidence-based decision-making to enhance health outcomes for our population.

Madam Chairman, in response to the rising prevalence of noncommunicable diseases in Bermuda, the OCMO is actively developing chronic disease clinical standards and guidelines. Collaborating closely with the UHC [universal health coverage] project management team, the CMO is facilitating the creation of clinical standards for the treatment of common diseases in Bermuda. This initiative involves health care professionals and specialists for both the public and private sectors, ensuring a comprehensive approach to chronic disease management.

The CMO further supports UHC efforts by chairing the Clinical Senate and participating as a member of the UHC Steering Committee, thereby contributing to the strategic direction and implementation of these initiatives. These efforts are critical to ensuring consistency, quality and equity in care across the health system. By establishing national clinical standards, the Office of the Chief Medical Office aims to align care practices with international best practices while adapting them to Bermuda's unique health care contexts.

This work will help reduce variations in treatment, promote evidence-based decision-making and improve patient outcomes, particularly for conditions such as diabetes and hypertension. As Bermuda continues to pursue universal health coverage, the development and adoption of standardised clinical guidelines will serve as a foundation for improving the effectiveness and efficiency of health services across the Island.

The ESU team has been instrumental in building capacity for health emergency responses in Bermuda. Their work ensures that this country can rapidly detect, assess and respond to health threats, minimising the impact on the population. ESU played a pivotal role in completing the Public Health Emergency Response Plan, which will be simulated in June of 2025.

The simulation will serve as a critical test of the plan's effectiveness allowing for the identification of gaps, refining of protocols and strengthening of interagency collaboration. The office works closely with the Health Disaster Coordination Unit to coordinate efforts and enhance Bermuda's preparedness for public health emergencies. This plan is scheduled to be updated biannually to ensure its relevance and effectiveness and underscores the Ministry's commitment to maintaining a high level of preparedness and resilience in the face of evolving public health risks.

Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation for business unit 31040, Epidemiology and Surveillance.

Port Health—31050

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now to line item 31050, which again can be found at page B-150, Port Health.

Madam Chairman, the Port Health business unit has a budget allocation of \$541,000 for fiscal year 2025/26. This unit will take on the responsibility of monitoring arriving travellers, conveyances and commodities at the airport and other ports of entry in order to provide controls against any infectious diseases arriving on the Island from overseas. These functions were previously under the Environmental Health programme but were moved to better align with the objectives of the OCMO.

The OCMO plays a pivotal role in protecting public health in Bermuda through its comprehensive pharmaceutical drugs control responsibilities. By registering pharmacies and overseeing the importance of prescription drugs, the OCMO ensures that controlled substances are brought into the country solely by authorised health care entities. This oversight is crucial in maintaining the integrity of Bermuda's health care system and protecting the public from potential harm.

Furthermore, Madam Chairman, the OCMO's commitment to compliance with international standards is evident in its adherence to the quotas for controlled drugs allocated to Bermuda. Regular reporting of import data to the International Narcotics Control Board (INCB) in Vienna underscores Bermuda's dedication to upholding global drug control conventions. Additionally, the OCMO ensures that all imported medications comply with the Pharmacy and Poisons Act 1979, which is a key piece of legislation that regulates the importation, sale, and distribution of drugs and poisons in Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, through these rigorous measures the OCMO not only ensures the safety and efficacy of pharmaceutical products available in Bermuda but also reinforces the Island's commitment to maintaining high standards in public health and regulatory practices.

This ends, Madam Chairman, my presentation on business unit 31050, Port Health. This ends my presentation on programme 2102, the Office of the Chief Medical Officer and this concludes my presentation on Head 21, Ministry of Health Headquarters.

HEAD 22—DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, turning now to Head 22, which can be found on the following pages, B-154 through B-157 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure in the Budget Book.

It gives me great pleasure again to present the budget for Head 22, the Department of Health, pages B-154 through B-157. The total current expenditure is estimated at \$36,764,000 for the 2025/26 budget year. This is an increase of 17 per cent, or \$5,464,000, compared with the original 2024/25 budget. The 2025/26 budget allocation for Head 22 also constitutes 15 per cent of the overall budget for the Ministry of Health.

Vision and Mission

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The Department of Health's vision is *Healthy people and healthy communities*. The department's mission is *To promote and protect optimum health and well-being in Bermuda*. Madam Chairman, 296 Department of Health officials—and I'm still on page B-157—work within 27 Public Health programmes to assume the health and well-being of the population. The 2025/26 estimate is an increase of 20 posts, or 7 per cent over post levels from budget year 2024/25. The total number of FTEs reflects the unfreezing of posts from the 2024 to 2027 fiscal year and the reorganisation of the Occupational Safety and Health, Port Health and Child Care Regulations and Child Health business units of the Department.

It is important to note, Madam Chairman, however, that the apparent increase in 2025/26 is artificial and represents the restoration of 14 posts that were deliberately unfunded in the previous budget year.

Madam Chairman, you will recall that in my budget brief from last year and the mid-year supplemental brief that the Ministry of Health committed to funding 14 posts so that they can be recruited in this budget year 2025/26.

Madam Chairman, the projected revenue for the Department of Health found at page B-156 is \$3,755,000 and that represents various fees, equipment and medication.

Madam Chairman, I will now address the first programme [under] Head [22], Administration, 2102 [sic]. Madam Chairman, I am at 2205.

The Chairman: Could you reference the page, please?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: I am looking at it now, Madam. Just a moment. [Page] B-155.

The following submissions are between pages B-154 and B-157.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Administration—2205

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, the Department of Health Programme, 2205, Administration comprises the business units of Administration, Health Promotion, Comprehensive School Health and Child Care Regulations and the Administration's programme consisting of 15 FTEs.

Are you with me? Okay. I'm turning now to line item 32230. That's still on page B-155.

This line item 32230 represents a \$995,000 budget item and this represents an increase of \$530,000. This business unit, Madam Chairman, is responsible for providing strategic direction, overseeing the recruitment and retention of a competent work-

force to ensure that the department delivers quality public health services to the community, management of the department's infrastructure (including facilities, vehicles and information technology), and budget monitoring and management. This business unit comprises only three FTEs and this is insufficient for one of the largest government departments.

There is a proposal under consideration to supplement human resources to better position the Department of Health for modern and strategic service delivery and for change management that will be driven by the transition to universal health coverage and an ageing population. This will include the addition of a Health Informatics Manager and a Health Planning and Performance Manager. These functions are key for population health management programmes that public health systems use to assure results when delivering services to make populations healthier, ultimately promising strong return on investment through improved population, health outcomes and efficient service delivery.

Madam Chairman, for the 2024/25 fiscal year, the department achieved a 92 per cent staff retention rate and is aiming for 95 per cent retention rate by reintroducing and continuing opportunities for recognition, like the long service awards, bonuses for exceptional performance and the revision of job descriptions to ensure equitable compensation. The department also continued providing training and development opportunities, including reassignments to projects and roles, to demonstrate public health competencies to sustain an optimal retention rate. The department is in the process of completing succession planning to address attrition over the next 10 years due to retirements, contract expirations, resignations and promotions, and provide opportunities for staff development and preparation of the next generation of leaders.

With a large percentage of contract workers, the department has made efforts to recruit and retain Bermudians for many of these specialised posts. These include bursary students and trainees in these hard-to-fill posts, including Public Health Nurses, Environmental Health Officers, Speech and Language Pathologists, Physiotherapists and Laboratory Analysts.

Madam Chairman, two Cabinet memos were approved in 2024/25 fiscal year, which included a reorganisation of the Environmental Health section and the Office of the Chief Nursing Officer. This resulted in new and redefined posts to ensure the modernisation of public health services. The department still has challenges in recruiting and filling posts within a timely manner and has introduced key performance indicators to measure the length of time for local and overseas recruitments. The Department of Employee and Organisational Development supports the Department of Health to address the backlog of recruitment, which has remnants of the COVID-19 pandemic, the aforementioned hiring freezes and natural attrition for a

large department to ensure that we meet the targeted outcomes.

Programme managers have also been trained as recruitment managers themselves to lead in the recruitment drives, thereby reducing the length of time of recruitment. In this way, additional resources are being engaged to bear on the ongoing need to recruit approximately 20 to 30 posts annually. To keep pace with turnover, two or three department of head recruitments must occur each month and more recruitments are needed to make headway into the pool of vacant posts that arose from the above-mentioned reasons.

Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation on business unit 32230, Administration.

Health Promotion—32240

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: I am still at page B-155, turning now to line item 32240, Health Promotion. The 2025/26 budget estimate for the Health Promotion and Wellness business unit of the Department of Health, listed at cost centre 32240 on page B-155 is \$773,000, and this is a 24 per cent increase over the year 2024/25 and [is] accounted for not only by salary uplifts but also additional modest funding for health promotion events and funds that will support adolescent mental health training.

Madam Chairman, the first strategic principle of the Bermuda Health Strategy is health promotion, which emphasises the importance of encouraging healthy living and preventative care as foundational elements of a strong and sustainable health system. The Health Promotion and Wellness Programme plays a central role in this effort, working to develop and implement public health policies, programmes and educational tools that empower individuals and communities to make informed choices about their health. In collaboration with public health partners, the programme focuses on raising awareness, reducing risk factors and fostering environments that support wellness through the lifespan.

A key element of successful health promotion is health literacy, the ability of individuals to obtain, understand and use health information to make appropriate decisions. Higher levels of health literacy are directly linked to better health outcomes as they enable individuals to navigate the health system more efficiently adhering to treatment regimes, engage in preventative behaviours and manage chronic conditions. Equally important is the promotion of behavioural change, which involves shifting long-standing habits related to diet, exercise, smoking, alcohol use and medication adherence. These behaviours are among the leading contributors to non-communicable diseases which are prevalent in Bermuda and pose significant burdens on individuals, families and the health system.

By investing in health promotion that strengthens health literacy and encourages positive behavioural change, the Ministry of Health is laying the groundwork for a healthier, more empowered population. These efforts not only improve individual well-being but also help to reduce the long-term demand on health care services. They help to lower system costs and support the broader goals of universal health coverage. In essence, health promotion is not just about preventing illness. It is about creating a culture of wellness where people are informed, engaged and supported in leading healthier lives.

Madam Chairman, the annual health promotion calendar is a product that the Health Promotion Programme uses to inform the public of the many health promoting activities and observances of the department and community health partners. In the 2024 calendar, each month focused on a healthy recipe using fruits and vegetables that are grown locally. I want to take a moment to recognise the late Pauleter Stevens, who was the Health Promotion Officer who was responsible for coordinating the production of the health promotion calendar. Pauleter was a true champion for public health and a stalwart with the Health Promotion and Wellness Office. Her passion and dedication were evident to every facet of her work, and she will be deeply missed by all those who knew her.

Madam Chairman, two of the Department of Health events of the calendar that Health Promotion annually sponsors are Public Health Week and Celebrating Well. The 2024 theme for Public Health Week was "Protecting, Connecting and Thriving: We are all Public Health." Each day of Public Health Week focused on a particular public health topic and identified ways to make a difference on that topic.

The topics were community, healthy neighbourhoods, violence prevention, sexual and reproductive health, mental health and food and nutrition. Activities related to each topic were offered to the community and a highlight was the "Let's Talk Mental Health" that featured a panel of local mental health professionals providing information and answering audience questions regarding mental well-being.

Madam Chairman, the Celebrating Wellness Week is an annual event geared towards increasing awareness and promoting measures to address the epidemic of non-communicable diseases which continue to severely impact the health economy and development of Bermuda. The 2024 focus was "Power Through Collective Action: Good Health is Our Right," and this event featured community partners who provided information, health screenings and activities to promote healthy living. To combat noncommunicable diseases, we need to make commitments to live a healthy lifestyle by moving more every day, choosing water, eating more vegetables and protecting our mental well-being. It is important to note that we must work together as a community if we are going to promote mental well-being and tackle the chronic diseases

and noncommunicable diseases, modifiable risk factors for diseases like diabetes, heart disease and cancer. The goal of the Department of Health is to reduce the number of Bermuda residents who are at risk of chronic disease.

In 2024, Madam Chairman, the Department of Health, in collaboration with the Bermuda National Athletics Association, the Ministry of Social Development and Seniors and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports hosted the second annual Move More Bermuda Senior Games. The Move More Bermuda Senior Games is part of the Department of Health's Move More Bermuda campaign, which was launched in 2011, and these initiatives aim to promote the importance of incorporating physical activity into our daily lives. We celebrated people 50 years and older who enjoy being active and enjoy a little healthy competition. The Move More Bermuda Senior Games provided our participants with various track and field events that suit their abilities and preferences.

There are many benefits for those persons over 50 and having an active lifestyle. According to the National Institute of Ageing, staying active can help an individual to maintain and improve their strength, have more energy, improve their balance, manage and prevent some diseases, sleep better, reduce stress and anxiety, reach or maintain a healthy weight, control their blood pressure and perk up their mood. More than 50 local competitors participated in the event, and it is scheduled to take place again in June of 2025. I would invite all Honourable Members 50 and older to join with me as we participate in the Move More Senior Games.

Madam Chairman, continuing the work of destigmatising mental health, in 2024, there were 32 professionals who formed the second cohort of the Community Adolescent Mental Health Training Programme. The cohort was comprised of professionals from the Department of Education, the Department of Child and Family Services and the Department of Health. Participants in this programme learned about stigma, completed the youth mental health first aid course which was facilitated by Dr. Judith Bruce Golding of Mental Health First Aid [England] and local instructors Dr. Allison Daniels and Ms. Yosefyah Spence. They learned about adolescent development, signs and symptoms of common disabling mental health problems and crisis situations, when and how to refer students and how to promote anti-stigma in the school environment. Several trainings are scheduled for 2025.

Madam Chairman, additionally, in 2024 we commissioned an instructor training course through Mental Health First Aid [England] and we trained five local professionals and three from two Overseas Territory (UKOTs) islands to be instructors in youth mental health first aid, thereby strengthening our local capacity to offer more sessions. These sessions empower adults to recognise the signs of mental health chal-

lenges in young people and respond with appropriate support. The inclusion of participation from other UK Overseas Territories also fosters regional collaboration and knowledge sharing, helping to build a stronger, more resilient mental health network across our island communities.

Madam Chairman, the Health Promotion team started the refresh of the Well Bermuda Health Promotion Strategy, with assistance from the UK Health Security Agency. The refresh commenced with a desktop review of the strategy and related documents, such as an action plan, progress reports and presentations, Government policies and other related Bermuda Government strategies. This was completed by interviews with relevant stakeholders in Bermuda, including those who were directly involved with the Well Bermuda Strategy and those whose work is related but have yet to be actively involved. The review aimed to understand progress and achievements in data across the objectives and priorities of the Well Bermuda Strategy, to understand the challenges reported by stakeholders in delivering the core objectives and to collate views of future priorities for health improvement and health promotion.

And finally, Madam Chairman, the Health Abets Podcast was launched in April of 2024, and the aim of this podcast is to discuss everything from A to Z on healthy living with the mission of empowering, informing, motivating Bermuda's residents. Currently, the podcast episodes are featured on the Department of Health's Facebook and YouTube channels.

Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation on business line item 32240, Health Promotion.

Comprehensive School Health—32265

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now to line item 32265, Comprehensive School Health and that can be found again at page B-155 on the Budget Book. And this is also referred to, Madam Chairman, as Healthy Schools. The line item budget for this is \$170,000, which is a significant increase from previously \$157,000. The Healthy Schools Programme promotes health in schools through government departments such as Education, National Drug Control and Mirrors, Child and Family Services, community health partners such as the Bermuda Diabetes Association, Bermuda Cancer and Health, the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute and the Department of Health school-based programme including Child and School Health, Nutrition Services, Oral Health, Community Rehabilitation Services and Environmental Health.

The Healthy Schools Programme collaborates with the schools to implement the 10 components of health and ensure integration of those components with academics. The 10 components include physical education, nutrition education, mental and emotional health, health services, healthy environment, health promotion for staff, substance abuse prevention, fami-

ly and community involvement, health and safety education and school policy and the environment. In 2024/25, 80 per cent of . . . 25 of 31 schools took part in the programme, adopting the 10 components. Schools receive feedback about what health looks like on their campuses and tips for making improvements. And each spring schools compete in a self-assessment that reflects the 10 components of health and how they comply with this year's health components. And then the progress of schools is celebrated at the annual Healthy Schools Awards ceremony held in May. And that was actually held last week. So honourable colleagues will probably hear more about that and the schools that participated.

So, Madam Chairman, in compliance with the school nutrition policy, the Healthy Schools team is working more closely with the Department of Education to limit all fast-food deliveries to schools for any reason and fast food-focused fundraising to no more than once a month. Healthy Schools has provided schools with recommendation for non-food related fundraisers as well as rewards. And all public and private schools have at least one filtered bottle filling station and/or a filtered water system making fresh, clean water the easiest choice. Healthy Schools also supports and recognises those schools that choose to implement their own water-only policy.

Madam Chairman, in 2025/26, Healthy Schools will continue to encourage schools to grow edible plants, fruits and vegetables. Additionally, to help students understand their own health-related fitness, Healthy Schools will continue to work with the Department of Education's Curriculum Officer for Physical Education and Health to improve the completion of the FitnessGram assessments for P5 to S4 students in terms one and three. Meetings are planned to encourage schools to integrate small bursts of physical activity throughout the day in the classroom and to present strategies on how they can implement the daily mile with students and staff each morning.

A healthy lifestyle assembly is provided by Healthy Schools in as many preschools, schools and camps as possible that includes fun and interactive discussions about the importance of adopting, practicing and maintaining healthy habits and lifestyles. Healthy Schools has also designed a Wellness Wednesday calendar that preschools and schools can use to highlight a healthy habit each Wednesday. Students and staff are also encouraged to practice the healthy habit throughout the week. Healthy Schools has also developed a school health policy manual that schools can reference when they have a question or concern related to safety and health at school. All schools have received copies and are due to receive the 3rd edition.

Madam Chairman, for the environmental component, Healthy Schools and the Department of Education's facilities management in partnership with

the Environmental Health Department will carry on working closely with school custodians and cleaning companies that clean schools to raise school's environmental cleanliness standards through frequent cleanliness inspections and . . . they are monitoring tools and provide feedback to each school custodian for improvement.

In addition, since 2020, Healthy Schools has been working with the public and private schools to improve compliance with the Bermuda Schools asthma policy and ensure optimal environmental health in schools by having schools reduce clutter in classrooms and other school areas and eliminate the use of scented plug-in air fresheners and aerosol sprays.

Madam Chairman, since the summer of 2021, Healthy Schools has been coordinating out-of-school camps during all school breaks and after school programmes throughout the school year. To ensure children's safety and health, Healthy Schools provides support and public health updates, monitor safety and health standards, and conduct surveillance visits as needed. Discussions are planned to begin setting standards for camps to ensure the safety and health of all children enrolled in out of school camps and after school programmes.

Madam Chairman, finally, during 2025, the Health Promotion team plans to conduct the World Health Organisation's Global School Health Survey as part of its ongoing efforts to better understand and support the health and well-being of young people. This internationally standardised survey collects crucial data on health behaviours and protective factors among students, including physical activity, diet, mental health, substance abuse and exposure to violence. The insights gained are vital for the development and implementation of evidence-based health programmes, policies and initiatives tailored to the specific needs of Bermuda's youth. By identifying emerging trends and risk factors early, the survey enables targeted prevention strategies, promotes long-term health and strengthens disease prevention and efforts within this key population group.

This ends my presentation on business unit line item 32265, Comprehensive School Health.

Turning now to 32290, still on page B-155, is Child Care Regulations.

The Chairman: Minister, before you continue, can I just remind the listening audience what they're hearing here? Thank you.

Listening audience, this is a reminder that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are now in debate on the Ministry of Health being led by the Honourable Minister Kim Wilson, JP, MP, and we are under the Head of Department of Health.

Minister Wilson, thank you.

Child Care Regulations, 32290

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you. Madam Chairman, this is the budget as it relates to Child Care Regulations or the CCR business unit. And again, I am on page B-155 and their budget is \$510,000, and this increase of 38 per cent or \$140,000 is entirely due to staffing and budgeting for four posts to sustain the programme.

This business unit is responsible for the registration certificates of day care providers and licences for day care centres. For the fiscal year 2024/25, Madam Chairman, 85 per cent of day care providers and day care centres received the S.T.A.R.S. inspections and those were completed. The CCR team was able to investigate complaints within the allocated time frame (48 hours) for concerns for children's safety and five days for non-safety risk complaints. This was due to clear procedural guidelines and productive partnerships with the relevant agencies when conducting joint investigations. Following the inspection period, the CCR team created focused professional development workshops to help address areas of growth for day care centres and day care providers. These workshops, in addition to access to pre-recorded professional development sessions, assisted with meeting the target of offering the total hours of recommended professional development for the day care providers and the day care centres.

Madam Chairman, our young children deserve the highest quality of care and education, and the field of early childhood education is constantly evolving. Continuous learning is not only essential for professional growth, but keeping up with the advancements in the field allows providers and centre staff to refine their skills, expand their knowledge and become more effective in their roles, thereby increasing the quality of care. Knowing how important professional development is to those working with children, the Child Care Regulations team started the developing professionals training in 2024. These three monthly professional development training sessions available to all providers and centre staff allow participants to gain knowledge and skills on a variety of topics based on trends observed by the [CCR] staff or based on the recommendations of participants, and we look forward to expanding the list of presentations as the series grows.

Madam Chairman, the second cohort of the Child Care certificate programme commenced in September 2024, and we are excited to see persons interested in a career in the field of early childhood, taking advantage of this opportunity at the Bermuda College. These participants can apply the knowledge and skills that they have gained in the classroom during their practicums in our four- or five-star rated centres. Without the collaboration between CCR, the Bermuda College and Department of Education, this second

cohort would not have been possible, and this is a win-win for all parties involved.

Madam Chairman, there continues to be an increase in providers and centres that not only meet the minimum requirements by law, but choose to exceed them by implementing the best practice standards which are evaluating using an inspection tool referred to as the S.T.A.R.S. The S.T.A.R.S. inspection is a comprehensive tool looking at areas such as supervision, health, safety, learning environment and materials, caregiver competencies and parent/family engagements to list a few. The S.T.A.R.S. tool allows the officers to evaluate various aspects of child care while providing support and guidance throughout the process.

The aim is to ensure safe and enriching environments for our children to grow and to develop where quality continues to be raised. The public is now able to access a list of all day care providers and day care centres that are licenced and registered with the Department of Health by parish and S.T.A.R.S. rating. This is in addition to a summary report that allows parents to see how the provider or care centre performed on their S.T.A.R.S. inspections in [20]22 and [20]23. The summary report lists the individual areas inspected and how well they performed, and this tool is a starting point for parents when considering the best placement for their child.

The CCR website also has a checklist and a booklet to assist parents with what to look for and what questions to ask to help them make an informed decision.

Madam Chairman, the CCR team continues to make improvements to its programme using the data from the relationship-building and collaborative collaboration survey. The data shows that the team has made gains in several areas and the work to collaborate continues. The CCR team is committed to work together with the sector to achieve its mission: Happy, healthy and safe child care.

Madam Chairman, this ends my presentation on business line item 32290, Child Care Regulations, and this ends my presentation on programme 2205, Administration at page B-155.

Community Health, 2201

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The second programme I would like to present is under Head 22 and it is Community Health and that's at page B-154, line item 2201.

The Department of Health's programme again comprises 13 business units and it is again at page B-154, and I will go through those units and the total budgetary allotment for those 13 business units is \$26,741,000. This represents an increase, Madam Chairman, of 15 per cent over the 2024/25 original budget and is on par with the salaries uplift that's already been previously mentioned.

The budget units for the Community Health programme consist of 221 FTEs. Starting with line item 32000, Lefroy [House] Care Community and 32015 Sylvia Richardson Care Facility and again, Madam Chairman, I am still on page B-154.

The Department of Health operates two exemplary long-term care facilities. The Sylvia Richardson Care Facility in St. George's and the Lefroy House Care Community in Sandys. The 2025/26 budget estimate for Lefroy Health Care Facility listed at business unit 32000 on page B-154 is \$5,321,000. The 2025/26 budget estimate for Sylvia [Richardson] Care Facility listed at business unit 32015 represents \$6,000,212. These amounts are increased by 6 [per cent] and 4 per cent, respectively, from the original 2024/25 budget amount.

Both facilities, Madam Chairman, provide care and promote independence and optimal health for persons age 65 years and over who have significant nursing and care needs requiring 24-hour facility-based care. The two facilities are residential care communities providing comprehensive medical, nursing, environmental and recreational services to the resident and respite care elders. Our aim is to maintain and improve quality of life for elders and their loved ones. The demand for nursing beds continues to far exceed capacity. Sylvia Richardson and Lefroy House collaborate with Ageing and Disability Services, community health and the social work teams from the Department of Health and the Bermuda Hospitals Board to prioritise and fill the vacant beds as they become available.

At Lefroy House, infrastructure projects continue to improve and optimise the living space for elders. The kitchen, dining hall and storage areas have been completely refurbished and the staff lounge and toilet facility renovation is complete. Windows and doors have been replaced in the administration and main buildings. The entire roof of the main building was recovered and waterproofed. Replacement of the internal sealing material in the communal areas is underway. With the completion of these major works the restricted operating licence has been lifted with the Regulator allowing full occupancy of which the premises can have—which is a total of 32.

Respite care will recommence once the shipment of new beds is received in the weeks ahead. Day care can no longer be facilitated due to the increased level of care that the residents and elders require, given that over 80 per cent of the residents have dementia and that their client profile creates its own staffing constraints. The activities programme has been restructured to accommodate the needs of the current clientele as we aim to provide elders with meaningful engagement.

Finally, educational opportunities have been facilitated so that the staff have the required skill set to continue to provide a high level of care. General repairs and maintenance, at Lefroy maintain a safe and

comfortable environment for our resident elders and staff. However, a new build is planned due to the demand for beds. Plans to build a new Lefroy House at a new location are still moving forward as architectural firms have been invited to submit proposals for a design competition for a new build. Three firms have been shortlisted for the conceptual design phase and the winning firm is to receive \$70,000 and the opportunity to design the new Lefroy facility. The deadlines for the submissions of this competition were 2 May of this year.

Madam Chairman, the Sylvia Richardson Care Facility, has been accommodating at-risk seniors referred from emergency admission via Ageing and Disability Services, investigations and proposals for increasing the capacity of Sylvia Richardson Care Facility, leveraging the existing staff and facilities to increase the long-term care capacity in Bermuda are underway.

Madam Chairman, maintaining the required minimal staffing levels 24-hours per day, whilst ensuring coverage is found for staff who are out on sick leave and vacation have resulted in significant overtime expenditure. The operating costs have increased significantly, especially the cost of supplies, food and utilities. Additionally, the repair/replacement of equipment and maintenance costs have increased. New beds have been purchased and are being shipped. Overall, the performance measures indicate a positive trend in preventative care and a higher percentage of residents receiving physicals and a low incidence of severe pressure sores requiring treatment or hospitalisation. However, there are areas needing improvement, such as the need for educational initiatives for key preventative measures like reducing urinary tract infections, falls and pressure sores.

Madam Chairman, efforts were made to survey family members of the residents of Sylvia Richardson Care Facility with phone calls made to connect with relatives to ascertain their feedback on the facility's service delivery. However, only 12 out of 42 family members completed the survey. While some families indicated they would participate later, feedback from the 12 respondents showed mixed opinions. Approximately one-third felt communication could be improved to better involve and inform them about their family members well-being. On a positive note, about one-third expressed satisfaction with the care provided by Sylvia Richardson Care Facility, noting the clean environment and that their loved ones appeared well cared for. Conversely, around 14 per cent of family members suggested that certain staff members would benefit from more training and dealing with elderly residents with dementia.

Madam Chairman, ongoing education and training are critical to enhancing the skills and knowledge of the nursing home staff. Staff development has a direct correlation with improved patient care, resident satisfaction and overall necessary skills

to respond efficiently to the evolving needs of the residents, particularly in an era where health care is consistently changing. Recent studies have shown that a well-trained staff is essential in reducing errors in health care and improving the quality of life for residents. Thus, this increased allocation is not merely an expense but a strategic investment in the nursing homes foundational elements. The Sylvia Richardson Care Facility management and staff are committed to enhancing the quality of care through staff education and necessary physical improvements. With the increase in the education budget and the attention to furnishings and equipment needs, the nursing home is positioning itself not only to maintain its high standards, but also to an exceptional living environment for the residents and ensure that staff are fully prepared to meet the evolving needs.

This ends my presentation with business line item 32000, Lefroy [House] Care Community and 32015, Sylvia Richardson Care Facility.

Community Health Administration, 32010
and Community Health, 32060

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Madam Chairman, turning to 32010, Community Health Administration and 32060 Community Health.

The 2025/26 budget estimates for business line items. 32010 Community Health Administration and 32060 Community Health, which [funds] the nursing team—we are still at page B-156—and represent \$1.573 million and \$2.301 million, respectively.

Community Health nurses' budget for 2025/26 will increase by \$475,000, which represents a 26 per cent. The Community Health Administration Business unit consists of administration support and health education. The cost centre provides administrative support for the programme for preventative and curative services, including child, school, travel, immunisation, community nursing, sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, clinical laboratory, rehabilitation, speech and language pathology, as well as two long-term care facilities and vaccine storage, medical office supplies and logistics. The programme assures coordination and conditions in which the facilities can operate safely, effectively and efficiently for clients and staff.

Madam Chairman, options to redesign the Hamilton Health Centre are being explored to modernise and provide the services needed, particularly for persons with disabilities, mobility, adaptive equipment, access, safety and health functionality, and privacy considerations. The recruitment of new staff anticipated with the Community Health Administration reorganisation requires capacity for redesigned workspaces to enhance the public health programme.

The risk assessment revealed privacy as one of the leading concerns in all clinical areas requiring strengthening. Additionally, the Mangrove Bay Clinic's renovation plans have progressed slowly, but it is at

the general contractor selection stage. Vehicular replacement included four electric vehicles to the fleet with good effect for teams within the Community Health section.

Madam Chairman, the social work team remains in demand, with one additional FTE position filled. In 2024, there were a total of 109 new referrals in addition to the existing case log. Of the new referrals, 65 per cent of the clients were discharged following resolution of the primary issue. This is reflective of the team's effective and efficient role to help meet the increased needs of the community and connect persons with the appropriate services. The main reasons for social worker referrals are financial hardship, care support and care home placement assistance. Case complexities are related to a lack of health insurance, limited access to essential medications, and the inability to secure affordable housing. Collaborations with NGOs to address homelessness continue.

Madam Chairman, the predominance of the referrals has been received through the adult preventative health community nursing programme, which has been instrumental in identifying persons in need. There were 1,851 service events, which included home and office visits, collaboration and correspondence with other agencies, family correspondence and transportation assistance. In addition, biweekly participation in long-term care referrals team meetings occurred to ensure an efficient admissions process to the Government's long-term care facilities and for seniors.

The community health nursing team comprises a team of highly skilled, dedicated and community nursing staff. Currently the team operates with only five full-time nurses and one temporary relief nurse. To address the current staffing deficiencies and strengthen our capacity to meet the growing health care demands of our community, we have recruitment drives ongoing. Another recruitment drive will be conducted this year to on board two more full-time public health nurses. Despite the challenges posed by the existing staffing levels, our team has consistently delivered quality, professional care, maintaining a patient-centred and evidence-based health care approach.

Madam Chairman, the use of Penelope software for case management and electronic documentation reflects a commitment to staying technologically advanced and is aligned with the Government's initiative to be paperless. Numerous efforts have been made to streamline processes and make referral forms and policies available online for other stakeholders to utilise. Although this is still a work in progress, completion before the end of the fiscal year is anticipated.

Madam Chairman, the initiatives undertaken such as the Adults Preventative Clinic and the HEARTS initiative demonstrate a proactive approach to promoting healthy living practices and addressing

prevalent health issues like hypertension, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The team continues to provide excellent teaching to those within our services. Throughout the 2024/25 year, 54 acute preventative clinics were held once weekly with 566 patients seen for new and follow-up appointments, wound care, education, blood pressure and glucose monitoring as well as other types of education. In February 2025, the clinic days increased, adding an additional half-day for adult health clinics. The increase in patients, clinic days and complexity of cases highlights the need for additional adult health services, improved access to families that can meet these needs, advanced nurse practitioners and programmes for the adult population in Bermuda. The addition of a Community Health social worker has been a necessary asset to the team due to the number of complex social issues being encountered.

Madam Chairman, as Bermuda's population continues to age and experience an increasing prevalence of chronic illnesses, the demand for health care services across acute community and home settings is projected to continue growing. While the need for long-term care, skilled personal home care, respite and palliative care rises there is a shortage of health care professionals to meet these demands. Addressing these demands requires a shift from the traditional physician centred model of care to one that leverages the diverse skill set of a range of trained and quality health professionals, including advanced practice nurses. This year, the Ministry of Health will seek to expand the role of advanced practice nurses, as a part of the health care workforce strategy.

Madam Chairman, advanced practice nurses are trained at the master's or doctoral degree level and are certified to deliver care within their competencies. Advanced practice nurses with training and qualification and clinical assessment and prescribing have an essential role in health care delivery, including the assessment, diagnosis, treatment and management of patients across various settings.

Madam Chairman, advanced practice nurses play a pivotal role in increasing equity, access to quality primary care services, especially for health promotion, disease prevention and management of chronic conditions. In Bermuda's health care system, there are significant opportunities to optimise the role of advanced practice nurses, particularly by allowing them to practice autonomously, including prescribing medication within their areas of expertise. Additionally, collaborative practices with advanced practice nurses have been demonstrated to improve patient outcomes whilst alleviating physician workload, reduced wait times, improving patient flow and enhancing efficiency. The Ministry acknowledges the need to ensure appropriate accountability and infrastructure to support the integration of advanced practice nurses into the health care system and to update legislation to protect the title of advanced practice nurses and regu-

late their practice. And we are committed to consulting with regular health professionals to discuss the way forward.

Madam Chairman, the HEARTS initiative continues to advance, with 119 clients on the registry who have attended the clinic since commencing in 2022. Much effort and training has been conducted to ensure adequate follow-up patient education and support for these those participating. The community health nurses have also ensured that our homebound population continues to be serviced and seen through home visits, reducing the burden of acute care services. There have been 6,916 home visits conducted within the community, providing wound care management, maintaining client independence and offering additional support with health care needs after hospital discharge, education, long-term care assessments and other health care management needs.

A significant number of clients associated with two or more agencies, and a substantial portion of the client list requires a high level of support within the community. Madam Chairman, 31 per cent of the community nursing caseload receives financial assistance and finds it challenging to meet their basic needs.

Madam Chairman, patient surveys have been conducted showing 100 per cent satisfaction with the timely responses of the Community nursing team and accessibility. It is particularly noteworthy that clients reported being either very satisfied or extremely satisfied with the services provided, reflecting a high level of patient containment.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. If we could take a short break here. We are at the halfway mark, two hours into the four-hour debate on the Ministry of Health. We are now going to change out the chair and we welcome to the Chair, MP Scott Pearman of consistency 22.

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Members, and the listening public.

We are listening to the debate for the Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures for the budget year 2025/26. This is two hours into a four-hour debate, and we have been listening to the Honourable Minister Kim Wilson, JP, MP, Minister of Health.

Minister, you have the floor. Please continue.

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

Mr. Chairman, throughout the year, the team has participated in 16 health promotion activities and educational sessions, conducting health screenings and referring clients according to their needs, demonstrating a comprehensive and proactive approach to health maintenance. The team also collaborated

throughout the hurricane season and was readily available with staff attending the hurricane shelter at CedarBridge Academy last August.

Mr. Chairman, that ends the presentation of business unit line item 32010, Community Health Administration and 32060, Community Health.

Child Health, 32030

Expanded Programmes on Immunisation, 32070

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, turning now to 32030 Child Health and 32070 Expanded Programmes on Immunisation. I am still reading from page B-154 of the Budget Book, in which Child Health listed at 32030, received \$3,124,000 and the Child Health budget has increased by \$49,000 or 2 per cent. The Child Health Unit consists of four sections: immunisation, child health, school health including asthma education, and travel health.

These sections, Mr. Chairman, provide preventative and curative health services for infants, children, adolescents, adults, seniors and the travelling public. These are conducted through various clinics, schools and community settings. Services include health and developmental assessments, screening, referrals, treatment of minor ailments, health education, health promotion, anticipatory guidance, adult and senior immunisations and travel consultations for travel to high-risk areas.

Mr. Chairman, Bermuda's Expanded Programme of Immunisation (or EPI) plans for the needs of vaccines in the child, adult, senior and travel health immunisation schedules. EPI procures most of its vaccines through the Pan American Health Organization Revolving Fund. This process assures safe, effective and quality vaccines. Universal access for many of the vaccines is provided through the public and private sectors. As the Department of Health undergoes a structural reorganisation, the EPI programme under its business unit 32070, will work across programmes for the needs of individuals at all stages of life, and this will impact business unit 32030, Child Health, as funds will need to be reallocated to 32070, the Expanded Programme in Immunisation. And this programme has been funded for \$1,003,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Expanded Programme of Immunisations in Bermuda provides equitable and high-quality immunisation services to the population, particularly targeting infants, children, pregnant women, adults, seniors, travellers and vulnerable groups. The programme aligns with global immunisation targets and public health guidelines established by the WHO and the Pan American Health Organization. The EPI programme continues to play a critical role in ensuring the health and well-being of Bermuda's population, by delivering essential vaccines to prevent communicable diseases and prevent the importation and transmission of diseases.

Post COVID-19, Mr. Chairman, the declining vaccination rate have highlighted the importance of sustained immunisation efforts. Public concerns and misinformation continue to affect immunisation, particularly for the MMR (the measles, mumps and rubella) and booster vaccines. Notably, the measles outbreak in November 2024 underscored the importance of maintaining high immunisation rates and rapid response mechanisms.

Public Health Officers swiftly implemented outbreak containment measures, including emergency vaccination clinics, public awareness campaigns and private sector involvement. This resulted in coverage of the first dose of the MMR achieving the target of 95 per cent by the end of 2024. However, children who are appropriately vaccinated by two years of age remain below the target of 75 per cent, despite the primary series of whooping cough, tetanus, pertussis, diphtheria, polio and Haemophilus influenza achieving 90 per cent.

This requires more work through the vaccine hesitancy strategy to develop trust and collaboration with the community, key leaders and health professionals. Strengthening the information system and timely reporting has realised popular and positive results through the use of electronic immunisation registry.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Health administered 814 flu doses across the eastern, central and western areas of the Island during the annual Flu Express. Clients were able to get fast-tracked if they registered and made payments online, which improved customer experience. The total flu vaccines given between October 2024 to January 2025 was 1,691. Distribution to private facilities was 1,461. A total of 6,000 doses were procured and 2,790 doses were distributed. This does not include what was imported by the private sector.

Mr. Chairman, I will now turn to the other three sections of 32030, Child Health Programme. The Child Health continues to face human resource challenges but is actively recruiting in all areas to maintain high quality standards and services for child health and school health services. Despite this challenge, the Child Health Programme has achieved positive outcomes with 88 per cent of parents of newborns receiving home visits within 14 days of birth and all (100 per cent) of mothers being screened for maternal well-being at six weeks. Health visitors who are advanced practice nurses are essential in delivering health services to families with children under five. Feedback from the First 1,000 Days Integrated Pathway community survey emphasised the need for additional antenatal support. And in response health visits have begun offering antenatal home visits as a universal service to pregnant women. Feedback has been positive so far and visitors plan to continue the service to meet the community's needs.

Additionally, initiatives to promote and increase breastfeeding rates have yielded positive results, with the exclusive breastfeeding rate at six weeks rising to 44 per cent, up seven percentage points from the previous year. Activities such as antenatal breastfeeding classes promotion during Breastfeeding Awareness Month and collaboration with King Edward Memorial Hospital and the National Breastfeeding Committee will continue to attain favourable results.

Mr. Chairman, the School Health Programme is still operating with fewer staff than the full-time equivalent capacity. Despite these challenges, school nurses have diligently conducted health screenings and assessments for five-year-olds. This dedication is evident in the 96 per cent screening rate for the entire five-year-old cohort. In the prior school year, 48 per cent of school health assessments were completed, an increase of 19 percentage points over the previous year and 100 per cent of school health assessments were offered to all public schools. Last year, 21 per cent of five-year-olds were identified as overweight or obese, an increase of 1 per cent over the previous year. Addressing childhood obesity remains a key focus for school nurses, who are dedicated to promoting healthy habits and carrying out the necessary interventions.

Mr. Chairman, the School Health Programme collaborated with the Bermuda Public School system to engage in the signature discovery sessions at Whitney Institute Middle School. Through interactive session, students explored nursing as a potential career path. This is in alignment with one of Bermuda Health Strategy 2022-2027 principal themes: *Strengthening Our Healthcare Workforce*. The school Asthma Education Programme is also actively gathering student asthma registries from all schools on the Island, and this initiative focuses on educating school staff about asthma management and providing personalised teaching sessions for students who have missed school due to asthma.

Mr. Chairman, finally, Travel Health. Travel Health services continue to be in demand for the community, with 644 consultations in 2024/25, which represents an increase of 283 consults from the previous year, likely a change in trend due to post COVID-19. These consultations offer essential guidance on preventing waterborne, foodborne and vector-borne illnesses, equipping Bermuda residents with the knowledge they need to protect their health abroad. By providing this crucial service, Travel Health aims to reduce the risk of infectious diseases being brought back to Bermuda ensuring the safety and well-being of our community. Looking ahead, this unit will continue to adapt to evolving trends and providing timely, relevant services that help safeguard the health of our residents both at home and abroad.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation for business unit 32030, Child Health and 32070, Expanded Programme on Immunisation.

Sexual and Reproductive Health, 32040

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now, Mr. Chairman to line item 32040, still at page B-154, Sexual and Reproductive Health. Mr. Chairman, this was awarded the sum of \$985,000. Savings are being achieved by delaying the recruitment of a vacant administrative post for part of the year.

Mr. Chairman, the Sexual and Reproductive Health Programme consists of two sub programmes: maternal health and communicable diseases. Sexual health requires a positive and respectful approach to sexuality and sexual relationships, and the programme addresses this through high quality information and education, treatment and interventions.

Mr. Chairman, women make up approximately 54 per cent of Bermuda's population. Of these, more than three-quarters, at any one time, want to either prevent or achieve pregnancy. It is crucial that women have a choice and control over reproduction to ensure pregnancies are planned and wanted, health is optimised before and during pregnancy and women who do not wish to have children can effectively prevent becoming pregnant. To reach these goals, the sexual and reproductive clinics offer comprehensive family planning services to the underinsured and uninsured populations at low cost.

Mr. Chairman, a planned pregnancy is likely to be a healthier one, as unplanned pregnancies represent a missed opportunity to optimise pre-pregnancy health. For this reporting period referrals for termination of pregnancy had decreased by 11 per cent in comparison to the previous year. Women seeking the service range in age from 17 to 38 and despite the declining number of referrals, young women remain the group at the highest risk of unplanned pregnancies. Outcomes for young parents and their children are still disproportionately suboptimum, contributing to intergenerational inequity with increased costs to the education, health and welfare services. Family planning is important for women of reproductive age, with contraception providing a longer opportunity to address any health issues in advance of a pregnancy, leading to better health outcomes. There was a 3 per cent increase this year in the number of women accessing Sexual Reproductive Health clinics for contraception and family planning information.

Mr. Chairman, the World Health Organization recommends a minimum of four antenatal visits as more and better-quality contacts with health professionals will help to facilitate timely detection of risk, reduce complications and lead to healthy outcomes. In Bermuda, 74 per cent of women attending Sexual Reproductive services had four or more antenatal contacts, of which 42 per cent were transferred care

to OB/GYNs once they acquired health insurance, 5 per cent left to deliver abroad, 2 per cent miscarried and 2 per cent had pre-term labour. These figures underscore the importance of continued efforts to enhance access to antenatal care and ensure that all expectant mothers receive the support they need to achieve the best possible outcomes for themselves and their babies.

Mr. Chairman, the human papilloma virus, or HPV vaccine, has proven to be a highly effective tool in reducing the incidence of anti-genital cancers and genital warts in both men and women. By preventing the spread of high-risk strains of HPV vaccines significantly lowers the risk of developing several types of cancer, including cervical, anal and throat cancers, as well as genital warts. Since the introduction of the HPV vaccine through the Sexual Health clinics, 82 per cent of females and 18 per cent of males have received the vaccine. This initiative primarily targets individuals who may not have received the vaccine during adolescence, ensuring that even later in life they are protected from the associated risk of HPV infection. As we continue to promote this vaccine, it is essential to recognise its long-term benefits, not just in terms of cancer prevention, but also in reducing health care costs associated with the treatment of HPV-related diseases. Increased uptake of the vaccine is in both genders will help prevent future cases of HPV-related cancers, leading to healthier outcomes for the community overall.

Mr. Chairman, sexually transmitted infections including HIV pose significant public health challenges and can lead to severe long-term health complications if left undiagnosed and untreated. These complications may include infertility, chronic pain, cancer and increased susceptibility to other infections. In the past year, a total of 4,152 STI screening tests were conducted through the Bermuda Sexual and Reproductive Health Clinic at a cost exceeding \$70,000. These screenings are a vital part of our public health strategy aimed at detecting infections early and ensuring timely intervention.

Mr. Chairman, of the individual screened 1,348 people received comprehensive STI testing, with 35 per cent found to require treatment. This significant percentage highlights the importance of making screening service accessible, confidential and stigma free. By identifying infections early we are not only able to prevent further health deterioration in individuals, but also significantly reduce the risk of onward transmission within the community. Moreover, early detection and treatment are essential tools in curbing the spread of STIs and managing and mitigating the broader impact on public health. Ongoing investment in STI screening, public education, and access to treatment ensures that individuals are empowered to take control of their sexual health.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on line item 32040, Sexual and Reproductive Health.

Physiotherapy, 32080
Occupational Therapy, 32120

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now to line item 32080, Physiotherapy and 32120 Occupational Therapy and I am still on page B-154, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The 2025/26 budget estimates for the respective line items are \$1,284,000 and \$1,164,000, respectively. Both budget amounts have increased by 6 [per cent] and 7 per cent, respectively, year over year from 2024/25 original estimates.

Mr. Chairman, under the remit of Community Rehabilitation Services, Occupational Therapy and Physiotherapy Services aimed to maximise the functional potential of children with delays in normal motor development or people with physical movement challenges. This rehabilitation service which spans the age spectrum, is organised into three teams: early interventions, school-based therapy and seniors. The staff is comprised of nine registered occupational therapists and eight registered physiotherapists, one coordinator and one team administrative assistant who is shared with the Speech and Language Pathology Service.

To strengthen Bermuda's health care workforce, trainee physiotherapist positions have been initiated. One position is already filled and recruitment for the second position is underway. Furthermore, investments in professional development have led to all paediatric therapies and most adult therapists obtaining certification in neurodevelopment treatment, enabling them to more effectively address complex neurological conditions, including stroke, developmental delay, cerebral palsy and various other neurological conditions. With an early intervention team, dedicated specialist OTs and PTs provide early intervention for babies and young children ages zero to four at risk of developmental delays and or disability.

The OT and PT early intervention services aims to complete a full assessment of referred clients within 20 working days to ensure the appropriate interventions provided and to mitigate any delay in function. Approximately 93 per cent of referrals were received for PT services and 84 per cent for OT were assessed within the established time frame this fiscal year, while an estimated 91 per cent of clients on the PT caseload and 100 per cent of clients on the OT caseload were making steady progress towards their goals that were established.

Mr. Chairman, improvements in staffing have contributed to better outcomes even as demand for both early intervention OT and PT services remains high. Additionally, outreach initiatives have been expanded to equip parents and caregivers with practical strategies and home programmes ensuring early and effective intervention. Assessment clinics are held

weekly to promptly identify and address sensory motor delays in babies and young children, thereby enhancing their functional potential and quality of life. Furthermore, parent and multidisciplinary training sessions have been delivered throughout the year, which have effectively reduced the number of referrals from the early intervention team to school-based services.

Mr. Chairman, the school-based paediatric therapy team aims to increase early recognition of sensory, motor and developmental delays and provide a more equitable service for school-aged children throughout the year, not just during school term time. The OT and PT school-based service aims to complete a full assessment of referred clients within 20 working days. Approximately 59 per cent of referrals received for PT services and 73 [per cent] for OT services were assessed within the established time frame and an estimated 87 per cent of school-aged children for PT caseload and 84 per cent for OT caseload were progressing towards established goals. While the school-based PT team experienced a period of reduced staffing which resulted in fewer clients being assessed within the established time frames, effective teamwork and collaboration, particularly in the delivery of home and classroom programmes for parents and caregivers helped to mitigate these challenges.

Mr. Chairman, during the current fiscal year, the team successfully conducted sensory motor screening for each child entering primary one in the government school system. Additionally, services were extended to summer camps attended by children with complex medical needs, ensuring the preservation of skills acquired during the school year and mitigating the risk of regression. Furthermore, this year selected students based on their level of severity and in alignment with the programme's intervention goals participated in intensive neural development treatment sessions as part of the Neuro-Developmental Treatment (NDT) certification workshop for therapists. Several children from the government school system, including Dame Marjory Bean Hope Academy, engaged in off-site intensive multidisciplinary OT, PT and SLP sessions.

Mr. Chairman, the OT and PT seniors team aims to support clients in remaining as independent as possible in their own homes. The seniors team conducts home safety and fall-risk assessments for all eligible seniors referred to minimise the risk of falls at home and in this reporting period, client and caregiver training was provided to maximise function and promote ageing in place. In addition, several health promotion and educational activities were conducted to further educate and promote healthy ageing within our community. The OT and PT seniors-based service aims to complete a full assessment of referral clients within 20 working days and approximately 96 per cent of the referrals received for PT services and 92 per cent for OT services were assessed within the established time frame and an estimated 72 per cent of cli-

ents on PT caseload and 77 per cent on OT caseload were progressing towards established goals

This ends my presentation with respect to line item 32080, Physiotherapy and 32120, Occupational Therapy.

Clinical Laboratory, 32090

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning to 32090, Clinical Laboratory and again I am still remaining on page B-154.

Mr. Chairman, the Clinical Laboratory received \$893,000 and this budget reflects the merged laboratories which [were] once separately the Clinical Laboratory at the Hamilton Health Centre and the Bermuda Molecular Diagnostic and Research Laboratory, or MDL, in Warwick. The merged laboratory is now renamed and registered by the Bermuda Health Council as the Bermuda Government Clinical Lab. The 12 per cent budget increase is due to several factors. The Laboratory is now a separate facility which requires maintenance and utility operations. The operational cost of real time PCR, which is a gold standard for communicable disease testing, also contributes to the increase in cost. This testing methodology offers flexibility for the identification of new and emerging public health threats. Funding is also allowed in expansion of testing for non-communicable diseases, mainly for the adult health programme.

Mr. Chairman, the Clinical Lab is responsible for clinical laboratory diagnostic testing for the programme within the various clinics, such as the Maternal Health and Family Planning, the Communicable Disease Clinic, the Adult Health Programme, Child Health and Oral Health as needed and the clinical laboratory also serves as the public health laboratory for Bermuda, assisting with outbreak investigations and public health emergencies. The lab provides specimen referrals for highly infectious organisms that cannot be tested locally. The collaboration with the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA), as well as UK HSA can be arranged to provide advanced testing of diseases which has major public health significance.

The merged Bermuda Government Clinical Laboratory maintains accreditation standards under the Commission on Office Laboratory Accreditation (COLA) and upheld registration requirements by the Bermuda Health Council. The lab currently provides clinical chemistry, haematology, serology, immunology, microbiology and real time PCR using a robust quality assurance system. Molecular testing for sexually transmitted infections such as gonorrhoea and chlamydia continue to be the gold standard for STI identification. The laboratory has performed 5,867 sexually transmitted diagnostic testing during the last budget year, which is approximately 26 per cent of the overall diagnostic testing provided by the Government programme. Mr. Chairman, 3.5 per cent of the testing is clinical chemistry. There has been significant decline in COVID-19 testing, which is constituting less

than 10 per cent of the total number of diagnostic testing. This decline is due to less screening for the coronavirus.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the forecast performance measures were mostly achieved. The target goal outcome for communicable disease testing was underachieved due to several changes in location. The outcome for non-communicable disease testing has increased, which is due to the adult health programme and as the Clinical Laboratory continues to expand, this will influence the performance measures for non-communicable disease testing. The Government Clinical Laboratory continues to enrol in proficiency testing as a quality assurance measure providing competency and assessing the capabilities of all who work within the laboratory. The Bermuda Government Clinical Laboratory continues to expand the testing for government programmes using a newly installed chemistry analyser and an immunoassay analyser.

The objective of expanding clinical chemistry testing is to provide diagnostic support as it relates to the adult health programme targeting the underinsured and uninsured populations. The aim is to make diagnostic testing available to all who require support in health care. The lab aims to provide real time PCR trichomoniasis testing in men, which is not routinely screened due to the sample and testing requirement. The lab aims to offer real time PCR for influenza A and B providing subtyping, such as H1N1 and H3 at full capacity in 2025/26. As most clinical diagnostics [are] using real time PCR, these tests are considered laboratory developed tests and the lab continues to undergo a rigorous test regime to ensure the data is of excellent quality.

Wastewater surveillance remains an activity to perform in [2025]/26, as this can provide early warnings of potential public health threats, which will require action. The lab also specifically aims to study antimicrobial resistance, COVID-19 and other projects deemed necessary.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation for business unit line item 32090, Clinical Laboratory.

Speech and Language, 32100

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now to 32100 Speech and Language. I'm still on page B-154 and they received in their budget \$1,971,000 and this represents a 20 per cent increase over the 2024/25 original estimate accounts for the recruiting of two vacant speech language pathologist posts.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Health, Speech and Language Programme provides speech, language and feeding/swallowing assessments and intervention services across the community. When fully staffed, the programme consists of 14 speech and language pathologists, one trainee post and one programme coordinator. Of these, three speech and

language pathologists provide early intervention services in collaboration with the Department of Education's Child Development Programme for children aged from birth to four or five years of age. Eight speech and language pathologists are school based, providing services across all levels of Bermuda Government schools ages four to 18. One speech and language pathologist provides services to students with special needs who attend Dame Marjorie Bean [Hope] Academy which houses students between four and 18. And one speech and language pathologist providing services to our adults and senior population. Four posts were vacant in 2024, and the recruitment drive has recently finished with seven interviews held. Recommendations have been made for recruitment and onboarding to occur immediately.

Mr. Chairman, speech and language pathologists work closely with parents, school personnel, allied health professionals and private homes and clinic settings to raise awareness of speech and language delays and disorders, to provide functional communication skills as well to prevent life threatening complications that may occur during feeding and swallowing. Speech and language pathology therapy services include the provision of prevention and promotion information, screenings and assessments, consultations as well as interventions. Objectives are measured in terms of the provision of timely and responsive assessments. Services also include the delivery and provision of treatment for those identified as needing intervention client improvement, that is the effectiveness of treatment is measured by the reduction in the severity of the communication/swallowing challenges. This year, the wait list numbers for early intervention services are still high, but we are happy to report that they are lower than the last reporting period. While current programme time guidelines aim to provide an initial assessment for young children within three months of initial referral, the average wait is six months or less. Additional staffing will be key in achieving this target.

In 2024, Mr. Chairman, 50 cases were referred to the school-based programme. All students who were referred received an initial assessment within the programme's time guidelines of 35 working days. Once identified as needing services, clients are provided with therapy interventions. Currently there are no school-based students on a wait list. Clients are reassessed on a routine basis to assess their status and measure progress. This also serves as an indication to determine if services are still required. A combined 382 cases were followed for intervention by speech and language services this year. Caseloads vary between 50 and 70 clients per officer. Services to middle and senior schools have been adapted to be provided through a consolidative model, where the therapist provides school personnel and parents with the appropriate resources and strategies for clients with complementary direct services.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation of business line 32100, Speech and Language.

Nutrition Services, 32110

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning on to 32110, Nutrition. Still on page B-154.

Mr. Chairman, the Nutrition Services business unit received \$286,000 and this represents an increase of 13 per cent from the last fiscal year. And this increase is justified given the high incidence of diet related disease in Bermuda. About half of the increase is from salary uplift and regrading and the remainder is intended to enhance the programme. In 2024/25, Nutrition Services operated as a sub programme under both the Community Health and the Health Promotion and Wellness units. The programme has a staff of two public health nutritionists who support government and nongovernmental organisations and promoting healthy lifestyle behaviours and preventing of chronic diseases through consolidated nutrition services across Bermuda's population. The programme services include, but are not limited to health promotion, nutrition policy development, development and implementation of community-based nutrition programmes, consultation and community nutrition education, quality assurance visits, medical nutrition therapy, nutrition research, assessment and monitoring of the nutritional status of the population, and training and education.

Nutrition Services aims to deliver community programmes that raise awareness of health strategies for improved eating habits and healthier lifestyles. These efforts align with the Department of Health's mission *to protect and promote the health and well-being of the people of Bermuda*. The focus is on reducing chronic diseases through sustainable nutrition intervention and health education to improve food security and good health. Two key intervention programmes aim to boost food security, namely the Bermuda Parish Garden competition and the Grow! Eat! \$ave! programme. The gardening competition had 77 registrants in 2024, encouraging all skill levels to participate, leading to 34 successful garden submissions. Categories that entered include 17 small gardens, 21 large gardens, 6 community gardens and 17 school gardens and 16 nontraditional gardens. Since Grow! Eat! \$ave! launched in 2017, it has received nearly 800 registrants, and this year there were 42 committed gardening graduates. Responding participants in the combined Gardening Intervention programme reported a 71 per cent increase in their consumption of the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables.

Recognising the importance of enhancing Bermuda's nutritional environment, the refresh of the Well Bermuda Strategy will result in previous nutritional service goals of establishing community gardens in each parish. This effort has the potential to

enhance access to affordable and nutritious food, foster community engagement and cohesion, and promote physical activity, eating healthy and mental well-being and we must continue to cultivate healthy communities and a healthy Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, the PIVIO nine-week lifestyle intervention programme, which saw high demand in 2024 with 23 participants, led to significant group health improvements, collectively 128 pounds of weight loss, 17 inches lost, decreased blood sugar by 64 points and decreased cholesterol by 361 points, decreased bad cholesterol, which is the LCD by 41 points and decreased levels of lipids and fats in the blood as triglycerides by 706 points. All respondents reported increased awareness with 74 per cent of participants indicating an increase in their consumption of the recommended five servings of fruit and vegetables from the lifestyle intervention programme. Half of those who did not report an increase cited cost as a barrier to consuming more fruits and vegetables. This programme has achieved significant results in positive challenges and lifestyle habits and behaviours. Unfortunately, barriers such as limited course availability and course cost hinder its ability to meet the high demand. Therefore, future investment in PIVIO is essential in teaching sustainable healthy habits.

Mr. Chairman, Nutrition Services received 82 medical nutrition therapy referrals from across the life course. Most referrals received were from internal sources. This may be directly related to nutritional services primarily supporting high-risk individuals who are underinsured or uninsured to ensure health quality and equity. Most referrals were adults from the Adult Health Prevention Clinic in support of the HEARTS programme. Group education classes will be incorporated to enable people to develop knowledge and skills in self-managed disease and confidence. To ensure compliance with the code of practice for nutrition standards, 18 senior homes annual inspections were completed in 2024 and 89 per cent of senior homes met the requirements for a nutritious and varied diet to promote good health.

Additionally, the Department of Corrections met the same requirement with assistance from Nutrition Services to support cost-effective menu planning. Further to this, Nutrition Services in collaboration with Age Concern to facilitate a nutritional education and curriculum in the senior homes supporting standardisation of food service and medical nutrition therapy. The monitoring assessment of compliance and nutrition policy from responding schools suggest 84 per cent compliance.

Mr. Chairman, due to the rising cost of food in Bermuda Nutrition Services conducted a pilot baseline survey to assess the extended food insecurity among users of the Department of Health Clinic. Food insecurity is defined as having limited or uncertain access to sufficient high-quality food to meet basic needs. The survey was based on the Hunger Vital Sign screening

tool, which is a validated two-question assessment designed to identify households at risk of food insecurity. Respondents who answered true or sometimes true to either question: *Within the past 12 months, we worried whether our food would run out before we got money to buy more;* or, *Within the past 12 months, the food we brought just didn't last, and we didn't have money to get more* were classified as at risk for food insecurity. Preliminary findings suggest that 59 per cent of the respondents were at risk for food insecurity, providing critical insights for future intervention programmes and policy development.

This ends my presentation, Mr. Chairman, with line item 32100, Nutrition [Services].

Adult Health, 32130

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now, Mr. Chairman, to 32130, Adult Health. This is again remaining on page B-154 of the Budget Book in which they were allocated the sum of \$624,000.

The Adult Health programme consists of three sub programmes: correctional health for medical services to inmates and correctional institutions, occupational health for the medical assessment of recruits to the uniformed services, and occupational health services to government employees and hazardous and high-risk occupations and forensic services to the Bermuda Police Service and medical supervision of detainees and police custody.

Together, these services are integral to protecting public servants, maintaining institution health standards and promoting the humane treatment of individuals in custody. Recognising the scope and distinct nature of these services, the programme is proposed to be renamed Uniformed Services and Occupational Health. This new name more accurately reflects the breadth of medical oversight provided to uniformed personnel and high-risk occupational groups.

Mr. Chairman, during the prior financial year 1,761 medical consultations for persons in prison were conducted at the Westgate facility, 88 per cent or 176 new persons in prison received an initial medical examination within 72 hours of intake and 60 recruitment medicals were completed for the uniformed services, namely police, fire or corrections. During the same period, a total of 132 BPS forensic call outs were attended.

Mr. Chairman, although not budgeted for this fiscal year, the department seeks to return a full-time equivalent nurse position to this sub programme, as the lack of nurses impacts the department's ability to provide consistent services to uniformed services. The lack of a nurse for the sub programme has negatively impacted recruitment for the Bermuda Fire Service and the Department of Corrections for the two budget years and is particularly critical as we look to expand

and provide occupational health services in the incremental package.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the incremental package is to provide routine health assessments, preventative health promotion and health education, as well as secondary screening services to the Department of Health employees, including Vector Control and health care workers. The aim is to modernise the approach around health maintenance, help maintain and manage the burden of illness for the ageing workforce, as well as increase our compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). It is anticipated that this will ultimately generate cost-savings for the Government of Bermuda and increase productivity.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation for business unit 32130, Adult Health and this ends my presentation for programme 2201, Community Health.

Oral Health

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The third programme I will present is under Head 22, Oral Health.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, this is now at page B-155.

The Chairman: Yes, the top of page B-155.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you.

Oral Health—2025/26 budget estimate for this programme listed . . . will include business units 32150, 32155 and 32160, has \$1,694,000. The Oral Health programme provides comprehensive public health dental services to Bermuda's school children aged zero to 18 and seniors aged over 65. The oral health services are based on high quality, patient-centred care including dental examinations, consultations, preventative and dental hygiene appointments, as well as a range of restorative clinical treatments including extractions and fillings. There is a strong emphasis on preventative care, especially for children and adolescents, and restorative and minor surgical procedures.

Mr. Chairman, oral health is not separate from overall health. It is a critical component of it. Poor oral health has been linked to a range of systemic conditions including heart disease and diabetes. For older adults, untreated dental issues can lead to pain, nutritional deficiencies and increased risk of chronic illness. In children, dental problems can affect growth, school performance and self-esteem. By promoting accessible, preventable, and restorative care, the oral health programme not only addresses immediate dental needs but also contributes to better long-term health outcomes and reduces the burden on other areas of the health care system.

This programme exemplifies the importance of integrated equitable public health services by prioritising the oral health of our youngest and oldest residents. Of utmost importance is the need to address their personal needs through human resources redevelopment to assure continuity of the full range of oral health services. Following the onboarding of two dentists, the St. George's dental services had been suspended for one year and resumed in October and it has been shown that the dental offices posts are hard to fill. To ensure continuity of care, patient treatments were accommodated by transferring all support staff to the Hamilton Clinic. Moving forward it is intended that all dental assistants are cross-trained and upgraded on their skills and knowledgebase to enable them to function in any capacity as their job description dictates. This process of retraining has begun through the introduction of one-on-one clinical rotations.

Mr. Chairman, the school-based programme is an essential part of oral health services for children in primary school upon age entering grade P1 and they are examined by the school health team to obtain baseline health status information and using the decayed, missing and filled teeth index. They are using this during the screenings to document the oral health status of each child. Annual screening using this tool serves to observe trends and introduce appropriate programmes to address oral disease and maintain healthy mouths. Children who are examined and who need urgent care, are referred to the clinic or their primary dental provider for immediate attention. In the past, the medical and dental teams made separate visits to the schools to conduct screening and gather information. And in the case of the medical team provided other services, such as immunisations. This way of operating between the medical and dental teams often presents a distraction for the school and students. However, this school year, the oral health and the medical teams have collaborated to provide the health screenings on the same day and time.

The ends my presentation, Mr. Chairman, for 2202, Oral Health.

Environmental Health, 2203

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The fourth programme I will present is Head 22, Environmental Health. Still on page B-155. Environmental Health [Programme] 2203 consists of five business units and the combined operational budget estimated as \$4,217,000, and this represents an increase of 12 per cent over the 2024/25 original estimates and incorporates an increase in recruitment for some vacant posts of 3.5 FTEs. The Environmental Health Programme consists of 35 FTEs. [Business unit] 32170, Institutional Hygiene; 32171, Public Health Nuisance Pollution and Outbreak Control programme; and 32175, Environmental Health Administration.

The allocations for the heads that I just mentioned have been allocated \$888,000, \$62,000, and \$1.65 million, respectively, Mr. Chairman. The Environmental Health Programme provides monitoring, investigative and regulatory services in diverse areas such as food safety, occupational safety, nuisance safety, water control and tobacco control. Additionally, the Environmental Health Programme has begun utilising a new data system to input plumbing information and the administration team has begun entering licence details in preparation for inspections to conduct their inspections on the cosmetology and food sector businesses for September 2025.

In April 2025, the Environmental Health Programme undertook a ServSafe training with the target participants including food handlers, managers, restaurant employees and other relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the Environmental Health staff will continue to focus on publicity, education and promotion to raise the profile of the environmental health, informing the public of the wide range of responsibilities and activities within the section. Finally, the Environmental Health programme hopes to gain two bursary students who will complete their qualifications for personal proficiency training and designation as environmental health officers at recognised universities and the expected benefit is for continued delivery of environmental health services by qualified Bermudians.

Vector Control, 32190

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, 32190, Vector Control was allocated \$1.816 million, and Vector Control is a dedicated and hard-working team within the Department of Health tasked with protecting Bermuda from the potential spread of rodent-borne and mosquito-borne diseases such as—I am not even going to try to say that—leptospirosis, Dengue fever—

The Chairman: A valiant effort, Minister. There you go. Dengue fever, there we go.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: I can say that one and Zika and there's another one—Chikungunya . . . through—

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: —through vigilant monitoring, surveillance and timely intervention, the team plays a critical role in preventing public health threats from taking root in our communities. And their work includes the systemic inspection of properties, treatment of mosquito breeding sites and rodent control measures, particularly in areas where high environmental risks exist.

In addition to the field operations, Vector Control places strong emphasis on public education and community engagement. The team regularly participates in outreach initiatives such as the Ministry of

Health's wellness fairs, career fairs, school visits and other public events to raise awareness about the importance of environmental hygiene in disease prevention. Through these engagements, residents are empowered with practical information on how to minimise breeding grounds around their homes and businesses, safely storing waste and identifying early signs of vector infestation.

In November 2023, Mr. Chairman, a representative from Vector Control attended the Cayman Islands hosted workshop sponsored by the Pan American Health Organization on regional mosquito-borne diseases and this was held in collaboration with PAHO and CARPHA. These collaborative efforts are critical to ensuring that Bermuda remains well-prepared to respond to vector-borne disease threats.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on 32190, Vector Control.

Occupational Safety and Health, 32270

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning to 32270, Occupational Safety and Health. The Occupational Safety and Health Office was allocated \$386,000 and this unit inspects places of work throughout the Island, investigates serious workplace accidents and ensures Bermuda's workers safety through the development of policies and procedures such as the requisite training and permit system for asbestos abatement.

Safety and Health is onboarding two staff members as inspectors, and the goal is to sustain a proactive workplace inspection programme that guarantees compliance with all relevant regulations. Occupational Safety and Health staff will continue to focus on publicity, education and promotion to raise the profile of Occupational Safety and Health.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on business line item 32270, Occupational Safety and Health.

Port Health, 32285

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning to 32285, Port Health. The Port Health Unit of the Environmental Health Programme plays a critical frontline role in safeguarding Bermuda against the international spread of infectious diseases. By monitoring arriving travellers, conveyances and imported commodities at the airport and other ports of entry, the unit provides a vital layer of protection that ensures early detection and timely responses to potential public health threats. This includes the inspection and risk management and assessment of cruise ships and other vessels, with a focus on hygiene standards, waste disposal practices, potable water safety and any signs of illness among passengers or crew. In close collaboration with Customs, the Department of Immigration and the Department of Marine and Ports, the Department of Health Laboratory and the Port Health Unit also oversees the

safety of imported food products, pharmaceuticals and other high-risk consignments verifying that they meet public health and safety standards. Their responsibilities extend to issuing clearances for food shipments and ensuring that any goods requiring special handling, such as perishable items, are stored and transported under appropriate conditions.

More importantly, the Port Health Unit is central to Bermuda's compliance with the WHO's International Health Regulation 2005, which require Member States to develop core public health capacities at designated ports of entry. This includes the ability to detect, assess, report, and respond to public health events of international concern. By fulfilling this mandate, the unit supports Bermuda's global health responsibilities while protecting the Island from emerging diseases, food-borne illnesses and other cross-border health risk.

As global travel and trade continues to grow, the work of the Port Health Unit remains essential to maintaining Bermuda's bio security, public health resilience and international reputation as a safe and healthy [destination]. The Port Health unit is actively recruiting officers to ensure that they are able to deal with emergencies and so forth and the unit has implemented an emergency roll call-out rota. Finally, the Port Health Unit and its functions will move from 2203, Environmental Health Programme of Head 22 to the Department of Health, 2102 Office of the Chief Medical Officer, under Head 21 as the Ministry of Health Headquarters to better align this unit with this mandate under the Quarantine Act and Regulations 2017 in line with their reporting to the Quarantine Authority. Thus, this budget line is unfunded.

This ends on a presentation on business unit [32285], Port Health as well as 2203, Environmental Health.

Central Government Laboratory, 32203

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The fifth [programme] is Head 22, Central Government Lab.

Mr. Chairman, the Central Government Lab consists of business unit 32203 and that is the Forensic Analysis 2204, Central Laboratory and 32220, Water and Food Analysis. And I still am on page B-155. And the estimates of this business unit represent \$1,066,000, and \$598,000, respectively. And this represents an increase of 25 per cent and 3 per cent increase, respectively, from the 2024/25 budget. And the drivers of these increases, Mr. Chairman, are uplifts in salaries, increased call-out remuneration for fast-tracked cases, additional funds for laboratory supplies and lab gases, import duty, preventative maintenance contracts for equipment and increased electricity bills. The Central Government Laboratory programme consists of nine FTEs.

Forensic Analysis, 32200

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, the forensic analysis programme performed seized drug analysis and toxicology analysis. In this reporting year, the total of 6,777 exhibits were produced and processed. The laboratory continues to manage very large case submissions. The noteworthy ones are 32 kilogrammes of cannabis resin and there was a submission that was analysed resulted in 1,168 tablets found to contain 3,4-[Methylenedioxymethamphetamine] (MDMA) colloquially, known as ecstasy. The most labour-intensive case received for the reporting year was a suitcase of various items of clothing and a travel pillow and a garment bag which, when analysed was found to contain 5 kilogrammes of cocaine. The cocaine had been soaked into the items in an attempt to conceal it, which required laboratory techniques to extract the cocaine from the clothing. The process was very labour intensive and required a large volume of solvents.

Mr. Chairman, the laboratory continues to receive submissions of dangerous fentanyl and this reporting year, the fentanyl was presented in various forms of coloured tablets and a variety of coloured powders. The most concerning fentanyl submission contained a cocktail of drugs which in addition to the fentanyl, included cocaine, alprazolam (sold under the brand name Xanax), acetomorphine, caffeine, codeine, and dextromethorphan. The laboratory is committed to expanding its THC testing to include a variety of cannabinoids. There is a requirement to purchase a new high-performance liquid chromatograph to achieve this, and quotes have been received, and the procurement process has started.

Mr. Chairman, also toxicology analyses are performed on coroner's cases, cases of driving under the influence and urine analysis for stakeholder agencies. The compounds that are routinely tested are for the common drugs that are abused in Bermuda, which include cannabis, cocaine, heroin, ecstasy and fentanyl. These continue to be steady year on year increases in cases submitted to the laboratory, and this year has been no different. The lab processed 157 cases, as noted in the performance measures. However, the total amount of toxicology cases submitted to the lab was 367 and there is now a backlog of 210 cases. The backlog is being cleared, and these duties are currently shared with the government analyst and there is now a demand for a dedicated toxicologist to maintain this service and support the current staff. The increase in cases is requiring a marked increase in laboratory supplies and maintenance of analytical equipment. To maintain continuity with casework during periods of recruitment and staff shortages, the lab locum scientists are in route.

Mr. Chairman, this ends presentation of 32200, Forensics.

Water and Food Analysis, 32220

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Turning now to 32220, Water and Food Analysis. This programme performs analytical testing on potable drinking and non-potable water samples, dairy products and food. It is primarily a laboratory support service to Environmental Health with the results used to identify bacteriological and chemical risk in both human and animal health. It is through this collaboration that the Department of Health can maintain a low incidence of water and food-borne diseases. There was a total of 4,790 water samples tested during this reporting period, representing 17 per cent increase from the previous year. It is noteworthy that the water quality of our main bathing beaches continues to meet the United States Environmental Protection Agency's guideline value every week through our routine seawater testing.

Mr. Chairman, since August of 2024, there has been unprecedented challenges in procuring water sampling supplies due to ongoing supply chain issues. However, a workaround has been implemented. With respect to the performance measures, the programme continues to excel with respect to a turnaround time of five to ten days for disseminating water, dairy and food testing results and they were achieved 99 per cent of the time. And we are on target to accomplish the same for the next fiscal year.

Local milk samples are being analysed bi-monthly to determine whether they meet the legislative limits, as set out in the Public Health (Milk and Dairyfarm) Regulations 1952. Milk samples that have not met the legislative limits cannot be used for supply and are referred to the government veterinarian for assistance and intervention. There were a smaller number of dairy samples processed, and that shortfall was due to a shortage of human resources. The number of food samples tested remains low as Bermuda continues to maintain low incidence of food-borne disease, albeit a figure worth celebrating. From January to March each year, this programme maintains laboratory capacity with respect to food testing in collaboration with the Environmental Health Programme and 92 per cent of our proficiency test scores met international standards.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, the WHO and CARICOM have committed to the elimination of trans fatty [acids] globally and in the region by December 2025. The Government of Bermuda has made a commitment to enforce the ban on industrially produced trans fatty acids to promote healthier dietary options and reduce health risks associated with trans fats consumption. The presence of trans fats in foods, even in small amounts, poses a significant risk to our health and well-being. And to monitor compliance with the upcoming ban on industrial produced trans fats, the water and feed analysis programme is actively building local laboratory capacity to conduct food testing for trans fats content in preparation for the ban.

We will also continue with public education, which we feel is essential not only to help food pro-

ducers, importers and retailers prepare for the ban, but also to raise awareness among consumers about the health risks associated with trans fats and the benefits of healthier alternatives. This initiative is being supported by UK Health Security Agency.

This ends presentation for line item 32220, as well as 2204.

Capital Development

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Real quickly, Mr. Chairman, the capital development estimates for the Department of Health are found at page C-5, total \$3.124 million. Allocations have been made for Sylvia Richardson Care Facility in the amount of \$300,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The refurbishment of the parish clinics in the amount of \$2.204 million and the Lefroy [House Care] Community in the amount of \$620,000.

Capital Acquisitions

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Capital acquisition estimates can be found at page C-20 of the Budget Book and amount to \$107,000.

And that concludes the presentation for Head 22, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. If you want to grab a sip of water, having finished Head 22. We are currently about three quarters of the way through a four-hour debate on the Ministry of Health.

We are hearing from the Minister of Health, the Honourable Kim Wilson. The heads for the debate that have been covered thus far are Heads 21 and 22. We still have Heads 24 and 91 to go, although I note that they are theoretically shorter heads than the others, but we will see.

Minister, if you have had a moment to catch your breath and have some water—

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: I have.

The Chairman: You have the floor—Head 24 begins I believe at page B-166.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: That is correct.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: All right. I will speed read.

HEAD 24—HOSPITALS

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The Bermuda Hospitals Board delivers emergency critical care, acute care, chronic

care, long-term care, learning disability, substance abuse and mental health services. BHB is the only provider of 24/7 health care services in Bermuda and their services are delivered through King Edward Memorial Hospital, Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute (MWI), and Lamb Foggo Urgent Care Centre campuses. BHB serves Bermuda's resident population and has the second largest number of employees at 1,600 full-time and 200 on-call and local staff.

A total of \$177.141 million operational grant has been allocated under Head 24—Hospitals, which represents an increase of 14 per cent, or \$21,743,000 over the budget of fiscal year 2024/25. This constitutes 72 per cent of the total budget allocated to the Ministry of Health for 2025/26, compared to 77 per cent of last year.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: The Head 24 budget also comprises hospital patient subsidy in the amount of \$112,498,000 for children, the aged and indigent. This amount remains unchanged from the previous year and a further \$41,161,000 grant has also been allocated for services at MWI, which is relatively the same as last year and an operational grant of \$22,482,000 has also been allocated.

Heading 2401, General
King Edward Memorial Hospital, 34000

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure was \$384 million and represents an increase of \$3,000,000 or approximately 0.9 per cent higher than the budget for that fiscal year.

From June 2019, the BHB's funding model was changed from the government to a fixed grant, and this includes all services under the standard health benefit legislated from the Mutual Reinsurance Fund (MRF), a fixed grant to the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute and a grant provided to cover youth, aged and indigent patients. The MRF portion of BHB's revenue is a transfer of a portion of the funds from the Standard Health Benefit [SHB] premiums and as such is not a budgeted line item in the Budget Book, but it is a significant portion of the BHB's overall revenue.

The overall revenue cap for SHB, MRF and MWI grant has been relatively flat for six consecutive years, with an additional funding coming in the form of grants such as \$17,000,000 operational grant and a \$7.2 million capital grant in the last fiscal year. This revenue formed about 95 per cent of BHB's total revenue in the fiscal year. The BHB's management team has achieved an average of 6.4 per cent annual interim savings over the past five years.

Mr. Chairman, there are four additional revenue streams not reflected in the budget for Head 24. As mentioned, previously I spoke about the Mutual Reinsurance Fund payment, which is—BHB is funded

by a portion of the standard premium rate paid by each person with insurance in Bermuda and this is meant to cover Standard Health Benefit services for the insured population. In 2024/25, the MRF payment totalled \$171 million. Again, these are four additional revenue streams that are not reflected in the Budget Book.

So, the first one is the MRF transfer of \$171,000,000. A small portion of BHB's revenues paid by individuals who do not have insurance and non-residents who need urgent or emergency care, and that represents 5 per cent of their total revenue. This revenue stream has been gradually increasing alongside the rise of tourism and is expected to grow further in the fiscal year following an increase in the hospital fees from 200 per cent to 300 per cent—these are the 4B codes that we refer to. And then the third one is BHB receives donations—in the fiscal year a donation of \$500,000 was recognised by two patients with the cardiology unit. The Hospitals Auxiliary of Bermuda also has donated \$350,000 for the purchase of two ambulances and other medical equipment.

Mr. Chairman, I certainly would like to pause for a moment and thank the Bermuda Hospitals Charitable Foundation, the Bermuda Hospitals Auxiliary Board for their generous donations and support for their assistance to BHB.

The Chairman: And whoever gave half a million is probably worth thanking too, I would have thought. But there we are.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes.

The Chairman: The whole House. The whole House.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, due to pressures of delivering health care within a capped revenue funding, BHB has seen its cash reserves [and is] currently maximising utilisation of a \$25 million overdraft facility.

By the end of March, BHB had recorded a net loss of \$15.5 million after taking into consideration savings, and this is \$7.3 million better than the projected loss previously.

Net revenue was slightly above budget by \$10,600,000 and expenses were \$3,300,000, or 0.9 per cent above budget highlighting the efforts BHB staff have undertaken to control costs.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Industrial Union staff had a cost-of-living adjustment, or COLA, of 4 per cent in October 2024. However, BHB's BPSU members to date have not received a COLA increase since 2018, although the negotiations for the 2022 period are ongoing.

Mr. Chairman, as of February 2022, savings totalled \$23,000,000 with approximately \$12 million

year to date attributed to government concessions. This is concessions such as tax concessions for payroll and the like. The remaining savings have been achieved through a range of internal initiatives with a focus on disciplined financial management and keeping all expenditures below budget.

Mr. Chairman, you may recall that was announced [in] last year's budget. BHB is moving to implement part of the 2024 budget speech which was an initiative to bill people injured in road traffic accidents. And their work is ongoing to near completion for that. And this practice when put in place in 2019, when BHB was in—this practice will . . . Sorry, they are in the final stages of this practice so that persons who are injured—road traffic . . . basically subjugated claims. BHB will be looking to do that. I know you don't understand what I am saying.

Mr. Chairman, regarding the auditing process, BHB has had clean audited financial statements up to 2023, and 2022 and 2023 annual reports are completed or in their final process and the audited financial statements for 2024 and 2025 fiscal years are underway and is expected to be completed.

There have been numerous upgrades and improvements by BHB, and they have made substantial investments in capital and infrastructure to ensure quality care is provided to patients.

Capital projects and operational projects are being deterred or postponed due to financial pressures. They have made upgrades to the Sterile Processing Department, an upgrade at \$4.5 million, and that's a major renovation that started in November to upgrade their Sterile Processing Department. Surgical tools are cleaned and packaged in this area, and it supports over 9,000 surgeries undertaken by KEMH per annum.

The current equipment is over 14 years old and this is with respect to the upgrade that I just spoke about and in the older part of the general wing. So the infrastructure is needed urgency. So many issues have affected the Sterile Processing Department, which, like I have said, they have just started those upgrades.

Pyxis upgrade is a medication management system used across BHB for clinical units, and they access this through an advanced medication cabinet called the MedStation that provides controlled access to key medications by nursing staff.

The new Acute Care Wing (ACW) generator. An additional generator was installed in the hospital in 2024, and this new generator provides additional added security to their electrical supply.

BHB replaced 129 older mattresses in the Acute Care Wing at a cost of \$80,000. Diagnostic imaging equipment. Some of their diagnostic imaging equipment, I am sorry, in the Acute Care Wing is at least 10 years old, which is the expected end of life for such technology. Some equipment—there have been increasing number of times that the MRI and CT has

been impacted and replacing the equipment means all Bermudians can benefit from the latest technology. To make the replacement programme more affordable, BHB has structured payments to the vendor over time.

Over the course of the fiscal year, work began on implementing a new human capital management system and a payroll system, and these systems are a major part of this project, expected to be completed within the last quarter of this fiscal year.

Two new oncologists have been hired this year and arrived in February, and two new oncology nurses have also been hired and brings the full complement of full-time oncologists to three and a full complement of oncologist nurses. This means that all new and current cancer cases can be cared for on Island, supporting inpatient and outpatient needs. And they are up to 300 oncology patients seen by the services each month. BHB remains grateful to the support of the Bermuda Cancer and Health Centre and P.A.L.S. to their support, while their recruitment process was being completed.

With respect to the oncologists and oncologist nurses, of course they are specialist positions. So hiring in general oncologists for Island services has been increasingly rare, and hiring time could take up to six months.

The Digital Health Trainee Programme was launched in November 2024 as a partnership with the Bermuda Government Workforce Development and the first cohorts consist of four staff members enrolled in two-year programmes, rotating every six months.

BHB signed a memorandum of understanding with the Minister of Education in November 2024, and they are now . . . which means BHB is now a learning partner for the new signature schools programme, specifically the health and social care signature programme, which will take place at The Berkeley Institute.

BHB also has awarded—and continues to invest in their future talent by awarding \$190,000 in scholarships to 12 local students in this fiscal year. One of the scholarship awardees received \$20,000 and is funded by GlaxoSmithKline and administered by the BHB.

Performance Measures

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: With respect to performance measures, Mr. Chairman, if I can turn to that real quickly.

The Chairman: Mm-hmmm.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Accreditation Canada is a non-profit organisation that works to improve the quality of health care services and more than 1,100 health and social service organisations in Canada and around the world have been accredited. BHB received its formal notice of achieving accreditation in fiscal year Novem-

ber 2023. They also received Accreditation Canada for their pathology departments. Primary stroke unit—this is more good news—achieved an inpatient benchmark and a critical stroke performance indicator in December 2024 and BHB received a faster average door to needle time for administering tissue plasminogen activator (TPA) and clot busting drug treatment to stroke patients. Getting the treatment within the required four-hour window can be the difference between a complete recovery and ending up with lifetime disabilities or even death.

Another issue—

[Pause]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, the BHB remains focused on ensuring safe discharges and not discharging at any cost. However, data on inpatient bed weights continues to be influenced by the number of complex discharges, where external factors affect the discharge process.

BHB publishes a monthly KEMH performance report on its website, which highlights that wait times and inpatient beds have generally trended upwards throughout the year, with only brief periods of relief.

Data released in December of 2024 show that nearly half of its acute care beds were filled with patients who are medically fit for discharge. The average length of stay for these patients in the acute care wing units was over two months or 70 days. Of course, the knock-on impact, and we have talked about here in this Honourable Chamber, has led to the hospital . . . has been where they have at times had as many as 30 people waiting for beds in the emergency department due to bed unavailability throughout the rest of the hospital.

Improving care—the integrated care pathways, as we have discussed in this Chamber with respect to structured and multidisciplinary approach has been offered by BHB and that's with respect to the development of pathways involved in the collaboration with BHB staff, local urologists, the Daily Mail, P.A.L.S., and the Bermuda Cancer and Health.

Ongoing efforts to integrate care pathways for a more timely, efficient and high-quality patient experience have led to the release of new prostate cancer integrated care pathway and [information] booklets this month. An information booklet was also produced.

Optimising and upgrading the PEARL (Patient Electronic & Administrative Records Log) system. We have spoken about—that was a major upgrade to PEARL by the vendor. It was completed in 2024—that is their electronic medical records system.

Okay—returning to staff matters. All 1,800 staff were offered PIPA training. And Food Service improvement continues with a new room service experience for moms and kids in the Maternity and Gosling units. Following a three-month pilot, an a la carte menu has been established with a restaurant style

option for special kids' options. MWI food service staff achieved a 100 per cent pass rate on a comprehensive food handling and safety course.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, completing the upgrade of the diagnostic imaging equipment in Acute Care Wing by fall of 2025, completing the upgrade of the Sterile Processing Department that I spoke about, upgrading the Maternity unit to remedy issues relating to the age of the infrastructure, continue the strategic planning process to prepare BHB's strategic plan for 2026 to 2030. Continuing optimising PEARL with annual vendor upgrades.

That concludes the presentation of Head 24.

HEAD 91—HEALTH INSURANCE

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Moving quickly to Head 91—Health [Insurance].

The Chairman: Thank you. Please do.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: This can be found at pages B-166 through B-170 of the Estimates of Revenue Book.

The mission of the Health Insurance Department is *To provide equitable access to affordable benefits and collaborative programmes leading to improved community health outcomes*. The budget for the Health Insurance Department is \$15,901,000 and this represents an increase of \$12,459,000 over last year. There are 18 full-time equivalents driving the important work of this department, and this number remains unchanged from the previous years.

If you turn to page C-19 of the Budget Book, it will show that \$13,250,000 represents an increase of \$10,950,000 and this represents the Health Insurance Fund. And this additional funding will enable the Government to meet its commitment to the rollout of phase one of UHC, starting with expanded access to essential health care services through the Health Insurance Plan and FutureCare. And this increase also supports the Government's commitment to remove the waiting period for the personal home care benefit.

General Administration

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Chairman, budget parity. This budget funds the Health Insurance Department, so it will be the Health Insurance Plan (or HIP), the FutureCare, the Mutual Reinsurance, the Government Subsidies Programme (which pays towards the hospitalisation cost of select populations) and the Health System Strengthening Fund.

The Health Insurance Plan covers policyholders under 65 years old and FutureCare covers seniors for hospital care and a variety of doctor visits, prescription drugs and outpatient services to ensure that

the most vulnerable can access necessary health care services.

The head also manages the Mutual Reinsurance Fund, which helps to stabilise the health insurance system by redistributing funds collected from the standard premium to subsidise the cost of the Standard Health Benefit.

In life's most critical and vulnerable moments, whether facing a sudden stroke or requiring emergency air lifting for life-saving care, access to timely and affordable health can make all the difference. And, Mr. Chairman, the Health Insurance Department continues to serve as a vital safety net for those who need it most. Through the HIP and FutureCare, we ensure that Bermuda's most vulnerable have access to essential medical treatment without the fear of financial ruin or exclusion due to pre-existing conditions, as is the case in private insurance companies.

Importantly, HIP and FutureCare are non-discriminatory plans. There are no pre-existing condition exclusions. Coverage begins immediately, ensuring individuals are protected when they need care the most. And this level of access/inclusivity is uncommon and is a testament to our commitment of health equality, ensuring that everyone has access.

There are, of course, financial realities that we need to underpin, and we will continue to provide the provision of care. The cost of health care does continue to rise and the medical trend rate for HID, which reflects an annual health care inflation is approximately 8 per cent. And this is driven by multiple factors including increased utilisation of services, an ageing population and a growing burden of chronic diseases.

Since November 2021, HIP and FutureCare policies have not experienced an increase in premium. The monthly premium for HIP has remained at \$459.24 and for FutureCare it is \$530.14, and this reflected the Government's commitment to ensuring that the premium rates remain stable. However, to sustain the comprehensive and reliable nature of these benefits, and to ensure continued financial viability of both plans, a modest increase in premiums will be introduced this coming fiscal year and the next step in that, Mr. Chairman, is necessary to keep pace with ongoing medical inflation and increased service demands.

We are . . . I have spoken already about the increase, but drug benefits that we will see as we phase out UHC phase one for HIP and FutureCare patients.

Maternity benefits, Mr. Chairman, another crucial programme with the HIP is the Maternity benefit programme which is designed to provide financial support and essential health care services to expectant mothers during pregnancy, childhood and the postpartum period. This programme ensures that all pregnant women regardless of their financial situation can access the necessary medical care including prenatal visits, screening, [and] labour and delivery ser-

vices. And this is a wonderful programme that was designed for women who are under- and uninsured to ensure that they and their babies get the best medical care, their children get the best intervention of early life and at the beginning stages of life, and they get [the] comprehensive provisions of the maternity benefits programmes. So, this is almost 100 qualifying women who were able to access this.

Personal home care benefit. I think we are all familiar with that. And that is where qualifying individuals can receive up to \$60,000 of personal home care to help to keep people to age in place. So, it is not only for seniors but for persons who may have disabilities.

We will be looking to remove the 12-month required waiting period for persons to be able to enrol automatically in this coming legislative session.

Currently around 478 participants receive the personal home care benefit. And almost \$6.6 million was paid out in claims for the personal home care benefit averaging approximately \$13,000 per participant compared to 2023/24, which represents a 3 per cent increase.

And as I previously mentioned, Mr. Chairman, the Government is committed to eliminating the 12-month waiting period for the personal home care benefit. So, the Health Insurance Department is now positioned to facilitate immediate access. And this means seniors and people living with chronic conditions will be able to access this which will, of course, help with respect to provisions with . . . sorry. And this means that seniors and people living with chronic conditions and others who are seeking hospital discharge can receive the support that they need as quickly as possible.

The Enhanced Care Programme is still very successful. And we have seen 92 people actively participate, each of whom are eligible for four primary care visits annually without a co-pay along with access to critical medications. The feedback from the participants has been consistently positive, and clinical indications, which are more important, show that this cohort continue to show encouraging trends in not only the patient experience but their health outcomes.

Operating results. The HID fund—I will just talk about that really quickly because this is on the performance measures—has two products, like I said, HIP and FutureCare. There are approximately 3,771 projected FutureCare headcounts and 5,250 on HIP. Did I say that right?

The Chairman: Yes. You did. And we are on the performance measures—

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes. Thank you.

The Chairman: —Page B-170.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you. Thank you. Okay.

Still on performance measures. Premiums collected for FutureCare are projected to be \$32.6 million which represents a 2 per cent increase. And HID is expected to collect \$32.1 million. The Mutual Reinsurance Fund premiums play a critical role with sustaining the operation of the health system. And the fund in 2024/25, Mr. Chairman, collected \$376.97 per month. And the current rate of the MRF would collect approximately \$18,128,000. And if the headcount remains as is at 48.08 persons, 48,000, then it is anticipated that \$217.5 million for fiscal year. And that headcount has increased by 1.1 per cent to 1.2 per cent over the past three years. Should this be a 1.0 per cent increase, the MRF is expected to collect a total of \$219.8 million. [The] Health System Strengthening Fund, which has been allocated \$1 million, is to support the implementation of UHC, Mr. Chairman.

I have spoken previously about the Project Management Office, that they are advancing the financial analysis and the actuarial modelling of the core benefits. And then the subsidy operating results. And that is under the performance measures as well—\$134 million or 65,490 encounters. So that is with respect to the subsidy. And the Health Insurance Department continues to monitor the subsidies.

And then performance measures, real quick, part two, page B-70. The Health Insurance Department has reviewed and revised its performance measures to better align with the strategic goals involving demand. The recalibration reflects the broader commitment to continuous improvement and accountability in the delivery of the public health insurance. And HID is placing a renewed emphasis on emphasising stakeholder engagement, recognising the collaboration with policyholders, health care providers, and community organisations is critical.

I certainly want to pause real quick to provide my appreciation to the HID business partners including Sutherland Healthcare Solutions, Trellis Health, Argus Insurance, Global Medical Management Inc., and ProServe for their steadfast support of the department and offer again my thanks to the Health Insurance Department and the Health Insurance Committee who meet regularly to help to drive the agenda.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Health carries a vital mandate to implement the policies, plans, and programmes necessary to build a healthier Bermuda. This budget reflects our steadfast commitment to this mission advancing a health care system that is more equitable, resilient, and sustainable through strategic reform and focused investment. Despite the pressures of rising health care costs, the Ministry continues to demonstrate sound financial stewardship through careful planning, collaboration, and so forth, Mr. Chairman. Across all business units, the Ministry's work is shaped by equity and access and outcomes, fiscal responsibility and sustainability, preventative care, early intervention support for the

vulnerable populations, health system strengthening and integration, and workforce development and community engagement. As we advance towards health reform goals, this budget is more than a financial plan; it is a catalyst for meaningful change.

Mr. Chairman, as I indicated, I will end where I started thanking all the teams at the Health Department and the Ministry and the quangos for all their support in helping us drive Bermuda and creating a healthier Bermuda.

And I also do invite the Honourable Member . . . if there are any questions that we were not able to answer, I will submit to them in writing.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Honourable Members and members of the listening public.

We are in the Committee Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for budget year 2025/26. We are dealing with the Ministry of Health which was scheduled for some four hours. To be fair to the Minister, she has struggled valiantly with a very large brief.

We have about 20 to 25 minutes left. The Chair recognises the Honourable Member for constituency 7, the Shadow Minister of Health, MP Robin Tucker.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First, I just want to start by thanking the Minister for two things. One is for a very, very comprehensive brief this evening, and as well, all of the health care workers, health care providers, anyone at all who is involved in health care because it is such an important thing for us as a community no matter how difficult it may be. So, I just want to start by saying that.

Another thing that . . . I recognise I only have a short time. But I wanted to just very quickly say something. On Monday I had the unfortunate opportunity to be a patient at the hospital. Right?

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Robin Tucker: And as I was waiting, when I was in the ER, I had the opportunity to overhear people, I mean, just looking around the room and seeing all the people who were waiting like I was. I had the opportunity to overhear a conversation with one of the hospital staff about a little displeasure that their loved one was discharged from the hospital and they were back because of continuing issues. So, what that did for me was it reminded me that going into this budget debate, this debate is not, for me, as much about dollars and cents as it is about people. And so that is what that experience reminded me of.

With the time that I have left, I just want to say that my focus and a lot of the focus of my questions that I had prepared are around quality, transparency, and accountability. So, Mr. Chairman, if you do not

mind, I would like to start with Head 24 . . . given, . . . in the interest of time. If I could start with the hospital.

The Chairman: Please, please proceed.

Ms. Robin Tucker: So, one of the things that is blatantly clear is that the hospital grant funding, the block grant, is not working. One of the things I want to point out is that between from 2019 to 2020, 2019 when the block grant actually started, to 2024/25, Mr. Chairman, \$795 million was spent. If you look at the actuals in prior books, that is what it totals, \$795 million. If we include what has been budgeted for 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, \$177 million, that is a total of \$972 million, almost a billion dollars, almost a billion of taxpayers' dollars that have been spent on the hospital and the hospital funding.

So, I do ask about accountability because we are heading in a direction of universal health care and, you know, the hospital, and where we go with that. We do not even know where we are going with this block grant funding.

So here are my questions:

- Would the Minister please confirm whether the Government has fully repaid the balance of the \$31 million owed to BHB which was to be repaid monthly and completed by the end of fiscal 2024/25?
- When was the final monthly payment made, and what was the amount of the final instalment?
- Can the Minister tell us how the \$22 million additional funding for the hospital was determined and how it is intended to be used to address the current operational and staffing needs especially given recent pay disputes and inflationary pressures?
- What month does the Government pay the block grant funds to the BHB, and what is the full amount that the BHB can expect to receive?
- Given past underfunding and delayed payments, what mechanisms are in place to ensure that the BHB receives full and timely payments this year?
- When will the block grant funding be revisited to ensure that funding is adequate to keep pace with medical inflation [and] that the model aligns with actual cost and capital spending?
- When was the last block grant financing review for the Bermuda Hospitals Board conducted and by whom, and what were the funding gaps identified?
- Can the Minister give assurance to the public that the current operational grant and patient subsidy allocation to the hospital are sufficient to meet growing demands of an ageing population and a population with increasing chronic

conditions and demands on health services and rising health care costs?

- What reporting and oversight mechanisms are in place to monitor how the block grants are spent and to ensure accountability for both the Government and for the hospital?
- Will the Minister commit to publishing regular updates on hospital funding, expenditure, and outcomes to enhance transparency for the public?
- How is the hospital preparing for the transition to universal health care in 2026, and what operational or financial challenges are anticipated during this shift? And how is the BHB preparing to overcome them?
- Will the BHB receive targeted funding or resources to prepare for the transition to universal health care, and how will this affect its financial planning and service delivery?

The next question I have is on staffing. We know that there have been significant challenges in terms of recruitment and the like. There are a multitude of reasons why there is a challenge to recruit, but the question is: What are we doing to overcome it?

If I may, Mr. Chairman, may I quote the Minister from last year's budget debate?

The Chairman: Please.

Ms. Robin Tucker: It was in the Hansard. So, the Minister relayed a warning from a member of the World Health Organization who anticipated that in two years' time, we will have over 10 million shortages of health care professionals throughout the world. So, the internal recruitment issues mentioned already make challenging recruitment strategy much more difficult because we are not just competing with our neighbours next door, we are competing with the world in terms of having available resources.

Part of the reason we cannot attract people is our high cost of living. I mean, people hear about funding challenges. People hear about no salary increases in seven years. People hear about all those types of things, and then of course when you consider that you do not have sufficient staffing numbers then it immediately goes to, Is that going to lead to stress and burnout and extra overtime to cover vacant positions and the like?

So, I would like to know if the Minister can tell us what proactive changes to recruitment strategies and practices and additional steps have been taken to recruit to ensure that Bermuda's residents have sufficient health care professionals on the Island given that we are competing with the world for human resources. And I know that is a tall, tall, tall order, but I must ask the question because we have a hard enough time getting health professionals now. We cannot afford not to have sufficient . . .

I have more questions, but I can sit and wait a minute because if I can, I would like to have a few answers before we wrap up, if that is okay with you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Just to remind the Chamber for those who may not have heard. The Minister did very kindly indicate that she would give written responses or responses to questions if they were provided.

Is there any other Member who would like to contribute to the debate? If not, Minister would you like to bowl a few overs, or would you like to go back to questions from the Honourable Member?

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

Okay. I do have the 14 questions, so let me just answer the ones that I do have. But like I said, I will provide these—

The Chairman: Minister, you have the floor.

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

And this may not necessarily be in the order in which they were asked, but I have the order in which they were asked.

What month does the Government pay the block grant to BHB, and what is the full amount? It is paid monthly on the fifteenth of each month.

What mechanisms are in place to ensure that BHB receives full and timely payments this year? Payments occur in a timely manner according with the grant letters that are in place between the Government and BHB.

What proactive changes are being done with respect to recruitment? I can speak to what the Ministry is doing, but insofar as what BHB is doing, no doubt they have similar challenges with respect to the worldwide shortage of nurses. But BHB continues to support talent development programmes.

I spoke about their scholarship programme, which is similar to what we have at the Ministry with respect to the Dr. Barbara Ball Scholarship so we are trying to encourage participation through higher education in roles of health care through the offering of scholarships through the Bermuda Government scholarships, the Dr. Barbara Ball scholarship. And then BHB also has offered scholarships to individuals that would hopefully come back and work for us. BHB is also, as I indicated, part of the education . . . What is it called? They are one of the cohorts that are providing at The Berkeley Institute the science/ (I cannot remember the name of it.) medical . . . What is it called? Signature school.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Right. Thank you. Thank you. So that that can help to encourage individuals and

promote the provision of health care services in Bermuda as a career opportunity. (Just a minute.)

When was the final payment made, and what was the amount of the final payment? All payments were made by the 2024/25 fiscal year. (I am still reading.)

I can also say while I am getting more answers, Mr. Chairman, that the Government recognises that BHB is an important stakeholder within our health care system and that we value the vital services that they are providing to us, but we also remain committed to working collaboratively with them to ensure that the hospital has the necessary funding that they need to sustain and provide essential services to the community whilst also recognising that transparency and funding allocation are critically important. The issue as the Honourable [Member] Ms. Tucker, who sits in constituency . . . constituency . . .

The Chairman: Seven.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you—seven.

—mentioned the issue as it related to the block grant. That was introduced—appreciating that she was not here at the time when we introduced that—but it was a cost-saving measure. We were on our way to a million-dollar-cliff health care spend. Half of that was at BHB.

And we recognise that jurisdictions throughout the world have moved away from fee-for-service towards a block grant because not only is it more sustainable, [but] it makes sure that it is not having cost overruns. It is just a more efficient mechanism that hospitals are running throughout the world as a best practice to move away from fee-for-service to something that is more of a block grant system. So that is what we did.

We did a lot of work when we did health financing reform in 2017/18. And that was the decision of the trajectory that the Government chose to go on for a number of reasons not the least of which is the savings as it relates to controlling costs without sacrificing the provision of services.

[The] general vacancy rate is only 8 per cent actually at BHB. And the registered nurse vacancy is only 7 per cent. And again, as I indicated concerning the issue—it is question number 14 with respect to staffing—both BHB and the Ministry of Health are actively recruiting recognising that we are competing against other jurisdictions that are offering green cards.

So, we are competing against a number of other jurisdictions, but we are actively trying to recruit. But the general vacancy at BHB and the registered nurse vacancy is not as big as one might expect when I say 8 per cent and 7 per cent, respectively.

We are also working, Mr. Chairman, with the Health Council to review developing entry level pathways into new job categories such as the advance

practice nurses that I spoke about and LPNs. I did speak about the signature school that BHB is now engaged with, with respect to The Berkeley Institute.

Workforce strategy work is underway as part of UHC, one of the initiatives. And also, when we spoke about the Bermuda Health Strategy 2022–2027, it was one of the eight pillars—workforce strategy and identifying what our workforce needs are in Bermuda and making sure that we take steps to ensure that we have a Bermuda population that is within our health care system. So, we will always need to rely on overseas talent, but we want to ensure that we can have and develop homegrown talent as well.

Yes. The Government agreed to pay the remaining \$16.3 . . . I am sorry. This is with respect to . . . The question is: When was the final payment made, and what was the amount of the final payment? All the payments were made, Mr. Chairman, by 2024, and the Government agreed to pay the remaining [\$]16.3 shortfall in October 2023 in six equal instalments. And that has been paid.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Mr. Chairman, sorry. While the Minister is—

The Chairman: Sorry. Is this a point of clarification?

Ms. Robin Tucker: It is a question.

The Chairman: Minister, do you take—

Ms. Robin Tucker: May I ask a question?

The Chairman: —a point of clarification?

Ms. Robin Tucker: No. Sorry.

The Chairman: Yes.

Ms. Robin Tucker: It is a question for you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Oh, I am sorry. Yes.

Ms. Robin Tucker: I just wondered while the Minister was waiting to get answers if I could just get one more question in there.

The Chairman: Minister, are you happy to have another question put?

Yes, please. The Honourable Member for constituency 7, you have the floor.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just wanted to know, in response to the Minister's answer about fee-for-service, if there was or if there is any consideration for having a blended model so fee-for-service for some things, grant funding for

some, and capitated. Is there any sort of consideration in that regard?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Honourable Minister for Health, are you prepared to proceed?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes. Thank you.

The Chairman: We only have about two or three minutes left.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Chairman, like I said, the Government's commitment when we did the health financing reform several years ago was an introduction of a block grant. However, we maintained discussions and a working group with the BHB so that we can look at revenue generation ideas. The 4B codes, which is a fee-for-service mechanism so to speak, have been expanded. We have increased the amount. I think it went from \$200 to \$300. So, we are looking at perhaps some other services that can be going into the fee-for-service.

We have spoken about the road traffic incidents that I spoke about. So those 4B codes are in essence separate and apart from the block grant. So, there are considerations as to what else can be potentially inserted into the 4B codes. But we always have to remember—whatever we are doing as it relates to inclusions into 4Bs—what impact it may have on the overall health system. So, all of this . . . You cannot just . . . When you . . . It is like Whac-A-Mole. You cannot just do one thing and then do not expect that there is going to be any type of consequence. We have to look at the overall health care system in totality.

We are looking at other mechanisms in these discussions, in these working group meetings with the BHB, to look at other mechanisms as it relates to how to make sure the funding is sustainable. And we are also looking at perhaps consideration of transferring some services that are currently performed in BHB out into the community, which may have cost-effective economies of scale. So, that is all a part of the conversations.

Again, as I have indicated previously, Mr. Chairman, as a Government we are committed to ensuring that the hospital has the financial resources that they require to provide the services that each and every one of us is expecting. However, we have to look at it in totality. We need to make sure that accountability exists. I think the Honourable Member spoke first about accountability. And that goes on both sides from BHB as well as the Government. We have to continue in those dialogues, and those dialogues are continuing regularly.

I just have to see if I have a couple more answers.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Members, while the Honourable Health Minister is looking—

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes.

The Chairman: Oh, you have got them?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes.

The Chairman: You have the floor, Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes. In addition to this, what other proactive steps are being taken for recruitment, practice, et cetera? The Department of Health is exploring options to provide housing for public health professionals upon their arrival to the Island because we recognise that the cost of living is one of the bigger barriers to recruitment. I have spoken about the bursaries and the trainee programmes.

With respect to the question . . . What information would the Minister commit to publishing [in] regular updates on hospital spending annual reports? This would obviously come from BHB not the Ministry. Annual reports up to 2023 have been completed, Mr. Chairman, which will speak to the updates with respect to the hospital funding because they produce their own reports. They have been produced up to 2023, and they are complete and close to being made public. That is for 2023.

And there is a quality and safety data report posted quarterly on the website of BHB and a monthly report as well with respect to the emergency department and bed-waiting data and real-time waiting time in the waiting room. And that is also produced monthly by BHB. So, the annual report is about to be public for 2023, and then there is a monthly report that is on their website. And again, that speaks to the question as it relates to the publishing of regular updates of the hospital spending that would come from them in their annual reports.

I think that might be half of the questions at least, but like I said, I did undertake to—

The Chairman: Well, I am afraid we are probably now at the end of time anyway.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Okay.

The Chairman: So, firstly, thank you to the Honourable Minister of Health and thank you to the Honourable Shadow Minister of Health, respectively, the Minister Kim Wilson and MP Robin Tucker.

Minister, would you care to move your heads?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Sure.

Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 21, 22, 24, and 91 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: Yes, Honourable Members, it has been moved that Heads 21, 22, 24, 91 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none; agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Health, Heads 21, 22, 24 and 91 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

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

I move that the Committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Members.

It has been moved by the Honourable Minister that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none, the Committee shall rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply rose and reported progress and asked for leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 8:03 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Deputy Speaker: It has been reported that the Committee rise and report progress with leave to sit again. That was approved.

No objections to that?

There being none; accepted.

That takes us on to the next matter. I do understand that we have one matter to deal with today. And that matter will be done under the Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour, I believe it is.

Minister?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam [Deputy] Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Department of Labour Act 2025 be now read the second time.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill labelled the Economy Labour Act 2025 *[sic]* be read a second time.

Did I say that correctly?

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Department of Labour Act 2025.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh, Department of Labour. Sorry.

Is that approved? Yes.
Minister, continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, I am pleased to introduce in the Honourable House today a Bill entitled the Department of Labour Act 2025. [It] provides for the continuation of the Department of Labour in legislation and appoints the Director of Labour as the public officer responsible for the supervision of the Department of Labour subject to the general direction and control of the Minister responsible for labour relations.

The Department of Labour, previously known as the Labour Relations Section, used to be a section within the Department of Workforce Development. In 2017, the section was separated from the Department of Workforce Development and placed within the Ministry of Home Affairs Headquarters as a standalone government section headed by the Manager of Labour Relations. All employment and labour-related legislation was amended to provide the manager with specific legislative responsibilities that were previously held by the director of Workforce Development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in March 2023, the section was transitioned into the Department of Labour, and the Director of Labour post was created to ensure the efficient operation and management of the department. This meant, Madam Deputy Speaker, that the legislation, regulations, and orders prescribed to the department as well as any consequential legislation required amendment to correctly reference the department by name and appoint a Director of Labour as the public officer within the supervision of the department as legislation currently refers to the Manager of Labour Relations.

Madam Deputy Speaker, it is essential to ensure that the legislative responsibility for the department is correctly assigned to the head of the department, and this Bill achieves that.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this?

I recognise the Member from constituency 9. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I just have a few questions for the Minister. The first one is: Why was this not done? I mean, this is fairly straightforward. It is making consequential amendments to some Acts and obvious amendments to principal Acts. Why was this not done in July 2017 when the Act was separated from the Workforce Development or when it actually transitioned from a unit into a department in March of 2023?

I think from earlier today in our debate it was mentioned that the staffing of this unit/department has been through using employees from other departments. Is that correct? And since . . . I know the director was announced in October of last year. I am just wondering, since then, has the director been the only full-time equivalent, and have they been working with employees from other areas or temporary employees from other areas?

So, the last question is: The net impact of this department to the Government coffers is . . . As far as expenditure, is that equal to the \$1,199,000 as per page B-199 in this year's budget?

That is it, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to this Bill?

There being no other Members, Minister?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, I did not hear whether or not the Opposition supports the Bill or not.

[Laughter]

Mr. Vance Campbell: Madam Deputy Speaker, a point of clarification, if the Minister will accept.

The Deputy Speaker: A point of information, you mean?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of information.

[Inaudible interjections]

Some Hon. Members: What is it?

POINT OF INFORMATION

Hon. Jason Hayward: Oh yes. The Opposition does support this.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Well, let me begin by thanking the Opposition for their support of this particular Bill.

The Department of Labour is extremely fundamental in terms of maintaining labour standards in Bermuda, in terms of ensuring that there are harmonious labour relations. And so, I will walk through the exercise of where we came from to where we are.

And so, in July 2017, when it was moved as a unit head and transitioned from the Department of Labour underneath the [Ministry of] Home Affairs, as I believe I indicated at that point in time, the appropriate title for the person who actually managed the section—because it was not a department—would have been the Labour Relations Manager. When the Labour Relations Section shifted ministries to the Ministry of Economy and Labour, the Ministry then thought it best fit to create a Department of Labour with the necessary administrative support so it can carry out the functions that are required to ensure we can achieve the objectives that are set out from the department. That meant that we do a management service review and identify positions. Once the positions were then identified, we were able to get Cabinet approval to approve the department.

When you create departments, you can create two departments two ways in government. It can be [an] administrative department, or it can be a statutory department. When it was deemed to be an administrative department, it was still fine where we had reference to the manager responsible for labour relations, but we thought it was a simple amendment to just change the Manager of Labour Relations to Director of Labour Relations. Chambers had then advised us that the process is not as simple as that. If you refer to a director, the director needs to be a director of a department, and the department has to be a statutory department in law. And as a result of that, we brought the legislation to first and foremost create a Department of Labour that will be a statutory Department of Labour, and then at the end of that process, we then were to transfer the responsibilities to the Director of Labour.

The Director of Labour is not the only full-time officer and has not been the only full-time officer within the Department of Labour. We are in a process where we do ongoing recruitment, and that is primarily for the positions such as labour inspectors and also labour relations officers who may have transitioned out of the department at that particular point in time.

But when it was a unit, it did have staff associated with the unit that transferred over into the department. Where there was a shortfall in human resources, we then seconded individuals in the department because it is such a fundamental role that these officers play that we thought it was important for us to have the appropriate coverage.

I want to underscore what the fundamental importance of this Bill [is] in the context of how it is actually going to continue to allow us to assist persons

in need within the world of work—that is increasing labour standards, ensuring we have appropriate labour policy, ensuring that we advance labour rights, ensuring that we have harmonious labour relations and the approval of . . . (I wouldn't use the word approval) or the facilitation of assuring that labour disputes actually get adjudicated in an efficient and effective manner.

I think that the statistics I mentioned earlier when I was going through the brief of the department in terms of the number of persons who had called in for consultations regarding provisions of law underneath the laws that govern the world of work in Bermuda is a testament to the fundamental importance of assuring that we have an appropriate administrative body within Government that actually can support persons within the world of work.

The level of complaints and the nature of complaints were also something that we should find somewhat concerning as it pertains to persons who are seeking justice through the Employment and Labour Relations Tribunal for not being paid, not being paid redundancy, for not having the appropriate time underneath the Act, and things of that nature.

So, this is fundamentally important. I believe it is an important milestone in terms of us having a properly constituted department with [a] full complement of staff who have been identified in terms of need and our ability to ensure that we improve the workforce.

When we start to talk about human-centred policies, the Department of Labour is on the forefront of supporting workers in the world of work. Not just that, but [it is] also looking in the future and determining how the world of work will adapt and what policy changes may be needed, ensuring that we stay up in alignment with best practices from the ILO, and as a means of social protection. You know, working in dignity is one of the goals, the sustainable development goals, that the UN actually sets. And we should be advancing to or trying to accomplish those goals as best as we possibly can. And in this particular area we find that jurisdictions that actually support their workers have more productive environments, better conditions. We have persons working in dignity and in decency.

This department is also responsible for ensuring that the minimum wage provisions, which are set out in law, are actually adhered to and there is compliance with the minimum wage. When I came to this House some time ago and I got the full body of complaints from an immigration standpoint that pertain to contracts that were not amended to reflect the minimum wage, I saw the gravity of having a department that persons can rely on, that they can contact to get the justice that they deserve. Sometimes we rely on employers to simply do the right thing, and that is not the case. We need to have a regulated environment with consequences for those persons who do not fol-

low our laws. The Department of Labour and the Director of Labour are at the forefront of that.

I think that the statutory responsibility shifting from the Labour Relations Manager to the director is appropriate. It makes perfect sense, but it had to be an organised transition that we can actually facilitate. I would say until this law comes into force, the statutory responsibilities today remain with the Labour Relations Manager and not the director. And so, you can see how you have an officer within the department that has greater statutory responsibility than the person responsible for the department, and that does not make much sense and is the not the appropriate way we should be governing ourselves.

With that said, Madam Deputy Speaker—

Mr. Vance Campbell: Minister, I had a question about—

The Deputy Speaker: Please speak to the Chair—

Mr. Vance Campbell: Sorry. I apologise.

The Deputy Speaker: —and please wait until you have a point of information that you would like the Minister to yield to?

Mr. Vance Campbell: That is correct.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Minister, do you yield?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Sure.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. You have the floor.

POINT OF INFORMATION

Mr. Vance Campbell: Madam Deputy Speaker, I had a question about the net expenditure that this department would have on Government expenditure. The Minister may have forgotten that part of the question. And is it equivalent to the \$1.99 . . . I mean the \$199,000 that is in the Budget Book?

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.
Minister?

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, I would caution you to ensure that Members of this House recognise the rules governing debate—

The Deputy Speaker: Not reflecting on other debates, is that what you—

Hon. Jason Hayward: —where a Member can only speak once during debate, and there is no interjection for further questioning and answers as we are not in the Committee of Supply.

The Deputy Speaker: And you are correct. And you can do that in Committee of Supply.

Hon. Jason Hayward: That was the first infraction.

The second infraction that I will caution about is that we just did a full debate regarding the Ministry of Economy of Labour and the departments that fall under that, and we debated and approved the head related to the Department of Labour. So, it is the most absurd question when we are talking about the funding associated with the department that we just approved earlier within debate.

Notwithstanding that, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to move that the Bill be committed.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill entitled the Department of Labour Act 2025 be committed.

Any objections?

There being none; approved.

[I] call on Member Famous to come and take the [Chair].

House in Committee at 8:22 pm

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT 2025

The Chairman: Honourable Members and the listening public, we are now in Committee of the whole [House] for further consideration of the Bill entitled [Department of Labour Act 2025](#). I call upon the Minister in charge to proceed.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move clauses 1 through 6.

The Chairman: It has moved that clauses 1 through 6 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. Agreed to.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, this Bill makes provision to amend the Employment Act 2000 and the Trade Union Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 2021 with respect to the continuation of the Department of Labour under the supervision of the Director of Labour as the public officer responsible for the department. Related matters are provided for in Schedules 1, 2, and 3.

Schedule 1 amends the Employment Act 2000, Schedule 2 amends the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 2021 and Schedule 3 provides consequential amendments to various primary and secondary legislation; all amendments

change the officer responsible in legislation from the Manager of Labour Relations to the Director of Labour.

Clause 1 provides a citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends the Employment Act 2000 to insert a new section 3AA that provides for the continuation of the Department of Labour, under the supervision of the Director of Labour, who is the public officer responsible for the department.

Clause 3 provides for amendments to the Employment Act 2000 as set out in Schedule 1.

Clause 4 provides for amends to the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 2021 as set out in Schedule 2.

Clause 5 provides for consequential amendments as set out in Schedule 3.

Clause 6 provides for commencement.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clause 6 *[sic]* be approved.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Any Members wish to speak to that?
No one? There is no one?

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 6 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 6 passed.]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam *[sic]* Chairman, I move that Schedules—

The Chairman: Wait, wait, wait. Let's be clear. It is not Madam Chairman.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: We are not gender-fluid up here.
Please continue.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move that Schedules 1 through 3 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Schedules 1 through 3 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. Agreed to.

Anyone wish to speak to it?

[Motion carried: Schedules 1 through 3 passed.]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. Agreed to.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. Agreed to.

The Bill will be reported to the House as printed.

Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Department of Labour Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

The Chairman: Madam [Deputy] Speaker.

House resumed at 8:27 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT 2025

The Deputy Speaker: It has been reported that the Bill be reported to the House as printed and that was agreed to. So accepted.

So that moves us on. Today we have no further matters.

I do understand that the Junior Minister wishes to do something.

Junior Minister of Finance, you have the floor.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam [Deputy] Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for consideration to the Honourable House of Assembly draft Regulations entitled the Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2025 proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance—

The Deputy Speaker: Junior Minister, can I get you to move the suspension of Standing Order 14 first, please?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I am sorry.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Got to get my glasses on.

[Laughter]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 14

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that Standing Order 14 be suspended to enable me to present a communication to the House.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that Standing Order 14 be suspended.

Are there any objections to that? To enable the Junior Minister to provide a communication to us.

No objections.

Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE****DRAFT REGULATIONS: GOVERNMENT FEES
AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2025**

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I have the honour to attach and submit for consideration to the Honourable House of Assembly draft Regulations entitled the Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2025 proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance under provisions of section 2(1) of the Government Fees Act 1965.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

So approved.

That takes us to . . . there being no other matters to deal with. The third reading of the Bill.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Department of Labour Act 2025 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that Standing Order 21 be enacted to enable the Minister to read the Bill the Department of Labour Act 2025 for a third time.

Any objections?

There being none . . .

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

BILL**THIRD READING****DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT 2025**

Hon. Jason Hayward: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the Bill be now a third time by its title only and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the Bill be read a third time by its title only and passed.

Any objections to that?

There are none. Approved.

[Motion carried: The Department of Labour Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

The Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the . . . I need a Minister to move . . . Yes.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House now adjourn until Wednesday, [the] 21st of May at 10:00 am. And I do believe I have a Member who wishes—

The Deputy Speaker: That is okay.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that the House adjourn until Wednesday, 21 May.

Is there anyone that wishes to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Member from constituency 33. Member, you have the floor.

BERMUDA DAY

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

You know, for the past couple of weeks we have been talking a lot about not just how well aspects of our economy are doing, but we have also talked about the people who have been left behind.

Recently I had somebody stop me. And they said, *Why are you spending all this money on these people who do not want to pay their way? You know, do not want to work. They are lazy.* And just the whole nine. And it really struck to me how in the midst of all our wealth and prosperity there are still pockets devoid of compassion for each other.

We see too often in our community our neighbours struggling, and instead of offering compassion, we offer judgment. We gossip about them. We laugh about them. You know, we talk to everybody about them. *Look at them. Look at them.* So, we . . . The struggles that people are facing are being compounded by the judgment of their peers, the judgment of their communities, the degradation and the gossip, and the whispers and the laughing.

And we do not think sometimes, you know. You walk up to somebody and say, *My God. You gained all this weight.* But there are people who have mental issues where the medication they are taking to help them feel better made them gain weight.

You know, you will say to somebody, *Oh, your shoes are falling apart.* And you do not realise that they are paying all the money they have for their children to be educated, or even just to keep the lights on.

And so, we know as we come towards Bermuda Day, which was created specifically to engender unity in our community and engendered to help break down barriers in divide, I am asking each of us to think and see each other as human beings not sources of entertainment, not sources of degradation. I want us to see, and before we judge ask, you know. Before you look at somebody and you say [something], ask them, *Are you okay? Do you need help?* That is a change that needs to run through this community and a spirit that needs to run through this community because as we go to Bermuda Day and we talk about unity, unity begins with us getting back to being who we are as a people as we have been historically, people who look out for each other, people who care about each other.

We have always talked about each other, but now if we want to progress, we have got to change. *We have got to change.* And so, I am asking everyone, the next time you see somebody struggling, before you take a picture and pass it on, before you run to everybody and say, *Look what happened to so-and-so*, reach out. Knock on their door. Go to your neighbour and say, *Look. Do you need some help? How can I help you?* You know? Let's try and change that mind-set.

And I will ask that each of us have a very wonderful Bermuda Day even though we will be back here on Wednesday. I do not know if I will be speaking on Wednesday. But I would like to extend on behalf of my family and the team at constituency 33 a happy Bermuda Day to all Bermudians when it comes.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Members.

Is there anyone else who wishes to speak to the motion?

There being none, the House is now adjourned.

[Gavel]

[At 8:34 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Wednesday, 21 May 2025.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
21 MAY 2025
10:03 AM**

Sitting Number 10 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, Members.
We will have the prayers.

PRAYERS

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

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 16 and 19 May 2025]

The Deputy Speaker: Members are there any concerns about the Minutes for 16 May?

There being none, those Minutes are approved.

The Minutes of 19 May, any corrections?

There being none, they are also approved.

[Minutes of 16 and 19 May 2025 confirmed.]

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Deputy Speaker: Members, the Honourable Speaker is absent. The Honourable Premier is absent. Honourable Member Famous has given apologies for his absence. Honourable Member Emilygail Dill has given apologies for her absence and Honourable Member Dickinson has given apologies for his absence.

Those are the notices.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PETITIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: Of course, there are none.

**CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY
SPEECHES**

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise the Member from constituency 29, the Deputy Premier.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy speaker, I would like the House to send congratulations to the Bermuda Snooker League. You will know that the Honourable Member Kim Swan mentioned the St. George's team winning a cup two weeks [ago]. Well, the Bermuda Snooker League is currently hosting the International Snooker Tournament, which is being held at the Spanish Point Boat Club. And I think it's only fitting that we mentioned some of the Members responsible for the organisation of such. And those Members are the President, Paul Fedden, Steven Bremar (and I declare my interest), my sister Penny De Silva, and many others that have taken part in getting this.

It's a huge undertaking because snooker tables, as you may know, Madam Deputy Speaker, are very heavy. When you have to break them down and install them, they are very, very heavy slates to put in place to make them work. So, there have been many other people who have helped to pull this event off, which we expect almost, I think 48 international visitors are coming down for the tournament.

Others that have been involved, and whom you will know, are Calvin Richardson, also known as "Squalla" from down the East End; Alan Smith, Aaron Bean, Tyler Moniz, Kyle Williams, Martin Siese, and I'm sure there are others. But I did go to the opening the other night and it was well represented and everyone,

the international visitors, seemed to be really enjoying the Bermudian hospitality and they will be here for the next week.

So, my hat goes off to all of them for making this event the success that it is.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Deputy.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Minister from constituency 15. Minister, you have before.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to start my comments by saying these come from a position of my professional status rather than my personal, and I would like to congratulate the St. David's Cricket [Club]. And you probably won't hear me say that much in a personal capacity at all, but I want to congratulate them, the St. David's Cricket [Club], and associate the Vice President of Cleveland County, and another supporter of Cleveland with those, and yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker, because St. David's Cricket Club has secured the Premier Division 2020 league title as of last week. And I particularly want to shout out to the captain of St. David's Cricket Club, who is my constituent, Mr. Derrick Brangman.

You would all know Mr. Derrick Brangman as a Cup Match player and also three-time MVP of the Bermuda Cricket Board. So, he is the captain of that team. And I thought it only fitting that I rise to my feet this morning and congratulate St. David's Cricket Club on the first trophy that has been, you know, produced this cricket season. And it hurts so much to say that, as you know, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Also, I'd like to congratulate Miss Caitlyn Bobb. I'm not sure if that was done the other day, but she was very successful in an ACC championship, of winning the 400 metres which we have seen recently. So, I'd like to congratulate her.

I'd like to be associated as well with the comments from the Deputy and Acting Premier on the snooker. I will be making an appearance at some point this weekend. You know, I had to explain to some in my office what snooker was. But congratulations on being able to bring tournaments. And as you would know, Madam Deputy Speaker, it is always important to see sporting competitions and sporting groups come to Bermuda because, although it is all in good spirit of competition, it is also additional tourists to the Island.

So, thank you Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 26. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

It is with some sadness that I have to stand this morning to say that the Death Angel has not been very happy with us in Warwick of recent, taking some of our constituents at a very early age. So, I am asking if this House can send condolences to two families in my constituency. And the first one is the passing of Katherine Ann Ming, whose husband is Roirdon Ming, which a lot of people I think may know of Spice Hill Rd. I remember speaking to Mrs. Ming just before the election in February. And we were having such a good time on her porch that I forgot I had to go next door. And all of a sudden, I heard that she took sick and passed just recently. So, I asked that condolences be sent to her husband, her children Selina, Selica and Sabrina as well.

The next family that I wish to talk about is Miss Marie Saltus, who passed. She was from Bulkhead Drive in Warwick. I know her son, Darian Bean is certainly going to miss her very much because I think they were very, very close. Mrs. Saltus was not that young; but at the same time, I still think that she was taken a bit too early. And I would ask that the condolences be sent to the family.

I didn't get the opportunity earlier to associate myself with the passing of Mrs. Minna Scott of Spice Hill as well. In fact, her son actually was in this House at some point in time. And he and I know each other well. So, I ask that I be associated with those condolences as well.

Thank you very much.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 28. Member you have the floor.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker, and to our listening audience.

I would also like to be associated, Madam Deputy Speaker, with the condolences being sent to [the family of] Mrs. Minna Scott. Her grandson was a very good friend of mine from school days and we still keep in touch today. So, I would just like to be associated with the comments and just send my condolences to the Scott family. I would like to associate MPs Lawrence Scott and Scott Simmons.

I would also like to send condolences to the family of Mr. Thomas Lauwaske Jones. While I didn't know him, he was the son of Thomas and Paulette Bailey. His younger brother is best friends to one of my younger brothers. He had his incident happen around a similar time that my mother was in Agape House, so our families went through a time of grieving at the same time. So, I just wanted to send condolences to the family of Mr. Thomas Jones.

Also, to the family and to a relative of mine, the family of Mr. Alan Stacy Gilbert, who passed and was

buried this week. I would like to associate MP Scott Simmons. He was a family member. And, while I hadn't seen him in recent years, I do remember in my younger years always running to him, and he was always had a smile on his face, and we shared a good laugh. So, condolences to the Gilbert family.

And, on a lighter note, I would also like to add my comments to those of Minister Darrell's, in regard to Miss Caitlyn Bobb. The 400 metres that she ran, she did that in 51.11 seconds, which was a personal best not only for herself, or a national Bermuda best, but also for her school, a record for her school, Virginia Tech.

Also, I would like to send congratulations to Miss Sheayla Cann, who also over the weekend participated in the Coastal Athletic Association Women's Track and Field Championship. I would also like to associate Minister Wilson. She finished silver in the 800 metres in a time of two minutes, seven seconds, 7.89 seconds. And so as again, I always like to highlight Bermudians, especially young Bermudians participating, competing, rather, locally or internationally and representing Bermuda well.

And lastly, I would just like to commend . . . well, while it hasn't happened yet today, the West End Primary School is hosting and holding their Heritage Day celebration. And the theme is The Future is Now, where they will be doing a parade and a marathon in and around the Somerset community, and that again is—

The Deputy Speaker: See how the West copies the East?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: What does it say? *The best is in the West*. But I'd like to just send . . . as I said, it hasn't happened yet, but I commend the West End Primary School for recognising our history and our culture and starting young, getting the children to understand what the history and culture is all about.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Minister from constituency 4. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I don't know if this was done in the House already, but if it was, I do definitely want to be associated with it, and that is the recognition of the teen services Outstanding Teen Awards that had taken place earlier this month. And want to take the opportunity to for us to send congratulatory remarks to all of those teams who participated and who were recipients of the award.

I had the opportunity last night to attend a reception for all of the outstanding teams that were

awarded. And I just wanted to share with this House and the members of our community that we have some outstanding young people in Bermuda. And every year . . . we know this, but we tend to focus on the negativity and the sort of situations as it relates to our young people. And we need to take more opportunity to highlight the positivity of our young people. We had young people who were . . . there were about 12 awards that were given. And they had over 200 nominations of outstanding young persons, particularly for the different awards.

If you allow me, I'd just like to announce the winners of the special categories, if I have enough time, but [they are]

- Most Progress: Aleigha Trott and Kameron McNeil
- Community Service: Milan Nisbett
- Spiritual Leadership: Kaelyn Fleming and Daequan Dixon
- Sport: Charlotte Millington and Jake Smith
- Public Speaking: Helena Thomas and Guyen Bean
- Entrepreneurship: Shia Bean and Michael Scott
- Visual Arts: Ella Hubbard and J'yindae Preece
- Stem: Sophia Perrin and Remy Donawa
- Perseverance: Alyssa Walsh and Mikale Willis
- Performing Arts: Hannah Taylor and Jack McDonnell
- Vocational/Technical Arts: Jordan Mello and Michael Darrell
- Leadership: Kaelyn Fleming and Elias Baia
- Academic Achievement: Ryanna King and Jaden-Alex Walrond
- Hospitality: Canasia Wolffe and Olly Cherry
- Special Recognition: Kijali Jean-Marie
- Outstanding Overall: Esi Naylor

So, I do want to publicly congratulate all of those outstanding teens and all of our young people who are doing some amazing things in Bermuda. Well done!

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise Member Simmons from constituency 32.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. Good morning, colleagues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise in this Honourable House to ask that condolences be appropriately sent to the former Chief Inspector, Mr. Hilton Wingood. I ask that if we haven't—

The Deputy Speaker: So yes, associate yourself.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Very well. I will associate myself, if you have already seen to it. But Madam Deputy

Speaker, I had the opportunity of going to his service, which was held just in the early part of this week. It was a wonderful service. I had the opportunity of serving on the Bermuda Police Service with Chief Inspector Hilton Wingood, and I found him to be a stately man, a wonderful chief inspector who I had a very brief encounter with, because, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I joined the police service, went through the training school and when I was I was attached with, I believe it was, now, Superintendent Tracy Adams. And we went to the West End Division with Clara Saunders and under Sergeant (I can't think of his name now).

But at any rate, Madam Deputy Speaker, when I walked in the door, I was sent to immediately speak to the chief inspector. And we sat down. He spent quite a long time regaling the police service, bringing me up to date. And then he said to me young constable, I wish you all the best. So, I looked at him and he said *this is my last day*. My first, his last.

And Mr. Wingood was well known in the community. I knew him for a long time. It was a sad day. And then, of course the West End Police Division was taken over by Chief Inspector Larry Smith LSM, GPMG.

He will be much remembered. He will be revered. And I wish for certainly condolences to be sent out to his family.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member, Linda Smith, from constituency 31.

Ms. Linda Smith: Correct. Thank you, Madam. Deputy Speaker.

I just wanted to associate with myself with the comments made by the Honourable Minister with respect to the Outstanding Teens award and congratulations to all the participants and certainly the winners. And I think it does speak about, you know, the quiet people in this community that are doing the good things and the right things. And it is nice when you the spotlight can be on them. So, congratulations to them.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Ms. Linda Smith: And I associate the Honourable Member Robert King, with my comments. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 24. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, I just want to be associated with the comments for Minna Scott, who is my great aunt. She and

my grandfather are brother and sister. And she was a darling lady. If a flower was to represent a person and personality, her flower would be the rose. It was beautiful, fragrant, but still thorny at times. So, she did not mince her words, and she let you know how she felt at all times. She was a staunch Seventh-day Adventist supporter and spread the gospel as much as she could, and made sure that everybody made it into heaven by celebrating and observing the Sabbath.

I would also like to be associated with the comments and the congratulations for Teen Services. I would declare my interest. It was founded by my mother, Olga Scott, and I never knew why I wasn't able to participate in the Outstanding Teen award when I was younger and my mother told me because it wouldn't be fair to the others, and the others would have to have a chance of winning. And so, I still believe that to this day.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: But it is good to see her legacy live on. I am a proud uncle, and my nephew was nominated for one of the categories. But once again it is just good to see her legacy live on. It shows that the future of Bermuda is in good hands.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member, Miss Tucker from constituency 20 . . .

Ms. Robin Tucker: [Constituency] 7.

Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Thank you so much. I just wanted to associate myself with the condolences expressed for Mrs. Marie Ismay Saltus. Particularly for her brother, who is a constituent. Mr Earl Lee Bean, and his wife, Mrs. Olney Bean, and as well as Shawnette, Shari[-Lynn] and Syreeta. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member Tucker from constituency 7.

Any other persons wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 30.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and good morning.

I rise to give condolences to the family of Jasmin Smith, who unfortunately lost her life in the incident—the horrendous incident—that happened at Legends in Somerset. And I knew that we—

The Deputy Speaker: You want to be associated.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I want to be associated. I knew that it was spoken about, but I wanted to speak about her specifically because as a fellow Raleigh alumni at

Raleigh, Bermuda, it has been a very rough year. Losing her and Jawonday Smith in such a short span of time, people who really epitomise what it was to be a Raleigh Bermuda member and give back to the community and also, you know, have a story of redemption, as well, and getting back on the right path. And so, you know, I wanted to also extend my condolences to the Raleigh alumni who are grieving the loss of two very crucial members of this organisation. And I hope that you know her family and all the families affected and all her loved ones find some solace in each other during these difficult times.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

Well, I just want to say a short congratulatory comment to the great Warriors from St. David's in winning the 2020 league. And I thank the Member from constituency 15 for sharing how great they are and hopefully they will go on to win the knockout competition as well. So, I had to be associated with those comments.

Thank you, Member.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

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

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTION

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

And that brings us to the Orders of the Day.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Deputy Speaker: Resumption in Committee.
[Deputy] Premier, please.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in

Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we move to Committee of Supply.

Are there any objections?

There being none, so moved.

I ask for Member Simmons to assume the Chair.

House in Committee at 10:27 am

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Chairman: Good morning, Honourable Members, and to the listening public. We are now in Committee of Supply for further considerations of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26, where Heads 86, 23 and 55 will be considered and now will be debated.

I call for the Minister in charge to proceed.

I recognise the Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert, Minister (if I am correct) of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

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

The Chairman: Good morning.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I move that the following heads: Head 86, Ministry of Youth Social Development and Seniors Headquarters; Head 23, Child and Family Services, Head 55, Financial Assistance be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the heads be now taken under consideration.

Any objection?

There is none.

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF YOUTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SENIORS

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the 2025/26 budget estimates for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors which comprises the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters, inclusive of Ageing and Disability Services, the K. Margaret Carter Centre, the Office of Youth Affairs; the Department of Child and Family Services and, the Department of Financial Assistance.

Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget allocations for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors will demonstrate that there is a continued commitment with funding to support Bermuda's population during their lifespan, which includes our most vulnerable and cherished population groups, that is our children (including youth), persons with disabilities, and our seniors. To this end, Mr. Chairman, we have ensured that the services and programmes offered by the Ministry will directly impact and improve their overall well-being and quality of life.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry focused on numerous national priorities during the last budget year, which are ongoing and will continue in the upcoming 2025/26 budget year. I will briefly highlight these as follows:

Mr. Chairman, the Steering Committee for the National Intellectual Disabilities Plan, is a non-statutory body that includes representation from a cross-sector of the community who have technical expertise, and first-hand experience interacting with persons with intellectual disabilities. The Committee members represent the public and private sectors; Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) and civil society, and has been charged with overseeing the implementation of the five-year National Plan for Adults with Intellectual Disabilities and their Families 2023-2028.

The aim of the National Plan is to facilitate cross-sector collaboration to identify and address the gaps to improve services and supports to ensure adults with intellectual disabilities have healthy and happy lives.

Three priorities were selected as the starting point for executing the National Plan which included:

1. Quality Support and Services;
2. Policy, Regulation and Accountability; and
3. Advocacy and Communication.

The work of these sub-committees will be shared later in the brief under the Ageing and Disabilities Services initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors is committed to creating a more inclusive Bermuda by empowering adults with disabilities and their families, strengthening the Government's commitment to uphold the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and aligning with the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goal [5], Good Health and Well-Being; and Goal 10, Reduce Inequalities ensuring persons with disabilities in Bermuda do not get left behind.

Mr. Chairman, the first Gender Affairs Council established in 2023 was given the mandate to propose legislative changes to the Government; review policy initiatives; and evaluate programmes that ensure gender equality, as well as ensure Bermuda's compliance with the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Mr. Chairman, last year the Council developed a work plan that included reviewing the CARICOM

Regional Knowledge, Attitude, and Practice (KAP) Tool. The KAP Tool provides a regional model that aims to address the gaps in comprehensive, reliable, comparable data on what people in the region know (based on their knowledge) about violence against women and girls, what they think about the issues (their attitudes), and how social norms might influence their experience of the issues (practice). The development of the KAP Tool is supported by UNICEF and the Gender and Development Programme within CARICOM to support the development of a standardised model on social/gender norms and violence against women and girls to enable the formulation of evidence-based programmes aimed at changing social norms to strengthen this area of prevention.

Mr. Chairman, the Council has developed recommendations and a framework on how the KAP Tool will be adapted for Bermuda. This framework aims to assist government departments and organisations in collecting accurate data on Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices to support strategies and support informed decision-making about social/gender norms.

Mr. Chairman, to engage the public and raise awareness on gender matters within the community the Gender Affairs Council created an Instagram account which provides information about the role and responsibilities of the Council and gives a brief biography of members serving on the Council. The Instagram page is @gender.affairs.council.bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, this year in support of International Women's Day, the Gender Affairs Council highlighted Bermudian women past and present who have accelerated action in the community, Jessica Cooper Lewis (Paralympian Athlete), Cindy Clarke (Director of Public Prosecutions), Dame Pamela Gordon (former Premier of Bermuda), Dr. Barbara Ball (Physician, Politician and Social Activist), and Gladys Misick Morrell. The Chair of the Gender Affairs Council also presented an affirmation on behalf of the Council during the opening of the Women's Resource Centre International Women's Day Celebration on March 7, 2025, and at the Government of Bermuda's first "Empower, Thrive and Shine: Women's Wellness Celebration Fair."

Mr. Chairman, [ensuring the best interests], protection and safeguarding of our children is imperative. In support of this, during the past year, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors continued to strengthen the Litigation Guardian Framework by setting up building blocks for a long-term, sustainable litigation guardian service.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry officially established the Office of the Litigation Guardian as part of the Ministry and identified a private, secure meeting room for the litigation guardians to meet with children and their families. Also, a pool of lawyers who specialise in child care was developed to serve as litigation counsel when appointed by the courts. Additionally, a public information pamphlet was produced in December 2024 explaining the work of the litigation guardian

service to enhance public awareness of the role of the litigation guardian.

Mr. Chairman, the UK Foreign Commonwealth Development Office continued to provide the Ministry with the technical expert support of consultant Mr. Anthony Douglas CBE, a former chief executive of England's Children and Family Court. In March this year, the Ministry hosted a series of meetings, discussions and work sessions for the Judiciary, Litigation Guardians, and community partners, all who impact the lives of our children in some way.

Mr. Chairman, in November 2024, the Ministry organised its third awareness campaign last year to observe the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Girls and the launch of the 16 Days of Activism. The theme was (hashtag) #NoExcuse, which emphasised the importance of collective investment and continued action. The theme urged individuals, communities, and governments to unite in the fight against violence against women and to invest in long-term solutions.

The Ministry actioned its investment by proposing a perpetrator treatment services programme that will be launched later this year, hiring a domestic violence social worker who commenced in April of this year, and providing a grant of \$150,000 to the Centre Against Abuse to support their services within the community to prevent violence against women.

Mr. Chairman, as part of the campaign the Ministry held a groundbreaking roundtable focus group session that brought together the Attorney General and Minister of Justice, Government Senators, the Deputy Police Commissioner, officers from Department of Child and Family Services, and representatives from the Gender Affairs Council, Women's Resource Centre and Centre Against Abuse. This collaborative initiative provided a forum for the discussion of pressing issues concerning domestic violence and support for abused women in Bermuda, which aligned with global efforts to eliminate violence against women and girls and work towards helping them rebuild their lives.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry continued its joint partnership with the UN Women and UNDP participating in the Joint Sustainable Development Go-Fund Programme entitled: *Building Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*. In partnership with UN Women, the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation [BEDC] and UN Development Programme, (the Joint Programme) was advanced by offering initiatives and services to support opportunities for women, persons with disabilities and youth who own Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises [MSMEs] in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, in July and September 2024, UN Women, through the partnership with the Ministry and BEDC led virtual training sessions on Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) 101 and the Gender Gap Analysis Tool for Business Growth in Bermuda. WEPs are a set of guidelines established by UN

Women and UN Global Compact to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the workplace, marketplace, and community. The guidelines provide a framework for businesses, regardless of size, sector, or geography on how to empower women in these spaces. Several corporate businesses, organisations and financial institutions were invited to participate.

Mr. Chairman, to further advance the UN Joint Programme, in August 2024, the Ministry, in collaboration with UN Women Multi-Country Office, Caribbean and BEDC, launched an initiative calling for specialised and experience business services providers to offer their business and technical expert services to women, persons with disabilities and youth entrepreneurs in need to help contribute to the growth and sustainability of their business. These services were in the areas of accounting, financial services, digitalisation, and e-commerce.

A total of 18 women entrepreneurs benefited from this opportunity, a first of its kind in Bermuda, assisted many women entrepreneurs to bridge gaps they identified in their businesses, but at the time could not financially afford technical and business services. This initiative empowered these women to develop new ideas and skills, ensuring they do not get left behind as women business owners.

Mr. Chairman, as part of the UN Joint Programme *Building Back Equal through Innovative Financing for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment*, the Ministry, BEDC, UNDP, and UN Women, in collaboration with the Founder Institute the world's largest pre-seed startup accelerator advanced the initiative, *Rise and Scale: Bermuda Business Accelerator*. The initiative aimed to foster an inclusive entrepreneurial ecosystem in Bermuda through a five-week intensive accelerator programme that was offered from September to November 2024 and aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

Mr. Chairman, the Founder Institute recruited 21 entrepreneurs in Bermuda, referred to as founders, comprising 20 women, inclusive of one with a disability and one youth. These Bermuda Founders had the opportunity to have 16 mentors who actively engaged with the founders during the programme. During the five-week programme, the founders engaged in areas such as developing revenue and business models, business pitch development, preparing their business to go to market, scaling their business, mentor feedback, and reviewing potential funding needed from investors.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry hosted the five-week programme Rise and Scale: Bermuda Business Accelerator 2024 Pitch Forum on October 17, 2024, at the HSBC Harbourview Centre. This provided a forum for 11 Bermuda founders to pitch their businesses to investors and international partners during a live recording. This event allowed the business owners to showcase Bermuda's emerging role as a hub for impactful and inclusive business growth. The winner of the Pitch Forum, Mrs. Antiona Holder the owner of

DigiRoo and Kids Digital Wellness, was given the opportunity to attend the annual Founder X Conference held in Texas, USA, in March 2025.

Mr. Chairman, in October 2024, the Bermuda/UN Joint Programme concluded. As a country, much was accomplished to empower the Bermuda community in advancing gender equality and sustainable development through government departments, agencies, banks, entrepreneurs, NGOs, and the general public. This programme laid a strong foundation for the continued growth to empower vulnerable sectors within our community, specifically women, persons with disabilities and youth entrepreneurs.

Mr. Chairman, the UN Joint Programme with Bermuda aligned with the Government's commitment to advance gender affairs and uphold its obligation to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination. During this upcoming year, the Ministry will explore opportunities for sustainability by offering Women's Empowerment Principles training, hosting an annual Rise and Scale Bermuda Business Accelerator and Pitch, and creating a platform to provide professional services to women, persons with disabilities and youth to ensure the sustainability of the Joint Programme. This will help Bermuda to further achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular, Goal number 5, Gender Equality; Goal number 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth; and Goal number 9, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure.

Mr. Chairman, on October 10, 2024, Bermuda became the first British Overseas Territory to have the United Kingdom extend the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, something as a country we should be extremely proud of. This achievement signifies a journey that has been years in the making, which fulfils the pledge made by the Government in its 2020 Speech from the Throne to seek the extension to ensure persons with disabilities, irrespective of their type of disability, can enjoy fundamental human rights and freedoms. This extension safeguards the rights, dignity and full participation of more than 3,000 persons living with disabilities in Bermuda, which the Government remains committed to.

Mr. Chairman, the UK extension signifies the strengthening of protections of all persons living with disabilities in Bermuda and secures their rights to civil; economic; political and social rights; and freedoms enjoyed by all other members of our society. By working together Bermuda would continue to comply with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and be able to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals by 2030, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 3, Good Health and Well-being; Sustainable Development Goal 5, Quality Education; Sustainable Development Goal 8, Decent Work and Economic Growth; Sustainable Development Goal 9, Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure; Sustainable Development Goal 10, Reduce Inequalities; Sustainable Development Goal 11, Sustainable Cities and Communities;

and Sustainable Development Goal 16, Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions.

Mr. Chairman, the National Child Safeguarding Committee is a statutory body that was established under section 11A of the Children Act 1998, to carry out specific functions to combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children. To uphold its statutory duty in areas of combating sexual exploitation and abuse of children in Bermuda and in alignment with the Committee's National Policy for Working Together to Safeguard Children, a sub-committee was formed to conduct research and make recommendations to close identified gaps that hinder the existing recruitment screening process for persons seeking employment or volunteer to work with children directly (i.e., nursery school teacher) or indirectly (i.e., a school custodian).

Mr. Chairman, the subcommittee has reviewed Bermuda's current position on recruitment screening processes for persons working or volunteering with children and has undertaken a jurisdictional review of countries such as, the UK, Australia, and Jamaica to provide insight on how these countries conduct their recruitment screening processes when working with vulnerable populations like children. These recommendations will be presented to the National Child Safeguarding Committee at large this fiscal year, for discussion and further direction.

Mr. Chairman, during the past year, the Ministry promoted its services and programmes directly associated with social protection efforts for seniors and persons with disabilities through radio talk shows, "Let's Get Social," "The Golden Hour," in-person meetings with various senior clubs and churches, at guest speaking events and proclamations which included:

- International Day of Persons with Disabilities [2024]
- World Homeless Day [2024]
- International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women [2024]
- Human Rights Day [2024]
- International Women's Day [2025]

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry has demonstrated that during the past year, the public purse was steered toward direct investment supporting our community and all persons across their lifespan, from birth to death.

Mr. Chairman, I will now move on to the summary of the fiscal year 2025/26 current account budget estimate for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, which is found on page B-290 of the "Approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Year 2025/26."

The Ministry's total budget estimate for the fiscal year 2025/26 is \$91,274,000.

The Chairman: Members, we remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

The Honourable Minister, Tinee Furbert, the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors . . . and Members, as a further reminder, this debate is four hours. It began at 10:30 exact . . . am I correct? It began at 10:30 am, exact. So, we will go on for four hours, and at 12:30 we will be taking a break.

Minister, you can resume.

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

This represents an increase of \$5,979,000 or 7 per cent compared to the original estimate of \$85,295,000 for fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the breakdown of the Ministry's current account budget estimate for 2025/26 by head as shown on page B-290 is as follows:

- Head 86, Ministry Headquarters, \$14.11 million, a 23 per cent increase.
- Head 23, Child and Family Services, approximately \$21 million, a 7 per cent increase.
- Head 55, Financial Assistance, approximately \$56 million, increase of 4 per cent.
- Overall Ministry Total \$91.2 million, increase of 7 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, this summary shows that the 2025/26 current expenditure allocations for all heads within the Ministry have increased. I will explain the details of these increases further in this budget presentation.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

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

HEAD 86 - MINISTRY HEADQUARTERS

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the current account expenditure for Head 86, Ministry Headquarters, can be found on pages B-290 to B-293 of the Estimates Book.

The Ministry Headquarters is responsible for the budget of 10 business units

- 96000—Administration;
- 96040—Ageing and Disability Services;
- 96050—K. Margaret Carter Centre;
- 96060—Policy Development;
- 96070—Grants to the Third Sector;
- 96080—Youth Office;
- 96090—Youth Grants and Investments;
- 96100—Youth Community Centres;
- 96110—Before, After, and Out of School Programmes; and
- 96120—Youth Policy.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters found on page B-291 is the *protection of all individuals during their lifetime and facilitation of well-being*. The five objectives of the Ministry Headquarters are also found on page B-291.

Mr. Chairman, the General Summary of the Ministry's budget on page B-291 shows that the total budget allocation for the Ministry Headquarters for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$14,111,000, distributed amongst the 10 business units representing a net increase of \$2,617,000.

I will now share details of each of these business units, commencing with business unit 96000, Administration.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Business Unit 96000—Administration

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget for the Administration business unit 96000 of \$1,625,000 compares to the \$1,352,000 originally budgeted in fiscal year 2024/25. This reflects an increase of \$273,000, or a 20 per cent increase, as shown on page B-291, which primarily accounts for salary uplifts to substantive staff resulting from union negotiation agreements and increase in rental fees and the cost of materials and supplies.

Business Unit 96040—Ageing and Disability Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I now present the budget for business unit 96040, Ageing and Disability Services or ADS, which can be found on page B-291.

Mr. Chairman, ADS has been allocated a budget of \$1,902,000, for fiscal year 2025/26. This allocation is 43 per cent or \$570,000 more than the budget allocation in fiscal year 2024/25. This increase includes the mid-year supplementary funding of \$120,000.

Policy and Program Development

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Ageing and Disability Services (ADS) continues to lead the planning and coordination of policies and programmes for the protection of seniors and individuals with disabilities. In October 2024, Bermuda reaffirmed its commitment to disability rights by ratifying the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, reinforcing the Ministry's efforts in this area.

The Disability Advisory Council (DAC) of which ADS is an ex officio member, continues to work alongside community organisations, advocating for the advancement of efforts aimed at improving the lives of persons with disabilities and reviewing government policy to provide feedback and advice from a disability perspective.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry fulfilled its 2021 Throne Speech commitment with the launch of the National Disability Register mobile app on April 24, 2024, at City Hall. The Register serves as a centralised source of accurate, up-to-date data to inform, programing and support in areas such as health, education,

and employment. To date, 102 individuals have registered, and ADS remains focused on increasing its participation.

Mr. Chairman, the National Disability Register app allows Ageing and Disability Services to collect, store and manage critical data on persons with disabilities, which is accessible on the Apple App Store and Google Play.

Mr. Chairman, the introduction of the National Disability Register is a pivotal step and underscores the Government's commitment to persons with disabilities by upholding the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goal, SDG 10, Reduce Inequalities.

Mr. Chairman, following the extension of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to Bermuda in October 2024 and in line with the 2025 Throne Speech, ADS commenced a review of Bermuda's existing legislative framework for disability rights and inclusion. This initiative champions the rights of individuals with disabilities to access the same opportunities and services as everyone else, ensuring dignity, autonomy, and inclusion for all and ultimately a more equitable society.

Mr. Chairman, additionally, under this broader policy and programme remit, ADS is also responsible for processing duty relief exemption requests for materials to facilitate persons ageing at home and for medical or adaptive equipment in relation to disability conditions. To that end, ADS received and approved eight duty relief exemptions this past year compared to two in 2024/25. We are keen to advance the uptake of this exemption relief over the upcoming fiscal year through collaborative initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, a significant achievement was the completion of the National Seniors Strategy 2024-2030, a first for Bermuda and fulfilling the Government's 2020 Throne Speech commitment. The National Seniors Strategy [NSS] is a framework to ensure Bermuda's seniors and future generations age with dignity. Developed in collaboration with the Bermuda Health Council with extensive consultation, the National Seniors Strategy was launched in December 2024. It addresses senior challenges while highlighting opportunities to enhance well-being, health, and quality of life. The strategy emphasises a collaborative approach across all sectors to create an age-friendly Bermuda.

In February 2025, ADS advertised for a Project Manager to establish and implement the infrastructure and steer the National Seniors Strategy, along with coordinating the development of Long-Term Care actions that fall under this broader strategy.

Mr. Chairman, while the recruitment of the Project Manager is still in progress, this has not delayed the commencement of critical work under the National Seniors Strategy within the remit of this Ministry. During the past fiscal year, several national policy and programme initiatives have already been initiated that include:

- The establishment of a long-term [care] working group: The Ministry is working in partnership with the Ministry of Health and other key stakeholders. A working group was established to facilitate both immediate and long-term solutions facing the long-term care sector, focusing on the current community and hospital bed crisis.
- Amendments to the Senior Abuse Register Act 2008: The drafting of amendments to the 2008 Act is in progress to help strengthen and clarify existing authority and intervention options and lay the foundation of a legislative framework needed for adult protection.
- Development of an integrated care pathway for Dementia: The Ministry contracted with the Bermuda Health Council to conduct research and stakeholder engagement to identify current local practice, service availability and gaps, international best practices and viable local solutions for quality dementia prevention, diagnosis and care. The Council will produce a proposed integrated care pathway to streamline, standardise and enhance current dementia care and support. This is part of the Ministry's commitment to address dementia and a key focus of the National Seniors Strategy.
- Collaboration on the development of an Office of Public Guardian ADS is working with the Ministry of Justice to ensure high-risk welfare cases are managed under the appropriate entity and to address the broader needs of the community in this area. This service is critical for our community, and a pilot programme will be developed to help define the scope and role the Office of the Public Guardian will hold.
- The development of Senior Day Care Facility: The initiative aims are to
 - o Enhance quality of life and reduce social isolation among seniors, particularly those with dementia or cognitive impairments.
 - o Alleviate financial, physical, and emotional stress on caregivers through structured programmes and services.
 - o Provide onsite, best-practice training in dementia-specific care for health professionals and students.

Mr. Chairman, the Gilbert Institute school site was identified as the location for the facility. Enhancing accessibility and implementing robust safety measures will be key to ensuring the facility meets the needs of seniors and promotes their independence. Additionally, incorporating sensory-friendly elements in both indoor and outdoor spaces will create a therapeutic environment conducive to their care.

On page C-8, Capital Development, a total of \$1.5 million has been allocated this fiscal year to hire an architectural firm and start the building designs for

this project. A project manager has already been identified and engaged, and the Ministry is actively collaborating with the Ministry of Public Works to advance the project. 25

Education and Awareness

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, education and awareness is another important component to ensure our community knows how to protect itself from senior abuse, plan for their future, support inclusion and upholding disability rights, and identify and locate available services and supports to meet their needs.

During the last fiscal year, ADS held 19 education and awareness events, well exceeding its projected number. This includes the second annual Seniors Tea held in June 2024, which successfully hosted over 100 seniors. The theme of the tea for seniors was dementia prevention and support, with presenters from Dementia Bermuda and NorthStar Dementia.

The feedback from participants and partner agencies was extremely positive and again resulted in invitations for further community engagement. I would like to acknowledge and thank the generosity of our partners who made the event possible, including: the Bermuda Police Service who volunteered to serve our seniors at the event, the Open Door Christian Assembly for offering their Hall and equipment at no cost, and the Northlands Primary School choir for an uplifting performance.

Other community awareness activities during the past year included:

- Radio and podcast interviews on tips to prevent abuse, understanding domestic abuse and gender-based violence.
- Domestic Violence Day Proclamation and awareness event that ADS helped to co-organise and participated in as a member of MARAC [Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference].
- Presentations to organisations on abuse prevention including but not limited to: HSBC customers focusing on scam prevention; Chamber of commerce members on senior abuse and domestic violence; as well as abuse prevention tips to four seniors' clubs, and at the Age Concern annual info session.
- In recognition of United Nations Day for Persons with Disabilities on December 3 to promote the rights and well-being of persons with disabilities in all realms of society and helps to increase awareness of the challenges they face. The theme for 2024 was: "Amplifying the leadership of persons with disabilities for an inclusive and sustainable future."

An awareness raising event took place at City Hall, including a ministerial proclamation and speeches by leaders in our community, including Sacha Richardson, Chair of the Disability Advisory Council, Lisa Reed Executive Director of the Human Rights Commission,

Sherri Lynn Lilley founder of Inspire, and Solay Thomas a member of Special Olympics. The primary message shared was "Nothing About Us Without Us" which emphasises the critical importance of people with disabilities being in the room, as leaders, to help shape inclusive futures.

Case Management

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, case management represents the primary programme under ADS business unit 96040. Case management clients include seniors and persons over 18 years old with long-standing disabling conditions and are divided into general case management and adult protection services. General case management services include needs and service identification and system navigation and support coordination. Adult protection pertains to seniors and persons with disabilities who are at risk of abuse, neglect or self-neglect. The team strives to provide compassionate and accountable support to members of the community as needed.

Mr. Chairman, in 2024/25 ADS had a total of 389 cases, an 18 per cent increase from the previous year. Of these cases, 228 were general case management cases, including 26 cases of persons under 65 years of age, of which 8 included abuse allegations. The remainder of the total cases were senior abuse referrals totalling 161 reports received. The reports, identified were categorised as: 5 per cent for physical abuse

28 per cent for financial exploitation
23 per cent for psychological abuse
11 per cent for neglect and
3 per cent for sexual abuse

Of these reports received, to date:

24 [per cent] were substantiated
54 [per cent] were unsubstantiated
22 [per cent] are pending, as they are still under investigation

The increase in senior abuse cases and decrease in general case management cases for persons over 65 years, compared to previous years and projections, is due to changes in how data is logged and reported. However, overall, the trend remains as expected, that the number of reports and cases managed by this office is increasing each year due to an ageing population and increased awareness of the ADS services.

Mr. Chairman, over the course of the last year, the case management programme made key advancements internally and maintained key external partnerships to strengthen our responses to the needs of persons with disabilities and seniors from an adult protection and general case management perspective. ADS continues as a core member on key committees including:

- MARAC—the multi-agency risk assessment committee for high-risk domestic violence

cases, to be discussed further in another section of this brief;

- SART—the Sexual Assault Response Team;
- The Transition Team—established to help identify and plan for service needs for persons with intellectual disabilities as they age.
- Long Term Care Working Group.

Mr. Chairman, for fiscal year 2025/26, ADS continued the development of a Structured Decision-Making Framework completing the first phase. This framework will help staff with consistent decision-making but also generate necessary data to further develop the programmes. ADS contracted Evident Change, a US-based company specialising in this field.

The first phase of this project, consisting of the intake and safety assessments, included the tools; development, integration and certification in the case management software, testing and staff training. The second phase is a strength and needs assessment tool, which should commence development in the second half of this upcoming fiscal year.

Page C-15, Capital Acquisitions, shows that \$103,000 has been budgeted this year for continued work to build the case management system.

Mr. Chairman, professional development is critical to the practice of social work and training and education opportunities. During 2024/25, two staff members attended the National Adult Protection Association conference in New Mexico. This conference brings together US-based practitioners for three days of presentations and information sessions on best practices and promising practices in adult protection. Another two staff members completed the Older Person Domestic Violence training, an intensive five-day specialised online course for experienced practitioners under the SafeLives curriculum.

Mr. Chairman, in September 2024, as part of the mid-year supplemental funding, a hardship fund of \$120,000 was allocated for case management support. These funds were used for critical services or interventions required to ensure the safety or welfare of seniors. To date, this has included grocery cards, cleaning services where the state of the home was preventing care services from entering, and temporary emergency funding support. The intent is to target a portion of funds for a specified pilot programme based on needs identified, such as hearing aids and hearing tests for seniors.

Mr. Chairman, as result of the Ministry's commitment to dementia support services, a dementia pilot programme, managed by ADS, commenced in October 2023 with funding extended in six-month increments up to June 2025. As recently presented in a House of Assembly's Ministerial Statement, between September 2023 and December 2024, a total of \$96,000 was allocated to the dementia services pilot programme. The funds contributed to the provision of dementia needs assessments and case management services to 111 persons in the community.

This service provides critical support to families and individuals with dementia due to the long-term degenerative nature of the condition, the impact it has on support persons, and the challenges experienced with navigating a complicated and incomplete care pathway.

In addition, this programme has also greatly benefited the ADS case management programme, whose high caseload limits their support for these clients and families in general. The pilot programme is reaching its capacity, requiring more sustainable and systemic solutions, which the Ministry is engaging in.

Business Unit 96050

K. Margaret Carter Centre (KMCC)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the K. Margaret Carter Centre (KMCC) provides direct support for adults with intellectual disabilities in the community through comprehensive day programme services and case management.

For the fiscal year 2025/26, on page B-291, the K. Margaret Carter Centre has a budget allocation of \$2,343,000. his budget funds 12 programme staff, two bus drivers, three administrative operations staff, and three service providers who all assist in the delivery of services to 39 clients at KMCC.

Mr. Chairman, this past year, KMCC continued to provide programmes, five days per week, to service users across six client groups with programme and staff development efforts taking place in the following areas:

- The continuation of a once weekly hot lunch programme that promotes client involvement in the preparation of meals, affording 29 participating clients access to quality meals in response to reports of poor nutrition and growing concerns of food insecurity amongst the client population.
- Regular bake sales promoting culinary and vocational skills development amongst participating clients.
- Seventeen clients successfully demonstrated improvement in life skills goals, exceeding the established target.
- Achieving the target outcome of increasing client fitness initiatives from five to six including water aerobics, walking, track and field, chair yoga, soccer, and aerobics.
- Participation in key events such as the International Day of Persons with Disabilities [2024] proclamation, "A Motown Christmas Musical" put on by the clients with staff support, and the annual Mates & Dates Valentines Dance hosted in collaboration with the Mid-Atlantic Wellness Institute's Community Intellectual Disabilities Team (CIDT) and Carter House Charity.

- Expanded involvement with community stakeholders increased from 13 to 15 surpassing the targeted goal and enhancing the quality of programming by offering additional engagement opportunities for service users.
- Continuation of both a monthly multidisciplinary team meeting, as well as a monthly transition team meeting, that include involvement from community partners to better understand and respond to the support requirements of current and potential clients.
- Increased compliance with First Aid OSHA standards by ensuring that 100 per cent of staff are First Aid/CPR certified.
- Ongoing efforts to increase compliance with Fire Safety & Emergency standards, including gathering estimates on upgraded comprehensive monitoring systems that would allow for a more effective response to emergency situations that arise.
- Identification of the need to expand programmes to allow for a seniors group, for clients aged 55 years and older with intellectual disabilities, who would largely benefit from structured and supportive engagement activities that are less rigorous than other client groups.
- Identification of the need to expand staffing resources to include an additional Case Manager, Paraprofessional, and Nurse to provide more comprehensive services.

Mr. Chairman, it is important to note that the K. Margaret Carter Centre has undergone a leadership transition, with the Administrator post becoming vacant in November 2024. As of the latter part of January 2025, this position has been temporarily filled by an Acting Administrator while recruitment continues for a substantive appointment. Despite the absence of a permanent Administrator, there has been specific programme enhancements, which have already been implemented.

These include:

- Restructuring the programme format to establish seven distinct core programmes, each with clearly defined criteria for engagement, group function and mandate, and a set maximum client capacity with consideration of the level of support needs within each group.
- Development of a Safeguarding Policy and a Behaviour Support Policy, to better align KMCC practices with international standards.
- Establishment of formalised entry and exit criteria to assess the needs of potential clients and ensure that KMCC has the appropriate resources to provide effective support.
- Engagement in professional development focused on psychological safety in the workplace, aimed at fostering a more cohesive and

supportive environment for staff, which in turn benefits client care.

- Facilitation of a comprehensive programme design consultation process involving staff, parents/guardians, and clients to evaluate the programme's strengths, identify service gaps, and explore opportunities for ongoing development and improvement.

Mr. Chairman, the K. Margaret Carter Centre received a mid-year supplementary funding of \$668,930, which has played a critical role in enhancing its service delivery and supporting ongoing development efforts. This funding has directly enabled:

- Hiring an additional case manager and paraprofessional to improve staff-to-client ratios; and a nurse and behaviour specialist.
- Expanding the day care hours at KMCC from 3:00 pm to 5:45 pm for those parents and guardians who worked until 5:00 pm and needed the extended day care for their loved ones.
- Renovations of the former woodwork room to create an appropriate space for a specialised day programme for its clients who have aged and are now seniors.

On page C-8, Capital Development, \$45,000 has been budgeted for this upcoming year to cover the requisite renovations.

Mr. Chairman, we remain committed to ongoing development efforts that directly benefit clients while promoting overall well-being and quality of life.

Mr. Chairman, I will move on to business unit 96060, Policy Development (page B-291).

Business Unit 96060 Policy Development (page B-291)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: For fiscal 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, \$157,000 was allocated for policy development. This is an increase of \$2,000, reflecting a salary uplift offset for the one full-time equivalent as shown on page B-293. This policy resource supports the Ministry's policy commitments, which include Throne Speech and the Government's platform initiatives.

Mr. Chairman, \$3,695,000 has been allocated for the fiscal year 2025/26 for business unit 96070, Grants to the Third Sector, as shown on page B-291. This is an increase of \$590,000, or 19 per cent, reflecting the inclusion of grant funding for The Teen Services and The Teen Haven, which have shifted from the Department of Child and Family Services to the Ministry Headquarters where all other third sector grants lie.

Youth Affairs

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now present the fiscal year 2025/26 estimates of expenditure and

revenue for the Office of Youth Affairs, which can be found on pages B-291 to B-292 of the Estimates Book.

The Chairman: Very well, Minister. Go ahead.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-291, the total 2025/26 budget allocation for all four programmes Youth Development, Youth Outreach, Youth Services and Youth Policy, is \$4,389,000, an increase of, \$729,000, an increase of 20 per cent.

Programme 8602, Youth Administration
(shown as Youth Development)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$691,000. This reflects an increase of \$75,000, or 12 per cent, as shown on page B-291.

Mr. Chairman, within this youth development programme, \$556,000 will cover business unit 96080. This allocation is \$40,000 higher, or 8 per cent more than in 2024/25. The allocated funds provide for salaries, training, recreational services, supplies and other funds to ensure the operations of the Youth Office, which has now relocated to Verita's Place, 5th Floor, 65 Court Street, Hamilton.

Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for business unit 96090, Grants and Investments, is \$135,000. This is an increase of \$35,000, or 35 per cent, compared to 2024/25. This funding is vital for youth-focused organisations and groups working to develop and empower young people.

In 2024/25, in collaboration with the Department of Child and Family Services, TOYA co-hosted a safeguarding child protection workshop for youth organisations that receive grants to inform them about governing policies and legislation. This training affords grantees an opportunity for improvement through awareness and aligns with Goal 1.2 of the National Youth Policy, work with youth-focused organisations to ensure they have a safeguarding policy in place.

Programme 8603, Youth Outreach

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for business unit 96100, Youth Community Centres is \$1,713,000, an increase of \$135,000, or 9 per cent compared to 2024/25. These monies will cover the cost of operations for the three community centres [located at] the Eastern Zone Community Centre in St. George's, the Sammy Wilson Central Zone Community Centre in Hamilton, and the Western Zone Community Centre in Sandys.

The increase in funding of \$135,000 is attributed to expanded hours of work for the community workers to support parents and guardians who work shift hours and need to have their children in a safe environment. Many parents/guardians working in the restaurant and retail sectors in the city that close 9:00 pm or later require suitable evening care.

As a result of this need, the central zone community centre team designed a programme that provides school-pick up services, assists children with homework, project assignments, life skills and meal plans. This resource proved viable and, in the fall, will expand to assist parents/guardians working in healthcare and uniform services.

The Western Zone Community Centre extended its operational hours on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays to support its surrounding community. The additional operational hours provide safe spaces for young people to have healthy engagement through sport, recreation and dining. This initiative is designed to engage the whole family featuring friendly competition that facilitates gaming for all ages.

The Eastern Zone Community Centre highlights the importance of supporting our ageing population through its programming, which is centred around the preservation of the matriarchs and patriarchs in their community. Many of the activities offered at the Eastern Zone Community Centre are designed to ensure interaction between seniors and youth through the form of storytelling/tales of old Bermuda. These interactions aim to teach our youth respect and lessons by embracing the words and wisdom of our treasured seniors. This setting also allows our youth to share their aspirations and educational pursuits to gain advice from our seniors.

Mr. Chairman, the Youth Community Centres have 20 full-time equivalents (FTEs) for fiscal year 2025/26, shown on page B-293. These workers facilitate a variety of community enrichment programmes for seniors, adults, youth, and children providing engaging activities for the whole family that promotes the section's aim in empowering youth, families, and our communities.

Programme 8604, Youth Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, business unit 96110, Before/After/Out of School Programmes has been allocated a budget of \$1,802,000, shown on page B-291. This is an increase of 23 per cent, or \$336,000 in comparison to fiscal year 2024/25. This increase reflects adjustments made to salaries, communications, materials and supplies for 15 youth programmes.

The objective of Youth Services is to provide safe spaces for youth during periods of the year when schools are closed or not in operation due to school mid-term or holiday breaks. The youth programmes facilitate engagement that infuses developmentally appropriate activities to deter our youth from antisocial behaviour. Additionally, there is a renewed commitment to the care and employ of the neurodivergent population.

Mr. Chairman, during 2024/25, Youth Services supported approximately 550 preschool, primary and middle school-aged participants in the after school programme; and 1,650 preschool, primary and middle

school participants in the out of school programmes across the Island.

There are a total of 28 full-time equivalents committed to these programmes, an increase of 8 per cent compared to 2024/25, shown on page B-293. Just over 60 seasonal workers are employed with Youth Services and just under half are local college students. This employment supports the advancement of Goal 4 in the Youth Policy, which is to increase youth employment opportunities.

Programme 8605, Youth Development

Hon. Tinee Furbert: For fiscal year 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, \$183,000 has been allocated to business unit 96120, Youth Policy, shown on page B-291. The budget is designated for salaries, workshop facilitation, conference materials and supplies.

Mr. Chairman, this programme is responsible for the coordination of the National Youth Policy and the execution of the activities to progress the policy. The working group for the policy is in its third year of implementation of the eight policy goals, focusing on developing and empowering Bermuda's youth.

The working group consists of a cross-section of individuals representing the public and private sector, youth organisations, youth activists, youth creatives and entrepreneurs supported by the Office of Youth Affairs ex officio.

There is one full-time equivalent, as shown on page B-293 responsible for providing technical advice and support to the working group for advancing the National Youth Policy priorities.

Performance Measures

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the performance measures for the Office of Youth Affairs can be found on pages B-295 to B-296 of which all target outcomes were met during 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 96090 funded 15 grants to youth organisations and groups in 2024/25. These organisations have invested countless hours into the development of Bermuda's youth and include:

- **Ambers Wings:** This programme aligns with National Youth Policy Goals numbers 2 and 8, by supporting young people to be well prepared socially, emotionally, and academically for post-secondary success, ensuring equal access to opportunities and resources.
- **Big Brothers Big Sisters:** The programme aligns with National Youth Policy Goals numbers 1 and 3 by providing quality mentoring support to young people in need to help them reach their full potential through social development.
- **Connectech Coding:** This programme provides safe spaces and places for young people to socialise and develop; supporting young people

to be well prepared academically for post-secondary success; develop their skills in technology and promotes young people's core skills and competencies aligning with Bermuda's employment needs and the National Youth Policy Goals 1, 2 and 4.

- **Children's Reading Festival:** This initiative designed for children up to age 14, provides free books and activities to promote literacy. The purpose of the festival is to encourage children to enjoy reading, inspire imagination and creativity through fine arts and provides access to resources for parents, ensuring support for children goes beyond the event. The festival aligns with National Youth Policy Goal 2 by providing an opportunity that supports children in achieving their full potential in learning, development and education.
- **Delta Gems** provides activities and supports developing girls ages 14 to 18 to reach their goals, which aims to prepare them socially, emotionally, and academically for post-secondary success, which aligns with National Youth Policy Goal 2 and 3.
- **Delta Netfest** engages young girls in sport and connects them to physical and mental health professionals, which promotes the advancement of National Youth Policy Goal 5 to encourage youth in sport, culture and recreation and Goal 6 to support young people to be active and healthy.
- **Bermuda Overseas Foundation.** This programme aligns with National Youth Policy Goals 3 and 4 in that mentorship and support are provided to at-risk youth, which provides the skills and encouragement to steer them away from anti-social behaviour.
- **Bermuda Sea Cadet Association** aligns with National Youth Policy Goals 5 and 6 by offering a range of developmentally appropriate community sports and recreational programmes, which encourage young people to establish a healthy balance in their lives.
- **Dibia Dream** prepares young people with the skills needed to assist them in attaining post-secondary success; and provides support through a STEAM-based programme and sport. This programme aligns with National Youth Policy Goals 2 and 5.
- **Footy Promotions.** This programme aligns with National Youth Policy Goal 5 by providing developmentally appropriate community sports programmes that are fun to young and encourages the engagement of parents and guardians in physical activity with their children.
- **Phenomenal People** supports young people to be prepared socially, emotionally, and academically for post-secondary success through young people's contributions to public

dialogue, such as providing their views on proposed Government policies; and supports Goals 2 and 7 in the National Youth Policy.

- Raleigh International aligns with National Youth Policy Goals 3 and 5 by providing mentorship and support to empower at-risk youth through training that provides knowledge and skills to young people and their families.
- Skills Development. This programme supports young people to be prepared socially, emotionally and academically for post-secondary success and ensures that young people have access to increased tertiary education and vocational training in support of Goals 2 and 4 of the National Youth Policy.
- Family Centre provides various programmes and services in a safe place for young people and provides young people an opportunity to contribute towards public dialogue by exercising their voice to express views on issues within the community, such as Government policies, and suggestions on proposed policies and programmes aligning with National Youth Policy Goal 1.
- WindReach provides support and services to enrich the quality of life for young people with diverse support needs by providing a safe environment for young people free from discrimination and ensures equal access to opportunities and resources supporting National Youth Policy Goal 8.

During 2025/26, the Office of Youth Affairs will continue to support organisations that are committed to making impactful change to empower Bermuda's youth. Additionally, Mr. Chairman, during 2024/25 two youth investments aligned with National Youth Policy Goal 5.3, were given as a short-term sponsorship to young people who wish to pursue their recreational passions in areas including the arts, oration, culinary arts, science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The first two recipients to receive this sponsorship were:

- o Carter Murray, an eight-year-old prodigy student at the Bermuda Institute who showed proficiency in math and represented Bermuda USA Calculation Contest. He was the only international student to participate.
- o Christian Warren, a seventeen-year-old who is determined to become Bermuda's youngest commercially licensed pilot to fly at 25 years old. He completed flight school training last summer; these hours will go toward his Commercial Pilot Licence.

Mr. Chairman, the performance measures of the Office of Youth Affairs, shown on pages B-295 and B-296, provide evidence of a productive year.

- o The Performance Quality Inquiries were executed at the end of every term, meeting the

targets to ensure markers could be identified for programme improvements.

- o The Community Enrichment Programme courses and participants exceeded the count forecasts with the introduction of mindfulness engagements.
- o The National Youth Policy Working Group met regularly last year, surpassing the target due to additional meetings set for consultations with overseas partners and to review research on the formation of a youth council.
- o The number of youth platforms exceeded expectations with the introduction of additional schools to the Zone-In rota.

Other Youth Initiatives

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, during the past year there were opportunities created to engage young people and show appreciation for those who work with them.

The first ever Middle School Mash Up was held April 18, 2024, whereas eligible students participated in a day of Xtreme Sports to develop and enhance team building skills. This event provided TOYA with an opportunity to gain invaluable insight on how to retain the engagement of young people.

- From April 22 through 26, 2024, the team acknowledged staff during the after school programme Professional Week with activities that gave clients and the public opportunities to express their appreciation.
- The TOYA team had an opportunity to reach the wider community at the Bermuda Day 2024, and introduced The Office of Youth Affairs through an interactive game called 'Finding TOYA', which enabled the public to gain a better understanding and appreciation for the goals and objectives of the National Youth Policy; the alignment of TOYA's services; and how all residents can become involved.
- The National 18+ Youth Conference and activities were held from July 15 to 21, 2024. Intentionally unconventional, this allowed for interaction with young people across the Island. The TOYA team promoted the National Youth Policy goals during evening socials, county games, talks with radio personalities and across all social media platforms.
- On August 12, 2024, International Youth Day was observed with a proclamation to declare the Government's commitment to youth by establishing the entity Youth Affairs.
- An Anti-Bullying Week campaign culminated on the steps of City Hall from November 11 through 15, 2024, with testimonies to bring awareness to eradicate the antisocial behaviours associated with bullying.

- The National Mini Youth Conference “Big Up Yaself” and your mental health was held on January 30 and 31 2025, at the Botanical Gardens. This two-day event yielded the presence of over 200 students participating in workshops and mindfulness activities.
- A Neurodiversity Week Awareness Campaign held March 17 through 21, 2025, was a soft launch to the expansion of services within the Before, After and Out of School Programme. This engagement has fostered public and private collaboration, which will assist TOYA with better equipping programme facilitators.

Mr. Chairman, Youth Outreach, through the Community Centres successfully ran over 90 Community Enrichment Programmes for three terms, September to November, January to March, and April to June. These programmes focused on the social development of the whole family, engaging seniors, adults, youth, and children.

Mr. Chairman, after a year of research and a consultation pilot programme assessment, the Before School Programme successfully launched two additional programmes at the Elliot and Francis Patton primary schools. This service is critical for parent/guardians who must attend work early hours before the school day commences.

Mr. Chairman, the employees at the Office of Youth Affairs known as TEAM TOYA are to be congratulated for the set-up of their new office. This team is committed to serving Bermuda's young people looks forward to collaborating with youth organisations and groups. This synergy is vital to keeping our young people motivated in maximising their skills and talents.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the presentation on the fiscal year 2025/26 budgetary allocation for Head 86, Section: The Office of Youth Affairs.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

We remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We just completed Head 86. We are doing Heads 23 and 55.

Go ahead, Minister, you have the floor.

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

I am actually going to give a breakdown of the budget allocations on page C-21 of the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Oh, go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The following charities and organisations will receive a grant from the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors to provide our community with the resources and social services needed to support our vulnerable population groups:

- Grant to External Bodies has been allocated \$220,000 for ad hoc requests made by social services organisations during the year.

- Youth Organisations as well as Voluntary Youth Organisations and National Youth Choir that provide youth services and programmes in alignment with the goals of the National Youth Policy will receive [in aggregate] \$130,000.
- Age Concern programmes consist of information, advice, and referral services via their call centre. Other support and services provided are financial support for groceries, prescription drugs, and minor home repairs. A grant allocation of \$25,000 will be provided.
- To uphold the Ministry's commitment to our senior population, grants totalling \$1,170,000 has been allocated to nursing homes Matilda Smith Williams and Lorraine's Nursing Home.
- Seventy-five thousand dollars has been allocated to the Women's Resource Centre, to enhance the lives of women in Bermuda and its vision is to be the leading resource and voice for women in Bermuda. And this is actually the Transformational Living Centre.
- The Centre Against Abuse will be allocated a grant of \$150,000 as they continue to provide crisis support services for victims of domestic abuse and sexual assault.
- Care of the Blind now known as Vision Bermuda is the only organisation on the Island to provide a full range of specialist services for persons within our community with low or no vision. They will receive a grant allocation of \$30,000.
- A \$50,000 grant has been allocated to Meals on Wheels, which supports vulnerable members of our community through the lunch service of Meals on Wheels.
- Salvation Army. The government is committed to our homeless population and to ensure they have accommodations and services. A grant of \$550,000 will be given to Salvation Army Shelters.
- The Summerhaven facility provides residents of our community who have physical disabilities the opportunity to live independently and will be given a grant of \$600,000 to support their operational costs.
- The Packwood Nursing Home has been allocated \$350,000.
- The charitable organisation HOME will receive \$70,000 to continue its work with the homeless.
- Tomorrow's Voices provides services to individuals in our community who are diagnosed with Autism or on the Autism Spectrum. A grant of \$30,000 has been allocated as financial support.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now present the combined subjective analysis of current account estimates for the Ministry Headquarters as found on page B-292 of the Estimates Book.

Salaries

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated for salaries is \$4,880,000, an increase of \$651,000. This salary allocation covers the Ministry's 87 full-time equivalents, found on page B-293. The salary growth reflects increases in manpower due to new social sector programmes, such as the Seniors Intellectual Disability Day Programme and additional employee costs as a result of expanded hours of the day care programme at the K. Margaret Carter Centre. The increase is also explained by additional funding for negotiated salary uplifts for 2025/26.

Wages

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the increase in the budget allocation for wages of \$392,000 supports a cost-of-living increase for non-unionised youth programme coordinators, programme supervisors, and programme workers community workers, as well as additional funding for two supervisors, all of whom are employed within the Office of Youth Affairs. As well, extra funding has been appropriated for wage uplifts for unionised industrial employees.

Training

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, \$56,000 has been allocated to facilitate professional training for employees during fiscal year 2025/26, representing an increase of \$43,000. This increase is due to Ageing and Disability Services funding a four-day joint safe training course to include other government departments in the forensic interviewing of older persons.

Transport and Travel

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the \$3,000 budgeted for transport for fiscal year 2025/26 is on par with the prior year. The increase of \$12,000 for travel is budgeted to cover overseas travel for conferences and technical meetings.

Communications

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, communications, inclusive of phones, courier and postal costs, is budgeted at \$128,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, indicating an increase of \$7,000. The increase reflects new expenses for telephone rentals and cell phones for the Youth Policy section, as well as modest increases by the Ministry HQ and the Youth Office.

Advertising and Promotion

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, advertising and promotion costs increased by \$39,000. This increase is attributed to various planned marketing campaigns by Ageing and Disability Services on financial abuse and scams committed against vulnerable persons; and by the Office of Youth Affairs to promote year-round recreational and social experiences within the Community Centres, and to bring awareness of youth initiatives and events planned by the new Youth Policy section.

Professional Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, professional services of \$1,658,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, increased by \$515,000. This increased level of funding reflects the allocation of monies to fill a social sector gap and provide specialist domestic abuse perpetrator treatment services.

Monies are also included to advance planning and implementation of the National Seniors and Long-Term Care Strategy by the Ministry, and also funding for case management coverage and welfare guardian support needed by Ageing and Disability Services.

Rentals

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, \$235,000 was budgeted for rentals, an increase of \$1,000. This increase represents a reduction in equipment rentals, offset by an increase in rented facilities to host workshops and conferences by the new Youth Policy section and the Youth Office.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2025/26 repair and maintenance has been allocated \$209,000, or \$41,000 more than the budget allocation for fiscal year 2024/25. This increase in funding covers the cost of a variety of repair and maintenance expenses anticipated by the Community Centres including but not limited to industrial cleaning of floors, minor interior building repairs, pest control, and equipment maintenance. Also, increased funds have been allocated to maintain an ageing bus operated by the K. Margaret Carter Centre.

Insurance

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, \$72,000 is budgeted for insurance costs for fiscal year 2025/26. The reduction in costs of \$42,000 is representative of a decline in the number of clients at the K. Margaret Carter Centre who require HIP health insurance coverage.

Energy

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, energy costs increased by \$27,000 to \$181,000. This increase will cover the costs of electricity for the Youth Office which recently moved from a shared rental space to its own office.

Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, costs for clothing, uniforms and laundry account for \$12,000. The marginal increase of \$1,000 will cover the costs to replenish uniform shirts, jackets and protective wear for the caretaker groundsman and community programme staff.

Materials and Supplies

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, \$417,000 has been allocated for materials and supplies for fiscal year 2025/26. This increase of \$160,000 reflects the costs of added social sector programmes, such as, vocational supplies and equipment for the new Senior Intellectual Disability day care programme at the K. Margaret Carter Centre; sport and fitness equipment, educational supplies, and vocational hardware for the extended day care programmes at both the central and western zone Community Centres; and recreational supplies to facilitate the Conference to Consultation held by the Office of Youth Affairs. The increased costs will also cover supplies needed by the Youth Policy section.

Equipment

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, equipment expenses have an allocation of \$26,000, a reduction of \$16,000 from fiscal year 2024/25. Refurbishment works to fire and safety systems at the three community centres were completed in fiscal year 2024/25, and thus only maintenance works needed to be budgeted for this year.

Other Expenses

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, \$186,000 has been allocated for other expenses, which is an increase of \$166,000 above fiscal year 2024/25. This increase will support new social sector programmes such as Ageing and Disabilities Services' Seniors Hardship fund, which will cover the costs of food, medication, utility bills or short-term housing for vulnerable persons in a crisis; and the central and western zone Community Centres will provide meals during their extended day care programmes.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the allocation for grants and contributions for fiscal year 2025/26 is

\$3,825,000, an increase of \$620,000. The increased budget supports additional funding to youth organisations offered by the Office of Youth Affairs, and new funding for dementia care navigation and intervention services offered by the Ministry. Also, grant funding for Teen Services and Teen Haven has shifted from the Department of Child & Family Services to the Ministry Headquarters.

Revenue Summary (page B-292)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The majority of the \$643,000 in revenue earnings reflect after-school vouchers purchased, and online payments by parents and guardians to have their children participate in the after-school programmes offered by the Office of Youth Affairs.

Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents) (page B-293)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, on page B-293, you will note that there are 87 full-time equivalent positions for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors Headquarters for fiscal year 2025/26. This covers four full-time equivalents for Headquarters Administration; 11 full-time equivalents in Ageing and Disability Services; 19 full-time equivalents employed with the K. Margaret Carter Centre; 1 full-time equivalents within Policy Development; and 52 full-time equivalents for the Office of Youth Affairs.

Performance Measures (pages B-294 to B-296)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, performance measures for sections in the Ministry Headquarters are outlined on pages B-294 to B-296.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Ministry Headquarters team for their diligence and for remaining committed to delivering the requisite services for our community.

Mr. Chairman that concludes my budget presentation for Head 86.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

I will remind Members that we are in Committee of Supply for the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. The Minister will proceed with Heads 23 and 55, or as she sees fit.

Minister.

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

I now wish to present fiscal year 2025/26 Estimates of Expenditure for Head 23, the Department of Child and Family Services—

The Chairman: Go ahead.

HEAD 23—DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

Hon. Tinee Furbert: —which are found on pages B-297 to B-303 of the Estimates Book.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Department of Child and Family Services is *Protecting children by strengthening families*. The objectives of the department are found on page B-297.

The department carries out its objectives by providing investigative services; day care services; care and protection services for children; residential and home-based services for families; assessment; intervention and counselling services for children, adolescents and families.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-298 of the Estimates Book, a total of \$21,133,000 has been allocated for Head 23 for fiscal year 2025/26. This represents an increase of \$1,453,000, or 7 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services continues to focus on developing an integrated service that allows children, adolescents and families to receive services that are appropriate and coordinated and meet challenges they face. These challenges can include but are not limited to: uninvolved parenting; limited parenting capacity; social and life skills; housing; employment; budgeting; abuse of substances; anti-social behaviour; cognitive debilities; education; mental health conditions and anger management.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services is responsible for promoting and protecting the best interests and social well-being of children, adolescents, and their families and meets these responsibilities with the operations of five programmes:

- Programme 2301—Services to Children and Young Persons
- Programme 2302—Services to Individuals and Families
- Programme 2303—Residential Treatment Services
- Programme 2304—Administration
- Programme 2305—The Mirrors Programme

Mr. Chairman, the US Council on Accreditation has approved the Bermuda National Standards, which is used locally for accreditation of entities including the department who manages children. The Bermuda National Standards Committee provides that review and accreditation. I am happy to report that, in accordance with the requirements from the Council on Accreditation standards, five sections within DCFS (Intake and Investigations, Assessments, Counselling and Life Skills, Family Preservations and Foster Care are all accredited.

Mr. Chairman, service improvements have been achieved by the Department of Child and Family Services Implementing a strategy that begins with the enhancement of a Structured Decision Making tool, designed specifically for Bermuda, taking into account our

cultural identity and social norms. The Structured Decision Making assessment tools allow staff to objectively determine safety and risk for all children and their families who are referred to the department. This tool utilises a comprehensive assessment that ensures clients receive the appropriate support and/or services from the appropriate agency. This process reduces referral duplication, closes previously identified gaps in service delivery and increases overall efficiency and effectiveness of programmes.

Utilisation of this tool has resulted in an improved, comprehensive service delivery system that has increased response time to initial referrals. Also, this tool further enhances appropriate prioritising of referrals according to risks; and ensures that the highest risks are addressed first resulting in better responses and positive outcomes for clients.

Mr. Chairman, I will now address each programme and business unit for the department as set out on page B-298.

Programme 2301, Services to Children and Young Persons

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Business Unit 33010, the Happy Valley Child Care Centre has a budget of \$1,200,000 for fiscal year 2025/26. The output measures for the Happy Valley Child Care Centre are found on page B-301 of the Estimates Book.

Mr. Chairman, Happy Valley Child Care Centre is the only Government-operated child care facility on the Island, which provides high quality child care for a maximum of 44 children whose ages range from three months to four years of age. Priority is given to children referred by helping agencies such as the Department of Child and Family Services, Teen Services, the Department of Health, the Child Development Programme and the Department of Financial Assistance. These agencies along with families experiencing various challenges account for 60 per cent of the Centre's intake.

Mr. Chairman, each year there is increased demand for child care placement at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre. For the school year 2024/25, Mr. Chairman, 75 applications were received for the 15 available spaces.

- Infant spaces were 5, they had 22 applications.
- Toddler spaces were 5, there were 40 applications.
- Toddler spaces for children born in 2024, there were no spaces and no applications.
- Preschooler Spaces 5, for children born in 2022. There were 13 applications.

Mr. Chairman, the previous . . . when we speak about toddler spaces, 5, there were children born in 2023.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The application process for the 2025/26 school year began on April 3, 2025. A PIPA privacy statement was created for this year's applicants. The statement included how application information collected is used, secured and disposed of. Online applications were released for download once the privacy statement was agreed to. On-site applicants signed the privacy statement prior to the submission of their application.

Mr. Chairman, to address concerns regarding the selection process for the limited number of spaces available annually, the Selection Committee has implemented a rubric and lottery system for applicants. This approach is designed to add greater objectivity and transparency, ensuring that all candidates are evaluated fairly and consistently.

Mr. Chairman, the Happy Valley Child Care Centre monthly fee is \$400 for all children enrolled. However, if a child is in the care of the Department of Child and Family Services Director, they do not qualify for the Child Day Care Allowance and as such their costs are absorbed by the department.

Mr. Chairman, the estimated revenue for the fiscal year 2025/26 school year as shown on page B-299 is \$192,000. It is important to note that the actual cost per child exceeds \$400 per month. However, a subsidy is built into the fees which are considerably less than private child care facilities. Despite the low cost to parents, Happy Valley Child Care Centre is a first-class facility that is specifically designed to meet the comprehensive needs of young children, provides an extensive curriculum of high academic standards with trained teachers who are continuously involved in professional growth and development. The Centre offers enrichment programmes that encourage family and community involvement and builds upon child development.

In July 2024, Mr. Chairman, 17 children graduated from the programme and were all well prepared to attend preschool. Their accomplishments were celebrated with a school leaving ceremony at the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2025/26, Happy Valley Child Care Centre will continue to uphold its commitment to partnering with community resources, including the Child Development Programme, the Department of Health, and Fire and Life Safety Associates.

Happy Valley Child Care Centre will continue to serve as a community [service] site for public and private school students and the Workforce Development Summer Placement for university students. Happy Valley Child Care Centre also serves as a practicum site for Bermuda College students enrolled in the PACE programme for individuals furthering their education in early childhood education. CedarBridge Academy students do their child care as a profession course placement annually at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at the Happy Valley Child Care Centre, the Centre's active Parent Teacher Association, volunteers and community partners for their continued dedication to Bermuda's most valuable treasures, *Our Children, Our Future*.

Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to programme 2302, Services to Individuals and Families, found on page B-298.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Programme 2302, Services to Individuals and Families (Page B-298)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the activities covered under programme 2302 are:

- Business Unit 33020—Investigating and Screening
- Business Unit 33030—Foster Care
- Business Unit 33200—Counselling and Life Skills
- Business Unit 33240—Child Safeguarding

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for these three business units for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$6,198,000, which represents a decrease of \$37,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Intake, Investigation and Assessment section is responsible for providing comprehensive investigations and assessments to children who are referred for services. The 2025/26 budget estimate for business unit 33020 is \$2,245,000, a decrease of 11 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services provides services and support for children and families referred for abuse or neglect. The department is committed to partnering with stakeholders to promote the safety and health of families while protecting children from abuse and neglect.

Mr. Chairman, all referrals that are made to the department are screened to determine if they meet the threshold for abuse and/or neglect utilising the Structured Decision Making Assessment tools. The performance measures for intake and assessments can be found on page B-301 of the Estimates Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Screening, Investigations, and Assessment teams have a combined total of 16 staff. The Screening team is comprised of five social work assistants who receive new referrals each day via email, the Kids-line, or from members of the public or professionals who walk into the department. The Investigations team includes five social workers who conduct inquiries on all cases screened to be investigated. The Assessment team includes three social workers who conduct assessments on all children who are referred from sections within the department.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services is mandated to provide services and operates 24 hours a day. Coverage is provided after work hours, weekends, and on public holidays on a

crisis basis to the police, the hospital, and to members of the community. The department responded to 22 on-call or call-out referrals in 2024.

Mr. Chairman, in 2024, the Investigation team received 1,210 new referrals. This is an increase of 204, or 20 per cent, when 1,006 new referrals were reported. Mandated reporters referred 1,072, and 138 were referred from other sources in the community.

Mr. Chairman, the Investigation team utilised the Structured Decision Making screening assessments to determine the required response times. Mr. Chairman, 310 cases were screened out either they did not meet the threshold for a child abuse investigation, or they were duplicate referrals from another source; 856 were screened in for investigation and 44 were screened directly to the Counselling and Life Skills section for substance education.

Referrals for the following types of abuse comprised:

- Neglect—357: One hundred and ninety-eight, or 55 per cent of the neglect referrals were for children exposed to family violence; 51 were for inadequate food, shelter, hygiene, and 64 were for lack of supervision.
- Sexual Abuse—197: One hundred and twenty-two, or 61 per cent were sexual abuse referrals for child-on-child inappropriate sexual interactions or child-only matters.
- Physical Abuse—198, an increase of 113.
- Behaviour Problems—48, an increase of 24.
- Emotional Abuse—58, a decrease of 2.
- Service Requests—48, of which 14 were welfare home checks, 12 were local and 2 overseas.
- Suicidal Ideations/Attempts—3.
- Family In Need of Assistance—20, this may be cases of child beyond parental control, AWOL, suicide attempts/ideations.

Of the 1,210 new referrals in 2024, Mr. Chairman, 856 were screened in for investigation and 554 involved children. The referral numbers by age are as follows:

- 0-4 years—146
- 5-9 years—165
- 10-14 years—170
- 15-18 years—73
- Unborn—7

Mr. Chairman, the department is required to respond within 24 hours, five days or ten days, depending on the nature of the referral and the designated timeframe. The department received 235 referrals that required a 24-hour response; 591 referrals required a 5-day response; and 30 referrals required a 10-day response. Seven hundred and ninety six out of the 856 cases were screened for investigation and 93 per cent of them met response times.

Mr. Chairman, social workers conduct thorough, objective investigations that include interviewing

child(ren), their parents and other witnesses or collateral contacts who may be relevant sources of information. Social workers must observe the child and their living conditions, the parent/child interactions and relationships, conduct further record checks and obtain all relevant medical and assessment reports when applicable.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services collaborates with the Bermuda Police Services on referrals received for physical, sexual abuse, severe neglect and behaviour problems. The MASH team (Multiagency Safeguarding Hub) that was established between the department and the Bermuda Police Services continues to review all referrals received every week. In the meeting, the team determines the investigation approach that is required for each case. During 2024, there were 853 cases discussed in the MASH meetings and 167 were jointly investigated by the Bermuda Police Services and the department.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Child and Family Services is also required to investigate mandated professionals that can include doctors, day care providers, teachers, coaches, religious officials, and youth leaders if an investigation identifies them as an alleged perpetrator.

A total of 60 investigations of professionals were conducted, an increase from 2023 when 23 investigations were carried out. The investigation social workers conduct interviews with the children, their parents or guardians, the mandated professional, and all relevant witnesses. These investigations may also involve the Bermuda Police if a criminal offence may have occurred. Of the 60 professional investigations conducted, 29 were in public schools, 23 private nurseries, 4 camps, 2 private schools and 2 Residential Treatment Services [RTS]. The outcomes were: 25 unsubstantiated, 6 substantiated, and 29 remain open with the Bermuda Police Services. One case resulted in the conviction of a mandated professional.

Mr. Chairman, the investigation social workers completed 524 safety assessments. This engagement with parents allows the department to ensure that the children are safe while working to preserve the integrity of the family.

Risk assessments are always completed after conducting a home visit and before a case is transferred or closed. The team completed 319 risk assessments. At the completion of investigations, there were 77 cases in need of case management and referred to the Family Preservation Team, 30 were referred to Counselling and Life Skills, 14 referred to the Assessments team, one to Foster Care, three to RTS and one to the Independent Living Programme.

At the end of December 2024, of the 856 cases screened for investigation in 2024, 709 were completed with outcomes, 128 remain open to the Bermuda Police, and 19 were pending.

Mr. Chairman, the Investigation Team provided 14 Presentations on Mandatory Reporting to the private and public schools, the Youth and Sport Afterschool Programme, Bermuda College students and all new employees. These presentations provide professionals with education on the Children Act, their duties as mandatory reporters, and the reporting process for child abuse matters.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the staff of the Screening and Investigations Team and the community stakeholders for their commitment to being the first response in promoting the safety and health of families while protecting children from abuse and neglect.

I would also like to thank the Assessments Team for empowering the family and enhancing family functioning through the comprehensive assessments they completed on at-risk children and families.

Foster Care, Business Unit 33030

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the foster care section of the Department of Child and Family Services is responsible for providing alternative living arrangements for children under the age of 18 years old who need out-of-home placement. The budget estimate for business unit 33030 for 2025/26 is \$2,672,000. This represents an increase of \$288,000.

Mr. Chairman, during 2024, a total of 61 children occupied foster care beds at some point during the year. This represents an increase of three children from the prior year. The team was also responsible for case management duties for the children's birth families and foster families. The team remains concerned about the complexity of the cases, which has magnified in terms of mental health, behavioural issues and school difficulties.

During the past year, the Foster Care Programme served a total of seven therapeutic foster children. The children in this category have a variety of physical, cognitive, emotional and behavioural challenges. Therapeutic Foster Parents are compensated at a higher rate than traditional foster parents. They sign contracts that outline the levels of care expected based on the children's needs.

Out of those seven children, two were referred to overseas facilities for a comprehensive assessment and were recommended for further overseas placement. By the end of 2024, a total of nine children left the Foster Care Programme. Three were reunified with a parent; Three were transferred to Residential Treatment Services; and three aged out of the Foster Care system.

Foster Parent Recruitment was conducted via several mediums that included developing graphics for social media messaging, conducting radio and web-based talks, using corporate newsletters and features in business magazines.

The Foster Care Coordinator interviewed 22 interested persons for foster parent recruitment. This was an increase of nine from the year before. Ten were approved and became foster parents. Despite the constant addition to the pool of available foster parents, the department continues to remain hard-pressed to recruit enough foster parents to be open, available, and suitable for emergencies and for hard to care for children.

Mr. Chairman, presently, the department has 12 sibling sets residing in foster care, and only two sets are able to reside together in the same foster home.

In May 2024, Foster Care Month, the foster care team held the Annual Appreciation Tea for Bermuda's Foster Parents. The Keynote Speaker was Ms. Lashunte Dill-Assing, who spent time in foster care as a youth and is now a registered nurse. This event was held at the Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club.

The Foster Care Programme ended 2024 with Christmas gift donations for all foster children. Items were generously donated from anonymous members of the public and the RenRe Insurance Company. Each child was gifted with multiple items for the holiday season. This initiative of gift donations from members of the public was fully arranged by the executive of the Foster Parent Association which is a registered charity.

The Angel Tree was publicised and was on display at Rosa's. Members from the public selected angels from the tree, which had the wish list items of foster children on them.

Mr. Chairman, the department acknowledges the foster parents of Bermuda. These are our unsung heroes who provide loving, stable homes to children who have experienced significant trauma as a result of abuse and/or neglect. Every day, they make a foster child's life better with their numerous acts of care and kindness.

Mr. Chairman, appreciation and recognition must also go out to the Foster Parent Association, that works in partnership with the foster care team. They provide extra support to foster children and foster families in the form of financial support for educational trips, specialised recreational programmes, laptops for senior school and tertiary education scholarships for foster youth post high school completion.

The Foster Care Team is to be commended as well for working through some very serious, complex and challenging cases.

Counselling and Life Skills, Business Unit 33200

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the Counselling and Life Skills [CLS] business unit is to advance and promote the emotional well-being of youth up to 18 years of age and their families. The budget for business unit 33200 for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$1,181,000. This represents a decrease of \$8,000, or 1 per cent, compared to fiscal year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the CLS team consists of a clinical supervisor and three social workers that provide

strength-based, solution-focused, and client-centred services aimed at empowering individuals and families to make healthy life choices. The CLS team conducts in-person sessions and uses technology such as Cisco Webex, Zoom, WhatsApp, Microsoft Teams, and the telephone to conduct sessions.

Through these methods, CLS counsellors have been able to complete necessary assessments and screening tools for developing service plans. The team has access to remote testing, and this has assisted clients with having the flexibility to fill out counselling tools via computer instead of having to come in person in the office.

Mr. Chairman, referrals to CLS are primarily from external entities like the Department of Education, Child and Adolescent Services, and the public. These referrals are screened through the department's Investigation/Screening section, where interventions are determined using the SDM tool and then assigned for services.

A memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Education and the Department of Child and Family Services mandates that all substance-related incidents in schools are referred to the department for assessment and education.

Mr. Chairman, in 2024, CLS received 110 referrals, a slight decrease compared to the previous year. Of these, 106 were approved to receive services and four were denied due to clients already being involved in external services. The referrals included 67 females and 43 males. Ninety-four clients were actually served in 2024, with 12 to receive services in 2025.

Mr. Chairman, the ages of the children served were as follows:

- Female clients:
 - o 0-4 years: 1
 - o 5-9 years: 8
 - o 10-14 years: 27
 - o 15-18 years: 14
 - o Over 18 years: 3
- Male clients:
 - o 0-4 years: 3
 - o 5-9 years: 8
 - o 10-14 years: 23
 - o 15-18 years: 7

In 2024, notably, the highest age group for both genders have traditionally been between the ages of 10 and 14 years old, and 15 to 18 years old. However, there was a shift in 2024, with females aged 15 to 18 years old, now outnumbering males aged 15 to 18 years old.

Mr. Chairman, in 2024, referral sources for the CLS team included:

- DCFS Teams (Investigations, Foster Care, Family Preservation, RTS, and Adoptions): 74 cases
- Court Social Worker: 1 case
- Schools: 29 cases

- Other (Police, KEMH, CAS, ILP [which is the Independent Living Programme]): 6 cases

Mr. Chairman, the CLS team has observed a continuing trend of adolescents using vapes in 2024. There was a shift in 2024 compared to 2023, whereas the number of females reported using was higher than their male counterparts. The average age for 2024 based on the data was 13 years old. However, it should be noted that there were children as young as 10 who were referred in 2024 for either experimenting or for having a vape pen in their possession. The referrals in 2024 were received from children as young as primary school age to middle to high school youth.

Mr. Chairman, it should be noted that 90 per cent of substance referrals are received from our schools. The other 10 per cent of referrals are sent in by the police or KEMH. Along with vaping, marijuana and alcohol use also remains prevalent among adolescents. Data from 2024 indicates that young people still appear to believe that substances are a healthy way to cope with life stressors, depression, anxiety, trauma, and grief. The complexity of family systems also underscores the need for co-parenting support and coping strategies for parents to help families effectively address mental health issues.

Mr. Chairman, CLS received a total of 46 substance referrals in 2024, and of these 43 referrals received services. The number of substance clients who received services in 2024 were 18 males and 25 females. The other 63 referrals were serviced either for trauma, domestic violence, behaviour, grief, mental health or parent/child relationships. It is not uncommon for clients in CLS to be receiving therapy for multiple issues that could be affecting their well-being. The CLS team conducted two substance groups for the year, in June and October 2024.

Mr. Chairman, several trends were identified in 2024 and included:

- Substance referrals for vaping and marijuana are still an issue with young people. This may be affected by legalisation in some jurisdictions despite this population being minors and their lack of understanding of the dangers of vaping.
- Grief counselling for children who have lost relatives as well as relationships with parents because of divorce.
- A growing need for co-parenting support based on issues of custody and divorce.
- Younger children being referred with complex neurodiversity behavioural issues, such as ADHD, ASD, who require a multidisciplinary team approach to address various needs.
- Parents requiring therapy support who themselves have experienced childhood trauma that is impacting them in adulthood.
- Younger children requiring therapy beyond talk therapy, such as play therapy, interventions to assist with self-regulation of emotions, such as somatic therapy, which focuses on the body

and how emotions appear within the body, and movement therapy.

- A need for parenting skills services that help parents understand different developmental stages and what is appropriate behaviour during those stages.

These trends highlight the growing need for counselling resources to support parents, children, and adolescents that are affordable, evidence-based and relatable.

Child Safeguarding, Business Unit 33250

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, this year, \$100,000 will fund the child safeguarding programme. As per the Child Safeguarding [(Miscellaneous Amendments)] Act 2019, children who are victims of sexual offences or who are convicted of sexual offences and serious personal injury receive both physical and psychological services, which translate to costs incurred for psychosexual assessments and counselling services.

Last year, seven children received psychosexual assessments. Six were victims of sexual offences and one was a perpetrator. All children subsequently received associated counselling services. One parent received a comprehensive parenting capacity assessment.

Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to: Programme 2303, Residential Treatment Services. Or should I pause?

The Chairman: I am prepared to accept, Minister, that it is 12:30, and that we can adjourn for lunch and return at 2:00. However, Minister, if you would like to continue.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: I will pause for lunch.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: The Shadow Minister agrees very well. Thank you, Minister, if you wouldn't mind bringing the [Committee] to adjourn for lunch.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I ask that we adjourn for lunch until—

The Chairman: Two o'clock.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Until 2:00pm.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister. The [Committee] will adjourn until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:30 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:02 pm

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

MINISTRY OF YOUTH, SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND SENIORS

HEAD 23—DEPARTMENT OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICES

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: We are here debating the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, Heads 86, 23 and 55. This is a four-hour debate. We have gone through two hours of it, and we have two hours left.

I will give the floor to Minister Tinee Furbert.
Minister Tinee Furbert, you have the floor.

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

I would now like to speak to programme 2303, Residential Treatment Services, found on page B-298.

Programme 2303, Residential Treatment Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, programme 2303, Residential Treatment Services includes Family Preservation, Brangman Home, Youth Development Centre, Observatory Cottage, the Psycho-Educational Programme, Youth Residential Treatment and Independent Living.

This programme has a budget allocation of \$10,388,000. This represents an increase of \$1,618,000, or 18 per cent from the financial year 2024/25 budget allocation.

Family Preservation, Business Unit 33060

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for business unit 33060 for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$3,836,000. The estimate is 121 per cent more than fiscal year 2024/25. This significant increase is related to the enhancement and expansion of social services provided to community for our high-risk families.

Mr. Chairman, the department's Family Preservation Team operates under a sound case management and assessment model, which comprehensively assesses family and child needs and develops service plans with the family, child and stakeholders to maximise intervention and positive outcomes for children and their families. The team provides ongoing intervention to monitor and ensure the safety of children at risk of abuse or neglect, assist families to improve family functioning, increase child well-being, reduce the need for placement in out-of-home care, and to enable children

in out-of-home care to return safely to their families. The ultimate goal is to reduce or eliminate the circumstances in the family that have been or are causing abuse or risk of abuse (emotional and/or physical) to the child, and to maintain the child in the home environment.

Mr. Chairman, in order to achieve this goal, Family Preservation Services requires its social workers and social worker assistants to manage cases in compliance with the Council on Accreditation Family Preservation standards, in accordance with the Policies and Procedures of the department and the Structured Decision Making (SDM) assessment system for Child Protective Services (CPS). The social worker's frequency of contact with a family is determined by the family's assessed risk level. The higher the assessed risk for future abuse or neglect, the higher the level of intervention and engagement is required monthly. A household assessed as high risk requires a minimum of four face-to-face visits per month with parents/caregivers and children in addition to collateral contacts (for example: schools, therapists, doctors, mentors, et cetera); moderate risk requires a minimum of two face-to-face visits per month with parents/caregivers and children in addition to collateral contacts; low risk requires a minimum of one-face-to face visit per month with parents/caregivers and children in addition to collateral contacts.

The Family Preservation Team consists of two coordinators, eight social workers, eight social workers assistants and one administrative assistant.

Mr. Chairman, from January 2024 to December 2024, the Family Preservation Team served a combined total of 147 families and 257 children. This is an 8 per cent increase in families and a 7 per cent increase in children served over the prior year.

Caseload complexities and risk levels remained high throughout 2024, thus requiring a high number of face-to-face contact, multiple court appearances, family conferences and consultations with community and government stakeholders.

Mr. Chairman, all families involved with Family Preservation receive Family Strengths and Needs assessments and are reassessed every three months. These assessments help to identify the areas of need or development required within a family, as well as strengths within the family unit. It also serves as a guide for service planning.

Mr. Chairman, needs assessments completed on parents during 2024 identified three top areas of need affecting our parents/caregivers. These were:

- Mental Health/Coping Skills/Cognitive Functioning;
- Parenting Skills; and
- Resource Management/Basic Needs.

The needs assessments completed on children during 2024 identified the top three areas of need affecting our children. These are:

- Emotional/Behavioural challenges;

- Educational Concerns/Needs; and
- Family Relationship Challenges.

Mr. Chairman, during 2024, 44 new families, which included 77 children, were referred to Family Preservation. The reasons for the referrals were neglect, child exposure to domestic violence, emotional abuse and physical abuse.

Throughout the year a total of 29 families had their cases closed. All closed cases were void of child safety or child protection issues at closure. Of the cases closed:

- Fifteen or 52 per cent of case closures achieved Service Plan goals/no child protection issues at closure.
- Six families declined services. There were no child protection concerns at closure.
- Three families relocated overseas.
- Four transferred to Foster Care.
- One was sentenced to Corrective Training.

Mr. Chairman, Family Preservation workers attended 113 Family or Supreme Court hearings in 2024, a 30 per cent increase over 2023. The court appearances were for Care Order applications, reviews or discharges, Supervision Order applications, reviews or discharges, Protective Intervention Order applications, Juvenile Court matters, and Custody/Access matters.

Mr. Chairman, the department constantly assesses outcomes to determine if intervention is effective and when and where adjustments to service delivery need to occur. Performance outcome measures for 2024 were:

- Sixty-three per cent of households assessed for abuse/neglect demonstrated consistent behaviours or some improvement in behaviour in service plan goals.
- Sixty-three per cent of households assessed where risk of abuse/neglect decreased or remained low/moderate.
- Fifty-two per cent of families had cases closed due to achieving service plan goals, a 10 per cent performance increase from the previous year.

Mr. Chairman, in 2024, Department of Child and Family Services [DCFS] continued with its commitment to increase the skills of its front-line Family Preservation workers in engaging and meeting the needs of clients. Officers participated in Staff Safety Training, Mental Health First Aid for Adolescents and four attended the 39th Annual International Conference on Child and Family Maltreatment. This is a highly acclaimed conference that offers continuing education, networking opportunities and presents best practice standards on evidence-based practices and current trends in the child and family maltreatment field.

Mr. Chairman, at the core of Family Preservation is the understanding that if we can improve the functioning and circumstances of the parents/adult, caregivers of the children, we can reduce the risk of abuse and neglect of children. As such, training

opportunities for staff are needed to increase their skills in engaging and providing intervention services to our families.

The Family Preservation Team continues to strive to provide effective services to children and families. Performance improvement is an ongoing endeavour, thus enhancing the opportunity for improved client outcomes.

Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to:

- Brangman Home, business unit 33070
- Youth Development Centre, business unit 33080
- Observatory Cottage, business unit 33090

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for business unit 33070, Brangman Home, is \$1,195,000, a decrease of \$62,000, or 5 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 33080, the Youth Development Centre's budget allocation is \$306,000. This is an increase of \$18,000, or 6 per cent.

The Observatory Cottage that falls under business unit 33090, has a budget of \$1,172,000, a decrease of \$311,000, or 21 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, Residential Treatment Services (RTS) provides group living intervention services to children between the ages of 12 and 18 years. These are adolescents who are deemed to be at risk in the community and require care and protection in a safe and structured residential environment. All children placed in this service have had their situation and circumstances considered by the Family Court, where it has been deemed appropriate for them to be placed on a care order and as such, become the responsibility of the Director of Child and Family Services.

Mr. Chairman, the RTS programme provides [services] 24 hours, 365 days a year. The young ladies are housed at the Brangman Home while the young men receive services at the Youth Development Centre.

The inclusion of family is paramount to the healing process of the children receiving services. The RTS programme allows for collaboration with the family and the community to understand the child's cultural experience through a trauma-informed care framework.

Mr. Chairman, we continue to see the impact of complex trauma on the adolescents served. Complex trauma is caused by the children's exposure to multiple traumatic events, often invasive and interpersonal in nature, and it is often wide-ranging with lasting effects. This impacts the goal of having children transition within 12 months. As a result, the services provided by RTS remain under a trauma-responsive lens. This is translated into the intake and assessment process, family engagement practice, crisis intervention, and both individual and group counselling. The trauma lens is also utilised in the reflective supervision of the staff and treatment team involved in the child's care.

Mr. Chairman, during last year, RTS provided comprehensive case management and intervention for children on transition in the community, as well as those

ready for discharge. This included working with both the internal and external multi-agency teams involved with the children and families to ensure a seamless trauma-responsive transition. The families involved welcomed the partnership and requested continued engagement post the three months aftercare phase.

Mr. Chairman, the RTS programme faced many challenges in 2024/25, in relation to services received by children in care. Some required closer observation and monitoring with therapeutic interventions to prevent escalation. Moreover, some needed to be separated from within the facility and required additional support. Clients' services included crisis intervention and referrals to respond to critical incidents. Strong case management of children was essential through crisis management meetings, ongoing individual assessments, and service plans. Client profiles indicated that 92 per cent of children had come from single-parent households.

Additionally, both male and female profiles continue to reflect that 100 per cent of the children experiencing trauma included abandonment and abuse. During the year, there was an increase in the use of substance abuse by residents, 42 per cent of the young people in care engaged in substance use, including marijuana and tobacco; and more specifically vapes. This data demonstrates the wide range of specialist services required for dealing effectively with children and families.

Residential Treatment Services remained committed in striving for the success of our children in the education system and responded to the learning challenges. This year, an additional professional tutor was hired; each cottage now has professional academic support, leading to increased partnerships with the educational psychologists, paraprofessionals and social workers.

Mr. Chairman, RTS met the performance targets with 100 per cent of residents given independent treatment plans, 100 per cent had service plans and 100 per cent of residents had individual crisis management plans. The team focused on ensuring all plans were aligned to offer the best care for residents and continue to partner with key community stakeholders such as the Bermuda Police Service, Department of Education, Child and Adolescent Services, the Gang Violence Reduction Team, Department of Court Services, Big Brothers and Big Sisters of Bermuda and the Mirrors Programme.

Mr. Chairman, 187 coordinated services were provided with community partners, 217 individual counselling sessions, 290 group sessions and 187 family engagement sessions. RTS held 20 joint family group activities to build connections and improve interfamily relationships.

There were over 100 prosocial activities that took place within the cottages; this included engagement in sports, community programmes and other

extracurricular activities expanding the residents' resiliency factors.

Mr. Chairman, RTS engaged in training to support the growth and development of the team which included participation in Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, Youth Mental Health First Aide training and Trauma Attachment Training using dialectical behaviour therapy skills. All staff participate in Relias training regularly, topics include conflict management, behavioural supports, suicidality and developmental concerns of adolescents.

Mr. Chairman, with a primary focus on establishing trauma-responsive environments for the children in our group homes, review and amendments are made to policies and procedures to reflect the principles of group home living. During the 2024/25 budget year, the DCFS administration continued its partnership with the Ministry of Public Works, specifically the Department of Public Lands and Buildings, to address ongoing building concerns at all three cottages; this included regular maintenance, addressing safety concerns and cottage improvements to better deliver a high-quality residential treatment program.

Mr. Chairman, I take this opportunity to thank the staff at the Residential Treatment Services and the community stakeholders for their commitment in providing trauma-responsive services to the residents of group living, to restore hope and build resiliency in their lives.

Psycho-Educational Programme, Business Unit 33100

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Psycho-Educational (Psycho-Ed) programme was developed to clinically address children who could not be effectively treated in Bermuda or those who had exhausted all available local therapeutic treatment services. The budget estimate for business unit 33100 is \$2,119,000. This represents less than a 1 per cent increase over 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, local psychologists, psychiatrists and educational therapists have demonstrated an improved ability to diagnose various psychological, behavioural and educational problems. However, more Bermudian children are being identified with various psychological, social/emotional, and psychiatric conditions beyond the ability of our local service providers. The Psycho-Ed Programme allows the Department of Child and Family Services to have external input concerning clinical therapeutic intervention and aftercare services.

Mr. Chairman, the Psycho-Ed Programme provides children with protection, care, and nurturance by licensed and accredited therapeutic overseas facilities. The programme provides a safe, supportive, and therapeutic environment for each child while working collaboratively towards either family reunification or an alternative permanent option.

The Psycho-Ed Committee is comprised of representatives from:

- Child and Adolescent Services
- Ministry of Education
- The Department of Child and Family Services

The Psycho-Ed Committee met virtually twice a quarter during three quarters last year to review the status and make decisions on children referred for overseas placement or clinical assessment. The monthly meetings mark an overall improvement and committee for the benefit of the Psycho-Ed clients.

Mr. Chairman, in the best interest of the child, the Psycho-Ed Committee utilises an overseas service provider that specialises primarily in providing clinical neuropsychological assessments at Huntsman Mental Health Institute (HMHI). Implementing the neuropsychological assessment at HMHI assisted DCFS in obtaining a clear and comprehensive understanding of the specific needs of clients referred for an assessment.

The majority of Bermuda's children who were referred for a neuropsychological assessment were current Psycho-Ed clients who did not have an identified diagnosis or those who did not engage with our local service providers. The comprehensive neuropsychological assessment assisted in developing the client's individualised treatment plan that facilitated the most appropriate match of local community resources or identified an overseas therapeutic placement that matched the child's specific needs.

Mr. Chairman, 14 children participated in the Psycho-Ed Programme in 2024. Four children participated in an overseas neuropsychological assessment. Three children were assessed at Huntsman Mental Health Institute (HMHI) and one child at Harbor Point Behavioural Health. Two children completed their neuropsychological assessments at HMHI resulting in one child being diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, returning to the local jurisdiction for active case management. And one child was referred for a long-term overseas therapeutic placement. One child remains at HMHI and has not completed the assessment process. One child who completed the neuropsychological assessment process at Harbor Point Behavioural Health was recommended for a long-term overseas therapeutic placement. Out of the remaining 10 Psycho-Ed clients, two children who were referred to Psycho-Ed were admitted directly into an overseas therapeutic facility for a long-term placement of nine to eighteen months, and eight children were already currently enrolled in a long-term overseas placement.

Mr. Chairman, all Psycho-Ed clients serviced overseas received the Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) with a scoring range of 20 to 50. A score of 50 is defined as having serious symptoms or serious impairment in social, occupational, or school functioning, and 20 is defined as having a danger of hurting themselves or others. The result of low Global Assessment of Functioning (GAF) scores required that all

Psycho-Ed clients receive intensive clinical treatment with a longer duration of treatment options coupled with one-to-one staff interventions, psychotropic medications, frequent team meetings, psychiatric hospitalisations, family intervention programmes, and overseas therapeutic visits.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Education (MOED) and the Bermuda Hospitals Board's (BHB) Child and Adolescent Services (CAS) face significant limitations in resources and capacity when serving clients diagnosed with conduct disorder, experiencing severe mental health challenges, presenting with complex behavioural needs, or those deemed high-risk within the community. As a result, multiple referrals are submitted to the Psycho-Educational Committee seeking approval for overseas therapeutic placements. These placements are requested for young individuals whose needs cannot be adequately met within our local school system or the existing therapeutic framework provided by CAS.

Mr. Chairman, DCFS continues to face significant pressure due to the limited resources offered by Child and Adolescent Services and the Ministry of Education's ongoing inability to adequately support children with severe behavioural challenges and intellectual disabilities. Although DCFS has a seat at the table on the High-Risk Intervention Committee (THRIC) to strategise how to manage complex cases, the department is not fully equipped to meet the growing volume and complexity of referrals from both MOED and CAS which includes non-acute mental health and psychiatric needs. This gap in service delivery highlights the urgent need for a coordinated response to meet the clinical needs of these children across all involved agencies.

Youth Residential Treatment, Business Unit 33110

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, business unit 33110, Youth Residential Treatment budget allocation for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$1,087,000. This reflects a decrease of 13 per cent compared to fiscal year 2024/25. Mr. Chairman, Youth Residential Treatment [serves] as the administrative and professional services arm that delivers comprehensive support, including accounting, management, counselling, and clinical services to all residential homes and programmes. This business unit is responsible for identifying staff training needs, assessing the clinical needs of all children within the programme, and managing facility maintenance and repair issues, which are reported to the director for appropriate action.

Additionally, the unit oversees all Performance and Quality Improvement (PQI) efforts, ensuring that every programme within Residential Treatment Services consistently meets and maintains industry standards. During 2024, two hard-to-fill positions within Youth Residential Treatment were successfully staffed, strengthening the team's capacity to deliver high-quality care and support across all programmes.

Independent Living Programme, Business Unit 33240

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, business unit 33240, [on page B-298], Independent Living Programme budget allocation for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$673,000, an increase of 4 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Independent Living Programme (ILP) is a pioneering initiative, offering a vital lifeline and safety net for young adults ageing out of the care of the director. This year, the programme celebrated two years of operations, providing the young adults with the support and resources necessary to successfully navigate the challenging transition into adulthood. By leveraging community resources and fostering a supportive environment, the aim is to ensure each participant has the best possible opportunity to thrive and create a successful, fulfilling future.

Mr. Chairman, at the start of 2024, the Independent Living Programme housed four residents. However, one female resident was terminated due to non-compliance. Subsequently, ten referrals were received and four were rejected. By the end of the year, Independent Living Programme was at capacity with nine residents—seven females and two males.

Two residents graduated from The Berkeley Institute. One high schooler moved to the Independent Living Programme in July, completed summer school, and is on the course to graduate from the CedarBridge Academy in 2025. One resident enrolled with the Adult Education School in December 2024 to obtain their GED. Also, each resident had some form of employment, whether full-time, part-time, summer employment, or apprenticeship. By the end of 2024, there were three residents employed full-time, three part-time, one seasonal, and two unemployed.

Mr. Chairman, during the past [year], Independent Living Programme staff addressed a total of seven employment-related incidents involving five residents. These incidents included concerns such as a lack of insurance and benefits coverage, dishonest employer practices, and questionable employment contracts. The Independent Living Programme staff provided individualised support to affected residents through advocacy, guidance, and resource navigation. In each case, residents were either directed to appropriate external supports or provided with alternative solutions to address their unique circumstances.

Mr. Chairman, life skills development continues to be a fundamental component of the Independent Living Programme, with a strong emphasis on equipping residents with the knowledge and tools necessary for successful independent living. Last year, group sessions were held that addressed a range of essential topics including, [for example,] tenancy, financial literacy, money management, utility bill management, meal planning and grocery shopping, legal awareness, understanding actions and consequences, job sustainability, personal safety and security, self-care, and common challenges faced by young adults.

In addition, the programme actively engaged community partners to deliver monthly workshops, contributing valuable expertise and perspectives aimed at enhancing the residents' life skills and fostering greater community connection.

Mr. Chairman, Renovations to the Independent Living Programme staff offices and boardroom commenced in November and are progressing steadily. Completion is anticipated by the end of May, May 31, 2025. These upgrades aim to enhance the functionality of staff spaces and support continued programme delivery.

In addition, the development of a new studio apartment is underway, which will increase Independent Living Programme's residential capacity to a total of 11 [rooms]. This unit has been thoughtfully designed to accommodate residents with disabilities, ensuring accessibility and inclusivity within the programme. When not in use for this purpose, the studio will serve as a transitional living space for residents who have demonstrated readiness for independent living, offering an opportunity to experience greater autonomy in the final stages of their Independent Living Programme journey.

Mr. Chairman, with the Independent Living Programme having celebrated its second anniversary, we have much to celebrate. Over the past two years the programme has served as a vital safety net for young adults, transitioning out of care of the director offering essential support during a pivotal stage of their lives.

I take this opportunity to extend my sincere gratitude to the dedicated staff of the Independent Living Programme and our community stakeholders. Their unwavering commitment has been instrumental in providing a lifeline to our young adults, empowering them to grow, gain confidence and move toward independence.

Programme 2305—The Mirrors Programme,
Business Unit 33140

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The Mirrors Programme, business unit 33140 is found on page B-298. Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated to the Mirrors Programme for 2025/26 is \$869,000, an increase of 24 per cent. Mirrors has begun to rebuild its team since it transitioned to the Department of Child and Family Services. A full complement of staff is expected this year. One additional post, a Youth and Community Engagement Officer, will be funded this year and the Recruitment Manager post will now be fully funded this year for a total complement of six staff for the Mirrors Programme.

Mr. Chairman, we are honoured and pleased to continue our development of prevention programming for Bermuda, which is grounded in neuroscience of accelerated learning, counselling [pedagogy and andragogy,] and leadership principles which demonstrate the depths of programming Mirrors is using. Mirrors and its partners continue to develop the work in the Social

Emotional Development and Life Coaching areas for our community. As an example of the high level of curriculum, the Western Association of Schools Colleges [WASC] accreditor observed the February 2025 camp, spoke with campers, staff, volunteers, leadership campers and parents with a positive report for re-accrediting our partner Quantum Learning Global, which extends the accreditation to Mirrors, producing WASC accredited programming. The Mirrors team is congratulated for this accomplishment.

Mr. Chairman, the new In-Power-Meant process developed by lead consultant Dr. Cheyenne Correia-Foster, is about social and emotional development and is very useful for life. Youth and volunteers have learned to identify who they are internally, to confidently express themselves externally, and to leave a positive impact on the world by elevating those around them. Mirrors continues its effort with relevant content to focus on the whole person and cycle of impact to support its primary population, youth well-being.

Mr. Chairman, Mirrors enrolled 30 youth in the October 2024 SuperCamp Senior Forum (Cohort 19) who are currently in their follow-through phase of the programme with a life coach, with expected completion in June 2025. This year, the students were separated by gender to provide more specialised monthly support services, and they continue to receive weekly life coaching.

Mr. Chairman, Mirrors is expecting to enrol a leadership senior group (cohort 20), in the upcoming year, of twenty-five 14- to 16-year-olds and five junior team leaders to travel to Singapore for the SuperCamp Senior Forum leadership experience. The focus is to build peer leadership skills and harness the peer influence such that they have a positive impact in their schools when they return. Their follow-through phase will be focused on experiential leadership skills development. Thirty volunteers who have demonstrated leadership qualities to coach the students will enrol. This focus will allow for positive peer influence on the school climate with the opportunity to accelerate positive community outcomes.

During 2024, Mr. Chairman, 60 middle school students participated in the All In! 8 Keys of Excellence [prefect] training across the three middle schools; 33 youth participated in the five-day SuperCamp Junior Forum workshop, and 20 youth were supported through the out-of-school suspension and drop-in service programme. All post-training surveys continue to receive 90 [per cent] to 100 per cent school-age levels in school reform positive experience ratings in content and experience. The team is engaging with the parish primary schools to explore serving the upper primary.

Mr. Chairman, PeerForward Bermuda travelled overseas in 2024 with a team of 16 peer leaders, four advisors, two college coaches and two support staff for the Mirrors-endorsed college and career readiness programmes at The Berkeley Institute and CedarBridge Academy. Thirty-two peer leaders attended the fall

training in student engagement to execute the PeerForward journey, which moves from self-awareness and self-agency to community service. Service is about leading peers to build a college-going culture in their high schools to raise college enrolment and degree attainment. All trainings in the PeerForward programme received 100 per cent positive experience in content and experience.

The report from Bermuda College Fall 2024 enrolment indicated that 171 of the 198 high school graduates for 2024 came from public schools. Mr. Chairman, 99 students came from The Berkeley Institute and 72 came from CedarBridge [Academy]. Students are using Bermuda College as a pathway to degrees. College Promise and PeerForward, hosting college application days at the high schools, are making a difference in post-secondary enrolment.

Mr. Chairman, over 100 parents and students signed up to attend the 2025 Finding Fund\$ for College webinars, and the focus has increased to engaging parents of students of all ages versus S4 parents to support families' proactive planning to build financial pathways for students to attend college. PeerForward is projecting to serve Berkeley and CedarBridge in the 2025/26 school year with the PeerForward programme and support from the Mirrors Alumni and Friends Association charity.

Mr. Chairman, 172 students provided art and digital submissions in the 8th Annual Art and Digital competition themed "Feels Like Home." Students won prizes for themselves and their schools to support the arts in school. The upcoming 2025 theme is "Faces of Bermuda" which will showcase student summer art.

Mr. Chairman, Mirrors continues to find ways to engage parents to attend training to build skills for positive youth development. Mr. Chairman, 384 parents participated in programming in 2024. The target was reduced based on transition activities and vacant posts. Mirrors has a secondary focus of building social emotional development in adult-serving youth. Mr. Chairman, 330 volunteers, educators and youth workers attended programming in 2024.

Mr. Chairman, 86 adults provided roughly 204 service hours, and 209 youth provided roughly 656 service hours in the Mirrors Field of Learning Garden. Students were able to engage in sustainable gardening curricula led by Mirrors team member, Nelson Bascome III, to transfer the knowledge in developing home gardens. Students were able to harvest vegetables, donating them across the Island to seniors, group living homes and families. The Mirrors Alumni and Friends Association will continue to support Mirrors in the upcoming year through the volunteer recognition scheme, the annual Bermuda-themed art competition, Southlands, PeerForward and other community engagements. Mr. Chairman, I take this opportunity to thank corporate Bermuda, the Alumni Board members and the Mirrors team for their commitment to the development of Bermuda's youth.

Mr. Chairman, I will now speak to programme 2304, Administration, found on page B-298.

Programme 2304, Administration

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, business unit 33120, Administration and business unit 33130, Grant Funding fall under programme 2304 with a combined budget estimate for fiscal year 2025/26 of \$2,478,000, reflecting a decrease of \$404,000 or 14 per cent.

Administration, Business Unit 33120

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Administration section of DCFS is responsible for the general supervision of the sections within the department and the oversight of the Psycho-Educational Programme, the Mirrors Programme, Child Safeguarding and Court Social work. The budget estimate for business unit 33120 for this year is \$2,383,000. This reflects a 2 per cent increase.

Mr. Chairman, staff development and training continue to be a strategic priority, purposefully aligned with the goal of delivering a seamless continuum of services that address the complex needs of our client population. To ensure staff remain current with best practices, a partnership has been maintained with Relias Learning Systems, DCFS's core web-based training platform. Relias offers a comprehensive library of accredited courses, endorsed by professional bodies such as the Council on Accreditation (COA) and the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), which are regularly updated to reflect the latest research and standards in the field.

Mr. Chairman, DCFS is required to conduct Social Inquiry Reports (SIR) for both the Family Court and the Supreme Court. This section has one substantive social worker, and due to the increased requests for reports another social worker was reassigned to assist in reducing the backlog from the courts. The court social workers function autonomously from the other sections within the department to ensure that all comprehensive reports are compiled based on the information provided by the parties, their collateral supports, and the relevant services that may be involved with the parent, guardian and/or the children. The court social worker's primary focus is to recommend what is in the best interest of the children.

At the beginning of 2024, Mr. Chairman, 35 court matters were carried over from 2023 and the total number of new cases for 2024 was 50. In addition to the SIR requests, the court social workers were required to submit 32 updated or addendum reports to the courts. The court social workers appeared in Family Court 96 times and 26 times in the Supreme Court.

Mr. Chairman, many of the Family Court matters now include trials and require the court social workers to testify regarding their reports. This is a significant shift from previous family court practices, and trials

often results in the social workers sometimes spending days in court, which significantly impacts their ability to meet requested timeframes for other SIR reports. There are delays in providing judgments that negatively impact the relevance of the Social Inquiry Reports. Social workers are often requested to provide an updated report due to the significant delay, and this can disrupt the lives of families and children. Efforts should be made to implement measures that ensure rulings are delivered immediately following hearings. Introducing a “child’s timescale” framework [could] prioritise timely resolutions while safeguarding the best interests of the child.

Mr. Chairman, in response to the recommendations of the SafeLives UK review, a Domestic Liaison social worker joined the Department of Child and Family Services in April. This officer brings experience as a complex needs independent domestic violence advisor and will work in partnership with the Centre Against Abuse. Their role includes providing specialised domestic abuse and sexual abuse support services to families and adults, promoting education and community awareness, offering case management, crisis intervention, and safety planning. The new addition to the team represents a welcome continuum in our efforts to safeguard children and families.

Mr. Chairman, the establishment of the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) was another SafeLives UK recommendation, which has been in operation during the past two years. Since April 2023, this dedicated team of professionals has been meeting regularly to review, assess, and ensure safety plans for referred high-risk domestic abuse and family violence cases. The MARAC team comprises representatives from the Department of Child and Family Services, the Bermuda Police Service—Domestic Violence Liaison and Vulnerable Persons sections—the Centre Against Abuse, and Ageing and Disabilities Services.

Mr. Chairman, from its inception in April 2023 until December 2024, MARAC has reviewed a total of 143 cases. These cases include couples, families with children, and seniors/vulnerable persons who experienced family abuse.

The breakdown is as follows:

- 69 new cases were referred between April and December 2023; while
- 74 new cases were referred from January to December 2024.

Of the 143 total cases:

- 25 involved vulnerable adults (seniors/disabled persons);
- 24 involved couples without children;
- 94 involved families with children or a child exposed to domestic abuse, which accounted for a total of 142 children exposed.

Mr. Chairman, during 2024, there were 14 reported recurrences of domestic abuse in households already open to MARAC. Alarmingly, 85 per cent of

these recurrences involved child exposure to domestic abuse.

Furthermore, DCFS recorded 197 investigations for neglect in 2024, specifically related to child exposure to family violence/domestic abuse. This reflects an increase from the 157 investigations recorded at the end of 2023, continuing a concerning year-over-year upward trend.

Mr. Chairman, as a community, we must address these rising numbers with urgency. Evidence from our cases, alongside extensive international research, highlights the devastating effects of domestic abuse on a child’s development. During incidents of domestic abuse, even if a child is not physically harmed, the emotional and psychological damage from witnessing or simply being nearby during such events poses a high risk. Children exposed to domestic abuse face both short-term and long-term challenges.

Mr. Chairman, it is critical to recognise that children learn and are shaped by their environment from birth and even in utero. The harmful effects of domestic abuse must not be underestimated, and the community has a responsibility to act.

Grant Funding, Business Unit 33130

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for business unit 33130 for 2025/26 is \$95,000, representing an 83 per cent decrease from 2024/25. This reduction is due to a shift of the grant allocation of \$375,000 for Teen Haven and Teen Services from DCFS to the Ministry Headquarters.

Mr. Chairman, \$75,000 in grant funding is to support the cross-ministry initiative and assist families in crisis through the development of coordinated, inter-agency responses that address urgent and multifaceted needs. This investment underscores a continued commitment to collaborative, holistic support strategies that create lasting impact where it is needed most. Mr. Chairman, \$20,000 will be allocated to MARAC to cover education, promotion and awareness about domestic violence.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now present the subjective analysis of current account estimates for the Department of Child and Family Services as found on page B-299 of the Estimates Book.

Salaries

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocated for Salaries is \$11,926,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, an increase of \$1,681,000, or 16 per cent more than the original budget for fiscal year 2024/25.

The salary growth largely reflects increases in manpower (FTEs) to ensure that a new community-based intensive model of intervention, i.e., the

Intensive Family Preservation programme, can be implemented under the Family Preservation section. The increase is also explained by funding for an additional full-time equivalent for the Mirrors Programme, and one new full-time equivalent for the Foster Care programme. Finally, negotiated salary uplifts for public officers also explain the increase for 2025/26.

Wages

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for wages is \$187,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, representing an increase of \$11,000 compared to fiscal year 2024/25. This is due to the adjustment of an understated annual wage in the prior year; however, negotiated pay uplifts for industrial employees accounted for the majority of the increase.

Other Personnel Costs

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The budget expenditure allocated for other personnel costs remained unchanged from fiscal year 2024/25 to fiscal year 2025/26.

Training

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the \$2,000 increase in training expenses for fiscal year 2025/26 is representative of new, specialised onboarding training for employees within the Family Preservation section.

Transport

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, expenditure for transport has been budgeted at \$70,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, indicative of a \$25,000, or 56 per cent, increase over the prior year. The Foster Care Programme provides transportation services for children to and from school and some after-school activities. The section has increased its transportation budget by this amount due to the number of children involved in several after-school activities, and special professional services that are time-sensitive.

Travel

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, total travel expenses have been budgeted at \$252,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, an increase of \$6,000 [over] fiscal year 2024/25. This represents minor increases in the amounts budgeted for overseas conferences and hotel costs for the Foster Care and Investigation and Screening programmes.

Communications

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, communications, inclusive of phones, courier and postal costs, are budgeted at \$225,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, which

represents a \$37,000, or 20 per cent, increase over the budget allocation for fiscal year 2024/25. Additional staff hired for the new Intensive Family Preservation initiative will each require a cellular phone for safety purposes. Also, the Counselling and Life Skills section will be issued cellular phones during 2025/26, as their client base has increased, and more time is anticipated to be spent at the schools and meeting clients outside of the office. Lastly, the rise in the budget covers increased costs of local calls for the programmes having satellite offices.

Advertising and Promotion

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget of \$18,000 allocated for advertising and promotion expenditures increased by \$5,000 for fiscal year 2025/26. This is to support a planned campaign on mandatory reporting by the Investigation and Screening section. The Children Act 1998 requires service providers and anyone working with children to be listed as a mandatory reporter of neglect and/or abuse. In the interest of children, the campaign will provide information on what is reportable by professionals and to better inform the community about mandatory reporting.

Professional Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Professional Services budgeted at \$3,929,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, represents a decrease of \$175,000. The Independent Living programme requires a security presence every night and weekends at the facility. Funding for this security was redirected from Professional Services to the Security Equipment (Minor Equipment) budget line in error. The necessary change will be made to the budget.

However, reductions were also made to professional services costs to support funding needed to cover increased transportation costs by the Foster Care section, additional communication expenses by the Counselling and Life Skills section and satellite offices, increased funding for food supplies, office supplies, stationery, printing and cleaning supplies across the various programmes, financing professional liability costs and covering maintenance expenses due to ageing assets and equipment.

Rentals

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Rentals for budget year 2025/26 is \$1,682,000, a decrease of \$8,000 from the prior budget year. This decrease represents a minor adjustment to the rental budget within the Independent Living programme.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, for fiscal year 2025/26, the costs of Repairs and Maintenance is \$611,000, an increase of \$64,000 over fiscal year 2024/25. The Brangman Home, Observatory Cottage, and Transitional Living programmes and Independent Living programme have each budgeted additional funds to carry out deep scale cleaning of their facilities on a quarterly basis.

Extra money has also been budgeted to cover vehicle maintenance to ensure staff are able to travel Island-wide to carry out their duties, and for ageing kitchen and office equipment at the Brangman Home.

Insurance

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the \$3,000 increase in insurance costs will ensure that the annual re-charge for psychologist medical professional liability is covered.

Energy

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, for fiscal year 2025/26 the Energy budget has been allocated \$318,000, representing a \$14,000, or 5 per cent increase over fiscal year 2025/26. This increase will support fuel costs for two new vehicles to be used by the new Intensive Family Preservation programme.

Also, the Brangman Home and Observatory Cottage have marginally increased gasoline and electricity budgets, respectively, to bring into alignment with historical spending.

Clothing, Uniforms and Laundry

Hon. Tinee Furbert: For fiscal year 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, \$176,000 has been budgeted for clothing, uniforms and laundry expenses.

This is a \$5,000, or 3 per cent, decrease that is attributed to the Brangman Home redirecting funding from their clothing budget to finance increased gasoline costs, as mentioned.

Materials and Supplies

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for Materials and Supplies for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$512,000, representing a \$136,000, or 36 per cent, increase over the 2024/25 budget allocation. Two-thirds of this increase is due to the rising costs to provide children's meals within the Happy Valley Child Care Centre, as well as for residents within the Brangman Home, Observatory Cottage and Independent Living programmes.

The remaining one-third of the increase is explained by additional funding needed for office supplies, stationery, printing and cleaning supplies across the various programmes; and the Independent Living

programme has also budgeted more for linen and toiletries for residents.

Equipment (Minor Capital)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, minor equipment expenses have been allocated \$111,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, an increase of \$83,000 over fiscal year 2024/25. The increase highlights an administrative error as these monies are earmarked for spending on contracted security services at the Independent Living programme, and not security equipment. The necessary change will be made to the budget.

Other Expenses

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget for Other Expenses increased by \$25,000 for fiscal year 2025/26. This increase will support a new social sector initiative funded by the Administration section for a Hardship Support fund for families facing a financial crisis, i.e., those having insufficient money to cover the costs of food, medication, or utility bills.

The fund seeks to provide immediate assistance to people, pending being assessed by the Department of Financial Assistance, or for those who may not be eligible for financial assistance.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the amount allocated for Grants and Contributions for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$685,000, representing a \$451,000, or 40 per cent reduction in funding from fiscal year 2024/25. As shown on page C-21, grants awarded to Teen Services and Teen Haven (shown as Grant to YHED) have decreased by \$375,000, since these grants have been transferred over to the Ministry Headquarters. Also, the grant for the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Committee (MARAC) has been reduced by \$76,000, as a social worker (Domestic Liaison) post has been created within Family Preservation, to provide these services. The remaining amount budgeted for MARAC will be spent on Domestic Abuse Awareness activities.

Revenue Summary (Page B-299)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, for fiscal year 2025/26, Revenue for nursery fees earned by the Happy Valley Child Care Centre is estimated to be on par with the 2024/25 estimate. Additional earnings of \$33,000 are anticipated to be collected by the Independent Living programme in respect of residential fees from clients.

Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, on page B-300 you will note that there are 117 full-time equivalent positions for the Department of Child and Family Services for fiscal year 2025/26. This is an increase of 11 full-time equivalents compared to fiscal year 2024/25. The increase is explained by the addition of nine funded temporary additional posts budgeted for the new community-based, intensive model of intervention, Intensive Family Preservation programme, operating under the Family Preservation section.

The temporary additional posts include one Social Worker, Domestic Liaison; three Social Worker Assistants; four Social Workers; one Clinical Social Worker; and one Behavioural Support Specialist. In addition, one Youth and Community Engagement Officer post has been fully funded for the Mirrors programme, and one temporary additional Social Worker post complements the Foster Care team.

It should also be noted that during November 2024, the department completed a realignment of its positions relative to the approved organisational structure. This resulted in some positions being moved to other business units, and thus accounts for the remaining differences shown on page B-300.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes our presentation for Head 23, the Department of Child and Family Services. At this time, I extend my sincere gratitude to all the dedicated staff within the department for their unwavering commitment to the children and families of Bermuda. Though often unrecognised, their impact is undeniable.

The Chairman: And for the listening audience, we are in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the budget for the country which is currently doing Head 86 . . . and Head 23 has just been completed by the Minister for Child and Family Services. We will be going into Head 55. This is a four-hour debate. We have done, roughly, just about three of those four hours. We have roughly 55 minutes left. This is being piloted through the House of Assembly by Minister Tinee Furbert.

Minister Tinee Furbert, you have the floor.

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

HEAD 55—DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I will now present the Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue for Head 55, the Department of Financial Assistance, which can be found on pages B-305 through B-307.

Mr. Chairman, the role of the Department of Financial Assistance [DFA] is to ensure that individuals with insufficient financial resources have access to services to gain, maintain, or regain a minimum standard of living while encouraging personal and economic independence. The services enable the individual to

maintain dignity and self-worth and encourage the development of personal skills and resources.

The mission of the Department of Financial Assistance is found on page B-304 and is, *To assist vulnerable Bermudians to maintain a minimum standard of living during challenging economic times.*

Categories of Financial Assistance Awards

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Financial Assistance is intended to assist with partial or full financial awards, in accordance with legislation, for items such as: food, rent, rest and nursing home fees, medication, utilities, home care and child day care. Approval for financial assistance is based on proven need, and a “means test” will assess the basic needs for a household to sustain monthly obligations either in whole or in part. Eligible and qualified clients on financial assistance, child day care allowance and the short-term relief benefit are categorised in one of six categories:

- Pensioners
- Disabled
- Earnings Low Employed
- Able-bodied and Unemployed
- Child Day Care Allowance
- Short-Term Relief Benefit

As of February 2025, the largest category of persons in need of financial assistance are pensioners, representing 53 per cent of total persons in receipt of financial assistance. The next highest categories are persons with disabilities at 36 per cent. Persons employed with insufficient earnings is at 7 per cent, followed by able-bodied unemployed persons at 4 per cent. Approximately 258 children were supported under the Child Day Care Allowance Programme during the same period.

Mr. Chairman, the monthly average number of new application submissions from the public currently stands at 50. The vetting process for each new application is meticulous, and officers in the department adhere to a turnaround timeframe of approximately two to three weeks from the time of receipt of each new application to completion of the vetting process. Whilst vetting new applications, the department continues to successfully service all existing eligible financial assistance and child day care allowance clients without interruptions.

Department Objectives

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the department's objectives can be found on page B-304, with legislation steering the core operational and financial activities of the department. The General Summary of expenditure for the department is shown on page B-305.

Mr. Chairman, the total expenditure for the financial assistance programme in 2025/26 is \$56,030,000. This budget allocation covers

expenditures for business unit 65050, Grants Administration and business unit 65080, General Administration.

Business unit 65050, Grants Administration, has a budget allocation of \$51,289,000, an increase of \$1,646,000, or 3 per cent more than in 2024/25.

The Grants Administration funding covers the social assistance and Child Day Care Allowance programmes as shown on page C-21. A total of \$48,789,000 will be used to maintain the financial assistance programme and the short-term relief benefit programme. This is an increase of 3 per cent or \$1,246,000 from the prior year. This increase is necessary to accommodate changes to legislation that will result in increases to client payouts.

A total of \$2,500,000 will fund the Child Day Care Allowance programme. This is an increase of 19 per cent, or \$400,000 from the prior year. This increase will also support increased child day care allowance payouts due to legislative changes.

Mr. Chairman, the total budget for 2025/26 for business unit 65080, General Administration, found on page B-305 is \$4,741,000. This is an increase of \$263,000, or 6 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, in its operational activities, the department continues to be guided by [the practices of] the National Association of Social Workers when managing relationships with financial assistance clients. In addition, the department collaborates with other licensed and accredited entities to provide supportive services such as health care assessments, psychological and psychiatric assessments, substance use disorder assessments and care placements. During fiscal year 2024/25, the department made strides in fortifying these collaborations, which will be explained further in this brief.

Mr. Chairman, the department will continue to collaborate with the department of Information and Digital Technology on the introduction of digital forms for persons making an application for financial assistance. The intent is to connect the public service with the people of Bermuda through comprehensive, secure, and accessible digital forms. Modern, innovative, digital technology facilitates internal efficiency and effectiveness and mobile working conditions. It is hoped that data gathering and reporting is expected to be less onerous in the very near future. This will improve the department's data analytics function and risk management.

Mr. Chairman, the department's compliance process facilitates the investigative, legislative, financial, and operational sections of the department to identify and prevent areas of potential fraud, abuse of the financial assistance system and overpayments to clients. Improvements can be measured by a more efficient turnaround of case referrals to Attorney General Chambers, random audit of client cases to detect any areas of concern, identifying red flags of possible fraud during assessments, and deploying preventative

measures to manage the cost of awards per legislation and budgetary constraints.

Performance Measures

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Performance Measures for the department can be found on page B-307. They demonstrate the achievement of public value to a vulnerable population group and are deliberately concise and precise. The focus is on measuring outcomes from the department objectives and other business improvements to better articulate the ability of the department in achieving effectiveness and service delivery. The department's performance measures are as follows:

Reduce Recoverable Debt from Prior Year

Hon. Tinee Furbert: This allows the department to eliminate waste and control budgeted amounts by effectively dealing with financial assistance fraud, reducing abuse of the system and overpayment of funds. The original forecast for 2024/25 was to reduce recoverable debt by 15 per cent from the prior year, and the revised forecast remains the same. The investigative officers remain committed to continuing their collaboration with Attorney General Chambers in the pursuit of legal recourse.

Reduce the Number of "Able-Bodied" and/or "Earnings Low" Clients from Prior Year

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The department provides a financial assistance award foundation that allows able-bodied unemployed, and earnings-low clients to become employed and employable without losing all financial assistance benefits. This has led to clients becoming employed, financially independent, and not dependent on financial assistance. Collaboration with the Department of Workforce Development has proven to be successful, whereby the use of personal employment plans encouraged clients' participation in employment opportunities that led to avenues for recipients to become financially independent.

The original and revised forecast for 2024/25 was based on the hope that with continual review and formulation of strategy, 10 per cent of clients that fall under the categories of able-bodied [unemployed] and earnings low, at fiscal year-end, will have been transitioned out of financial assistance and into sustainable work with independent living conditions. At the time of writing this brief, the actual outcome was 18 per cent, which is an increase of 8 per cent more than the original forecast for 2024/25. With continued collaboration with the Department of Workforce Development, the target outcome for 2025/26 is anticipated at 20 per cent.

Reduce Number of Legitimate Client Complaints from Prior Year

Hon. Tinee Furbert: This is aimed at improving service quality. The department addresses legitimate complaints via direct conversations with clients or in writing, and in many instances, issues are raised either at the departmental level or directed towards the Minister's office. Responses are provided in an efficient, fact-based, and timely manner without compromising professionalism. The original and revised forecast for fiscal year 2024/25 was a 50 per cent reduction of reported legitimate client complaints. This revised forecast was achieved, and the department will be benchmarked against a 75 per cent target for 2025/26. The department will continue to reinforce a work ethic of customer centricity and aimed at delivering consistent and professional service standards towards the delivery of excellence, at both the front end and back end, consistently and professionally.

Reduce Number of Review Board Appeals from Prior Year

Hon. Tinee Furbert: A Financial Assistance Review Board is appointed to hear appeals against the director's decisions to

- refuse application for an award,
- impose special conditions on an award,
- suspend in whole or in part an award,
- vary an award,
- to revoke an award, or
- require repayment of any sum of money as per legislation.

This performance measure is aimed at improving the overall administration of the Financial Assistance Act, the regulations and policy. The reduction in the number of legitimate client complaints led to a positive correlation, which resulted in only two registered appeals in 2024/25, compared to four from the prior year. In both cases, the Review Board supported the decision taken by the director. The target outcome for 2025/26 is anticipated to remain at 50 per cent reduction.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the total capital expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26 is estimated at \$4,000, as shown on page C-16. This expenditure pertains to capital acquisition and will fund three laptops to be shared by the senior leadership and the financial assistance teams in documenting findings while working in the field.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Subjective Analysis is found on page B-305 and explains the breakdown in expenditure for business unit 65080, General Administration as follows:

Salaries

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$4,175,000 will fund Salaries during fiscal year 2025/26, an increase by \$402,000, or 11 per cent compared to 2024/25. This is attributed to the recently negotiated salary and wage collective bargaining agreement and the department's funding three vacant positions discussed under the Manpower section.

Training

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, training funded at \$12,000 increased by \$4,000, or 50 per cent, compared to the prior fiscal year. This increase is necessary to facilitate staff training.

Communications

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Communications costs increased by \$2,000 or by 15 per cent attributed to an increase in the cost of telephone installation and setup for vacant positions that will be filled in this year.

Professional Services

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Professional Services funded at \$300,000 decreased by \$173,000, or 37 per cent. This decrease is due to a reduction in hiring local consultants.

Repair and Maintenance

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, funding for Repair and Maintenance increased by \$8,000, or by 18 per cent. This increase covers higher software maintenance and office equipment repair and maintenance costs.

Materials and Supplies

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the funding for materials and supplies increased by \$10,000, or by 7 per cent. This increase is due to anticipated higher operating expenditures for printing, office supplies and office cleaning.

Minor Equipment

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the increased expenditure for minor equipment of \$10,000 will fund the replacement of office furniture and fixtures.

Manpower (Page B-306)

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the total full-time equivalent count is 41 positions compared to 38 positions in 2024/25. The department will fund three positions this year, which include an accounts officer to support both the short-term relief programme and handle

the increase in accounting transactions due to the rise in the number of clients receiving financial assistance.

Investigations

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, as a summary of the department's investigative work to reduce fraudulent activity, officers continue to conduct investigations and pursue individuals or entities that commit fraud and abuse of the Financial Assistance system. The following three cases are based on actual occurrences and are provided to inform the public on the nature of fraud and abuse committed by persons who receive financial assistance.

Case Study 1: Pertains to Fraud Committed Due to Unauthorised Travel

Hon. Tinee Furbert: In 2024, the subject, who was deemed medically unfit to work received financial assistance to help with monthly household expenses. The financial assistance awards that were granted consisted of payments for rent, insurance and food items. When the subject's reassessment was due, which allows the department to determine continued eligibility for financial assistance, the subject was notified via post to submit the required reassessment documentation. However, the subject failed to submit the requested reassessment documentation despite repeated reminders. The department officers then conducted a home visit to check on the subject's wellbeing; however, the subject could not be located. Subsequent travel checks revealed that the subject had left the Island without notifying the Department of Financial Assistance, in accordance with legislative requirements. Therefore, the subject continued to receive financial assistance payments while not residing in Bermuda. This case was referred to the Attorney General's Chambers to recover any overpayments.

The Chairman: For the listening audience we are on . . . there is probably about 35 minutes left in a four-hour debate. This is being piloted through the House of Assembly by Minister Tinee Furbert. We are currently on Head 55, Financial Assistance.

Minister Furbert, you have the floor.

Case Study 2: Pertains to Fraud Committed Due to Unreported Employment and Income

Hon. Tinee Furbert: In 2024, the subject, was categorised as disabled and deemed medically unfit to work by a physician. Subsequently, the department received notification that the subject was employed at a local business. The matter was handed over to the department's compliance unit and the investigative officers investigated this matter. Digital evidence obtained confirmed that the client was indeed employed and was receiving income that was not disclosed to the

department. Based on recent changes made to department's legislation, the department is now able to seek a second medical opinion on this subject to confirm the occurrence of any fraud. This matter is still under investigation.

Case Study 3: Pertains to Fraud Due to Misuse of Food Cards

Hon. Tinee Furbert: In 2024, the subject received food allowance via a department-issued food card. The department was notified by a member of the public that the subject was exchanging food items purchased via the food card for cash. An investigation was conducted and digital evidence secured confirmed allegations made against the subject. As a result of repeated abuse of the financial assistance system, penalties were applied to the subject as per legislation.

Mr. Chairman, there are 43 active cases under investigation due to fraud and abuse of the Financial Assistance system. The total reimbursable amount due to the government for these 43 cases was \$329,758. For those cases handled by the Attorney General's Chambers, the department ensures all necessary evidence and supporting documents are available for court proceedings to recoup the funding. Other individuals are placed on a feasible repayment plan to recover the funds.

Suspicious activities are brought to the department's attention via field investigations by investigative officers, the department officers' observations, internal findings, and tips from the public. During 2024/25, the department received, on average, nine tips per month.

The department will continue to focus on standardising current procedures and clearly defining policies that govern operational activities. This process will also aid with the department's investigative officers documenting a blueprint for "Financial Assistance Typologies" which can be used in other jurisdictions as a point of reference for identifying patterns and trends of potential fraudulent activities.

Financial Assistance Social Worker

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Financial Assistance (FA) social workers are committed to improving the department's social services delivery system. This is aimed at enhancing living standards and the overall well-being of financial assistance clients.

Building on process improvement initiatives that commenced in the prior year 2024/25, the social workers continued to re-engineer internal processes. Specifically, the process for the submission of client progress reports by residential mental health treatment facilities was addressed. That is, to ensure continuity of care for clients served, the process for a client's "step down" to a lesser level of care was efficiently facilitated through discussions and collaborations with the relevant agencies.

As part of its mandate, and given that Bermuda has a large ageing population, the Financial Assistance social workers continue to work collaboratively with the Bermuda Health Council to validate the bed capacity of each rest and nursing home. Through this collaboration, the Bermuda Health Council initiated their inspections of all rest and nursing homes, which are ongoing. The inspections consider the requirements of the department's most vulnerable financial assistance clients.

Collaborative Partnerships

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, during the fiscal year 2024/25, frequent collaborations occurred between the Financial Assistance social workers team, King Edward Memorial Hospital social workers team, and Ageing and Disability Services social workers. Partnership expansions and strengthening efforts continued through ongoing collaborations and more efficient meetings scheduled on a quarterly or biannual basis with respective partners and stakeholders.

The Financial Assistance social workers continue to have a successful collaboration with the Salvation Army to support clients with housing challenges and participate in the Drug Treatment Court and Driving Under the Influence Court to facilitate interagency collaboration. The department also partners with other agencies such as Dignity House, which is a residential mental health rehabilitation facility and Focus Counselling Services, which is a residential treatment facility that provides substance abuse disorder, [addiction and recovery support.]

Case Referrals

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, workflow trends continue to be highly concentrated on case conferences, case discussions, and individual counselling. Overseas medical transfers for financial assistance clients averaged between two to four per month, with longer stays due to more acute medical conditions and subsequent care being required. The Financial Assistance social workers' pre-screen support continues as a mechanism to facilitate the application process, specifically for pensioners and individuals with disabilities.

Community Outreach and Support

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, Officers in the Department work collaboratively with several Government ministries, departments, quangos and agencies to strengthen community partnerships and to ensure support for their clients. These include:

- Presentations to the Bermuda Housing Corporation and Focus Counselling Services enabling them to understand the department's mandate.
- Conducting site visits to rest and nursing homes throughout the fiscal year to survey

each of the facilities and make sure that Financial Assistance clients are served in safe and healthy environments, and receive the appropriate services and programming, and quality care.

- Liaising with the Department of Education to facilitate the transfer of 3-year-old children in receipt of child day care allowance into the pre-school Bright Start Programme offered in the Government's preschools.
- Working with the Department of Parks to provide health insurance coverage for participants in their Skills Development Programme which is intended to provide hands-on skills and the enhancement of knowledge to help FA clients secure employment and reduce dependency on financial assistance.

During 2024/25, the Department of Financial Assistance also purchased school clothing and shoes from various Bermuda retail stores and distributed them to FA parents before the start of the 2024/25 school year.

Legislative Changes

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, in June 2024, the introduction of the Financial Assistance (Short-Term Relief Benefit) Act 2024 came into effect. The purpose of this legislation is to provide immediate financial support on a short-term basis to persons who qualify in the event of experiencing sudden financial hardship due to unforeseen circumstances.

This Short-Term Relief Benefit programme is not intended to be long-term, but rather short-term financial support to persons who qualify by providing \$1,500 per month for a maximum period of three months in any given financial year. For the nine months the programme has been offered, a total of \$20,000 has been paid out to persons due to termination from employment and domestic violence.

Mr. Chairman, the Financial Assistance Regulations 2004 were amended to add an expenditure line item for Personal Care Allowance in the Table of Allowable Expenses to provide a monthly Personal Care Allowance of \$100 to all Financial Assistance clients who reside in licensed rest homes and nursing homes. This legislation became effective in February 2025 and allows for the purchase of personal care and health care goods and services, such as toiletries and grooming services.

Roughly, 229 FA clients will receive the \$100 personal care allowance, of which 195 clients are pensioners and 34 clients are persons with a disability. The department is now working through compliance issues that must be addressed before the first payout is made this month of May.

Mr. Chairman, the staff at the Department of Financial Assistance continues to demonstrate professionalism and commitment to support disadvantaged

and vulnerable Bermudians. For this, I continue to recognise and applaud the hard work and dedicated actions demonstrated by this department.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 55, the Department of Financial Assistance and for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister Furbert.

Is there anybody else who would like to speak to that?

We have roughly about 26 minutes left.

I recognise the Member from constituency 31. You have the floor.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay. Thank you very much.

First off, I want to thank the Minister for a very comprehensive brief today. Certainly, listening to her brief and some of the research I did in preparation for today . . . it is amazing the depth and breadth and scope of the work that this Ministry's does for the good of our community and its well-being. I am just grateful to everyone who participates in that, and I am particularly grateful for the people who are on the frontline 24/7 working in crisis situations. There must be days where there is great joy and there must be days where there is great sorrow and much concern for people who you want to help that maybe are becoming more difficult to help. So, keep up the good work. And thank you so much for the work you do.

We don't have a lot of time here for questions today, so I did want to sort of move along. So actually, I will direct my questions to section C, the capital accounts estimates, in particular [page] C-8 line item 75093, the Seniors Day Care Facility. I note that the total authorised figure (or TAF) is \$6 million, and \$1.5 million has been estimated for 2025/26. Could the Minister please provide some information on what each of these figures entails? In other words, what can we expect is going to happen in 2025 and then going forward? That is my question. Okay?

I do have another question in relation to section C, and that is [pages] C-27 and C-28. It is Schedule C, and it is the Government Department Accommodation Rental list. There are obviously a number of Youth, Social Development and Seniors property rentals listed on that Schedule and they cover a wide range of services that are quite self-explanatory. I do however note that the office rental space for the Ministry is amongst the most expensive on that list. Specifically, Veritas Place and Customs House on Front Street. These two rentals are considerably above the next most costly items on that listing, and I do have a couple of questions related to them.

The first being, on page C-28, the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, and that is Heading 86, Headquarters, is listed as occupying the fourth and fifth floors of Veritas Place at an annual cost of \$656,971 for one floor and \$165,031 for another

floor, respectively. I believe that, for the record and the Budget Book, that the Ministry is actually occupying the fifth and sixth floors and not the third and fourth. So, you may want to have a correction there. But I do question why one floor costs so much more than the other. In fact, it is \$491,940 more expensive from floor to floor.

And still on that same topic, on page [C-]26, the Legislature is listed as renting the third and fourth floor of Veritas House for the House of Assembly, at \$84,800 and an office for the Legislature at \$98,980. My question is, Why is the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors paying so much considerably more than the Legislature? And those are being, as I mentioned earlier, \$656,971—

The Chairman: Member, just remember—

Ms. Linda Smith: Sorry?

The Chairman: Just remember that you have to stick the Heads 86, 23 and 55 right now.

Ms. Linda Smith: Okay.

[Crosstalk]

Ms. Linda Smith: I'm there. I believe I'm there.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: She was just under Head 2.

[Crosstalk]

Ms. Linda Smith: I'm not following. I'm sorry.

[Crosstalk]

Ms. Linda Smith: Sorry? I am just comparing . . . and I am repeating what I said just to put it in comparison.

[Inaudible interjections]

Ms. Linda Smith: For clarification, but if that is not necessary that is fine. Okay?

So those are my questions as they relate to section C. And I would like to then go back to . . . to go to section B. And on page B-292 of the Current Account Estimates, there is a \$515,000 increase in Professional Services and I was wondering if the Minister could please provide some details on what that increase covers.

On page B-294, the Performance Measures, business unit 96000, General Administration. The first line item. The Ministry forecasts two compliance reviews in 2024/25 but completed one and has again targeted two for 2025/26. My question is, What are the compliance reviews being referred to here? In other

words, what is the subject matter of the compliance reviews? What aspect of compliance?

Continuing on in Performance Measures, business unit 96040, Ageing and Disability Services. The third line item in that section, Accessibility Assessments, in 2023/24 there were 37, but this service was discontinued in 2024/25 and there is no estimate for this in 2025/26. My question is, What was that service and why was it discontinued?

Continuing on in Performance Measures, business unit 96040, Ageing and Disability Services. The seventh line down, Percentage of Senior Abuse Cases, opened after three months. We have gone from 48 per cent in 2023/24 to a forecast of 30 per cent for 2024/25, which was revised to 40 per cent and now is back to a lower target of 30 per cent. And my question is, Why is this target lower than it has been?

Performance Measures, business unit 96050, K. Margaret Carter Centre, fourth line down, to increase the number of community initiatives and stakeholder relationships. While the measure is increasing, the target for 2025/26 is actually decreased from 14 to 12. Perhaps that is an oversight, but I am just asking for clarification on that.

Continuing on with Performance Measures page B-295, business unit 96100, Youth Community Centres. The second line down. Projected number of community enrichment programme participants per annum. Original forecast was 900 for 2024/25 which was revised to 988. And the target for 2025/26 is again 900. My question is, What caused the increase? (Which is great.) And why hasn't the 2025/26 target been revised to target that higher number?

Under Head 23, Child and Family Services, which includes services to children and young persons, services to individuals and families, residential treatment, administration and the Mirrors programme. On page [B-]298, business unit 2302, Services to Individuals and Families. The overall budget of \$6.9 million has been reduced by \$37,000 with Investigation and Screening having been reduced by \$267,000 which is considerable. While Foster Care has a considerable increase of \$288,000 and I was wondering if the Honourable Minister could please shed some light on the reason for the shift in those two areas and what that is telling us.

On page B-299, the Salary estimate of \$11.9 million is an increase of \$1.69 million, or 16 per cent, over 2024/25 and \$2.3 million more than 2023/24. Could the Minister please explain the increase from year to year and the growth from 2023/24 to this current 2025/26 estimate?

Also, the estimate for Professional Services on that same page, B-299, is down from \$175,000, or 4 per cent, from the 2024/25 estimate of \$4.1 million and more in line with the 2024/25 revised estimate but it is still a large number of \$3.9 million. And my question is, What is included in those professional services and

what does the Minister see is the trend there going forward?

On page B-300, the number of employees servicing Child and Family Services is estimated to increase by 11 per cent, and it appears that a majority of those are in the business unit 33060, Family Preservation. I was wondering if the Minister could please explain the nature of those additions.

On page B-[301], under Child and Family Services, Performance Measures, under business unit 33010, Happy Valley Child Care Centre, there is a performance measure target at 100 per cent for a minimum of 85 per cent of children to receive set developmental and educational milestones. And I am wondering if the Minister could please provide some examples of what those milestones might include. Thank you.

Also, in that same business unit, Happy Valley Child Care Centre, Satisfaction with services: Referral sources. The target has been lowered from 100 per cent to 95 per cent. What is the actual performance being measured? I wasn't clear. And why was it reduced?

Under business unit 33020, Investigation and Screening, Number of children abuse referrals responded to in the designated response lines. I am not actually sure what the *designated response lines* means. Perhaps we could have some insight into that. And also try to understand what is the relevance of a 90 per cent performance target in that category.

Under business unit 33070, Brangman Home, which I believe serves female residents between the ages of 12 and 18. Performance measure for Number of adolescents successfully transitioning out of Brangman Home and reintegrating into the family unit/permanent placement. It was wonderful to see that the revised forecast was considerably higher than the original 2024/25 forecast. In fact, it was revised upwards from 50 per cent to 80 per cent. And the 2025/26 forecast is for 90 per cent. So that is super encouraging. That is 40 per cent in the right direction. What does the Minister believe has contributed to this success? Because it is a great success, or it appears to be.

Page B-303, continuing under Child and Family Services and Performance Measures. Now this is an observation and a question from somebody who is really going through this for the first time. But page B-302, business unit 33090, Observatory Cottage, which I believe is the male equivalent of Brangman Home that services [females]. I note that the performance measures are different there with the measurements for Observatory Cottage being on things like timeframes for assessments, plans and group sessions. While the performance measures for the Brangman Home speaks more to the outcomes, things like average cost of service, number of clients with educational plans and successful transition out of the home. Would the Ministry consider aligning the performance measure of Observatory Cottage with Brangman Home? I just think it would provide much more information and would align those two.

Under business unit 33100, the Psycho-Educational programme which provides overseas therapeutic services. The second item says *to ensure 100 per cent of families receive a minimum of three follow-up visits by a social worker per month for a minimum of six months at the completion of the reunification plan*. The performance measure for this has remained consistent at 80 per cent. My question is, Why is that 80 per cent? And if you are getting there, why not try to push it a little further?

The next line item under business unit 33100, Number of clients receiving overseas assessments. The measurements are in the original forecast of 100 per cent for 2024/25 with a revised estimate of 30 per cent for 2024/25 and a target of 30 per cent for 2025/26. My question is, What is this actually measuring? And perhaps more informative information might be the number of clients receiving this service.

Business unit 33110, Youth Residential Treatment. The first line item to achieve and maintain 100 per cent compliance with the Child Act 1998 and the Children Amendment Act 2000 the performance measure target here is consistently 90 per cent. I am questioning why, particularly, it is adherence to the Act. It is not shooting and targeting 100 per cent.

Under business unit 33140, Mirrors programme, the performance measurement for Education status and non-offending status after two years of involvement in the programme is very impressive at 90 [per cent] and 95 per cent, respectively. However, the status with respect to employment is somewhat concerning; it is 50 per cent with a 2025/26 target of 55 per cent. My question is, Why is the performance in terms of enablement to get employment so low and why is the target not pushing a little harder?

Under Financial Assistance, page B-305 under Expenditures. I note that the estimate for 2025/26 is \$5.6 million. That is an increase of \$1.9 million from 2024/25. My question is, What is actually driving that estimate? Where does the Ministry see that trending?

Those are my questions. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Is there anybody else who would like to speak to Heads 86, 23 or 55?

The Chair recognises MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just have two questions which speak to all three heads. What is being done regarding Mediation Services? Because I know that was a key component of the work that the Department of Child and Family Services was doing before.

And the second one is, Seeing that the Cross Ministry Intervention Team [CMIT] was mentioned as a Throne Speech initiative to address the criminogenic risk needs and adverse charge or hold experiences towards putting the services in place so that families and children will get the requisite service, I didn't see any

mention of that in the [Budget] Book itself, and I thought that was a bit unusual. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP King.

Is there anybody else who would like to speak to Heads 86, 23 or 55?

With none being recognised, Minister, would you like to take the remaining . . . what it looks like to be seven minutes to provide some answers?

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Yes, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just want to start with the last question that was in my head in regard to the question around CMIT. You would hear in our reporting in regard to CMIT, we changed the name from CMIT to Intensive Family Preservation, and I spoke about that a number of times within my budget brief.

Is that clear? Yes?

Mr. Robert King: Clear enough.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Okay.

I will go to the question in regard to the rental accommodation particularly for the Ministry Headquarters and the Office of Youth Affairs which occupies the Ministry Headquarters on the sixth floor and the Office of Youth Affairs which occupies the fifth floor and also has the basement area for storage.

That is an error in the Budget Book. I made that very clear. It is an error in the Budget Book. The actual cost for the sixth floor, in the Budget Book it says fourth floor, which we all know is for the Legislative Offices. Our floor is actually the sixth floor, and that cost is \$97,773 per year. And the fifth floor is \$101,949 per year. And again, that is inclusive of the basement level for storage as well.

Okay. There was a question in regard to the Mirrors . . . a question in regard to an increase in employees in 33060. This is due to the social initiative the Intensive Preservation, Family Preservation. There was a question around why the numbers have gone up. It is because we are including new staff levels to the Intensive Family Preservation programme.

There was question in regard to the percentage of senior abuse cases opened every three months, target is lower. Why is it lower for 2025/26? This is due to the introduction of the new Structured Decision-making Tool and planned changes to the investigation practices.

There was a question in regard to the Senior Day Care Facility cost. We did budget \$1.5 million for fiscal year 2025/26. These are estimated costs that were provided by the Ministry of Public Works. However, this is an initial rough estimate. However, the estimate will be updated to a Class B estimate once the construction drawings are complete. Total cost projected of approximately \$6 million under Projected cost for all construction and finished works. And this is inclusive of preliminary and contingency costs. So the \$1.5

[million] is an estimation. And I am not saying we are going to use all \$1.5 million for the architectural drawings and plannings for the Seniors Day Care Facility.

There was a question in regard to the accessibility consultations and assessments, why they were discontinued. This is due to the post being vacant. The person who fulfilled that post had retired and the role of accessibility assessment has now been moved to the Department of Planning who is taking on that role. So that role is now not within the Ministry. It is now with the Department of Planning.

There is a question in regard to the revised estimate of 988 and this is for the Community Enrichment Programme courses, page B-295. This is due to the unforeseen community partnerships that afforded additional courses to be facilitated. Therefore, it was reduced back to 900 as this reflects the 30 community enrichment programmes at a minimal of 10 participants required for each community centre to reach annually.

There was a question in regard to the Brangman Home asking for the Minister's consideration of alignment . . . let's see. Sorry, I will come back to that answer.

There was a question in regard to the professional services in page B-299 which includes services for the Domestic Abuse Perpetrator Programme that I spoke about in the media, as well as monies to advance the implementation of the National Senior Strategy. A question in regard to the Community Partnership for KMCC having decreased in the projected year of 2025/26 from 2024/25. The KMCC programme has recently undergone a strategic restructure to reprioritise long-term mutually beneficial community partnerships over a one-off or infrequent interactions. Additionally, KMCC is undergoing a period of significant transition with the expansion of programmes with new areas of the programmes being developed to create additional opportunities in other areas that will benefit clients.

In regard to referrals for investigations and assessment teams, they are assigned a designated response time of 24 hours, 5 days or 10 days utilising the structured decision-making tool. And the performance measure is to initiate the investigations 90 per cent of the time based on the designation.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The Mediation Services, I can answer that question really quickly.

The Chairman: That would be the last answer—

Hon. Tinee Furbert: All right.

The Chairman: —to give.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mediation Services continue to be provided through the Department of Child and Family Services. I have also spoken about this in the public.

That is . . . it is being subcontracted still through the Ministry. So, we still provide the mediation service through the Department of Child and Family Services.

The Chairman: Thank you for that, Minister.

That brings us to the end of our four-hour debate on the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, Heads 86, 23, and 55.

Minister, if you want to move your heads.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Sure, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 86, 23, and 55 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 86, 23 and 55 be approved as printed.

Are there any objections?

If there are no objections, approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors, Heads 86, 23 and 55 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

[Pause]

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

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

We are in the Committee of Supply for the review of Estimates and Expenditures for budget year 2025/26 and we are just concluding the debate in relation to the budget for the Ministry of Youth, Social Development and Seniors.

We are about to commence the debate with the Minister of Tourism [and Transport], Culture and Sport. And I am just waiting for the relevant Minister to get himself ready to address the Chamber.

I see the Honourable Minister, Owen Darrell. Are you ready, Minister?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Not yet.

The Chairman: Perfect. While you are getting ready, let me just say we will in this debate be covering the various heads, which are Heads 71, 20, 30 *[sic]* and 52. And in relation to Head 71, I understand that there was discussion between the Minister and the Opposition about how that would focus not on the issue of tourism but on the issue of sports in relation to Head 71. And I understand that has all been agreed and directed by the [Deputy] Speaker.

So, just to repeat: We will be hearing statements and questions in relation to Head 71, but solely in relation to Sport and then Heads 20, 30 *[sic]* and 52.

Minister, if you are ready, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF TOURISM AND TRANSPORT, CULTURE AND SPORT

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon to the listening public.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the following Head 20, Sport and Recreation; Head 52, Department of Culture be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Sorry, Minister. Let me just correct that. I have just been informed that Head 30 is not under consideration for this debate.

Hon. Owen Darrell: That is correct.

The Chairman: Thank you. Please continue.

HEAD 20—DEPARTMENT OF SPORT AND RECREATION

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 20, the Department of Sport and Recreation, found on pages B-237 through B-242 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure book. This budget invests in the growing participation supporting elite athletes and ensuring our community clubs and programmes continue to thrive.

Mr. Chairman, the mission statement found on page B-237 of the Department of Sport and Recreation is, *to foster a vibrant sport and recreation culture in Bermuda by increasing participation, achieving regional excellence and ensuring equitable access to sports and recreational facilities. Through collaboration we aim to inspire and develop young talent, promote community well-being and elevate the value of sports and recreation in our society.*

Mr. Chairman, a total of \$9,948,000, as found on page B-239 of the Estimates Book has been allocated for this head. This represents an increase of \$1,630,000, or 19 per cent higher from previous years. This change is primarily due to a transfer in Government golf courses and the Bermuda School Sport Federation to this head.

Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation of business unit, 30045, General Administration, is \$991,000. An increase of \$124,000, or approximately 14 per cent. This increase covers the cost of rent of the caretaker's house on Government islands. The allocated funds provide for the administration operations of the Department of Sport and Recreation Headquarters.

In addition, the Administration section provides administrative support for five programmes within the department and is responsible for monitoring departmental spending to ensure that policies and procedures are adhered to in achieving efficiency and effectiveness.

Programme 2002, Sport Development

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the Sports Programme Unit is operated through business unit 30055. The budget allocation is \$658,000, an increase of \$206,000, or approximately 46 per cent increase. This increase represents an additional staff member obtained through the transfer of the Bermuda School Sports Federation administrator to the department. The increase also reflects funding allocated for continued implementation of the ACTIVE Kid Sports Programme Academy which exposes young children to multiple sports. This initiative is Goal 1.2 of the National Sports Policy. Funding is also allocated for the organisation of a sports conference and expo which will feature overseas professionals who have provided sports education for athletes, coaches parents and administrators. This initiative supports Goal 1.3 of the National Sports Policy.

Business Unit 30065, Sports Investment

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, business unit 30065, Sports Investment, is dedicated to highlighting how Bermuda Government invests in the community through sports. In 2022, the National Sports Policy was updated with a five-year promise to raise the value of sport with the new vision that sport matters. To assist with the National Sports Policy business unit, 30065, and has been allocated a total of \$2,106,000, an increase of \$12,000 or approximately 1 per cent increase. Funds in this business unit are allocated through the Sports Investment programme which assist National Sports Governing Bodies with funding to develop sports through coach education, junior development and high performance. Twenty-eight sporting bodies have applied for the funding this year, up from 25 who applied in 2024/25.

Funding in the amount of \$125,000 will be provided for the Bermuda Olympic Association, and \$586,000 to the Bermuda Sport Anti-Doping Authority which is a statutory authority mandated to establish and enable Bermuda's athletes to compete internationally.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year 2025/26, the Department of Sport and Recreation in partnership with our recognised NSGB's intend to continue on focusing on all aspects of sports development to ensure National Sports Policy goals and objectives continue to be met.

Programme 23, School Sports Events

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the estimate for business unit 30025, School Sports Events is \$43,000. This is a newly established business unit that represents the allocated funding for school sports in Bermuda. The funding will support the officer responsible for organising and administering school sports and events throughout the academic year. The value of school sports in Bermuda extends far beyond the playing field, Mr. Chairman, offering athletes numerous benefits to contribute to their personal growth,

academic success, and overall well-being. The Government is committed to supporting school sports as it is a critical foundation and it is crucial for Bermuda's future athletes, helping them to develop their skills, develop their character, and develop the mind-sets needed to succeed both on and off the field.

Programme 23, Sports Initiatives and Awards

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the estimated budget for business unit 30030, Athletic Awards is \$410,000, maintaining the same allocation as in fiscal year 2024/25. This unit funds the elite athletes through the Bermuda Olympic Association as well as the department's separate Elite Athlete Sponsorship Initiative Association and the department's . . . Additionally, it provides performance-based rewards through special grants from the Department of Sport and Recreation and the Outstanding Performance Incentive programme. In 2024/25, the department sponsored 31 elite athletes from 14 different sports bodies to assist with the achievement of their athletic goals. Two of the year's recipients were our female and male athletes of the year, Yushae DeSilva-Andrade as well as Jack Harvey. (I thought you would give a clap there.)

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The sport of swimming, Mr. Harvey is from and Yushae DeSilva-Andrade—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —is the sport of boccia. Yushae placed fourth in the Paralympics Games in Paris and won silver in the World Boccia Cup. In addition, Jack, from the sport of swimming, qualified for his first-ever Olympics in Paris where he made the Island proud as he won his heat and finished 39th overall. Both athletes made Bermuda proud and we are elated to be part of their sporting journey.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit also funds the National Junior Athletic Sponsorship programme which supports the development of Bermuda's junior athletes aged 15 to 19. This support aims to develop future elite athletes who will represent Bermuda at major international events.

Programme 24, Sports Facilities Management

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the budget estimate for business unit 30060, Sports Facilities Administration, is \$2,640,000. There is an increase of \$1,067,000 over 2024/25 budget allocations and this is 68 per cent. The variance in the budget reflects the transfer of the Government's public golf courses, Port Royal and Ocean View, to the Department of Sport and Recreation, coupled with the increase in the operational budget of the National Sports Centre.

Business Unit 30075 WMC Preece Softball Diamond

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, business unit 30075, the WMC Preece Softball Diamond is allocated \$149,000. This funding covers wages of two industrial staff members and the cost of maintaining and operating the softball diamond.

Business Unit 30080, Joell Tennis Stadium

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, business unit 30080, the Joell Tennis Stadium is allocated \$462,000. This business unit provides funding for salaries and wages of the workers for the facility, and it's also used to maintain and operate the facility that houses seven tennis courts and eight pickleball courts, Mr. Chairman.

Business Unit 30090, Motorsport Park

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, business unit 30090, the Motorsport Park, is allocated \$8,000. There is no change to this business unit from 2024/25. The funds are used for insurance, maintenance, and water to the Motorsport Park.

Business Unit 30390, Sports Community Fields

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, business unit 30390, Sports Community Fields, is allocated \$47,000. There is no change from last year and the funds for this unit are allocated for the maintenance and operation of community fields under the department's remit. These investments help ensure every Bermudian has a place to play, has a place to train, has a place to gather in an open and clean recreation area.

Programme 27, Camping

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for department's Camping program is \$1,015,000, an increase of \$44,000, or approximately 5 per cent increase. The budget for Camping on the Government islands breakdown by facility is unchanged from 2024/25. The allocated budget for Camping provides for the staffing operation and administration which includes 10 full-time staff who maintain the facilities and marine equipment. Last year 96 per cent of our clients who utilise our Island stated that their overall experience was satisfactory with over 5,000 users participating in safe, affordable camping experiences.

Business Unit 30180, Recreational Programme

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for the Recreational programme, business unit 30180, is \$1,419,000, an increase of \$95,000, or approximately 7 per cent. This increase aims to assist working-class parents by alleviating the stress and

finding safe and affordable summer services for their children. This funding will increase the number of obtainable placements for campers through the Camp Connect Summer Day Camp programme.

Mr. Chairman, this programme typically supported approximately 1,700 school-aged children—1,700. We can happily report that as a direct result of last year's boost in funding, the programme serviced more than 2,773 children, an increase of 63 per cent. This further increase in financing should see another rise in participation of even more school-aged children. Preliminary [data] shows that we could have up to 4,000 campers this year, Mr. Chairman, in our Summer Day Camp programme. Approximately 150 part-time workers deliver this programme supervised by qualified educators. Also on offer is a special needs programme that provides care for children with exceptionalities.

Current Accounts Estimates

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis of current accounts estimates of the Department of Sport and Recreation is found on page B-239. I will highlight a few of them.

Salaries and wages will see a combined increase of \$232,000, or approximately 17 per cent. Representing the transfer of the athletic administrator to the department, uplift in salaries, and incremental salary increase for staff.

Training has also increased by \$6,000, or approximately 86 per cent due to staff training requirements and renewals in this upcoming year. This is due to recertification of staff and CPR and first-aid training, SCARS training, and fire safety training.

Rentals of our facilities has increased by \$116,000, or up 50 per cent due to the addition of caretaker's rent in this year's budget.

Advertising and promotion for the department has increased by \$9,000, or approximately 64 per cent for the advertising and promotion of Camp Connect, ACTIVE Kids, the Sports Expo, and school sports events.

Grants and contributions have increased by \$1,062,000, or approximately 28 per cent, mainly due to the addition of a Golf Course Grant to the department. And this is on page C-20 of the Estimates Book

Manpower. Mr. Chairman, the Department of Sport and Recreation administers six programmes and 16 business units for which manpower consists of 46 individuals as found on page B-240 of the Estimates and Expenditure Revenue for fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to report that most of the department's forecast performance measures for 2024/25 were achieved. The performance measures for the Department of Sport and Recreation can be found on pages B-241 through B-242.

Business Unit 30030, Athletic Awards

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, this business unit is responsible for the Athletic Achievement Awards that the department gives out. Thirteen junior athletes from National Sporting Governing Bodies received the National Junior Athletics Awards with an average of \$3,000 awarded to each recipient. This year saw Sam Williamson and Aiden Kendall become the third recipients of the Flora Duffy Award, where they were awarded \$3,000 and \$7,000, respectively, towards their pursuits of excellence in the sport of swimming and rugby.

Business Unit 30065, Sports Investment Programme

Hon. Owen Darrell: The department requires all National Sports Governing Bodies (NSGBs) to be compliant. To date, 27 NSGBs are recognised by the department [and] 23 recognised NSGBs have received funds to assist with the development of sports which includes junior programming, coaching, official development, and high performance.

Business Unit 30075, WMC Preece Softball Park

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, this business unit is responsible for the [WMC] Preece Softball Park where target of 500 participants was reached. This is directly attributed to the continued field improvements. Additionally, introducing youth baseball has made the facility more user-friendly and appealing. We commend the dedicated staff of the Softball Diamonding and the Softball Bermuda for their hard work and revitalising softball as a recreational sport of choice in Bermuda.

I would like to say, Mr. Chairman, that I retired from softball a couple of years ago.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I retired, yes.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I retired. I tell you . . . they had to put the fence higher for me.

[Laughter]

WER Joell Tennis Stadium

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, this business unit [30080] is responsible for the WER Joell Tennis Stadium where average monthly usage has increased up from 250 to 325 individuals using the facility each month. This increase was due to the installation of new lights at the facility for courts 1 through 3. And the addition of four pickleball courts.

Business Units 3150, 3160, 3165 and 3170
Camping Facilities

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, these business units are responsible for the government Camping Facilities. The number of campers who utilise this facility continues to rise. The programme exceeds the performance target of 2,200 campers to 5,735 campers. The camping section received an increased request for our camping facilities often having some facilities sold out during the first week of application. The department is very pleased to be able to serve the country all year round by providing safe, fun and local recreation areas especially during the holidays.

Business Unit 3180, Recreational Programme

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, this business unit is responsible for our recreational programmes. There was an increase in the Government Summer Day Camp participants from 1,600 students to 2,773 students. This increase was due to the rising demand for affordable, safe camps for students. The user satisfaction rate—I'm going to say this one slowly, Mr. Chairman. The user satisfaction rate of 97 per cent with 98 per cent of users willing to use this programme again.

Mr. Chairman, from the evidence of our performance measures, the Department of Sport and Recreation was able to have a successful year delivering valuable and very well-received programmes directly to the community.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming year 2025/26 the Department of Sport and Recreation will continue to meet our policy goals and objectives with our National Sports Policy. As you hear me say often, Mr. Chairman, sport matters. With the increase of funds allotted this year, we will host a Sports Conference and Expo. This event is designated and designed to bring together athletes, coaches, parents, and administrators as well as enthusiasts to promote sports development and sporting education, and networking.

Mr. Chairman, at our government facilities we will be starting the process of digital signage on all properties. The signage will enhance the user experience while allowing users to interact with the content for a personalised experience. Visual and audio components make information more accessible to individuals with varied needs.

This year the department offered a second year. The Camp Connect online registration system designed as a one-stop shop [for] parents. Camp Connect provides a platform to register for Summer Day Camps, including both public and private options. We welcome more private camps into the programme this year which will result in an increased number of participants. Our goal is to continue reducing the wait list for these programmes by expanding partnerships and offering a broader variety of camps. An exciting feature of Camp

Connect is that all camps will be offered at an affordable rate making it easier for families to access quality and affordable, summer programmes. Through Camp Connect families will benefit from a greater selection of programmes, ensuring that every child has access to fun, enriching and budget-friendly summer experiences.

While we continue to strive to meet the needs of parents during the summer months, it must be acknowledged, Mr. Chairman, *it must be acknowledged*, that the demand for camp spaces exceeds our current capacity, even with the capacity doubling in the last two years. Our team is actively reviewing all applications. Our team is removing duplicate entries to ensure that every available space is allocated accurately and as fairly as possible.

Mr. Chairman, along with the Camp Connect Programme, we will also provide summer employment opportunities for young individuals interested in the child care field. The Summer Day Programme has been a cornerstone of our community for over 50 years, offering valuable experiences that many of our counsellors and specialists carry with them throughout their careers. This summer we are pleased to offer approximately 150 job opportunities, allowing young people to gain hands-on experience while contributing to a meaningful and enriching programme.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Sport and Recreation remains steadfast in its commitment to pursuing and achieving the target goals outlined in the National Sports Policy. Guided by the principle that sport matters, we look forward to the upcoming budget cycle with great anticipation, recognising the exciting opportunities that lie ahead for sports in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the dedicated staff of the Department of Sport and Recreation, their tireless work continues to uplift sports and recreation across the Island, enriching lives of people of all ages. I also acknowledge the determination and achievements of our athletes. Their success inspires our entire community and motivates the next generation to aim high. Together with our staff, National Sports Governing Bodies, athletes, community partners, supporters, and swim coaches we are building a stronger culture of wellness, pride, and sporting excellence. I thank them all for their commitment and contribution to Bermuda's future.

Mr. Chairman, through the collective efforts of the department's staff, National Sports Governing Bodies, athletes, stakeholders, and most importantly, our valued supporters, we will continue to cultivate a culture of health, wellness and sportsmanship across the Island of Bermuda. I deeply appreciate their ongoing commitment and invaluable contributions to our sporting community.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the presentation on the fiscal year 2025/26 on the budgetary allocation for Head 20, the Department of Sport and Recreation.

I move, once okayed by you, to Head 52 which is the Department of Culture.

The Chairman: Yes. Minister, just before you move on, let me just flag with you that on page B-238 in relation to item 2007, Camping, there seemed to be a discrepancy between what the Budget Book states and what you presented in your brief to the House. It it's not a huge discrepancy, but I just flag it in case you want to bottom it out at some future point.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, thank you. I will ensure that I have a look at that.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: And it will be addressed later on in the presentation.

The Chairman: Thank you so much, Minister. And please, feel free now to move to, I believe, Head 52, Department of Culture.

HEAD 52—DEPARTMENT OF CULTURE

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, thank you.

I now present the fiscal year 2025/26 Estimates of Expenditure for Head 52, the Department of Culture, which can be found on pages B-258 through page B-263 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure Book.

The department's mission is *To develop our creatives, preserve our heritage and celebrate our people*. Culture shapes how we understand ourselves. As Bermudians, this budget reflects our continued commitment to honouring our heritage, supporting our creatives, and sharing our stories.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Culture administers two programmes and 12 business units. A general summary is contained on pages B-259 through B-260 of the Estimated Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26. The total estimate is \$2,497,000. This represents an increase of \$274,000, or 12 per cent over the 2024/25 original budget of \$2,223,000. For the 2025/26 budget year, the Department of Culture remains committed to fostering Bermuda's cultural identity and supporting the creative pursuits of our artists and tradition bearers. Building on last year's success, the department will continue to focus on the programmes and initiatives that celebrate and preserve our heritage while also creating opportunities for innovation and growth within the cultural sector.

A key focus this year is expanding access to cultural spaces and resources which will be elaborated upon later in this brief. Additionally, the department will engage Bermuda's young and old through educational workshops, videos, lectures and cultural programmes designed to deepen their understanding of Bermuda's history and artistic legacy. Platforms showcasing the

talents of our dancers, musicians, writers, Gombeyes, visual artists, actors and cultural practitioners will remain a cornerstone of the department's efforts to keep Bermuda's culture thriving. This increase reflects our investments in artists, cultural heritage, and national identity.

Mr. Chairman, I now outline the accomplishments and plans and changes in the estimates for the business units associated with the Department of Culture.

Business Unit 5202, Cultural Affairs

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the total amount budgeted under the business unit for Grants and Organisations. That is business unit 62000, Mr. Chairman. Let me go back up a bit. Cultural Affairs, 5202. Mr. Chairman, the total amount budgeted under this business unit for financial year 2025/26 is \$317,000. This amount reflects an increase of \$86,000, or a 37 per cent increase, as compared to the original budget for fiscal year 2024/25.

In the fiscal year 2024/25, Mr. Chairman, 30 individuals received Bermuda Arts Council [BAC] funding, while 16 organisations were funded through grants from the department. The Bermuda Arts Council grant, as you see on page C-20 of the Revenue and Expenditure book, has been increased to \$167,000 for financial year 2025/26, an increase of \$50,000, or 35 per cent. One of the primary roles of the Bermuda Arts Council is to review applications submitted by individual creatives and organisations for developing artistic projects and further educating themselves about their craft.

In 2024, BAC awarded \$70,893 in individual and organisational grants and \$20,000 in student scholarships. In the 2024/25 financial year, the Bermuda Arts Council awarded grants to a diverse group of creatives and organisations supporting a wide range of artistic endeavours. Individual grant recipients included Wendell "Shine" Hayward for free outdoor jazz concerts celebrating international jazz day. Hana Bushara for establishing a home studio to begin music composition. And Andrew Stevenson for his film series documenting humpback whales in Bermuda's waters. Additional awardees included Mischa and Gia Fubler for the creation of a children's book about Bermuda's Theatres Boycott. And Yesha Townsend for a creative writing residency at the University of the West Indies.

Organisations such as TROIKA Bermuda received funding for technical arts training programmes, while the Kaleidoscope Arts Foundation was supported in hosting a student portfolio class and a final art show. This year's grants also enabled projects spanning music, literature, visual arts and film, underscoring the Council's commitment to nurturing Bermuda's creative talent and cultural legacy. In addition to the individual and organisational grants that were awarded in 2024/25 fiscal year, the Bermuda Arts Council also awarded three student scholarships for the total of

\$20,000. Johnae Tucker is attending the London School of Musical Theatre, Honor Minors is pursuing her studies at Boston Conservatory at Berkeley, and Vidya Cannonier Watson has secured a place at the Trang Park School for Performing Arts in the UK.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Cousin *in'it*.

The Bermuda Arts Council awards took place in May of 2024, and they honoured six recipients. In 2025, the Bermuda Arts Council has revolutionised its grant system introducing a digital platform that offers a more streamlined and accessible process for local creatives aligning with international standards and grant-giving. These new categories aim to expand opportunities for both emerging and established artists emphasising accessibility, innovation and artistic growth.

The increase in budget allocated towards the Bermuda Arts Council for the 2025/26 financial year is to support its restructuring process. The department would like to acknowledge the hard work of the Bermuda Arts Council, particularly the Arts Council Chair. And what an artist and graphic designer she is, Ms. Shanna Hollis.

Heritage grants. Mr. Chairman, in addition to the fine work of the Bermuda Arts Council, the department recognises the importance of supporting our tangible cultural heritage. Government plays a vital role in assisting Bermuda's museums and cultural institutions. In the 2024/25 financial year the department awarded Heritage Grants to the Bermuda Historical Society, Bermuda National Trust, St. George's Historical Society Museum, the St. David's Islanders and Native Community, Friends of St. Peter's Church, and Bermuda's nine Gombey troupes. These heritage grants totalled \$73,000. The Department of Culture also provided a grant to the Bermuda National Gallery, in part, for their stewardship of the Watlington Collection of art owned by the Government of Bermuda, and the National Trust to assist with the Annual Christmas Walkabouts.

Business Unit 62001, Administration

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the function of this business unit is to provide for the administration and operation of the Department of Culture which is located on the third floor of the Government Administration Building. Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for financial year 2025/26 is \$1,127,000, as shown on page B-259. This amount reflects an increase of \$242,000, or 27 per cent, as compared to the original budget of \$885,000 for financial year 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget sustains both programmes and operation including salaries and wages. The remainder of the budget provides for office supplies, board fees, website maintenance and telephone services. This budget also provides funding for the department's wide promotion, specifically social

media engagement. This increase in this year's administration budget can be largely attributed to salary uplifts. Furthermore, two new posts were approved within the department with funding reallocated from another cost centre. These new hires will strengthen service delivery, enhance community engagement, expand the department's internal research capacity, and support the implementation and growth of a national cultural heritage policy. Additionally, there is an increase in the budgeted funds for digital media.

Business Unit 62010, Emancipation and Cultural festivals

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, our total allocation for this business unit in financial year 2025/26 is \$67,000. This represents an increase of \$22,000, or 49 per cent, compared to the original budget of \$45,000 allocated in the 2024/25 financial year.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit focuses on highlighting the contributions of our African, Caribbean, Azorean, British and St. David's Island native community, core cultures in alignment with the National Cultural Heritage Policy. Through public events, educational content, and cultural programming these efforts will reach hundreds of residents and visitors, deepening public understanding of Bermuda's diverse roots and fostering greater cultural pride across generations.

The Emancipation Programme

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Department of Culture offers an annual commemoration of Bermuda's emancipation. This programme that explores and researches the history of enslavement and segregation experienced by "Bermudians of African Descent." Beyond this commemoration, the initiatives in this programme also celebrate our African roots and Black Bermudian excellence.

The 2024 commemoration signature event was the fulfilment of the 2023 Throne Speech initiative which proposed producing a film to showcase the rich history, personalities and businesses of Court Street. That film was called the *Heart of the City*. It was a documentary and was an extension of this project that was begun by the students at the Family Centre as their summer project of 2023.

The film serves to celebrate the community and history and negate the areas of social stigma. The documentary was produced by filmmaker, Mark Rodriguez, researched by Meredith Ebbin, and featured interviews from students from the Family Centre. The documentary was launched at the Department of Culture sponsored Court Street Market, and has since aired on CITV and YouTube where it has been viewed over 4,000 times to date.

The department annually also produces a calendar of events, lectures and sponsored by the Department of Culture related to emancipation. Funding from

this business unit also provides some support towards the biannual Bermuda Powwow, hosted by St. David's Islanders and the Native Community in June of 2025.

Business Unit 62020, Heritage Celebrations

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the total amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2025/26 is \$379,000 which represents an increase of \$106,000, or 39 per cent, compared to the original budget of \$273,000. This increase represents a year over year increase in expense and increased funding allocation towards the creation of a technologically enhanced Bermuda Day Float.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit covers the cost of both celebrations, and our Bermudian heritage, as well as the Bermuda Day Parade. Heritage celebrations as you would be aware, Mr. Chairman, the Department of Culture annually produces a calendar of heritage and cultural events within the month of May. In 2024, highlights included weekly yoga lessons from the Bermudaful Centre of Mindfulness, sponsored by the Department of Culture's "Cultural Roots and Green Shoots: A Celebration of Heritage and Environment" Harbour Nights Sponsored, the Bermuda Day Parade in 2024. The Bermuda Day Parade was a remarkable celebration of our cultural resilience and community spirit. Last year's theme, "Culture = Energy," highlighted the vibrant power of our cultural traditions and the energy they bring to our Island. The parade was dynamic, and it was a reflection of how Bermuda's culture fuels our creativity, unity and sense of pride.

In 2023, the Department of Culture partnered with the Bermuda Foundation to create the Bermuda Day Fund. In 2024, this initiative enabled 26 of 66 entries to receive financial support. This is very important, Mr. Chairman, because this financial support offsets the cost and allows more robust participation from a diverse array of community groups, including some groups that had previously stopped participating citing cost concerns. The Bermuda Day Fund has proven to increase the diversity of representation to the participant numbers to the Bermuda Day Parade. To date, the most significant donor to the fund has been the Bermuda Government. And additional funds have been allocated to allow the support of participants to continue. Meanwhile the corporate and individual community is still encouraged to donate to the fund to help ensure the sustainability of the model and that the parade is inclusive and representative of the community.

Mr. Chairman, as you may have heard, the Bermuda Day Parade 2025 is this coming Friday. The theme is the "Future Is Now." Bermudians have always dreamed of a brighter tomorrow while facing today's challenges. This theme reminds us that our future begins with the choices we make today. While we once envisioned 2025 as a world of flying cars and Sci-Fi tech, the spirit of innovation is alive and thriving in Bermuda. From supercomputers in our pockets to students

coding apps and entrepreneurs transforming industries, Bermudians are proving that our dreams fuel progress. Annually, the Department of Culture participates in the Bermuda Day Parade and showcases the possibilities within each category, often stepping beyond traditional expectations.

For the 2025 parade, with a technologically focused theme, additional funds have been allocated to ensure that the department's float aligns with international innovations and designs. The Department of Culture has consulted float builders from around the world to incorporate best practices which will be shared with Bermudian artists.

The department, Mr. Chairman, is excited about the increased community participation in the Bermuda Day Parade and is engaging with the corporate sector for continued support of the Bermuda Day Fund. Additionally, a special guide has been created for schools to assist with planning their participation. The success of the 2024 media campaign showcasing behind the scenes footage of various groups participating and preparing for the parade will continue highlighting the hard work and creativity that goes into making the event a truly community celebration.

Business Unit 62030, Cultural Education Programme

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the amount budgeted for business unit 62030, Cultural Education Programmes, is \$31,000. This represents a slight decrease of \$6,000, or 16 per cent, when compared to the original budget for financial year 2024/25 of \$37,000. The decrease in this business unit can be attributed to the actual cost relating to the department's Annual Cultural Stakeholder Conference event.

Tradition-bearers in schools, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the fiscal year 2024/25, the department reintroduced the Tradition-Bearer in Public Schools programme with a focus on middle and primary school students. Our department worked alongside the Department of Education and tradition-bearer, Mr. Milton Hill, in the construction of a full-sized Bermuda-fitted dingy with M3 students at Whitney.

And I have to tell you, Mr. Chairman, I went, probably over a year ago now, to Whitney and I saw this boat being produced. And I told them that before the end of this year, which is coming up soon, I'm going to take a ride in that dingy down Flatts Village. So, if you see a Minister in a dingy going through Flatts you know it's not a mistake, Mr. Chairman, it is the Minister actually taking part and being fully immersed in the tradition-bearer—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —in the tradition-bearing exercise that is put forward by Mr. Milton Hill. And I cannot believe, Mr. Chairman, . . . I cannot believe, Mr. Chairman, that I hear the swimming coach talking about arm

bands. I cannot believe it. But nonetheless, we will stay focused on the tradition-bearers, Mr. Chairman.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: While this project focused specifically on a small group of students, school-wide presentations have been given on Bermuda's traditions, including a very popular presentation in 2024/25. At Dalton E. Tucker, by Ms. Janice Warner[-Virgil] on the Bermuda Gombey regalia. In the past years, the programme has been popular with educating our students on the traditions of woodcraft, banana dough-making by Ms. Ronnie Chameau, and Bermuda kite building with our Grand Marshall on Friday, Mr. Eugene O'Connor. Funding has been allocated in 2025/26 to continue this amazing programme of learning for our students with a focus on the primary schools.

Mr. Chairman, the department's Annual Cultural Conference and Eggnog & Dialogue also are funded within this business unit. This is a recognition that both units are focused on the education, support and promotion of Bermuda stakeholders. The Department of Culture proudly hosted the 4th Annual Cultural AGM on 2 June 2024. This event served as a valuable platform to engage with our stakeholders, highlighting our success, identifying areas for improvement, and gathering insights on their expectations and aspirations for the future. The Department of Culture plans to bring stakeholders together once again later this month continuing this important dialogue to foster collaboration and shape the future of our cultural initiatives.

Business Unit 62050, National Heroes Day

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for fiscal year 2025/26 is \$54,000. This represented an increase of \$28,000, or 108 per cent, when compared to the original budget in fiscal year 2024/25 of \$26,000. This increase in this business unit was based on anticipating the costs associated with possibly inducting a new hero.

Mr. Chairman, funds allocated to this business unit are used to formally honour and commemorate a new National Hero when one is named and celebrate our existing National Heroes on an annual basis. In fiscal year 2024/25, in addition to a public awareness campaign, the department organised a series of musical tributes at our Premiers Concert, celebrating our National Heroes event. This concert featured performances by Bermuda Donquili, Mr. Rakki Scott, Yesha Townsend, Troika, T'aja Williams and the one, Mr. Fire Wayne, from constituency 15.

Mr. Chairman, in financial year 2025/26, the department is prepared for the possible induction of a new National Hero. And I will say this, again, Mr. Chairman, we are prepared for a *possible* induction of a new National Hero, pending the deliberations by the Naming and Recognition Committee and Cabinet consideration

of their *possible* recommendations. The new National Heroes Act 2024 now legislates that this happens only once every 10 years.

Business Unit 62060, Promotion of the Arts

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit is \$49,000 which is a decrease of \$25,000, or 34 per cent, when compared to the original budget for financial year 2024/25 of \$74,000. This decrease in the business unit can be attributed to the annual hiatus of the Writer-in-Residence Programme for a future year.

Mr. Chairman, I would just like to note that in this business unit we also discuss the Art in Public Buildings, which featured artists such as Gherdai Hassell, Otto Trott, Graham Foster, Dana Selassie and Shanna Hollis. This also includes the Premier's Concert which we mentioned a little while ago.

Business Unit 62070, Folklife

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for this business unit in the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$73,000, reflecting on an increase of \$9,000 from the original allocation of \$64,000. That represents a 14 per cent increase. Activities that come under this business unit include the Bermudian Heartbeats lecture series and the Cultural Apprenticeship Programme.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to speak a bit on the Cultural Apprenticeship Programme. The department's Cultural Apprenticeship Programme aims to provide and preserve and pass down cultural knowledge and skills across generations. Its primary goal is to cultivate a new generation of tradition-builders in Bermuda by pairing experience tradition-builders with interested apprentices. The department was thrilled to coordinate three cultural apprentices for 2024/25 financial year to continue its mission to preserve and pass on vital cultural knowledge. In partnership with CariGenetics and BioQuest, apprentices were trained in researching and producing high quality of genome of Bermuda's national bird, the Cahow. This groundbreaking work contributes to Bermuda's scientists and cultural legacy.

The Bermuda National Trust provided a masonry apprenticeship focused on the care and conservation of historical cemeteries and built heritage in need of restoration. Apprentice masons gain hands-on experience preserving Bermuda's historic sites for future generations. And finally, the St. George's Foundation led an apprenticeship to remediate and replace blocks on the roof of the gunpowder magazine at Ferry Point Park ensuring the preservation of this iconic landmark.

I will tell you, Mr. Chairman, there are videos of these apprenticeship programmes, and I encourage everyone to have a look at them because not only do you see the individuals who were teaching but the apprentices themselves and just the joy that they had, Mr.

Chairman, of taking part in this Cultural Apprenticeship Programme. This unit strengthens cultural knowledge, preserves skills, and builds community connection through accessible intergenerational programming.

Business Unit 62080, Research and Publication

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2025/26 is \$61,000. This represents a decrease of \$12,000, or 16 per cent, when compared to the original budget of financial year 2024/25 of \$73,000. This decrease in the business unit can be attributed to the completion of the feature length documentary budgeted in the business unit financial year 2024/25.

Also, in this business unit, Mr. Chairman, you will find the Gold Bermudian Documentary Series. And in March of this year the department launched a third series of Gold Bermudians: Profiles in Excellence. And these documentaries are captured stories of Miss World Gina Swainson; musician Stan Seymour; and opera performer Gary Burgess. Each of these short documentaries is filmed and produced by a different Bermudian filmmaker allowing for a range of unique styles and storytelling to take place.

Business Unit 62180, Special Projects

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the amount budgeted for this business unit for financial year 2025/26 is \$120,000. This represents a decrease of \$180,000, or 60 per cent from 2024/25 of \$300,000. The funds allocated to this business unit are typically used to support special cultural projects. The budget decrease for financial year 2025/26 reflects the ongoing operational costs of the MakerSpace project rather than initial setup expenses. Funds were reallocated for this provision of two new salaries as above.

MakerSpace, Mr. Chairman, is located at CedarBridge Academy and the Department of Culture's MakerSpace offers dedicated areas for visual artists and musicians, as well as dancers and actors, to practice and create free of charge. Equipped with tools like easels, musical instruments and studio space, this facility is designated to remove the financial barriers and provide a supportive environment for Bermuda's talent.

We also have Creatives Culture Labs and, Mr. Chairman, this has been moved from business unit 62100 to 62180, to reflect the alignment with Creatives Culture Labs with the MakerSpace initiative.

Programme 5203, Community Service

Hon. Owen Darrell: This comes on the business unit 62100, and it is Uncover of the Arts programme. Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for financial year 2025/26 for the business unit is \$81,000. This amount represents a decrease of \$10,000, or 11 per cent, when compared to the original budget estimate of \$91,000 for financial year 2024/25. This decrease is associated

with the reallocation of funds related to Creatives Culture Labs when we moved it to 62180.

Creatives Live!, Mr. Chairman, as you would know, 2024/25 funds from this business unit supported Creatives Live! performance series. This programme benefits local artists by providing performance opportunities for Bermuda social clubs by promoting community engagements. Artists supported through this year include Joy Barnum, original Live Wires, Fire Wayne from constituency 15, Mr. Fotogenik, Hana Bushara, John Seymour, Jesse Seymour, PHC Majorettes and Drum Corps, United Dance Productions, Gombey Evolution and the Bermuda Gombeys.

Additionally, the department supported the Chewstick Foundation's Open Mic at Blue Waters Anglers [Club] offering a safe, supportive space to hone their performance.

Mr. Chairman, in this upcoming year the department will build on the success of Creatives Live! and we will host another series of events at social clubs such as Harrington Workmen's Club to continue to sponsor open mic events in partnership with our cultural collaborators.

Mr. Chairman, in 2025/26, the department will increase, and they will relaunch—this is something that happened back in the day—the Gombey Rendezvous. And this Gombey Rendezvous will be a weekly performance designed to support local Gombey troupes and celebrate Bermudian cultural traditions during the slower months, from November to March. This programme will provide a platform for Gombeys to educate the public about their music, their dance, and their heritage and of course it will entertain both residents and those lovely visitors which we call tourists.

We have nine active troupes rotating performances approximately 20 weeks, the initiative aims to fill the current gap and opportunities to regularly experience the Gombey performance which has been a concern for the community since a similar programme ended many years ago. Additionally, the Gombey Rendezvous will serve as a free family friendly event that fosters community engagement and shares Bermuda's culture and history in a very accessible way, Mr. Chairman.

Gombey Festival

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, I would like to go to the Gombey Festival, a fan favourite and this comes under business unit 62210. Mr. Chairman, the amount allocated for this business unit for 2025/26 is \$138,000. This represents an increase of \$14,000, or 11 per cent, when compared to the budget estimate of \$124,000 for financial year 2024/25. The difference is due to allocating funds for additional Gombey troupes and increasing the cost year over year for infrastructure.

The Gombey Festival. In 2024, the Gombey Festival weekend celebrated one of the most vibrant aspects of cultural heritage. The festival showcased

seven Gombey troupes: Gombey Evolution, Gombey Warriors, H&H Gombeys (from constituency 15), Place's Gombeys and the Warwick Gombey troupe. Alongside two participants, Phoenix Gombeys and Vibe Tribe and other Gombeys. This event also featured local vendors, free family friendly activities and the continuation of the "Gombeys in the Gardens Community Art Programme" an evolving mural project in sponsorship with the Chewstick Foundation. In 2024/25, the Gombey Festival budget funded the launch of the "Gombey Unity Short Film" which was directed by talented Qian Dickinson.

Mr. Chairman, the allocation budget for financial year 2025/26 will cover the cost of the event infrastructure, financial awards for the nine active Gombey troupes, support for other local dance groups and additional weekend events celebrating Gombey art form.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis. This will be found on page B-260. I will highlight the material object codes increase and decreases.

The salaries object code has increased from \$808,000 for 2024/25 to an allocation of \$1,040,000, or 29 per cent increase. The advertising and promotional object code has increased from \$83,000 to \$117,000 for fiscal year 2025/26, an increase of 41 per cent. This represents the department's digital marketing strategy to access users of non-traditional media to share Bermuda's history and culture.

There has been a slight decrease of 12 per cent in professional services from \$881,000 in financial year 2024/25 to \$773,000. This decrease is mainly due to the funds being reallocated internally. Rental cost for the Department of Culture has increased by 15 per cent, \$47,000 to \$54,000, reflecting year over year increase in event rentals.

As noted previously, grants and contributions has increased by 36 per cent largely due to increased awards to the Bermuda Arts Council, the Bermuda National Gallery, the allocated funds to Heritage Grant. In fiscal year 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, \$437,000 is budgeted, a \$116,000 increase from 2024/25 representing the Government's commitment to funding the arts.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, as seen on page C-7, the capital budget for the Department of Culture, in fiscal year 2025/26 is \$50,000, a decrease of \$450,000, or 90 per cent, from the \$500,000 from fiscal year 2024/25. These funds are allocated for further development MakerSpace, a 2023 Throne Speech initiative, detailed previously. This decrease in funds is due to the initial setup costs already having been spent in this space. This capital investment completes the infrastructure work and allows operational delivery and a fully functioning creative hub.

Manpower

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, there is an increase of two employees with the full-time equivalent increasing to 10 from 8 as found on page B-261. Recruitment is expected to begin in early this year for the new post.

Performance Measures

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Culture met or exceeded its key performance targets for the year, reflecting a strong return on public investment. The Bermuda Arts Council grant successfully funded 30 artist students and art organisation as planned, while support for cultural heritage surpassed its target, benefiting 15 organisations.

Business Unit 62001, Administration

Hon. Owen Darrell: Social media engagement exceeded expectations with an average reach of 9,000, surpassing the target of 8,500 and increasing public awareness of the department's programming.

Business Unit 62010, Cultural Festivals and Celebrations

Hon. Owen Darrell: The department reached its target by supporting numerous cultural events, including the filming of "Cup Match", a "Masked Freedom" talk by David Chapman, and a creation of "Heart of the City" documentary celebrating Court Street. Additionally, 80 per cent of participants rated their emancipation programming experience as satisfactory or better, meeting the set goal.

Cultural festivals and celebration—a total of 670 schools, community groups and business units were engaged to participate in the Bermuda Day Parade, surpassing the target of 500. The annual Conference for Cultural Stakeholders was successfully completed but now has been reassigned to business unit 62030. Additionally, 96 per cent of surveyed participants rated their Bermuda Day Parade experience as satisfactory or better. This far exceeds the goal of 75 per cent, and we hope to see similar satisfactory ratings come this Friday, Mr. Chairman.

Business Unit 62030, Cultural Education

Hon. Owen Darrell: The department successfully hosted the annual Conference for Cultural Heritage and Arts Stakeholders. Student engagement and cultural workshops exceeded expectations, with sections led by Writer-in-Residence at CedarBridge Academy, the Berkeley Institute, as well as tradition bearer workshops with Mr. Milton Hill at Whitney, surpassing the target of 80 participants.

Business Unit 62050, National Heroes Day

Hon. Owen Darrell: The percentage of attendees who felt that the National Heroes Day celebration fostered the national pride was revised from 75 [per cent] to 60 [per cent] after feedback indicated that the new video focus programming did not resonate as intended. In response, future events will return to a format that highlights Bermuda's heroes, alongside impressing talent.

Business Unit 62060, Promotion of the Arts

Hon. Owen Darrell: The success of the cultural labs programme contributed to 100 per cent of participating local artists rating their developmental experience as satisfactory or better, exceeding the 80 per cent target. This initiative provided hands-on training, mentorships and resources to reinforce the departments commitment to artist development and professional growth.

Business Unit 62070, Folklife Bermuda.

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Bermudian Heartbeats Lecture Series played a key role in achieving 80 per cent satisfaction for cultural events. Similarly, 80 per cent of apprentices reported gaining valuable cultural knowledge and skills through the Cultural Apprenticeship Programme, highlighting its effectiveness and preserving and passing down Bermuda's traditions.

Business Unit 62080, Research and Publication

Hon. Owen Darrell: The department successfully developed the Vernacular Architecture documentary, a film project set to be released this year, contributing to historical cultural research.

Business Unit 62100, Uncovering the Arts Programme

Hon. Owen Darrell: The department hosted eight events showcasing supporting performing artists, including four open mics [and] four Creatives Live! events. Additionally, 95 per cent of participants in the Creative Culture Series reported gaining new skills and networking opportunities. They have surpassed the target of 80 per cent.

Business Unit, [62180] Special Projects

Hon. Owen Darrell: These new performance measures reflected the transition of Creatives Culture Labs' programming and MakerSpace operations into Special Projects business unit, allowing for more focused development and enhanced support for performing artist and creative initiatives.

Business Unit 62210, Gombey Festival

Hon. Owen Darrell: The department successfully showcased and honoured the contributions of Bermuda Gombey troupes to the Island's culture through the vibrant Gombey Festival weekend.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation for the budgetary allocation for financial year 2025/26 for Head 52, the Department of Culture.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to thank the incredible team at the Department of Culture, who is led by Acting Director Ms. Carlita Lodge, who many of you will see this weekend as she runs around the parade route making sure that we are all entertained with our Bermuda cultural heritage, whose creativity, care and dedication in this department helps to preserve and celebrate the stories that make Bermuda unique.

I would also like to extend my appreciation to all our artists, tradition bearers, culture leaders, those whose work continues to inspire pride, spark imagination and connect generations, together with the staff, cultural partners, grantees, and community contributors we are ensuring that Bermuda's heritage is not only protected but continues to grow and thrive. I am truly grateful for the passion of that entire department and the commitment to our Island's cultural future.

Mr. Chairman, this ends my presentation for Heads 20 and 52 under the remit of the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Honourable Members and members of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Revenues and Expenditures of the Budget Book 2025/26.

We have been hearing from the Honourable Minister Owen Darrell, in particular on Head 20, Sport and Recreation, and Head 52, Department of Culture.

Is there anyone who would like to contribute to the debate? I recognise the Honourable Member for constituency 8, Ben Smith.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Firstly, I would like to thank the Honourable Minister for his brief this afternoon and as the Minister said, it was brief. So, he has given us plenty of time to ask questions and have answers to those questions.

Mr. Chairman, I would start by declaring my interest as somebody who has been involved with sport, involved with teaching sport, being an instructor at Whites Island when I was 16 years old. So, this particular sport and recreation is near and dear to my heart.

And as I start to go into the questioning of this, I would like to state that no matter how much support we give in the budget for sports, I am always going to advocate for more. Because I do not think that we can give enough support and specific financial support into helping our young people to stay on the positive path.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Ben Smith: And I would agree . . . I think for sure the Minister does agree with me. I have had several opportunities to talk to the Minister. I do get to see the Minister quite often when he's kind of hanging around the area of the National Sports Centre, going to the gym, walking around the track.

The things that sport can bring to our population are extremely important. Understanding that our young people for so many different reasons, have been pulled in a negative direction and so many times we hear those incidents rather than the positive things that our young people do. Sport and recreation has the opportunity to bring our young people together with a population that has a lot of health issues. Participation in sport and recreation is another way for us to encourage our people to move around and actually be active. And for those reasons, this is an extremely important Ministry.

I think that as we move forward today, I will be trying to highlight the areas where we have support, but more support will always be asked for and in any way that we can encourage our young people to be involved in sport, to be involved in recreation and our population as a whole to be active . . . because I know we are a country that likes to go out and support watching sport, but we also have to make sure that we're doing everything we can to encourage our people, young and old, to be participating.

The people that are involved in sport overall, I would like to thank all the coaches and volunteers and officials that allow many of the sports to happen and everyone in this particular Ministry who I know it is a love and passion for sports and recreation that allows them to continue to do their job at the level that they do. So, I thank them for their participation.

So, Mr. Chairman, starting on Head 20 Sports and Recreation, I would like to start on page B-238.

The Chairman: Yes, page B-238.

Mr. Ben Smith: Under 2001 Administration and Sports. The Minister mentioned that there was additional funding here that was because the Bermuda School Sports Federation, I think, has been brought into this Ministry. It is actually something that has been talked about for several years and this is an opportunity to really merge something that really was probably misfitting for quite a lot of time. And now to have the School Sports Federation as part of this Ministry I think is really important.

I think the question that I would ask is, What analysis will be done that will show that this change has been a positive movement? Because I know that sports has been advocating for this shift. But what we would like to see is that it is showing an increase in participation, an increase in the sports that are available. And maybe more collaboration between the School Sports and National Sports Governing Bodies that maybe

attract more of our athletes to be involved longer rather than just within the school. So, can the Minister give us some information on what the expectations are of this change and how we will be able to analyse whether it has been a positive move going forward?

Mr. Chairman, 2002 Sports Development, still on page B-238, 30065 Sports Investments. So, with the Sports Investments, the Minister had mentioned that there had been a change in the number of sports that would be involved. I think he said there was an increase to 28 sports. Of course, the issue that happens is as we encourage more sports to be involved, what tends to happen is we are now having to divide the amount of money between more sports. So, with that being said, it is also important that we try to grow that pie so that the sports that have been in the programme are still receiving similar amounts, if not more.

With that being said, I would like to be able to know whether the sports investments that were provided . . . because if you look in the actual [Budget] Book, I think you have to go to pages C-23 and C-24—

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: —in order to be able to see where those investments are going to be coming from. But you will note that the information there is actually only being provided for 2023/24.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, with that being said, obviously this is the year that we have just gone through. So, can the Minister provide us with what the investments were for 2024/25? And as we are moving forward, you know, the year would have started in April. What is the projected numbers that we should be looking for this upcoming year? I would gather that all of the different groups that would have put in applications will be waiting patiently to find out what kind of resources are going to be given, because I think it is important knowing that they have to plan for potential overseas travel for certain training camps, for different things that help the athletes to go forward. That planning phase would have been in full swing. Obviously with the election timing and the changing of the budget, that might have had an impact on some of them and what those plans are. So, can the Minister give us some information on . . . what the information . . . on what will be provided to those sports as soon as possible? And if he does have that data now, we would be grateful to get it.

The Chairman: And that's in respect to the Grants and Contributions at page C-23 and over the page at C-24 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, thanks.

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, during the Minister's brief he did talk about the fact that there was a significant change when the sports policy was implemented. With that implementation of the sports plan, will the Minister be able to tell us whether he has seen an increase in the participation of athletes in sport? One of the objectives of the Ministry is to foster a vibrant sports and recreation culture in Bermuda by increasing participation.

Obviously, by putting a plan in place for sport, one of the outcomes that you would be looking for is to get an increased participation in those sports. So, from 2022 to 2025, is the Minister able to provide us details on whether we have seen an increase in participation in the individual sports that interact with the Ministry? And since those new requirements have been put in place, has the Minister seen an increase in the interaction between the National Sports Governing Bodies and the Ministry? And has that increased participation led to more National Sport Governing Bodies getting involved with the programme?

And I see that we are increasing the number of sports that are participating, but is that also leading to an increase in the total number in participation? Because in Bermuda a lot of times what happens is something new comes up and what they end up doing is taking athletes or taking people from another sport. So, getting that data of what the increase in sports and opportunities is, are we doing a better job of increasing the number of participants overall? Because getting more of our young people involved in these healthy activities would be one of the main goals that we would like to see from this sports policy.

Mr. Chairman, still in this sports investment. The Minister would note that the sports investment number has only slightly moved up in this period. The question that I have is, considering the changes of the overall cost, not just in Bermuda but outside of Bermuda, has there been any kind of detailed conversation about what that means? An example that I will give is that there was . . . the people that organise the jump rope organisation in Bermuda were recently on the sports talk show. And I use them as an example because I don't think that they've actually reached the point to . . . I could be wrong, but I'm not sure that they've reached the point of National Sport Governing Bodies. And for that reason, I'm going to use them as the example.

They are going to travel and participate in World Championships this summer in Japan. And when they discussed that and were asked, *Well, what would be the cost of taking these young athletes to Japan?* The answer was \$8,000 per athlete. I use that as an example because those are the costs that happen when you try to participate at high levels in competition. But if you take it closer to Bermuda, one, you know we have multiple jurisdictions [where] we [can] land with one plane ride, but the cost of hotels has gone up, the cost of food has gone up, the cost of getting that plane

ticket to get to that jurisdiction has gone up. If you are trying to get uniforms for those athletes that price has gone up.

As all of those prices have moved up and at the same time we've increased the amount of sports that are applying for funding, Mr. Chairman, there's an issue where there was a gap that used to be picked up by what I would call the charity givers, people who were giving to our normal charities, but also giving to sports that also a lot of times our sports National Governing Bodies are also charities so that they can receive donations. Has the Minister seen an increase in the demand because of the increase in costs?

And when the National Sport Governing Bodies are putting in their applications with the certain levels of what is necessary in order to travel, in order to give our young people the opportunities to compete overseas . . . which I am going to tell you from the experience that I had as competing for Bermuda and somebody who has been able to, over the last 30 years, work with young people and travel with them, that experience can change a young person's life. It gives them an opportunity to see a broader part of our world in healthy activity, away from drug activity, from antisocial behaviour because there is a structure that is around it. And for that reason, we know that the Ministry is supportive of that.

But with the continued pressure of finances that are happening in order for us to be able to get our young people off the Island to be able to compete, I am saying that the number that has not moved must move. In order for us to be able to support these athletes and to support this positive growth of our young people, we are going to have to figure out a way to get them more financial backing.

Once again, I am not saying that the Ministry is not doing anything. I am only advocating that we have to do more considering that the people in our community who have been able to give are having to give in more areas, which means that a lot of times now they are not getting the same answer that they would have 20 years ago, even 10 years ago.

So, Mr. Chairman, still in the same area, I have a question on the decisions that are being made about the level of funding that is going to be given to one sport over another. Because obviously with so many people looking for these resources, it is going to become more and more competitive in order to get any finances. Is some of the consideration based off of performance? Is it going to be how sports are performing in our region, how sports are performing in our overall . . . in the international field? Locally? Participation? If the Minister can give us some insight into how that works and what that breakdown will be. Because in looking at the information that was provided on . . . as I was pointing out before [page] C-23.

The Chairman: Pages C-23 and C24, yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: There is a significant difference between \$300,000 that is going to one sport, and some sports are at \$5,000. And to be honest with you, for me, the answer isn't that I want the sport that makes \$300,000 to make less. In actual fact, I think that sport should make more because of the amount of participation it has. What I am advocating for is that these sports that are in these much lower numbers also are going to have to have increases in order for them to do the things that are necessary for them to have positive influences standing up in front of our young people so that we can do everything we can to put them on a positive path and away from the negative influences that are at present quite prevalent in our community.

And just a final question in that area, Mr. Chairman. Considering that more sports are getting involved, can the Minister give us maybe some information or thoughts on how we can support some of those other sports that are starting to move in that direction? As I mentioned, [something] like jump rope that allows them to maybe get access to some funding. It is almost a workshop for that group to move from being just on the outside to being part of this process where they have access to funding. I just think that would be an important option.

So, if it already exists, the Minister can tell us about it. And if it doesn't exist, is it something that the Minister is going to undertake to happen? Because what we will be looking for is more athletes, more young people getting involved. I know the Minister agrees with that. So that is the question that I would like an answer on. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, 2003 Sports Incentives and Awards, under 30030, Athletic Awards. The Minister mentioned that this was an area that provided funding for elite athletes, and also there was funding that would be for the Junior Athlete Award.

So, I am going to just quickly flip to page B-241, and looking at the Junior Investment Award, for junior athletes and the original target in 2024/25 was for 16 awardees and the revised forecast is for 13.

The Chairman: Yes, that's at the top of page B-241.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, considering our increase in the amount of National Sport Governing Bodies that are involved, is this difference between the number of awardees and the number of National Sport Governing Bodies simply because there were not applicants? And if, because now when you look at the target for 2025/26, it's been reduced to 14.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Is this because less people are asking for the money, less people are filling out the paperwork to get this application done?

Still on that same page, and the Minister did mention that the average awarded amount was \$3,000.

So, can the Minister let us know what the total amount that this funding for this Junior Athlete Award is so that we know how much is actually being put forward to this incentive programme? And the reason is because there were 13 in the outcome for 2023/24 and the average amount given was \$3,125. So, when you move forward and the revised for 2024/25 was 13, same number and now the average was \$3,000.

To me, I think something in here and once again for me, it's always about, Can we give more support? We as a country seem to find money for certain things that we think are important. And this isn't me saying that the Government doesn't think it's important. I'm once again advocating that we need to make this a priority for how we can support our young people. And the young people who are already on a positive path. They are showing that they can be the role models for the group coming behind them. And for that reason, giving them as much support as we can, I say, should be a priority.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, moving on to 2004, it's under . . . for Sports Facilities.

So, under Sports Facilities, the Minister did mention that there was a significant increase in this area and that it was due to bringing the golf courses into this Ministry.

The Chairman: And National Sports Centre.

Mr. Ben Smith: And the National Sports Centre. But \$900,000 is golf courses, so a significant portion of this increase is actually because of the golf courses. And I get the—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Ben Smith: And the Deputy Premier just took the words right out of my mouth. There is not enough there either. Once again, this is another opportunity for us to look at growth. How is it that we can give more support? And I'm going to tie the two things together. Page C-23, as I have gone back to several times.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: I am going to look for it.

The Chairman: Which is the Grants and Contributions page.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. So, the Bermuda Golf Association—\$10,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: But we are giving \$900,000 to golf courses. What we should be looking for is a way for us to encourage more of our young people and specifically our young who might not have access to golf. But there's a long golfing history in this country and I am sure the member from constituency—

The Chairman: Two.

Mr. Ben Smith: —[constituency] 2 will definitely support that statement.

But these are the connections where we could do more. So, if the Minister can give us an idea because this is something that is new to this Ministry and not something that I have had the opportunity to ask questions about previously. If he could give us an idea of how that \$900,000 is broken down. What that money is going to support, whether it is a reduction—because it looks like in the past it might have been a little bit more than that.

But I had to find . . . that's actually under, I believe Public Works was where it was, where it sat before. And now that it is under Sport, will there be performance measures to show what this impact is of the investment of \$900,000 coming out of Sport in order to support the golf courses locally? So, can the Minister give us a little bit more detail on the overall \$900,000, how we are going to see that as an impact and whether there will be performance measures to show what that investment impact is on Bermuda and in our sporting community.

Mr. Chairman, 30075, which is the—

The Chairman: Softball.

Mr. Ben Smith: —Softball Park. The Minister did mention in the brief that there has been an increase in the usage because of bringing baseball into that particular area. I know the Minister said that he had recently retired from softball. But which—

The Chairman: The fences were too low for him, he said.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, he said the fences were too low.

So, with that being said, can he give us an idea of what that impact has been for baseball? Like what . . . how many of the numbers that he's seeing that growth is actually because of baseball? So, if we're able to separate those two sports because once again, growing those sports, I think would be important because, Mr. Chairman, in, I want to say, in some of our neighbouring countries, like The Bahamas, they are actually producing some really top-level baseball players. So, this is another one of those opportunities for us to see growth and potentially see elite athletes coming out of both softball and baseball. So, any information that the Minister can give on this I think will be much appreciated.

And now on to 30080, which is the Tennis Stadium.

The Chairman: Yes, we are still on page B-238.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

There were some refurbishments done. The Minister mentioned that there's been an increase in the pickleball courts. Can the Minister let us know whether there has been any impact of increasing the pickleball courts, whether there's been any impact on the tennis side of what this facility was originally? I think a lot of people have been excited about the growth in pickleball, but there's also a bit of, you know, the traditionalists that are potentially not as happy that there seems to be a lot more usage on that side, which potentially is impacting where tennis has been and what the growth of that sport will be.

In the past, there was some conversation on potentially needing another tennis court in order to give us more ability to have international tennis competitions at that facility. So, can the Minister let us know whether there's any information that he has on that and whether we need to give more support in this facility to make sure that the growth of both pickleball and tennis continue at the level that I think all of us would like to see?

I might have missed it, but in 30390 Sports Community Fields, there's . . . it's not a big number. It's \$47,000. But if the Minister can let us know, what exactly does that give us? What is the breakdown of that money for community fields?

The Chairman: So that is page B-238, under 2004 and it is 30390. Line item 30390.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, correct.

The Chairman: So, \$47,000 allocation.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Chairman, I am now going to move on to page B-241.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: And I am going to be looking at the performance measures.

The Chairman: Still under Sport and Recreation and now performance measures.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes. So, I started with the point that I was making when it comes to the Junior Athlete Awards and that difference that you see there. I would like to just finish off with the number of elite athletes receiving funding.

The Minister had mentioned that there were 25 elite athletes who were part of the programme and that we would be . . . that is where a lot of the funding would be going. If the Minister could just give us a breakdown

of the C-level athletes, B-level athletes, and A-level athletes and why we are seeing a decrease from 25 with a target for 2025/26 to 18. Is this based on retirements? And what does the reduction mean? Does it mean that we are not seeing a growth of young people coming into the C-level while we are potentially having athletes retire? If we could just get some clarification on why that target would be reduced, considering I think everybody would have been happy with that number that reached 25. And the Minister did state the number 25, which I think both he and I are supportive of.

But using that specific area with elite athletes. Earlier, I was talking about the cost . . . the added cost of just living in Bermuda or living overseas and travel. And one of the items that I know has been an issue for elite level athletes, it is . . . athletes, when they're at the junior level, are usually being covered by their parents. That's where their funding is going to come from. And then the National Sport Governing Bodies have the ability to put in applications that allow them to get some funding if they are part of a National Sport Governing Body.

Then the next step is usually if that athlete has the opportunity to go away to school, and now that school structure sometimes is going to cover some of the costs that are associated. But the area that I'd like to focus in on when we're talking about elite athletes is that many times once they move out of school coverage, they run into trouble specifically with health insurance. And not having access to health insurance is one of the factors that so many times causes a really promising athlete to drop out of the sport.

So, Mr. Chairman, a lot of times you actually see a drop off with athletes that have been supported by their parents, supported by the Ministry. They have been awardees for multiple years and then they get to that point where the numbers don't work for them anymore because they don't have access to regular health care. And you know that if they are training in Bermuda, that health care cost is going to be significant, and in order for them to train at the level that is expected.

And, Mr. Chairman, an elite athlete, although most of us would like to say okay, they can go and work a full-time job and then be able to train in the morning or train in the afternoon or both, and be able to do the nutrition at the level they need to and all the physical support with physio and massage and the mental health support that is now needed for athletes. They are competing against athletes that get that level of support. So it puts them at a disadvantage. And a lot of times they are dropping out of the sport not because they don't love the sport or want to continue to move forward, but it is . . . this area.

Now there was a previous Sports Minister. And I had a long conversation with him about this specific subject and how maybe there is a way for us to come up with a government support programme that would allow for this to happen. And, Mr. Chairman, I think when you have athletes at this level, they are already

role models. So, there's great synergy that what you would have for that level of support. They would then be expected to be our sports ambassadors. And the Minister wears both hats, sports tourism ambassadors. Every time they travel, they have the ability to promote Bermuda, take that information and sell as part of this give back programme that they would get.

Then when they return to Bermuda, they also have an opportunity to stand up in front of our classrooms and go to help out with gym classes. I think in that initial conversation that we had, this seemed like something that potentially could get really good bipartisan support in order for us to take this to the next level of what the expectation is of our elite athletes, how we can support them and how they can then give back to the generation coming behind them. Because what we want is for our young athletes and our young people in Bermuda to be able to look up and say, *This is what the potential is for me going forward*. Instead of, in many cases, they are having to look at role models who really should not be role models.

And when we have spent so much time, energy and money to produce these elite athletes, having them drop off without doing something to kind of gain that give-back, also becomes a bit of a problem. And, Mr. Chairman, a step on . . . I have obviously brought up health insurance and health support because with health insurance now you get access to physiotherapy, you get access to mental health programmes. These are all things that would be extremely helpful to these athletes who are moving out of the university level and don't have the support financially from their parents anymore. Because one of the things that I am most definitely advocating for is we have to make sure that we are not setting up a situation where only the athletes who have access to finances are the ones who are progressing.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Ben Smith: Because if your parents don't have the ability to pay for you to do the extra travel, the extra training and all the things that are needed in order for you to make it, you are falling behind. Not because you don't have the athletic ability, not because you don't have the desire to be a top-level athlete, but maybe just because you did not have the financial support. And Bermuda is a country that does have a huge divide between the haves and the have-nots. If we could look at a way to make sure that we are levelling that playing field by giving the kind of support that is necessary, I think anything that we can do in that area would be extremely helpful.

And so, Mr. Chairman, the last piece of that would be a lot of times when you have an athlete . . . and we have some athletes who have performed at the at the highest level. They have gone to Commonwealth Games, Pan Am Games, World Championships, and the Olympics. And that was a 30-year-old that's been

chasing that dream and Bermuda has been celebrating those performances. They're now a 30-year-old, and the only job experience that they have is that they were an athlete. They don't have pension. They don't have the health support. And now they have to go into the working market kind of behind.

So once again, I think all of this is part of this process that potentially could really help us to move things forward with people who have already chosen to be role models. This could be an opportunity for us to really help them and help our next generation.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: While the Deputy Opposition Leader looks at his notes, let me just welcome Senator Fubler in the Gallery.

[Desk thumping]

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: This is the Committee of Supply for review of Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. We are looking at budget year for 2025/26. We have been hearing a brief presented by the Honourable Minister Owen Darrell and we are now hearing questions being posed by the Honourable Deputy Opposition Leader, Ben Smith. We are under Head 20, Sports and Recreation, which can be found roughly at page B-237 or thereabouts in the Budget Book.

Please continue when you are ready, MP Smith.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to go back to pages C-23 and C-24.

The Chairman: Yes, Grants and Contributions, pages C-23 and C-24.

Mr. Ben Smith: So Mr. Chairman, for several years I have brought this up. I am going to make sure that I say it in a way that does not actually cause any issue, because that is not what I am trying to do.

There is funding that is given to BSADA. There is funding that is given to Bermuda Sport Anti-Doping. It has to happen. I am not saying anything other than that must be for us . . . in order for our athletes to be able to compete, we have to have this. And we have spent a lot of time to set up this organisation and they do great work.

But I do have a couple of questions, one of them being . . . this budget has been similar to this amount for quite some time. But when we had to go through the transition, when we had some issues, one of the things that happened was that we took out the

illicit drug testing policy that was attached to this area. So, considering that when every National Sport Governing Body travelled overseas, there had to be testing that was done for the team. You would think that there might have been some difference in the funding because all of that has been removed.

So, if the Minister can just let us know whether there was any consideration about that significant change from the Illicit testing support that did exist, that no longer exists, and the actual amount that is given for BSADA.

The Chairman: And that's page C-23, and that's the figure for \$586,000.

Mr. Ben Smith: Correct, \$586,000.

The Chairman: But as you pointed out earlier, that's 2023/24 actual.

Mr. Ben Smith: This is 2023 . . . so, because I don't have the other numbers, I have to use the numbers that are in front of me.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Ben Smith: Using that number, I am pointing out that although the overall number for the support of contributions is \$2,466,000 here, right? And it has not changed significantly this time around. Remember that the additions are an uplift for the National Sports Centre and for the bringing in of the golf courses. So, the number is going to be very similar. That number divided up between all of the National Sport Governing Bodies and with BSADA and . . . from the Olympic Association.

So, if you take the numbers from the Olympic Association out, and BSADA out, you understand why I make the comment that although we are supporting, we definitely as a country can do and must do (in my opinion) better . . . more support. Because if we are going to tell our young people that they are that important, we need to give more finances in order to show them that support so that some sports are not getting such a small amount that it really isn't going to do any change other than potentially an admin spot. And even in that consideration, \$5,000 for a year is really not going to even do that. That number potentially is one trip for one athlete. And that is something that we have to look at and we have to figure out a way for us to increase this number.

The Progressive Labour Party has given more support to sport. They have increased this number. But it's not enough. And it needs to be more. And I will keep advocating. If the Minister got it doubled, I would still ask for more.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Ben Smith: Mr. Chairman, give me one second.

So, I am just going to quickly go back to 30030, which was on . . .

The Chairman: Page B-238.

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes, page B-238 under Athletic Awards.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: The 2023/24 . . . there was, I want to say there was about \$250,000 from that that was given to the elite athletes.

The Chairman: Out of the \$309,000?

Mr. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Right.

Mr. Ben Smith: There was a target of 10 with a revised forecast of 23. Right? For the sake of argument, it was \$25,000 a year under the . . . when you had 10 athletes that were in that situation. When you increase the number of athletes without increasing the amount of money significantly, you are now dropping down to a number that is significantly lower. Which means that the amount of support that is available is significantly lower. Which potentially impacts the ability of the athletes to perform.

I am not going to put this solely at the feet of the Government. I am just pointing out that as we grow the number of sports that are involved as we grow the number of athletes that are applying for the funding, if we do not at the same time increase the amount of funding, what we are going to do is give less money to more athletes.

Mr. Chairman, I am going to go to . . . on page C-20.

The Chairman: Yes—Grants and contributions.

Mr. Ben Smith: National Stadium trustees. There has been an increase there from . . . so in 2024/25 it was \$1,350,000. And then it was revised to \$1,630,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Ben Smith: So, can the Minister give us a detailed breakdown of what that difference was between the original and the revised estimate, and then what the expectation is with the new increase to \$1,500,000? I know part of that potentially is the increase in salaries, but there are several items within that facility that I think would be important for the Minister to be able to give us some information on.

I know the Minister will always say that I will have plenty of questions about the swimming facility. The first question that I will have regarding that is that the changing rooms at the National Sports Centre that

are located at the pool were put in originally when that pool was built on a temporary basis. If I recall, it was because there was supposed to be a next phase of the project that was going to have a major building, civic centre kind of . . . That was the original plan. But because that phase didn't happen, it meant that the temporary facility has now stayed for an extended period of time. Considering that some of that facility has actually become unsafe, can the Minister give us some details on what is going to happen to that changing room facility. Whether there is going to be new facilities built and when will we see that change happen?

I will applaud some of the changes that have happened at the Aquatics Centre. New lane lines have gone in in the last couple of weeks. I know that there were several changes to the heating system that, I believe, change some of the drop offs in availability in the wintertime. But as you look at the facility, there are also areas that need maintenance. So, with the entire facility, can the Minister give us an indication of whether we will start to see some maintenance investment, the tiling around the pool? Because it breaks and it becomes really sharp with people walking around without shoes on. It can become dangerous. The diving area, in the last year I know that the diving boards were replaced. So, Mr. Chairman, wondering if the Minister can give us—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Please continue. Yes, we are just going to change the Chair out. And I welcome the Honourable Lawrence Scott, who will now take the Chair for the remainder of the debate.

There are approximately two hours left in this debate about Sport and Recreation and Culture, Heads 20 and 52. Thank you.

[Mr. W. Lawrence Scott, Chairman]

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

So, considering the investment that was put into the diving boards, whether the Minister can give us a breakdown in the diving participation. And whether he is seeing growth in diving in Bermuda and whether we have an expectation to see an increase in the number of people that are participating in diving with the investment that was made in adding new diving boards at that facility. Because I think it is important that when we are making an investment that we have an analysis of [whether] that investment is leading to something, that we are seeing progress because of it. And in last year that's when the investment happened. Can the Minister give us some details on whether that growth has been seen?

Continuing with that facility, whether the Minister can give us a breakdown of the participation at the National Sports Centre. Whether they are seeing an increase in the number of people that are using the pool,

using the track and using the fields. Because obviously there is significant investment in this facility and I think that most people in Bermuda are very happy that Bermuda has what I would call a world-class facility in in many areas, but we need to make sure that we are giving them maintenance towards this facility.

Mr. Chairman, I am on page C-20, and I am talking about National Stadium Trustees because there's a grant that's given to them in order to run the facility. So, the same way I asked the questions when it came to the swimming pool, I would also like to know what was the date that the track was laid and what the estimated lifespan is of that. Because when we are budgeting, we also need to be looking forward to when will we have to deal with this expense going forward because maintenance of a facility like this is extremely important.

Mr. Chairman, last year was also a time when there was quite a bit of investment in changing the lighting at the facility, which would have had an impact on the electricity usage of the facility because everything was changed to LED. Can the Minister give us, now that we have had them installed for an extended period of time, what that impact has been, what the percentage of savings is that they have seen?

Mr. Chairman, still on that . . . in that same area with the National Sports Centre. Obviously there has been a lot of interest in changing the energy of the National Sports Centre because the cost of the electricity at that facility had become astronomical and it actually had put the facility in trouble overall because they could not keep up with the payments for that high level of electricity. And there is no way that we would have had enough participation throughout the facility, it didn't matter whether it was the fields, the track, the pool to be able to maintain and continuously maintain that level of energy bill.

So, a process was put in place to have the solar project. If the Minister can give us an update on that solar project, give us an update on whether it is now fully operating and what the overall reduction in the power has been since it has been put in place. And then if the Minister can let us know what the maintenance contract (or if there is one) in order to . . . because if you spend the time and money to put in that kind of facility, we need to make sure that the same way that we look to maintain the actual National Sports Centre that this facility that will be reducing our cost is also being maintained. So, can the Minister give us an update on that? I think it would be most important.

Mr. Chairman, would the Minister be able to tell us how many National Sport Governing Bodies are actually utilising the National Sports Centre? We know that there is a hockey pitch. There's a swimming pool. There's a track and there's fields. So, with all of that vast facility, is there a breakdown of what sports are participating and what numbers we are getting from each of those sports? I think what I would like to see is the country realising how important that facility is and

then that gives us an opportunity to maybe give it more finances. Because in, once again my opinion on this, if we were able to give the funding to the facility that covered all of its costs, potentially what you're doing is giving the ability and opportunity for more participation. Because it is the country's facility, it should have more access for the country.

And I can only speak specifically to the pool facility, because that's the one that I interact with the most. What I will say is that when that facility was built, the Aquatic Centre, one of the major reasons for putting it there was that the pools that were available at the time were sitting on private property. So, by having this Government facility, it was to give access to the public. Being an island, having the opportunity for more of our people to actually learn how to swim, to be safe around the water and then the Minister would know that in the policy when the experts were brought in, one of the major features that came out in the long-term athlete development was that some of the core sports that actually allowed our athletes to be able to get that foundation that will allow them to do multiple sports and swimming was one of those.

So having access for our public schools to be to be able to participate and go to the Aquatic Centre, the Minister knows that I brought this up several times. But you know it is not . . . it is cost prohibitive at the moment and it's not because . . . I know it is not because the Minister wants it to be cost prohibitive. And I know that the conversation with Department of Education . . . but now it actually might be easier to happen because Bermuda School Sports Federation is actually within the Ministry. So maybe that conversation can happen in a way that allows more access for the public schools to be able to participate and be part of the aquatic sports. Because it is a shame when really within a year, most times there's only one public school that actually has any real interaction with that facility. And what a great opportunity we actually have with having our own facility. So, if there is a plan to try to see if we can increase that participation, I think it would be important, and the public would be interested to know. Can the Minister give us information on that?

Mr. Chairman, one of the issues that has been kind of ongoing with this facility is that they were not able to get audited financials for a significant amount of time. So, can the Minister just give us an update on whether that has happened, whether they've been able to catch up and whether we are moving forward with clean financials so that when we are providing this level of support (\$1.5 million), whether we know that everything is what it is supposed to be? And potentially we might find out that we actually need more money than what's being provided. Because one of the things that I can bring up and I know this separately is covered in another Ministry when it comes to lifeguards on our beaches but making sure that you have the support to have well-trained lifeguards around that facility.

Mr. Chairman, I know the Minister would know because the facility ended up having a high diving tower, it meant that the pool was extremely deep, which then caused a significant need to have lifeguards there. Just the depth of that water is significant. So, if the Minister can give us an idea of how many lifeguards are actually being used at that facility and whether that number has had to be reduced in certain parts of the year. Specifically, because potentially there is not enough funding to the facility in order to cover that cost.

So, Mr. Chairman, I think I will stop there and maybe give someone else an opportunity to ask questions.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports—Heads 20, 52, 71. This is a four-hour debate, and we have another hour and 10 minutes left in this.

I recognise Honourable Member Cannonier. You have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just have one question. As I was going through . . . the Honourable Member who just took his seat, Ben Smith, was talking about the facilities of the pool. And I wanted to also go to the facilities as well. And just a question about the programmes. I just had the line item . . . I moved away from it.

The Chairman: Are you doing this under line item 6884 National Stadium Trustees?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: No. Under . . . on page B-238, business unit 2002, Sports Development, and Sports Programmes 30055 and 30065.

I will preface by saying I have had the fortune of swimming at the pool. A nice facility to be able to exercise in—a great . . . very economical as well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: No, no, no, no. I'm too—well, I was going to say I'm too broad for a butterfly, but that's probably good for butterflies.

The Chairman: Is that competitive swimming? Is that competitive?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I will say this that the first pool . . . just for information, the first pool that was competitive for students was in Flatts. I'm trying to remember the name of the condos there right across from Four Star Pizza right there. But that's where we used to have competition at that time for interschool swimming competition. And a lot of people may not know that.

And so, the first time that they started competing was at that pool, and St. George's Prep, which is the school I went to . . . some of the first Blacks were

going there. We won all the titles. And I won the free-style. But anyhow, the question—

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Sports programmes. I was just curious, you know, we spent a lot of time building this wonderful pool that we have there. What programmes are catered towards . . . because we've got this diving platform. Right? And I don't know, maybe I should have asked the Shadow Minister about if there's any diving programmes. But just curious, are there any diving programmes that are on? Because we've built this facility there that are ongoing. Are we producing any athletes in that particular arena? As to why we built it? So that was the only question I had. I think the Honourable Member took my question already.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Cannonier.
MP, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I'd like to thank the Minister for his comprehensive brief and also allowing for time for questions. I have to say that the Honourable Minister went through every line item quite succinctly and so I will first start off my questions because many have been answered by the brief. In the department objectives on page B-258. And I agree with these department objectives, but I would like to suggest that potentially with the new digital era and you know, social media and so much more ability in the global market for artists, creatives and whatnot to break in and cultures to be highlighted like we've never seen before, that potentially we add creating an industry here in Bermuda. And when I say an industry, I mean a creative industry where people can be employed and make income full time as an artist.

And if you talk to any creative, any artist, anybody who is currently creating here in Bermuda, a lot of times they must work a full-time job to obviously be insured, to pay their health insurance and vice versa. So, I think that a lot of creatives in the industry, a lot of them feel as though the Island right now, Bermuda, is geared more towards corporate and other nine-to-five jobs. And I think that it would be a really great sign to them to showcase that not only are we looking to protect our culture and to amplify it, but also to create an industry in which they can find full time, or at least enough to sustain insurance for themselves and be able to perform more full time.

The industry could use, in my opinion, outside investment, which is . . . meaning getting our Bermudians on the world stage. We have had a lot of iconic creatives and musicians and artists who have made it to the world stage and done great things. But how are we cultivating that next generation to be those internationally recognised artist, creatives in the industry. So that is just a general question on—

The Chairman: I understand that you have a head, but I just want to know the line item that you're speaking to.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, I'm speaking directly to Department Objectives.

The Chairman: OK.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: On page B-258. Because many of the line items have been answered so—

The Chairman: All right. Again, MP Robinson.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes. And just on these objectives, just also if I could ask whether or not we will be seeing a more concerted effort to weave creatives into our tourism product. As I know the Minister currently wears the hats of Tourism and Culture and it would be very good for us to see a bit of a road map on how our local creatives and local influencers can be better implemented into our tourism product and into our marketing advertisement when it comes to Bermuda as a whole.

And just to also speak a bit about what the brief stated, which was obviously support for creatives and increase in most of the grants and various things. I just wanted to know specifically when it came to animation. Where is the support level there? Because we've seen a few animators come forward in Bermuda and create amazing cultural things that really have been capturing us as a people, us as Bermudians.

And I just wanted to know how the department intends to implement that and support for that in these objectives. Because I feel like that's a very great uncharted territory for us to really build on and also create growth in the economy. Because if you have an industry of folks who are not only showcasing Bermuda to the global stage but drawing more people here and also exchanging those skill sets, I believe that we will see some benefits for the economy as a whole and in tourism and hospitality.

So just moving over, let me see. Just going through my notes here, make sure I don't ask anything that's been answered already.

Yes, so underneath . . . let me see. Ah, yes, okay, here we are. So, it was a line item where the Minister mentioned that a programme was coming back, which is a tradition-bearer programme that's been reintroduced. I believe the line item was under 62030, Cultural Education. I could be incorrect about that, but it was mentioned, and I just wanted to get a bit of clarity on how does one, you know, qualify or become . . . or is there any sort of description for being a tradition-bearer? Because I think this is so important and I feel like if we can get a bit of clarity on, how does one become a tradition-bearer that can participate in this programme? Because even in my constituency there was a master carpenter who was attempting to share some of his skills at the CedarBridge Academy, at one point.

And it just never really materialised like we had hoped. And unfortunately, he has passed away.

So, you know, I think that it will be really interesting for us to be able to hear about the specifics on that and how we can encourage more, because I think that's an excellent programme to bring back on behalf of the Government. And I think that it will showcase to a lot of people that hey, you know, you can pass on some of those skills without necessarily being overly qualified, having to jump through a lot of certifications. You can learn something from an actual master and pass that on. So, I just wanted to hear a bit of that.

Also, if we could get a sneak peek of the fancy float you were talking about, Minister, when it came to the theme.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, it sounded really exciting, and I said, *Hey, this sounds like something new*. So, you know . . . if you can . . . you can just post it somewhere real quick.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes, yes—

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: But I think that I want to also take this time to thank the department and also the Minister and those who are working on Bermuda Day because a lot of us have noted that it has indeed increased in diversity and inclusion, and that's what we're all about. So, I wanted to just take that time as well to congratulate the Minister on that.

So, there was also a mention in the brief of the Cultural Annual General Meeting (AGM) and that basically in that Cultural AGM, some of the strengths of the Department of Culture was mentioned. And also, some things that industry stakeholders felt could be improved. I would just like to hear just some of the high level . . . maybe if that is on file. What were some of the things that the cultural stakeholders felt the department did very well? And what were some of the things that they felt the department could improve on? To better support them and the work that they are all doing.

And also, in the brief there was a mention of film, a few mentions of films that are being done, and I'm just referring directly to the brief here now generally. Because I was jotting down notes, I don't have the specific line items. But there was a mention of film, and I just wanted to know whether or not the Minister or the department has ever floated the idea of a film studio to cultivate a film industry. And the reason why I asked that is because not only will it provide a bit of avenue for actors, screen writers, and various other initiatives, but whether or not that's being floated and whether or not that industry would be cultivated, especially when it

comes to capturing our culture and providing ways to do that on an Island.

And yes . . . most . . .

The Chairman: And for the listening public, we are debating the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sports, Heads 20, 52 and 71. It's a four-hour debate which started at 4:02 pm. So, we still have about another hour and . . . probably about forty minutes left in the debate and MP Robinson is on his feet asking the Minister questions.

MP Robinson.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and just jumping to page C-20.

We have line item 7099 which is Culture and Entertainment Support and one of the things that a lot of creatives have mentioned is that training up on their craft can be quite expensive, especially if you're a vocalist who is doing vocal training or various things that you need to do, similar to sports, to compete on the international level.

And so, I just wondered if anything was included in this or could be included in this to provide some affordable training or to bring in folks who can provide that that training to our local artists, whereas they don't have to pay quite a lot or maybe take any online courses that are not necessarily reputable? Because I know a lot of times if you have ever spoken to creatives or been around, you know that they all find a work around to make it happen. Right? And I just wonder how we can streamline that so that we know that a person who wants to be a vocalist can at least get training to be able to go and compete or do various things on a global scale. Because that's going to help us in the long run. So, I just wanted to ask if anything might be included in that.

Truthfully, Minister, I think you—

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I think you . . . yes, yes, yes. You have done quite well today. I do not have a ton of questions left.

Just moving along to Contributions in the Department of Culture, on page C-20, 6881 Contribute to Cultural Activity. I may have missed these, but I just wanted to get a bit of a breakdown on what these cultural activities were under this line item. And I also want to while I am on my feet celebrate that the Bermuda Arts Council has gotten an increase, similar to my colleague. You know, you always want more but I understand that the Government is doing what it can in that area. So, I will celebrate that as well.

And just wrapping up . . . the main thing that I want to close on is the necessity for us (and this is just speaking to the brief) to provide a way for artists to be able to have more opportunities in a longer season where they can be able to perform. And there was a

policy that was floated for a multi-purpose venue for not only performance, but also for meetings and different things. And I would like to just float that idea and offer it to the Minister and the department if they wish to take it up. But I believe that creating a multi-purpose entertainment venue would benefit artists and give them more opportunity.

So, with that Mr. Chairman, I will take my seat and make way for anyone who has any other questions.

The Chairman: All right. We are in the debate of the Committee of Supply for the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and Sports. This is a four-hour debate. We are on Heads 20, 52 and 71.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to any of these heads?

The Chair recognises the MP.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the Minister, when he was giving his brief did mention that there was going to be a sports conference. I'm actually taking this from under Department Objectives. There were certain things that he was trying to put forward. And there were two things that I noted. One of them was the digital signage. Where and when can we expect to see the digital signage? And does he have an expected date of when that sports conference is going to be?

And, Mr. Chairman, just quickly, I would like to take a look at page B-238, Camping and . . . actually page B-242. The Minister did talk about the significant increase in the camping. It was it was \$2,200 and now it's, you know, close to \$6,000. The Minister did mention that it's almost reaching capacity. Can the Minister let us know whether there is any area of growth that they potentially can look at next? Is there maybe an underutilised facility or a property that they have looked at that maybe they can start to increase the capacity of camping? Considering that this growth seems like a really important and positive move, and the fact that it seems to have reached capacity, if there is an indication of whether there is any room to grow. If the Minister can let us know, that would be helpful. Thank you.

The Chairman: Is there anybody else that has any other questions? MP Robinson.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Mr. Chairman, yes, sorry.

I was looking through my notes and I have one more left. Just under line item 6200 on page B-259. In the brief, there was a mention of a National Cultural Policy, and I just wanted to see if I could get a bit of detail, if possible, on that and also when it will be brought before the public.

The Chairman: Thank you for that.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to Heads 20, 52 and 71?

Honourable Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you kindly, Mr. Chairman.

I am referring to page B-237 and the mission statement. It specifically—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Specifically, increasing participation and ensuring equitable access. As many Members know, I am a big sailor and an advocate, and I wanted to point to our sailing traditions. We have had many numerous Olympians in that sport competing at a top, top level. I know we have two young Bermudians out there actively campaigning to qualify for the Olympics. We will see how that goes. And there used to be a fabulous programme out on White's Island that was run by the Government that, yes—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —maybe we should take the Minister out for a little test and see.

Now it is certainly true that many of the private clubs have expanded the scope of the programmes that they are generally available to the public. And they also do include (many of them) financial support and bursaries for . . . because not everybody can. You know, as we heard with the day camps, not everybody can afford programmes in in any sport. But I would like to know if the Ministry does have any plans or thoughts or inclination to supporting a programme like the White's Island, public sailing programme.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP.

Is there anybody else that would like to speak to the Ministry of Tourism, Culture and Sport? Heads 20, 52 and 71.

With there being nobody, Minister, would you like to take a stab at answering these questions?

And while the Minister sets up, I will just let you know that we now have roughly 90 minutes left in this debate, which started at 4:02 pm, and we are doing Heads 20, 52, 71, being piloted through Parliament by the Minister Owen Darrell.

Minister Owen Darrell, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and this is a nice debate.

I will say this: I think this is the first time in in probably four years that, you know, I was in another place, but it's the first time that I think I have had the opportunity to debate Culture. Maybe because it's Heritage Month and we are doing this debate a little later than normal. Maybe because we are on the week of Bermuda Day on Friday, but I just want to thank the Opposition for actually debating Culture because the lovely people and staff that work at the Department of Culture were starting to feel a little left out over years

gone by that the Opposition did not like to debate Culture. I don't know why.

Because there's so many great things that we are doing to uphold and keep our traditions going. Especially with individuals like Ms. Warner-Virgil, I'd like to say, and I just . . . before we get into some of these questions, would like to talk about those tradition-bearers. Ms. Warner-Virgil is one who I see often because not only does she assist in going into schools to promote this culture of . . . she does Gombey dolls now. But she takes pride in actually delivering these dolls herself. And she comes and she brings them, and she wants to take pictures with the Minister and the staff. And you know you would go a little farther to know . . . just a little history lesson as we are in Heritage Month and we are leading up to Bermuda Day where you will see many Gombeys. Right, Minister Lightbourne? Many Gombeys. And just know that Ms. Warner-Virgil, as her name states, comes out of the Warner's Gombey troupe. But she for many years did make the traditional Gombey capes.

And I would just like to shout out to Mr. Showande (I don't know why I'm drawing a blank)—

An Hon. Member: Butterfield.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Butterfield, thank you. Mr Showande Butterfield, now, who gave an excellent presentation last week at the CedarBridge Academy. And he has been going on to multiple . . . many schools, giving his presentation on how to make Gombey costumes and also the different pieces of the Gombey that makes up the entire performance.

And it is those traditions that are continuing to go. And we see these tradition-bearers like, in past years, Mr. Mills, who is a mason, and he has been keeping the tradition of Bermuda architecture alive and building homes. We have got, as I said in the brief, Ms. Ronnie Chameu has done it in the past. We still have Mr. Milton as well, Mr. Milton Hill and Ms. Warner-Virgil, as we have said. So that is just something I just wanted to highlight even further.

And I will get to the questions that the Honourable Shadow Minister did ask about that programme and it going further and continuing, but I would like to start in the order of which they were given.

I would start with the questions that came from Head 20 and . . . I would just like to say that when the previous Chair was there, he pointed out that there was a discrepancy in the . . .

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: It was a discrepancy. And what it should have said was that the budget allocation for the Department's Camping programme is \$1,015,000, an increase of \$44,000, or approximately 5 per cent increase. That's what it [should have] said. So, I just want to take a moment to correct that.

The first question I think was [asked] by the Shadow Minister, who holds the responsibility for Sport, came from page B-238 under the 2001 Administration and Sports. And the question was that there was additional funding due to Bermuda [Schools] Federation being folded into the Ministry, what analysis will be done that will show that this change is positive? For example, in participation and collaboration, what are the expectations of this change?

As noted, and pointed out by the Honourable Shadow Minister this change has been something that has been talked about and asked for by many in the sports arena for many, many years. And I'd just like to point out the difference between sport and PE. They are two different things. And I just want to make that clear before I get into answering that question because although PE still comes under education (and that's physical education in schools and they have a full curriculum that comes around that) it is different than sport.

Sport is what the BSSF oversees. And as a result, many of the PE teachers are also part of the BSSF. Not all, but many. And that is where the BSSF has been moved from education to sport because we recognise that there is a stark difference between physical education and sport.

An Hon. Member: What is it?

Hon. Owen Darrell: We will get that in a minute.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: But when we talk about sport, we are talking about organised sport and the organising of football. I know the Honourable Minister who has responsibility for Economy and Labour has long told us how he was a football captain on many of his teams and I know he participated in sport that would have come under the BSSF many, many years and is still going. We are trying now to get cricket back in into the schools as a sport and not just a PE [class]—and others. Right? So, we will be conducting surveys of the school sports, and this will come from teachers as well as athletes and all stakeholders. We're gathering these—

The Chairman: Minister, is the Minister for Economy and Labour the only athlete that you recognise in the Chamber?

Hon. Owen Darrell: I mean, I think you were a goalkeeper at one point, right? I think you're retired now.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Just kind of like I retired. Did you retire?

The Chairman: No, no. I am in preseason right now.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Oh, preseason goalkeeper. Okay. Well, there we have . . . I am sorry I did leave you out, Mr. Chairman.

We are gathering these baselines in order to show changes over the years to come. And, you know, this change just took place recently. We are excited about where we are. I mean you have seen it. And I am not throwing shade on anyone. But you even saw some changes at the recent interschool sports that you've seen. And you just see kind of a reinvigoration of all who are involved in the BSSF. And, like I said, over at the Department of Recreation we have sports officers that are very passionate about sport. One, Mr. Jacon Agnes will tell that story over and over how sport has shaped his life, professionally as well as recreationally. As you all know, he is a former Cup Match Captain for the team up West—not Cleveland County, but they were red.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, that team. But yes. The second question that was asked by the Shadow Minister with responsibility for Sport talked about sport development and it was under section 30065 Sports Investments. And the question he asked I believe that there had been a change in the number of sports that had been recognised as National Sports Governing Bodies. I think that is where we were at. And the concern always (and I get this) is that if you open up the participants, but the pot does not grow further, you know, you have more National Sports Governing Bodies (I will use this word) fighting over a smaller chunk of funding support.

How would this money be divided amongst more entities? Can you provide what the investments were for 2024/25 and what is the projected numbers for the upcoming year? So, the 2024/25 investments were as follows: The Bermuda Amateur Swimming Association (how did that get at the top of the list?), \$60,000. The Bermuda Basketball Association, \$5,000. The Bermuda Bicycle Association, \$74,000. The Bermuda Cricket Board, \$100,000. The Bermuda Equestrian Foundation—funny looking shirts showing up around here.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Bermuda Bicycle Association, \$74,000. Like I said, the Bermuda Equestrian Foundation. The Bermuda Golf Association, \$50,000. The Bermuda Hockey Federation, \$30,000. The Bermuda Karate Federation, \$20,000. The Bermuda Lawn Tennis Association, \$25,000. The Bermuda Motorcycle Racing Association, \$10,000. The Bermuda National Athletics Association (that is the BNAA), \$50,000. The Bermuda Netball Association, \$20,000. The Bermuda Olympic Association, \$125,000. The Bermuda Rugby Federation Union, \$30,000. The Bermuda Sailing Association,

\$40,000. The Bermuda Sanshou Association, \$35,000. The Bermuda Squash Racquets Association, \$20,000. The Bermuda Triathlon Association, \$65,000. The Bermuda Volleyball Association, \$40,000. Bocce Bermuda, \$15,000. Gymnastics Federation of Bermuda, \$20,000. Bermuda National Archery Association, \$30,000. And the Bermuda Pickleball Association of Bermuda—one of our newer National Sport Governing Bodies was \$25,000.

So, the funding available for this year is over \$2,000,000 that we have made available this year. So, to say that the Government is not investing . . . and I know you did not say this, but this is what . . . and I don't want to attribute that statement to the Shadow Minister of Sport. But you hear it a lot. You do hear it in the community and individuals will ask just a question: Well, why doesn't the government support sport? And although I do say that support is given in multiple ways, it has to be pointed out that \$2,000,000, in excess of \$2,000,000 is available and being made available to this.

We have not allocated the funds for each of these National Sports Governing Bodies yet this year. That will be something that once we pass this budget process, the budget gets approved, we will then sit down and look at all requests that come in and go through the rationale as to who gets what and why. So, it is a process that I do know that the senior officer who I mentioned a few moments ago takes very seriously and looks into why the funding is needed and that's how it is allocated.

You would know that some organisations, like the Bermuda Olympic Association in 2024, may seek a bit more as that is an Olympic year than what they would seek in subsequent years. So that's that.

Yes, the funding does include BSADA and the Bermuda Olympic Association. There was a question with BSADA that I think I will . . . I will get to that one a little later. As to the illicit drugs, that policy that we no longer have in place, where has that funding gone? And that's a question that we will look to answer.

There was a change, sorry. Since there are new requirements and there has been an increased interaction between the Ministry and international sporting bodies and has this led to more involvement in the programmes by these international bodies? Is the increase in sports leading to an increase in participation in these sports without taking from other sports? That was the question.

When it comes to the National Sports Governing Body, not all the time we get individual names back as to where that funding is going. You know, sometimes the National Sports Governing Body will highlight in their own publications that this individual is doing X, Y and Z. Sometimes they will attribute it to the government grant, sometimes they won't. So, it's hard for us to track exactly who . . . which individuals are excelling, and this is where good engagement comes, and I pride

myself on that community engagement whenever. I know my office has asked me to slow down a little bit.

But I say that it's important that whenever I am invited to engagements to show up and support—especially a National Sports Governing Body. I do try to make time, as you would have heard in a Ministerial Statement or Congrats earlier, that I did make it a point to go to the Squash Championship.

You know, if the national coach for swimming invites me to the national championships, I do try. He says it is next week. So, I do try to get up and see these swimmers, but it is at those meets and at those events that you have these conversations with individuals and their parents. And they'll say, you know, *Thank you. You know that that athlete right there is one that is benefiting from the increase that we got through the government grant.* Or, *That athlete is one that ordinarily would not be able to get the level of coaching that is needed, but we really thank you for the support that Government is giving.* So it is those types of conversation and those types of engagement.

And I will acknowledge, as the Shadow Minister has said, I think the Shadow Minister with responsibility for Sport and Culture has said that even if there is an increase, they will always (and we all should) advocate for more, as more increase usually leads to greater and better performance.

So, the only way to answer is to cross reference the individuals with sports. We don't go into that amount of detail, so we do not have detailed individual at this time.

Our sporting investment has only slightly increased. However, I would like to point out that it has increased, so more is always better than less. Right, Mr. Chairman? You would agree with that.

The Chairman: I definitely agree with that.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Good. Good.

Since there are new requirements, has there been an increased interaction with the Ministry and international . . . No, sorry, sorry. Let me . . . I answered that one already.

Sporting has only slightly increased. Considering the changes in overall cost, has there been any conversation regarding what this means for participating in international high-level competition and cost associated with our sporting materials? Is there an increase in demand and for international opportunities? And the Shadow Minister has said that there should be more money to support more athletes.

We have had conversations with sporting bodies in this regard. We recognise we have growing costs all over the world, that there's increased cost for travel. I always know when a sport is getting ready to embark on a large trip because, you know, someone will send an email to the Minister of Sport and say, *You should be doing this.* And a lot of times the e-mail goes back and says, *Thank you, but we have done XY and Z.* And

they say, *I was not aware*. But that is why we serve. We serve to try to assist in as many ways as possible. And as they have said, a long time. Right? What is it? Closed mouths don't get fed, right? So, if you ask, you may receive. I have no problem when these requests come in.

And I know that the Shadow Minister with responsibility for Sport, in his long involvement with the sport of swimming, will understand that there were requests that come and sometimes we are able to supply them—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —and sometimes we are not—accommodate. Thank you, accommodate. Accommodate those requests and sometimes we are not.

When decisions are being made regarding the levels of funding for the different sports, is some consideration based on performance in the region? Internationally? Local participation? And what is the breakdown and what is that competition? And I would say this, that is why the National Sports Governing Bodies and part of the requirements for the National Sports Governing Bodies is that you have an operational AGM. That you have an operational executive team. That you have an operational youth programme. Because it is the National Sports Governing Body that will govern and oversee their sport. Because I would not think that the National Sports Governing Body will put forward athletes to us or fund athletes who are not at the level where they need or deserve, I guess we'll use that word, funding.

So that lies with each National Sports Governing Body. But once it comes to the criteria that we set, the criteria is set into three parts: high performance, junior development and coaching development. So those are the three parts that you do. So, the National Sports Governing Body is usually interviewed and given a chance to state their need for funding.

I would even say this that a lot of National Sports Governing Bodies have gotten very creative as to how they use their funds, because what you could do is . . . one option is you have 10 students or athletes, sorry, and you try to get 10 plane tickets and 10 modes of transportation and 10 hotel rooms and try to send them overseas for specialised coaching or specialised support. When what a lot of National Sports Governing Bodies are now doing are actually saying, *You know what? Stay right here on Island and we will pay for the coach to come to Bermuda*.

So instead of trying to pinch pennies and get the National Sports Governing Body to go there, you can actually double the reach, and you can have maybe upwards of 20 or 30 students, sorry athletes, that are benefiting on that. So that's something that we leave in the hands of the National Sports Governing Body as to how they can maximise, Mr. Chairman, the funds that

they are getting and the funds that government is making available.

Next question I think came from the Shadow Minister with responsibility for Sport, is considering that more sports are operating in Bermuda, can we provide information on how we get support for other sports that are emerging that allows them to get access to funding if it already exists? Please inform and if not, how do we plan to make this happen? And I could use the Bermuda Pickleball Association as an example. And I know the pickleball courts that we have put in the Honourable Minister's constituency of 17 down there at the [W.E.R.] Joell Tennis Stadium have become extremely popular. And the Pickleball Association, which is now a National Sports Governing Body, took the documents that we laid out. It took the path on how a sport can become a National Sports Governing Body and the sports recognition policy is a document that guides the organisation on the path to receive funding.

So, I can use that organisation of one that initially . . . and I remember when they came and they said, *You know, this is one of the biggest growing sports around the world*. And I said, *Okay*. And they had a plan and they said, *How can we get funding?* And even in that case some of their ask was not just direct funding to the organisation, it was infrastructure. It was, *Where can we find a place to add additional courts to alleviate some of the demand that there is for pickleball?*

And we all know, Mr. Chairman, that there was some pushback to that with the traditional racquet sports. I will say that. But I will say this: without a shadow of a doubt, many of them . . . many of them, in addition to continuing on their traditional tennis coaching, have now started to play pickleball. They have started to coach pickleball and they started to embrace it. And that is what we like to see with—as I think the Shadow Minister called it—an emerging sport. That is the blueprint of what we are looking to do. So that shows that our National Sports Governing programme is working.

I know there will be a few who we would like to see take the next step to get there, but there is a blueprint through the sport recognition policy that organisations can use to get there.

Next question was about sports initiatives and awards under page B-241. Under the Junior Investment Awards and this is one, Mr. Chairman, that I'm very, very proud to be a part of because what happens is a lot of times some of the junior athletes will get kind of gobbled up in the stars that you are familiar with. We had some very young men, I will say, that participated in our Cricket Classic last summer, who benefited from the Junior Achievement Awards. One was and I'll call his name, Mr. Luke Fulton.

I remember one of my first engagements as the Minister responsible for Sport was to present him with a Junior Achievement Award. And then to see Mr. Fulton a couple of years later, as a Colt for the Cup Match

Classic last summer shows that this investment is working with the Junior Achievement. It also . . . it tags on to one of our policy goals, which is the long-term athletic achievement programme. And I know that this is something that all National Sporting Governing Bodies have been asked for a few years ago to develop. Because you don't just go from someone kicking a ball in your yard to someone who has multiple times taken his team to the championship playoff to get to the premier. That doesn't just happen by chance. Investment has to be made in that regard. So, I'm very happy and very proud that we continue to invest in these Junior Achievement Awards.

And they asked, Was the decrease because there were no applicants? I would not say that there were no applicants. But there were less applications that were being submitted. And that is part of the education that we are trying to do as we go out to these sporting events. We just don't go and clap and watch goals be scored and records be broken in the pool. But it's also a time and a way to educate the public on this. These are ways that Government is here to support you. And it is always disappointing when there are some National Sporting Governing Bodies—and I will not call them—that ask for an allotment of funds, they get the allotment of funds, and they give it back. Because for one reason or the other they were not able to utilise it. It does happen in some cases, and this would be one where we did get less applications submitted from previous years from the sporting bodies regarding the Junior Investment Awards.

The average amount was \$3,000. What was the total amount for Junior Athlete Awards? And this year we've allocated \$50,000 for these awards.

Next question falls under the Sports Facilities, and how is the \$900,000 broken down regarding golf? Will there be performance measures to show how this investment is being used to support golf courses and how we see the impact? The \$900,000 is an operational grant for the golf courses. The golf courses this year have also been given a capital development grant of \$1.4 million and that could be seen on page C-7. And a report will be produced from the golf courses and all National Sports Governing Bodies as to how they utilise the funds. Just like we have talked about other quangos in the past. Although I do have more oversight with the golf courses than some other quangos that we have talked about in the past. As always, once grants are given to these quangos, they have their own operational, you know, organisation that operates that. So, we will be waiting. And as soon as I get it, I will make it available, Mr. Chairman, for how that \$900,000 operational grant is used for the golf courses.

There was a question regarding the softball park, 30075. I mentioned that there was an increase in usage due to baseball. What are the baseball specific gross numbers? I don't have that at this time, but I'm going to tell a story, Mr. Chairman, regarding the

baseball and the Michael Preece Softball Diamond—the name is softball.

There was a young man who was an entrepreneur in this Island, and he came to me. He is married to a Bermudian, which I think now makes him Bermudian. Right, Minister? I believe—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: But we'll go there. Okay, okay. Thank you—a spouse of a Bermudian. Thank you. Appreciate the clarification.

But he came to me and he—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you for the terminology.

I don't like to bat outside my crease, but basically the story is that he came to a store and said from his native . . . baseball was very, very popular and still is very, very popular. You know, he has individual baseball players like "Big Papi" and the like. And he came and he said, *You know, I notice that you have a beautiful facility in Hamilton* (in my colleague's constituency), *but it's not being used on a Saturday morning*. And he said, *Well, why not?*

You know, I said, *Well, it's called the softball diamond. And for the most part, the Bermuda Softball Association or Softball Bermuda has their events in the evening time*.

And he said, *Well, I would just like to use it*.

And this is the story: He didn't wait for us to go through the process of opening the gate and finding who can go and get overtime on a Saturday. What he did was asked, *Can I set up some lines outside of the diamond and just start a little baseball programme?*

And once you saw that happening and once you saw young athletes (still pee wees) come in and play baseball, then you said, *Well, why can't we make the facility available?*

So, I can say that that is one example of an individual who has taken pee wee baseball and used the facility that's, you know, it's a softball diamond. And I've come to learn over the years when I was this great softball player back in the day, that softball rules are considerably different than baseball rules. However, with the facility that we have there, this individual has made it work, and we have seen an increase in baseball activities here in the area of Hamilton and not always having to go down to Kindley Field, which . . . don't get me wrong. They have an amazing programme as well, which my son has had the opportunity in years gone by to take part of.

But with that said, I don't have the specific numbers. But that is just an example of how we are

learning to pivot and utilise our facilities for more than just traditionally what we've had. Because I think when that softball stadium was built down at the Preece, it was built for fast pitch. And even fast pitch softball has different rules than slow pitch softball. So that is an example of that.

The tennis stadium, page B-238. There were some refurbishments to the pickleball court. Has there been an impact to the tennis site due to the facility and the workaround of pickleball? I could say this: not from a standpoint as pickleball courts can be converted back to tennis courts if we need them to. You know, there was some discussion at the beginning as to how we will make it work. Will there be fairness? Will they kind of push out the traditional racquet sports or tennis? But the nets that we have for the pickleball courts are portable. They can move.

If there is a need for a junior tennis tournament that may pop up this summer, more tennis courts can be made available. So, I'm very pleased that . . . you know, for those who spend time on social media, I think if they would report back that the kind of discussion and the back and forth between pickleball and tennis has diminished significantly. Almost, I would say to none. So, I would not say that there has been a push out or any negative impacts to the traditional tennis. Well, some may disagree, but it doesn't seem to be that big of a problem at this time.

Question regarding sports community fields. And these become very important, especially on holidays. I have never seen requests for grass being cut so much then Good Friday because what happens is we go through the winter, grass is not growing and then all of a sudden, these community fields like the one up in Somerset, Loyal Hill—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —Devil's Hole. The one on Shelley Bay Garrison. All of these are the community fields that come under the Department of Sport and Recreation.

And it is also . . . those are the fields that host some of our larger community events and those are very, very important events. And I'm glad that we have these fields and I'm glad that we have staff who keep them up. So, I want to say thank you to those individuals for keeping those fields in pristine condition so that we can support the community. And the question was what is the breakdown? And what is the money used for? And this uplift of funding provides funding for the repairs of the machines and maintenance of the fields and grounds. Because although they do a very good job of cutting these fields, there are other factors.

You know, some of these fields have gates. We did an extensive cleanup at Loyal Hill because there was an outside entity ABIR, I think it was, that put a playground—

An Hon. Member: BILTIR.

Hon. Owen Darrell: BILTIR, sorry. Sorry, it was BILTIR that put a playground at Loyal Hill.

So, I want to publicly thank them for doing that. And it is this type of corporate partnership that assists us in making sure that these community fields continue to do what they are meant to do and that is to provide recreational space for the community of which we all serve.

There was a question around page B-241 and performance measures regarding the number of athletes receiving funding. Can you break down monies based on level A, B and C? The number of athletes who applied this year has decreased. Last year there was an increase due to it being an Olympic year. The Bermuda Olympic Association breaks down the athletes in A, B and C levels. That is not something that we do, but they do that for their elite level grants that they give.

Question regarding 2023/24. There is funding given to anti-doping. However, this amount has not changed. When there were issues, the initial drug testing policy was removed. Was there any consideration to the change regarding illicit testing support no longer existing and the actual number that is given, which was \$586,000?

I would say this. Although one has gone down with the illicit testing, I can tell you that operational cost has gone up. So, their operational cost. As everyone is dealing with, increased rents, salary uplifts and the cost of other testing may have gone up. So, while it may look like the number is the same and it should go down, it's kind of a balancing act that has been done by BSADA to not come back for any additional funding and keep it where they were. But that is something that we will continue to look at.

I will admit, it is a number that does pop out to many people every time we go through this exercise. However, the Shadow Minister of Sport will recall that there has been one time in the almost three years that I've been a Minister, one time that someone called for my resignation and that was due to Bermuda losing—not losing, but being put on a list regarding its, . . . its—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, its compliance with the WADA Association. So that speaks to how important BSADA is to making sure that our athletes who are going and participating, like the sailors, like the swimmers, like the triple jumpers, so that they are compliant with going to international competition. So, it is a figure that while it may jump out, and while we may like to see other figures come closer to that, it is one that is extremely important. And you don't notice it until something goes a little left and then we really do understand the importance of BSADA.

So, I would just like to put in here that Ms. Debbie Hunter does a very good job as the Executive

Director of BSADA regarding the work that she does to make sure that we remain compliant and remain up to the standards of which WADA is seeking. Because there are horror stories all over the world. And I know the Shadow Minister would attest to countries that are way below the compliance mark for clean sport.

Question regarding \$330,000, page B-238 under Athletic Awards 2023/24. It says the number of athletes increased without equal increase in money, meaning available support is lower. Does this mean that we need to increase our funding? The Bermuda Olympic Association's elite athlete fund is separate from our fund. Their funding is for Olympic sports. Our elite athlete funding is for all athletes and in all sports.

Question—grants and contributions. National stadium increase. They've asked for the detailed breakdown in the original and revised estimates and what the expectation of the current amount was. What changes will happen to the changing room facilities? Maintenance? Investment updates, et cetera? When will they occur? If you look at page C-7, there is an increase of Capital Development for the NSC. And it is \$800,000 for 2025/26. This will allow for the continued maintenance and upgrade of the facilities. Out of last year's funding, the new changing rooms have been purchased. And they should be installed very soon.

As the Shadow Minister did allude to, that facility is one that I am at often. And I have asked the question many times. I asked, *Well, how soon can we wait?* And I'm happy to report that we should see some cranes in the area lifting those tiles out and putting new ones in.

Diving participation—considering the investment that we made recently in diving boards at the facility, diving participation numbers have remained steady. Dive boards were replaced for safety reasons and the boards that were there were no longer suitable for use. So, I will tell you this. This is another story. You know, I like my stories. And the Shadow Minister, I don't know where he was this day, but there was a time last summer, I think it was about June or July that I took the opportunity to go up to the National Sports Centre.

I took the opportunity. I went up to the National Sports Centre and I sat on the bleachers and there were two athletes, elite athletes, that were going through their paces. And they were swimming, and their names were Jack and Emma Harvey. I am sure he knows them well. And as Jack and Emma Harvey were going through their final participation to represent Bermuda in the Olympic games, due to great coaching by the national swim coach of Bermuda, as I was sitting there, there were many youngsters.

There were some that were from a football camp and they were sitting on the bleachers as well. And there were others from another camp called Star Diving and they were all sitting there and the . . . what do you call it? The Aquatic Centre. Bleachers were full of children and young athletes who were excited to see our former Olympic athlete Ms. Katura Horton[

Perinchief] as she was putting Star [Diving] Camp and, as well as her mother, through this diving course.

So, I know that while we may not see it year round, I do know that the diving platforms are used by a former Olympic athlete. And it was very, very heart-warming to see that the same pool was being used by two different sports: the sport of diving, which we have an Olympic athlete, and she was the Chef de Mission that went to Paris. So, it was a really good use of the National Sports Centre.

So, I will say that the diving platforms and the participation numbers have remained steady. That would be something that we could look into and get those exact numbers but it is always good that we have to replace the diving boards that are not safe because at any given time, someone like maybe the Minister may go up and decide that he wants to do a couple of one-and-a-halves or two-and-a-halves off the platform.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And take the PS and everybody else with me.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, we have to make sure that those diving platforms are safe at all times. But thank you for asking about that. I'm sure Ms. Katura Horton-Perinchief will be happy that we recognise her diving camp here. And we look forward to the day that we will have additional Olympic divers representing Bermuda as we have swimmers who often represent Bermuda at the Olympic Games.

Can we give a breakdown of participation of the National Sports Centre? More people using the fields, pool, track and considering the significant investment in the facility? I can tell you that every day—every day, every evening, every morning, this stadium is being used. It's to the point where I'm putting a lot of pressure on the new facilities manager, Mr. Steven Douglas, Jr. A lot of pressure on him to make sure that the fields and the facilities are in top condition. We have youngsters who are up there early in the morning before the sun gets up, going through their paces in the sport of football.

As you know, we had a massive tournament, even with rain. The Kappa Tournament had unprecedented amounts of rain this year. I was in a conversation and they said, *Well, I think we're going to have to cancel the tournament because the fields cannot take this level of rain.* And it was the facilities manager, Mr. Douglas that said, *Please don't disrespect my workers like that. We put a lot of work into keeping this field in pristine condition.* And even after the tournament went ahead the following day, there was no excessive wear and tear on that particular field. But we are seeing that the traditional carpet is starting to show its age, and we are going to put some investment into that to bring the

carpet back to the days that, you know, Minister Haywood and Minister Weeks used to play football on those fields.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: No? I see the former president of the BFA is questioning if these Ministers actually touched the carpet, but we'll leave that for another day. It just goes to the investment that we are putting into these fields.

So individual users of the facility are not tracked on the free North field. The Shadow Minister would know that is a track that we have made available for individuals to walk and jog on at any time that the facility is open and it is free of charge. So, we do not track those users. For paid users, and those are the users that like to use the rubber track, the pool, the gym, the hockey, participation has increased year over year following when we had to shut down the facility for COVID-19.

You will continue to see that as more usage happens, we will have to make sure that we are keeping this facility . . . but it's important to point out that the facility is an ageing facility. It is . . . you know, it has served Bermuda well and continues to serve us well. But I will tell you this, as the Minister responsible for Sport tries to go to CARIFTA Games and other sporting events, the National Sports Centre, which is in the constituency of my ministerial colleague who sits to my left, Minister Lightbourne . . . I will tell you it is a facility that we can continue to be proud of in the Caribbean region. And I look forward to seeing her up there a lot more.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, absolutely, yes.

There was a question about . . . what was the date that the track was laid and the lifespan of that. The 400-metre track was resurfaced in 2020 just prior to the unfortunately cancelled CARIFTA Games, and it has a 10-year warranty. There is, you know, with anything there are some slight spots that are going to be repaired this year. And we look forward to that track continuing to serve us and our athletes well.

Considering the lighting investment, which would impact the electricity bills, can I provide the percentage of savings due to this lighting investment? Absolutely. I am happy to. The total electricity savings due to the renewable energy project, which includes the full change out of lights, has produced an average of 51 per cent savings in the electricity bill. And of a facility of that size that is significant savings.

An Hon. Member: Say that again.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes, one more time. I will happily do that. I think that the Minister responsible for Energy and the MP for that area wants to hear that again. A

51 per cent saving on average due to the lights being changed out for this renewable energy project.

We have had (in the past issues) regarding high electricity consumption regarding the National Stadium update on the solar project. Is it fully operational? What is the reduction of power since it was put in place? Is there a maintenance contract and what is it? Again, these are some of the detailed operational matters of the Board of which is in charge of the National Sports Centre. I will answer the parts that I do know that they have shared with me and others I will seek to get in their annual report, which they have to report—or produce.

The project is partially complete. In the process of completing the application bulk generation single-use licence. It's expected to be submitted before the end of the month. Give me a second.

The Chairman: And for the listening audience, we are now about 40 minutes out from our . . . four-hour time limit. We are debating the Ministry of Tourism and Culture and Sports, Heads 20, 52 and 71 and the Minister is actually responding to questions that have been posed by the Opposition.

And so once again . . . and he is currently just talking about the National Sports Centre and going to go on to some other—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. It's expected to be submitted before the end of the month with parts of the facility being operational again. There's been that 51 per cent saving, which includes energy that's exported to the BELCO grid. The maintenance contract will be negotiated once the system has been fully commissioned.

How many National Sports Bodies utilise the National Sports Centre? Is there a breakdown of which sports are participating? And I'd be happy to provide that, Mr. Chairman. And is there a plan to increase the numbers? Absolutely. Always. Wherever we can support . . . again, support doesn't come in just financial. There are ways that we can support by usage of our facility. So, the answers of the National Sport Governing Bodies that are utilising the National Sports Centre are rugby, football, cricket, hockey, sanshou, athletics, Special Olympics, aquatics, to name a few.

And we always are advocating to increase the numbers that are using the National Sports Centre, and this is something that you remember that they only had the opportunity to use the facility two weeks before competition. We have increased that to use it free of charge two months before the competition, but even in some of these they have found the investment to make into using this facility, which will increase their participation on the world stage. And we can use field hockey as an example. I think that that is the only certified top-notch field hockey pitch on the Island. And they are using it. They are going to tournaments as we recently saw in Mexico, they are qualifying to additional rounds.

So, we can see that these facilities are causing our National Sports Governing Bodies to get recognised on the world stage and keeping our athletes in top-notch form. It is important to also know that National Sporting Governing Bodies can apply to utilise the National Sports Facilities, the gym, the pool, the pavilion, the classroom—again free—for two months before international competition. And I want to repeat that because everyone thinks that this usage is just maybe for a field or just for a pool or just for . . . but it's the other facilities that are available up there. Okay?

So, I'm happy to give up the bench press for a little bit so that you know the other athletes—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Can you—what's that?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Elite? Wow.

One of the ongoing issues as stated by the Shadow Minister responsible for Sport, was a lack of audited financials. The National Sports Centre again is a quango. They are working with the organisation to get all outstanding audits complete and current. I think that is the Office of the Auditor General. They are presently working on the year end of a couple of years back and once we get caught up, I can guarantee you, Mr. Shadow Minister, that you will be the first to know.

How many lifeguards are being used at the stadium? Do they rotate? Do they change around during the year because it's not enough money to cover? Lifeguards are not employed year-round. Lifeguards are employed during the summer months to cover events and group parties. Because I can tell you this, Mr. National Swim Coach, I don't think it is a good use of funds or Government funds to have a lifeguard on duty while your elite athletes in the swimming pool are going through, especially like the Honourable Member from consistency 12 who says that he was a top swimmer at one point. I don't think we need . . . we don't need lifeguards on duty as he comes and does his butterfly.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, you said freestyle. That's what you said it was. Freestyle. Okay, so we do not need lifeguards for those. So, we have dialled it back a bit when the Honourable Minister from constituency 14 organises her constituency Back to School party up there. We will make sure . . . we definitely have lifeguards on duty to make sure that her constituents from the Cedar Park area are safe in that wonderful pool facility that we have. But, no, the lifeguards are not employed year-round.

Facilities regarding the programme, page B-238, under Sports Development and Sports Programmes. We spent a lot of time building the pool.

Absolutely and I want to just . . . I think that . . . I believe the Minister that was responsible for the pool was Minister Glenn Blakeney, I believe, under the Premiership of the Honourable Ewart Brown.

The Chairman: That is correct.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, I would like to recognise him for his foresight in building that pool. I think it was in advance of the NatWest or Island Games at some point. So, thank you for the vision that that former Progressive Labour Party Minister had to build this pool. And the time that we spent building it, I would say was time well spent.

How are we developing programmes in swimming and how are we developing athletes in the area? And I will tell you this, there has been some talk at . . . way back that, you know, is this pool worth it? That's what they have asked. They have asked, Is this pool worth it? And I will tell you that discussions—not in this place but at other place—with swimmers, the national swim coach, a former Olympic diver. They can tell you that the investment that we continue to make in this pool is proving dividends.

I don't think you can recall the last time that there was the Olympic Games that did not have a swimmer from Bermuda in it. You have to go back a very long time. And that brings me to one of the amazing features that the NSC does have and that is an Olympic memorial—not a memorial, not a memorial . . . Olympic—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —Statue, commemorative plaque there where all Olympians that have ever participated in Bermuda are there. And on that we have Ms. Katura Horton-Perinchief, who conducts an annual dive camp to identify and develop young divers. West Pembroke School, which we know is in the constituency of our Premier, has an annual Make a Splash programme designed to teach all students the fundamentals and proper techniques of swimming as well as general water safety. There are also a number of swim schools and individuals, people who swim for fitness.

There are other aquatic activities which include water aerobics and water polo. So that's one thing that I want to do. I want to grow the sport of water polo in Bermuda. And I did have the opportunity while I was visiting the swimmers in Paris last year. I had the opportunity to go to some water polo events. And I can tell you just the competitiveness that not only happens above the water, as you are passing the ball, but the real athletic ability happens below the surface of the water as to how they are jockeying for position in this water polo.

That is something that I'm going to look to see if I can do. And I'll call on the Honourable Member who represents constituency 7 where that club, also known

as Cleveland and Harrington Workmen's Club, resides [to see] if she would go to the membership and maybe talk to the vice president and anybody on the membership committee to see if Cleveland County might actually put in a water polo team. Maybe Devonshire Rec. And maybe North Village, the champions. Minister Haywood, maybe the champions. Maybe Western Stars, as they're waiting to get their field built. Maybe they will say, *You know what? Let's try water polo.* But these are some examples of some of the increased—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The increased sport. You know, I'm sure that many of those pools out in the Fairylands area have some water polo specialists as well. And we would love to have them come up to the National Sports Centre and use the facilities that we are investing in to grow other sports that many Bermudians may not know and have too much knowledge about.

A question was asked about the Sports Conference. Mention was made under objectives, as far as digital signage, and when and where can we expect to see these signs come into fruition? The Sports Expo will happen in September of 2025, and more information will come. I encourage everyone to watch this space www.sportsandrec.bm—that is sports with an “s”—and the digital signage will first start on the Government Islands and we are in the infant stages of this project. But I'm sure that the Shadow Minister responsible for Culture will have his eyes peeled on these digital innovations that are going to come very shortly.

There was a question . . . what's that?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes. Permission, permission. Yes, I have to make sure I go through the Minister of Innovation.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And the question on page B-242.

It was mentioned that there's an increase in camping, which is now close to 6,000 and reaching capacity. Is there any potential avenue for growth that we can look at next? Maybe an empty venue that we could consider for camping, the camping that we are considering are on our Government Islands. I believe that the camping permits for beaches and parks will fall under a different Ministry and that is the . . . I think that comes under the Minister responsible for Parks and Environment. So, we are specifically talking about camps on islands, and I don't think there's many spaces because those camping spots fill up very quickly, just like our Summer Day Camp Programme—when registration opens, I think for this one it was 1 April.

I inevitably always get emails and calls and texts asking, *Minister, what can you do? My family is*

looking to camp over Cup Match. And I can tell you . . . it is a foreign concept to me because at Cup Match, there's only one place I go and that's to the game to watch cricket. But there are individuals who have been camping on these islands for Cup Match as long as they can remember. So, we have limited space on our Islands, and we do the best we can to not only upgrade those facilities but to accommodate all campers and all families as they request.

Page B-237, there was a question about our mission statement with an increased participation in sports. We also have equitable access while private programmes have expanded to be less cost prohibitive. Does the Ministry have plans or thoughts or an inclination to support a programme like the White's Island sailing programme? As I did say I had a short stint in the sailing programme. I wasn't very good. They used to stick me on the side of the boat and tell me hold the rope. I didn't really have much of a . . . much of a role, you know, Honourable Member from the other side.

But this programme was taken over by the private sailing clubs many years ago as they have the means, the instructors and the vessels, to carry on the sailing programmes. Maybe in the near future there will be a partnership with the sailing programmes. But I mean if anybody's looking to see my skills as soon as Whitney gets that boat done, I'll be down at the Flatts area to sail the fitted dinghy that comes out of the apprenticeship programme.

But with that said, Mr. Chairman, I have gone through every single question that was asked by the Shadow Minister of Sport. And now I will turn my attention in the time that I have remaining to go through the questions that were asked by the Shadow Minister with responsibility for Culture.

The Chairman: And that would be 25 minutes. You have 25 minutes remaining as this will end at eight o'clock.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Chairman, thank you. And I will make sure that I get through these questions. By the looks of it, it looks like I will get through it in about 24-and-a-half minutes.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, I would just like to just go through it and go through the questions so that the public get the detailed answers [to the questions] asked by the Shadow Minister and his colleagues.

So, the department objective, the first one was on page B-258, and it was a suggestion to add creative industry so that people can make a living off their creative contributions. How are we cultivating the next generation of creatives? And I would say this question does make me smile because I do recognise that as one of the younger Members of this place the Honourable

Shadow Minister is very much engaged in creative. I think that he would consider himself a creative, I believe.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, you know I am happy to give the details of these.

While the budget may not label a single line item as "Building a Creative Industry," the funding is absolutely there. It is being currently used strategically. This year we increased the Grants and Contributions by 36 per cent, which is no small feat in these times, Mr. Chairman, allowing us to fund more creatives across a variety of disciplines.

We have expanded the Cultural Apprenticeship programme to support hands-on training in areas that may be at risk of being lost. That also has the opportunity to employ our future employment opportunities. And in 2024/25 it looked like two different traditional Bermudian masonry approaches and scientific research.

Going along with that, with the answer to the question, the MakerSpace is functioning. And it is a functioning creative hub. It is used for workshops. It is used for preparation to shows. It is used to film productions. It is used for rehearsals and if the Shadow Minister, with responsibility for Culture has not gotten up to MakerSpace, I would encourage him to go up. Have a look. Just make an appointment, I guess with the Acting Director of Culture and go up and have a look at what is up there.

Just recently one of my constituents who goes by the name of Wayne Raynor, also stage name "Fire Rain," has put some videos online of him actually using the MakerSpace for various rehearsals. So, creatives across disciplines use this resource to build. They use it to collaborate, and they use it to earn money in this creative field. This approach may not be flashy. I know everybody would have liked for us to get a brand-new building and kit it out and fit it out with all the newest and fancy creative innovations, but it works and it is working.

We are actively funding artists. We are actively supporting the infrastructure. We are actively investing in programmes that make the arts a viable path, not just a passion, but a path for all Bermudians. And, Mr. Chairman, I would say that that is service at its finest.

So, the next question, will we be seeing a more concerted effort to weave creatives into the Bermuda tourism product through marketing and advertising? And I'm glad that question was asked, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, the Department of Culture is reintroducing, as I said in the brief, the Rendezvous Gombey plans, as it was detailed in the budget brief. And that is specifically geared towards visitors. Right? Because right about now we know that Harbour Nights is happening and that is one opportunity for our visitors, for the most part, to see our Gombey's performing. But if

they are unable to get down to Harbour Nights, if they are indulging in some of the wonderful restaurants that we have for our tourists, you will see that they may not have the opportunity to see a Gombey performance.

They may not have the opportunity to get to the 24 May parade or the Heritage Day parade on Friday where we have nine local Gombey troupes performing. They may not have the opportunity to get to the Gombey Festival, which we have at the Botanical Gardens that brings hundreds and hundreds of people out to engage in this. So that is why we have put this Gombey Rendezvous in place. It will definitely align with the Bermuda tourism product and this programme is being shared with the Bermuda Tourism Authority. It's being shared with our hotel partners at the Bermuda Hotel Association and visitors are all very welcome.

The Department of Culture Works with the BTA often. There's this narrative that the Government does not work with the BTA. But here we have it. An example of how the Department of Culture works regularly with the Bermuda Tourism Authority, and we recommend Bermudians for their advertising and for their promotions.

When it comes to animation. Where is the support level? How does the department intend to implement support into those objectives? The department had a film (as I did mention) in the Gold Bermudian series on Michael Frith and by a very, very talented animator, Mr. Kyle Simmons. There is a well-equipped computer in the department's MakerSpace there at CedarBridge and we are eager to have any aspiring animators come to us and use the facilities.

You can reach out to the Department of Culture at www.culture.bm because . . . animators are also welcome to apply to the Bermuda Arts Council for funding for any project that they would like to have. So, I thank the Shadow Minister responsible for Culture for raising that and helping me to highlight the great things that we are doing and the potential that we have in the area of animation.

It was mentioned that a tradition-bearer programme was coming back in 62030, Cultural Education. The Shadow Minister has asked me to provide clarity on how one becomes a tradition-bearer and what are the requirements? What are the criteria? The Department of Culture works with a range of community advisors, educators, cultural stakeholders to identify tradition-bearers. While there isn't a formal application process, individuals are typically selected based on their recognised expertise, their cultural knowledge and ability to teach or demonstrate traditional practices. The focus is on those who are actively engaged and preserving and sharing aspects of Bermuda's heritage.

So, what that means is, you know, there are many people who will sit down around Cup Match or a parade and you may have an uncle who will tell you how great he was as a carpenter. Who will tell you how great he was as a mason, but he may not be, you know, actively engaging in the trade. And although we

appreciate and we recognise the contributions of all Bermudians, when we want to put these tradition-bears in schools, we want someone who is still working in the trades and has the modern and local knowledge so that our students can get the best tradition-bearer experience possible.

Can you give a sneak peek on the fancy floats regarding this year's theme? Well, I don't know. I'm getting pretty good. I can tell you where most people sit off at the parade, but I do not know where the Honourable Shadow Minister does watch the parade with his family. But I will say this. I'm sure that he will be at the parade. And it is designed by a Bermudian artisan, Mr. Ian Tucker, who is born and raised in Bermuda. Ian studied at the Ontario College of Art and Design and went on to build a decades long career in animation, film and immersive digital experiences.

Although this Bermudian is based in Toronto, he remains deeply connected to the Island and continues to find ways to contribute creatively to Bermuda, including coming home to build the Department of Culture's float for the parade. Our team is going to have a look at it, as soon as the debate finishes. I will tell you this. They were more than happy to put down their parade preparations to make sure that you got the answers that you needed for this cultural debate. They may have liked a different day, but they were more than happy to serve the community and giving the answers to this. But right after I finish and I think I have, what 14 minutes? So right after that, Mr. Chairman, they will go. They will check out this parade and I'll make sure that someone from the department gets a picture when it is done.

But at this time, I do want to take a moment to thank all the parade participants who have spent late nights from February—late nights putting the finishing touches on their floats this week. Costumes, regalia. I talked to someone, Mr. Chairman, a leader of a particular majorette group—and I will not name them—but they told me that there are appointments as early as 5:30 am to get their makeup done so that they can come out on Front Street and perform for us.

So, I would just like to say, as we are debating Culture, that there are some individuals who may not appreciate the work that goes into preparing for the Bermuda Day parade. And while the gaps in the parade may be 15 minutes, they may be 5 minutes. They may be 20 minutes. I want everyone this year to remember the preparation that our creatives have put in their regalia, their floats, their costumes. Because just as we are excited to see this float and just like the Shadow Minister is excited to see the Department of Culture's new digital float, these participants—60-plus, Mr. Chairman, are excited for Friday and excited to share what they have been working on for many months.

There was a mention of a Cultural AGM. Can we hear some information of what are some of the things that the cultural stakeholders throughout the department will do, what we do well or do not do well to

support them and the work that they do? Based on the feedback received during the Cultural AGM, we are doing certain things well. And I will tell you what they are. The Department of Culture has gotten feedback that we have great visibility during Heritage Month. We are celebrating local artists in multidisciplinary fields. We are providing inclusivity. We are promoting cultural heritage through lectures. And the things that we can improve on, like was mentioned in this debate, we can improve on funding. We can improve on areas of cultural initiatives. We can improve on creatives focused on their job board, creative-focused job board. And we can do a little bit more in full opportunities. But I would say to the Shadow Minister responsible for Culture to watch this space because there will be some movement in the area, finally of a films commission. So please watch this space.

Has the Minister or department ever considered a film studio to cultivate the film industry in Bermuda? I will tell you this: recently Hustlerz Entertainment filmed some of their shows in the MakerSpace for an upcoming film production, with an original twist on a Bermudian storyline. They gave fantastic feedback on the versatility of the MakerSpace and how grateful they were for having a free creative space for them to work in. And I will tell you it's this type of feedback, Mr. Chairman, of why the Department of Culture are happy to serve the people that they do in this space.

The department's current focus is building on foundational support through funding, creative space access through MakerSpace and initiatives such as the mentioned Gold Bermudians film series. And this will continue to grow local capacity first before we pass that over to what's to come of the eventual film commission. And I think that there are some very eager creators ready to get that up and going with the support of Government and other entities.

There was a question regarding 799 Culture and Entertainment Support. People mentioned that training on their craft can be expensive. Absolutely. Is there anything included in that line item regarding affordable training or courses that can be offered to local artists for their development? And just like we talk about the long-term athletic sports development which we talked about a little earlier, the Bermuda Arts Council again led by the amazing Shanna Hollis offers semi-annual education and experience grants that awards \$2,000 for workshops, certificate programmes, residency fees and travel costs associated with achieving these goals. All Arts Council opportunities are available at www.artsCouncil.bm. The Department of Culture also offers creative culture labs, professional development series throughout the year.

They asked for a breakdown on 6881, a breakdown of what these cultural activities were under this line item. The contributions under object code 6881 support a range of culture activities that align with the department's mandate to promote Bermuda's heritage and creative sector. To illustrate this in 2024/25 these

included sponsorship of public lectures, such as the Masked Freedom Gombey Emancipation event with Doctor Chapman, which I mentioned in the brief, support of heritage events like Heritage Month, Yoga, Cup Match films, the Chewstick Open Mic, Bermuda Day fun, support of Gombey troupes. These activities all varied in scale but were selected for their cultural value, accessibility to the public and alignment with the department's policy goals.

On page B-259—National Cultural Policy was mentioned. Can you give details? In May 2021, the Department of Culture officially launched the National Cultural Heritage Policy for Bermuda. So that's the policy of which I was speaking of. It is not one to come. It is one that we've had for four years now. The overarching goal of this policy—the overall goal of this policy is to inspire national pride and to support the deepening of our shared identity. The policy also aims to ensure that Bermuda culture is embedded in every level of everyday life.

You can view it at www.culture.bm and there are six primary goals for this National Cultural Heritage policy. They are to promote culture and develop our creatives, to preserve and protect our cultural heritage. And I will tell you, Mr. Chairman, when I was an educator there was a course, and I think Minister Alexa Lightbourne may have been one of the first to do it, and it was called Preserving Our Heritage. I do not know if she was a part of that, but as a former Miss Teen Bermuda, I am sure that that course was beneficial. As she wore her crown. But that was the second one. Also to include culture in our national development plans, to establish cultural connections, to assist in cultural administration and to implement and review the policy.

Mr. Chairman, as I have gone through those, I would just like to point out that the Department of Culture are so excited, Mr. Chairman, to have Head 52 fully debated and discussed, because the work that they do, while it may not be something that everyone is interested in—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —and something that everyone is a part of . . . well there's a lot happening in here tonight, Mr. Chairman.

I see pictures. I see jerseys, man. A lot happening. But it must be that time of the month, Mr. Chairman. It must be Heritage Month in Bermuda. And I would like to take this opportunity, Mr. Chairman, as I have been doing so over the last couple of days to remind our Bermudians that our culture and our heritage is very unique. And a part of that (as we are debating in the other head) includes our sporting culture and our sporting heritage. And it is very important.

One thing that I did notice and this kind of ties to both, Mr. Chairman, is that a couple of months ago, when a team that is very, very close to the constituents of the area I represent and a team that Minister

Haywood has very close ties to. I think his family members play on that team as he used to play and be on the executive. But I say that to say this: that in 2025, Mr. Chairman, when the North Village community or the North Village Community Club won the Premier League, and they also went on to win the FA Cup title.

As we are debating culture and we are debating sport, I would like to point out that there were North Village legends that were at that field, Mr. Chairman. And the club took the time to recognise those sporting legends because in this particular instance—and it's not just the North Village Community Club that originally came from constituency 15, Pembroke East. But it is those clubs and clubs throughout Bermuda that recognised that the sporting history and the sporting legacy that comes through their clubs and permeates through communities like the Harris's Bay and like Bailey's Bay and like St. David's and others, is a major part of Bermuda's culture.

And I would go so far to say that as we sit on the sidelines and see our cultural parade on Friday, that there will be examples of creatives who have been part of this parade. There will be sporting organisations and the like. And it is important for us as Bermudians to make sure that we keep these traditions alive.

One of the first things that someone took a shot at me on, I think it was Twitter. Somebody took a shot at me years ago that they said—

An Hon. Member: *Who are you?*

Hon. Owen Darrell: They said, *Minister Darrell, what does he know about cultural traditions like sport? What does he know about making kites? What does he know about Gombey's?* And I was happy at the time to, as they say, "share my credentials" in these areas, through that wonderful app. And this just goes to show—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, no, no, no. It was not. It was not. Sorry. Yes, be sure . . . it was not the Shadow Minister responsible for Culture.

But I say that to say that it is important for all Bermudians to make sure that they recognise, honour and know their traditions. I make a kite every year, Mr. Chairman. Whether I fly it, that might be a different story. But I make one every year to make sure that these traditions are held alive.

So Mr. Chairman, with that said, I hope that the answers that have been provided through the technical officers—and I would just like to recognise my Permanent Secretary, Mr. Shivon Washington, the Financial Controller Mr. Mannard Packwood and others who are not here. The first female director of Sport, Ms. K. Charryse Bean. I would like to also recognise her technical officers, the Acting Director of Culture Ms. Carlita Lodge, who everyone will see on Friday. Also, I have to

recognise, as she did depart in this fiscal year, the former Director of Culture Dr. Kim Dismont-Robinson, I'd like to acknowledge her as well.

So, with that said, Mr. Chairman. We are pleased to give these responses on Heads 52 and Head . . .

The Chairman: [Heads] 71 and 20.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister, would you like to move your heads?

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

Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 20 and 52 be approved as printed.

And, Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee rise and report progress and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: Are there any objections?

No objections.

So approved.

[Gavel]

[Motions carried: The Ministry of Culture and Sport, Heads 20 and 52 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26; and the Committee of Supply rose and reported progress and asked for leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 8:00 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Deputy Speaker: Members, it has been moved that the Committee rose and reported progress and sought leave to sit again. And it is reported that that was approved.

Any objections? There being none, we shall move on.

Members, I understand that there is only one item that we are doing today and that is a motion that is being led by the Minister of the Cabinet Office.

Minister, you may now take the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Hello, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening.

MOTION

CITY OF HAMILTON PLAN 2025

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House now take under consideration the following motion, notice which was given on the 14th of May 2025:

BE IT RESOLVED that this Honourable House approves the City of Hamilton Plan 2025, pursuant to the provisions of section 11 of the Development and Planning Act 1974.

The Deputy Speaker: Members, it has been moved that this House take into consideration the City of Hamilton Plan 2025 motion.

Are there any objections to that?

There being none, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, we stand at a critical junction for Bermuda's capital city.

Today, I rise to speak not merely about a document of policies and maps, but about a vision; a new framework to guide the growth and identity of the City of Hamilton through the [City of Hamilton Plan 2025](#). This plan represents a departure from the outdated prescriptive planning policies and propels us boldly into a more sustainable, adaptable, and human-centred approach of urban development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, what we present to this House is the result of years of consultation, research, and careful deliberation. It has been shaped by the voices of stakeholders, guided by the expertise of planning professionals, and inspired by the successful global models tailored to Bermuda's unique context.

Madam Deputy Speaker, one of the most frequently asked questions I have received throughout this process has been, *What is the maximum height a building can be under this new plan?* Let me be clear. There is no fixed numerical height limit within the City of Hamilton Plan 2025.

An Hon. Member: Aah.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Deputy Speaker, we have moved away from the rigid, prescriptive model that imposed a cap of 138 feet OD, an approach historically tied to retaining a coordinated approach to sensitively managing building heights across the city thereby preserving the Cathedral's visual dominance. That approach may have served an architectural function in the past, but, in practice, it has often stifled investment, innovation, and urban vitality. Instead, this plan introduces a responsive, discretion-based framework. Height will be assessed based on location, design quality, context, and the proposal's overall contribution to the city. Proposals for tall buildings, whether 15-, 20-, or even 30-stories, will not automatically be rejected,

nor will they be rubber-stamped. They must earn their height.

Madam Deputy Speaker, each project must demonstrate that it enhances the skyline, protects key views, improves the public realm, and integrates with its surroundings. It must also be assessed by submitting a visual impact assessment, be sustainable, and demonstrate public value. This approach is not unique to this plan. We have already successfully adopted the North East Hamilton Local Plan 2022. That plan, debated and approved in this House, has approved that discretion-based planning allows for quality urban regeneration without sacrificing character or coherence.

Madam Deputy Speaker, however, the significance of the City of Hamilton plan extends far beyond building heights. This plan reflects a profound strategic thinking of how a modern capital city should function. The former 2015 plan, while valuable in its time, was based on conventional, rigid zoning approaches that separated uses, fixed parameters, and often resulted in delays, appeals, and frustration among investors and developers.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in contrast, the 2025 plan embraces placemaking as its guiding principle. It prioritises how people experience the city over rigid design parameters. This means developments will be evaluated on how they contribute to a vibrant, walkable, safe, and welcoming environment, not merely whether they tick a box on a list. The aim is to create a city that people live in, not just work in. A city where housing is accessible, culture and commerce coexist, open spaces invite community life, and streets feel alive after 5:00 pm.

Madam Deputy Speaker, another transformative element of this plan is its integration of climate change considerations into core planning policies. Sustainability is no longer an afterthought. It is embedded from the outset. The plan encourages energy efficiency, use of renewable energy, sustainable drainage solutions, climate resilient materials, and design. This is particularly vital given Bermuda's vulnerability to hurricanes, rising temperatures, and ageing infrastructure. We must plan for the city we need in 2050, not the city we inherited from 1950.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this plan also adopts principle-based zoning systems. Instead of an arbitrary distinction between zones that limit innovation, the plan outlines broad land use districts and allows for more flexibility. This gives planners the tools to make judgments based on merit, impact, and alignment with the plan's objectives. This reform will lead to fewer unnecessary planning appeals, shorter decision timelines, greater scope for investment opportunities, and more agile and responsive system of urban development.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I must also address the economic rationale. The City of Hamilton has encountered significant challenges in recent years. Office space vacancies are high. The demand for traditional retail has declined, reflecting global trends. E-

commerce and evolving work patterns mean the city must reinvent itself; not merely survive but thrive. The 2025 plan facilitates this reinvention. It permits mixed-use development, promotes cultural and creative industries, introduces new housing options to intercity, and encourages greater integration of technology, green space, and inclusive design.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the pedestrian experience is paramount. While parking is necessary to support the functionality of the city, the plan (under the banner of placemaking) seeks to prioritise pedestrian moving over vehicular movement. This approach aims to restore the balance towards walkability, accessibility, and quality public spaces. The city that is appealing to pedestrians is appealing to people, and people are the lifeblood of economic revitalisation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this is not simply about buildings. This concerns a vision for Bermuda's capital that we can take pride in, a city that fulfils the needs of today with aspirations of tomorrow; a city that encourages residents to live downtown; a city where tourists discover it's not just a business district, but a vibrant urban experience. A city that embraces height, yes, but also humanity.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I urge all Honourable Members to support the City of Hamilton Plan 2025. It is bold, flexible, and forward-looking. It represents our heritage while preparing for our future. Let us not tether Hamilton's potential to the constraints of the past. Let us elevate our sights, both literally and figuratively. Let us approve this plan, and with it, affirm our commitment to a capital city that serves everyone.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion? I recognise the Member from constituency 10.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

We on this side of the aisle definitely support this initiative to revitalise the city, given its current state and what it can become. Absolutely, we are in full support. Creating a city that's innovative, where commerce supports the community, 100 per cent.

We are also mindful of the fact that we have an opportunity to basically become the benchmark that other jurisdictions will follow. So, if we do this correctly, this can have a profound and lasting effect, basically a legacy project. I am also reminded of the fact that in the city, in its current form, there are a few problems that need to be addressed that I'm sure the City of Hamilton Plan has considered.

Absolutely, when you are considering pedestrianising the city, there's going to be a reliance on parking, and then we have to collect the parking to the city. Perhaps consideration is being given to a renewable electric vehicle shuttle service to get persons from the

outskirts into the city itself—similar to what you would have in other jurisdictions as a hop-on hop-off, which will take you to the points of interest, historical and otherwise.

I am also hopeful that in the City of Hamilton Plan there will be a city centre, a community centre, something where the youth can go to get the support that they need, where it's safe, homework support and families can be nurtured.

I am also hopeful as well that the issues that currently exist in terms of loitering and aggressive behaviour and panhandling that currently exists will be addressed in a strategic and meaningful way. And also, in the process of developing and designing the city, that there will be an opportunity for young persons to receive scholarships and perhaps apprenticeship opportunities as part of the design process. I would also hope that as part of the city plan that Sessions House—where this Honourable House is meant to sit—will be considered an area of priority to be repaired so that we can take our rightful place and run this country.

Those are essentially my submissions. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Member from constituency 17. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good evening, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise on my feet today pleased to support the City [of Hamilton] Plan 2025. As the Minister responsible for Economy and Labour, governing or presiding over a Ministry which is responsible for economic growth, economic development, and the expansion of jobs, the city is a vital economic hub to Bermuda's sustainability.

I think what you will find in this plan, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that this plan is transformative. It is focused on the future, it is focused on change, and it's focused on ensuring that it is inclusive of residents, visitors, and workers. It ensures that we have the infrastructure in place to have a sound economic hub. It is poised to ensure that we remain a bustling, sophisticated, blue-chip business jurisdiction.

Our city is safe, our city is clean, but our city is in need of modernisation. And this plan allows for a platform to modernise, to move forward, to embrace the past but understand that we are progressing into the future. There are some areas of this plan that intersect directly with the policy initiatives set out in the Ministry of Economy and Labour.

One of which is the work we're doing around entrepreneurship. It is no doubt that the City of Hamilton is a retail core. And in order for our entrepreneurs and business community to thrive, they need the appropriate commercial space to operate. And this plan

embraces that. This plan ensures that we have areas dedicated for retail and commercial activities. I appreciate the way in which the plan looks at mixed-use areas—not just mixed-use sites, but mixed-use areas within the plan. Because the plan embraces two things. One, that we want to encourage more residential development in the city, but we can't lose our commercial and retail footprint within the city as well.

And so, this plan works hand in hand to achieve those two items. And I think the plan appropriately calls them mixed-use districts. And you will find set out in the plan the level of development that can take place in each portion of the city, creating unique communities or subcities within a city.

I am generally interested in the plans for North East Hamilton. While we do have a Minister responsible for our Municipalities, I am the Minister responsible for Economic Empowerment Zones. And we do have a carve out within the city of two Economic Empowerment Zones now. One would be the South East Hamilton Economic Empowerment Zone, and one would be the North East Hamilton Economic Empowerment Zone.

While this plan did not envision that the Ministry of Economy and Labour would move at the speed of light in terms of creating a South East Hamilton Economic Empowerment Zone, it certainly embraces our historic North East Hamilton Economic Empowerment Zone. And so, what the team underneath the Cabinet Office have actually done is they have ensured that the City of Hamilton Plan coincides with the North East Hamilton Local Plan that was developed in 2022.

And so, the plan complements the plan that has already been established to create our economic bustling hub in North East Hamilton. I like how the general principle of this plan is to ensure that we create greater levels of economic activity and growth within the local community within North East Hamilton. And so, I'm pleased that planning permission for developments within North East Hamilton will be in alignment with the North East Hamilton Local Plan.

Many may or may not know that we have an Urban Development Agency. The Urban Development Agency's primary responsibility is to facilitate investment in North East Hamilton. You know that we have what we consider to be approved residential schemes. And the Urban Development Agency facilitates these approved residential schemes. But those schemes have to be in alignment with the North East Hamilton Local Plan. While two separate documents, I'm pleased with the merger because oftentimes we call things apples and oranges. With not understanding that we can put the two together and make a fruit salad.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: So, they do not work in isolation, and it is complementary.

But the aim also is to look at specific areas in our city that are poised for economic revitalisation. Embrace that more can be done and have a future focused approach to how development happens in those particular areas.

The other area of critical focus that this plan touches on is increasing the residential population in the City of Hamilton. The housing capacity is a major impediment to economic growth and development within Bermuda currently. And we believe that the city has the potential to unlock and expand our housing inventory. We are encouraging residential development in the City of Hamilton. And so, we have also a scheme called the approved residential Hamilton scheme which looks to encourage development in the City of Hamilton.

We want to ensure that the city is a vibrant city where persons can work, live and play. We want to ensure that our city transcends beyond some of the dormancy that you find after 5:00 pm in the evening. And that there can be more activities carried out in the city.

We want to increase the residential population of the city. We believe that more people living in the city closer to where they work cuts down on traffic congestion. It also allows the country to realign itself as it pertains to freeing up housing inventory outside of the city proper. I believe this plan recognises that there is great potential for the city.

I'm pleased with what the Minister has articulated in terms of building heights. Often that has been a restriction for developers as it pertains to them getting the return from developing. It's very expensive to build in the city. And so, they want to ensure that they can have a building size that can allow them to get the return on their investment. And as a result of that, I'm glad that the Minister indicated that there will be a greater level of flexibility as it pertains to developing in the city.

I like how the policy objectives are written. They are not written in a concrete fashion. They are written in a fashion that is flexible, which allows the City Plan to remain a living, breathing document that is extremely flexible for us to work around.

I believe the city calls the specific areas and regions within the city "districts." And that would allow for there to be layers of focused activity from an economic development standpoint and a development standpoint within the city proper so we can focus on different priorities in different areas. For some areas we will require additional commercial real estate, and we will welcome greater levels of commercial development.

I like the whole process of looking to see whether or not we can turn some areas within the city to pedestrian areas. Maybe even have greater levels of vendors in the city, not just at Harbour Nights. We see the vendor potential being unlocked on Harbour Nights and when special events are held in Bermuda. But imagine if we can have city districts that have vendor space built within those districts that allows for greater

levels of economic activity for our small- and medium-sized businesses.

The Ministry of Economy and Labour will be engaged in a process of building a national entrepreneurship strategy. Part of that is ensuring that we have an entrepreneurial ecosystem that allows businesses to grow, develop and thrive. The city plays and will play a critical part of that plan.

And so you can see where the city is poised to be the foundation or the cornerstone for whether it be housing plans, whether it be economic empowerment zone plans, whether it be national entrepreneurship strategy and increasing the level of entrepreneurs in the city, whether it be to alleviate some of our pressures on our housing market, this city is vital. And in order for us to operate in alignment and on the same page and not have persons complain about restriction, the plan for the city is appropriate as to lay the foundation to unlock greater levels of success in the future.

I am of the notion that the approach that is taken regarding mixed-use developments is the best approach for any economic hub. I think that we do not want the city saturated with one type of building. We do not want the city saturated with just residential buildings. I think that there needs to be an appropriate mix, and I think that this plan looks at what that appropriate mix is. To the extent that the plan also has minimum standards as it pertains to floor sizes, when we are talking about building in the city as well. What we do not want to see is dormitory-style developments within the city that does not meet the mark of the type of city that we have.

Bermuda is a blue-chip business jurisdiction as I mentioned earlier. And all that we do, whether it's our regulatory environment, whether it's our legal framework, whether it's the planning requirements within the city, all need to be in alignment with that standard. And so, we do see now a shift as it pertains to commercial developments on Front Street and we see that the building that's going up now looks a little bit different. But what it does is embrace a future Bermuda. It's also embracing the reality that we have an expanding business sector that is looking for premium spaces to rent out as well. What was premium years ago is no longer premium now. And so, we are setting a new standard of what that is. And this plan allows for more development in the City of Hamilton that actually complements who we are from a Bermuda-brand standpoint.

It has a good mix of preservation and forward-thinking approaches. And so, when speaking to the Minister when this plan came forward, there was a high level of consultation. There are some areas where we can say there certainly needs to be improvement. Like it continues to baffle me why we would have parking on our waterfront. When that can be—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Hold on, hold on—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Well, we did have a waterfront plan and then—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: So, hold on.

But it tells you that we can unlock opportunity and we can find places to ensure that persons who commute to work in the city via private transportation have areas in which they can store their vehicles while we can maximise capacity on the waterfront as well.

And so those are my comments, Madam Deputy Speaker. I thank the Minister and his team for the thoughtful development of the plan. I know there was widespread consultation. I know that members of the Government engaged in that consultation. The feedback was taken on and changes were reflected in the final document.

So, kudos to the team. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise . . . okay, I recognise the Member from constituency 20.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I suppose the Minister for Municipalities wants to go second.

The Deputy Speaker: Is your microphone on? Is your microphone on, Member?

Hon. Michael Fahy: It is. Is that better?

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you for bringing this to the House. I know that the Department of Planning has been anxious to get this put into place.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I attended a very good conference last week, put on by the Urban Development Authority. And I know a number of Ministers were there as well throughout the course of the day. And there were a number of interesting statistics that came out of that conference. I am just going to . . . these are the ones that I wrote down quickly as they went. And that is the cost of building can be anywhere between \$400 and \$2,500 a square foot. That was from a developer who was there, as someone who is in the construction industry. If my numbers that I heard are way off, I am sure the others in this House who are

engaged in construction can say differently. But that is obviously a large sum. We keep that in mind when we think about development. And in the City of Hamilton that may very well be higher, I do not know.

As well we heard a number of different figures throughout the course of the day based on assessments of houses that are on the land valuation registry. Other data that people have in different areas from the Chamber of Commerce have pulled down from various sources to say that we need about 2,500 units in Bermuda to start ensuring that we have adequate housing. And, of course, we also have the Home survey that said there are about 1,100 people facing homelessness in Bermuda.

Those are sobering numbers and as has been pointed out by a number of speakers already, this plan does make reference to the necessity for residential building in the City of Hamilton. Now that is something all of us can support. I wrote about it a number of years ago saying how important it is to have residential developments in the City of Hamilton and make the city a vibrant place to be. I think there's never going to be a disagreement on that.

But this plan does lay out a number of things that developers, whether it's housing, residential . . . sorry, retail or international business or other types need to be considering. And one of them is pedestrianisation. But a lot of them are different reports that need to be put forward.

And with that said, one of the statistics that was said by the Director of Planning at the conference from last week was that 60 [per cent] to 75 per cent of planning applications are deficient. And she encouraged developers to engage in a pre-consultation process before even purchasing property. And that is going to become all the more important when you look at the City of Hamilton Plan. Because there are a number of reports that are required for development in the City of Hamilton. And if 60 [per cent] to 75 per cent of planning applications are deficient, do not blame the Department of Planning. In other words, if you are not getting your applications in the correct manner . . . so they were very clear about that. And I think the Minister will no doubt agree that it's important for those types of pre-consultations.

The other sobering statistic was that 90 per cent of building permits are incomplete. So again, if you engage in the proper pre-consultation and pay attention to these plans and actually spend the time to read them, maybe those putting in applications can get them correct. I just think those are important things to take note of.

Now, more substantive comments on the actual document itself. Just a few things and maybe the Minister can answer them when he does his wrap-up this evening. I am just going to take you to a few pages and refer to some notes that I had made on them.

One of the primary items in the City of Hamilton Plan is to create a pedestrian-friendly environment.

Again, we can all get on board with that. It's disappointing that in all the years that we have talked about pedestrianising the city, it has never really been done. I would encourage the City of Hamilton and . . . whatever the result is going forward and how that corporation is made-up, whomever is in the positions to make the decisions about pedestrianisation that they actually take this plan into consideration and really, really think hard about it.

There are any number of areas that can be pedestrianised. We have heard for years about lower parts of Reid Street to be pedestrianised. In fact, I wrote a couple of years ago to the Corporation to ask them to consider the part of Burnaby Street with a number of restaurants that are now on that street to be pedestrianised, as ideas to try and make the city more vibrant and encourage people to spend time in the city, if they feel safe that they can walk around.

The plan makes reference to any number of different cities. We have got Lancaster, California, we have seen in other instances . . . and if any of you spend any time looking into it, you will see that Spain has made massive investment in pedestrianising cities, and some are in fact almost fully pedestrianised. And again, the figures speak for themselves that it does actually encourage use in a city. It encourages people to move into a city centre. It encourages retail. It encourages cafes and restaurants. Because obviously people are happy to walk around in a safe environment.

So, if—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Barcelona—I hear an interjection. But absolutely, Barcelona has made a massive investment. There is a city in fact called Pontevedra. If you look that up, you will see as well that is a very big example of how to pedestrianise a city. And here we are . . . I heard the Minister of Labour and Economy make reference again to pedestrianisation. I agree. I cannot believe, notwithstanding comments about the waterfront and things like that, that at the very least, I cannot believe to this day that we do not just have a nice green pathway that goes along the front of Hamilton that actually brings vibrancy to the city.

To me, it must be a revenue issue. Maybe that is what it is. But this is a plan. It is not a must for the city to do. But the city has to lead by example. If we are going to be asking developers to follow the number of things that they have to consider, or that the Planning Board has to consider, I should say the Technical Officers, before they allow it to go to the [Planning] Board, the city needs to lead by example. And for that matter, so does the government.

And I think of the old police station building that is sitting there on the corner of Burnaby and Reid, as an empty lot, overgrown with trees and all the rest of it. That's—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Did I say—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Yes, you said Burnaby instead of Front.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Sorry, my mistake. I think we all know it—the old police station.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: We can all accept that. But if I have got my mind set, I mean, I can say that slowly because we have heard that a lot this week . . . the old police station building lot. Okay?

The Government should really think about at least taking down the hoardings and making open space pursuant to what this plan says. Lead by example . . . and then others can get on board with that.

I think that is very important. We cannot put plans forward and have nothing that is showing and demonstrating that throughout.

A few other points, Madam Deputy Speaker. When you look at . . . a lot of the recommendations that are in here, again rethinking the city, the community benefits, all amazing things. In a number of instances, what we see is the Planning Board may ask, for example, for a traffic assessment, as an example. Again, when you use the word *may* and then in other instances you use the word *shall* or *will*, it may lead to some confusion.

Again, I would encourage those who are in the development field to engage in that pre-consultation process so that they know exactly what is likely to be required before they go down that road of further development. If it is a *may* then, surely . . . and I assume the Department of Planning will say to those developers: *You are going to need a traffic impact statement in this particular development.* Do not ask for it later. These things need to be asked for upfront. And notwithstanding that it is a holistic approach to development, it is very important that the developers who are going to spend a significant sum understand fully the requirements.

In this plan as well, we see references to requirements for renewable energy. And we have had a debate on that already in the budget. But again, we need to tie requirements back to the integrated resources plan, which again is late. So, we have to have some good cross-referencing between the integrated resources plan and what it is that the city is requiring—keeping in mind the issue of redundancy for BELCO.

And I raise these issues because some of those issues are outstanding in terms of that overall plan for renewable energy and how we get ourselves off of using heavy fuel oil and light fuel oil at the BELCO

plant. Notwithstanding the desire to have good renewable energy in buildings.

A couple of other items . . . I was a little concerned . . . and again it is just thoughts and maybe the Minister can shed some light on it. There's a reference in the plan to minimum square footage for residential development. And I just query where the figures came from for that suggested minimum square footage.

The Minister of Labour and Economy made the point, with which I agree. Ideally, you do not just want dormitory-style residences in the city—275 square feet for a studio seems rather small to me. I was just looking at some numbers in Manhattan, which is a highly dense city with terribly tiny apartments. It is kind of on average about 350 square feet. So, I just wonder where the number came from. And it also actually says in here (and we have got to be careful), it says that number can be reduced under certain circumstances. That sounds to me like dormitories.

And I would suppose again that is as a result of the development that was at the old LPG building for the Princess Hotel, where they have dormitory-style housing there—for good economic reasons. I am not going to criticise that.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Talk to the Chair, please. Thank you.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I don't think it makes any difference. That was where it was originally. It is an old building. It's an old building.

But either way it is dormitory style housing. And I did not actually realise the extent of it (to be blunt) until I went to the Urban Development Conference where the architect laid out how that was designed, the purposing for it. And again, the reason that is of interest is if you want a vibrant city where people are participating and using the facilities, essentially, that housing is for the workers to go to and from the hotel where they eat, basically work all the time and they are not there at the dormitory full-time because they are coming in and then they are going back to where they have originally come from in the off-season. Store their things there and then disappear. That's not encouraging (in my opinion) a vibrant residential sector in the City of Hamilton, so we have to really be careful about those kinds of developments, I would say.

So again, I would urge the planners when they are accepting submissions to really think as to, yes, it might very well be good to have the numbers. But does it actually then fulfil the desires in this plan for true economic growth? I don't see it. I just . . . I park that there. Again, this plan is holistic enough that that can be worked around because it's not overly prescriptive. Which is, again, welcome.

In terms of the issue of building heights that the Minister made mention of in his opening remarks. I

mean that can only be applauded, in terms of what the plan is envisaging. Again, I make no bones about it. I have spoken of it, for a while before I came back into politics, saying we need to build higher. The message from the Government is, and we have heard it a few times now, that, yes, it's important to have more people on the Island, but there has to be housing for those people on the Island. So, it's a kind of a chicken-and-egg situation. You can have the housing, but people need to know what the plans are to encourage the housing to be built in the first place. When you are looking at \$400 a square foot, you need to know what you're doing. And then the question comes up from many people is: we don't have much of a land-mass. So it absolutely makes sense to build higher, without any doubt at all.

Again, the holistic approach that's envisaged within this plan certainly will allow for that to happen and for that, I applaud the Department of Planning for taking away some of those restrictions. Now whether we have a 50-storey building or not, that's for the Planning Department to make those determinations—and the Board. But let's also be clear what this does not do. So that no one is under any illusions, it doesn't circumvent the regular planning process.

Still, planning officers will make the submission space and everything that they receive all the pre-consultation process . . . they will pay attention to this plan. They will have the discussions and designs will be forthcoming. There are ideas in here for public art, pedestrianisation . . . there's things in here about possible work with the Corporation to improve public spaces if there's not enough communal space. Great ideas. Again, not overly prescriptive as suggestions.

But again, we have to make sure that we understand that at the end of the day, if the Board rejects the plans, it can be appealed and it is still ministerial discretion. And again, that's not a bad thing. But maybe it's dependent on who the Minister is of the day and sometimes those things are dangerous. One Minister may make a very different decision than another Minister. But there's a comprehensive plan here for the Minister, whoever that may be, over time, to look at these and also put consideration into it.

As well, just for the listening public to understand a little further, the Minister's determination would still be based upon an independent inspector's report, once an appeal is lodged for a building that may have been rejected by the Board. What is of interest here is that the Board . . . and again, the Minister made mention of it in his opening remarks. There's a lot more opportunity for the Board to say yes. Right? A lot of the problems that you see with buildings when people see they're rejected, they say, *how can that be rejected?* And then we blame the Board. And then you blame the planners when in fact, if the Planning Act says "X," the Board can't approve certain things. The Minister can. And that power shall be used in an appropriate way in all circumstances. I think that's useful to keep in mind as well, and notwithstanding what this plan says.

A few more points if I may. In relation to Consultations, page 27 (it is reading like a Budget Book) 4.6, paragraph 3.2.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: It lays out there in the consultation list the number of potential consultations that may have to happen. And it's a lengthy list. There are (what?) maybe seven or eight here of different government departments, historical building societies and the like.

We need to ensure that those timelines are kept tight because time is money with developers. And what you can't have is, we buy the property and say now we're going to develop it and now we're still waiting for a report from whomever it is on this list. They are the Advisory Architectural Panel, the Bermuda Arts Council might have to be consulted, I presume because there's wording in here that suggests that there may be a request of a developer to put in public art.

But again, who makes that decision? I presume it's the Bermuda Arts Council says [whether] that art is suitable or not. But again, one would hope that the Department of Planning is cognisant of timelines and says, *If you don't come back with us within 14 days, your opinion is not going to be taken on board.* Notwithstanding the desire to ensure broad consultation. But again, if it is too burdensome, it is too much bureaucracy, developers simply will not develop, they will not be interested in participating.

In relation to the issue of open space, I see in the policy that there's a desire to make sure, if possible, or . . . I think it's something that says there has to be private open space within residential developments. I think that's how it's couched. I'm sure the Minister can correct me if I'm incorrect. Seems burdensome. To a developer, these are lovely things sometimes, but again \$400 a square foot, with a bit of open space, I don't know. It may be a lovely thing to have, but again, are we asking too much? And I just flag that and place that there.

In relation to communal space, the plan does envisage that there can be consultation with the City and Planning to perhaps enhance existing public spaces through work with the developers.

Parking lots. It's a shame almost that we didn't get this out six or seven months ago to prevent the rise of some of the parking lots in Hamilton, where there are empty lots. I would submit that going forward what the City and what the Planning Department should be looking at is in the event that there is an empty lot (as I have made mention of the old police station building), that it becomes communal open space. At least on an interim basis.

If there is intended development, which may take a year or two years before the ground is broken, if you want a safe city and people feeling like they want to walk around—which is what this plan is envisaging—heavy residential use, people using the city, not parking

in Hamilton . . . then don't have any parking lots at all on these empty lots. And I think that's what this plan is envisaging. So that's a good thing. No more parking lots, I think, in the retail sector. But that should extend elsewhere as well.

Again, I think that's . . . I might not be totally accurate about the sections, but either way, it would be fantastic rather than leaving a lot empty, that it might be converted to some other space on an interim basis. Maintained by the City of Hamilton, if that's what it takes—to cut grass, whatever, just to make something aesthetically pleasing and fulfil the desire for open space in the city.

I just note on the plan as well . . . for those of you who did not look, if you look at the map of historic areas, it takes in quite a large area of . . . basically all of Front Street. Now the issue with historical designations is that it can lead to higher costs. And I put that there because of the level of consultation here with historical societies, others wish to opine and the number of listed buildings. I think, believe it or not in Bermuda on the list are 791 across the Island of listed historical buildings of various grades. And I think the number that I heard the other day is 61 of those are in the City of Hamilton.

And again, yes, we like to retain our building heritage. We like to retain Bermuda design and, correct, we do not want to just see a carbon copy building to building. But again, we have to be cognisant of the costs. Especially if we are going to build higher. And that remains my concern. If we are going to attract investors and attract the ability to build higher and have residential buildings, then sometimes there is a trade off in terms of cost. I put that there.

A couple of other points. I was very pleased to see a desire in the plan to see the end of the City Hall car park eventually. That's fantastic. We are just going to have to start getting used to walking, even in the heat. Notwithstanding my colleague's remarks, with which I agree, about the City of Hamilton taking on board this plan and putting in place some form of transportation to get people to and from the car park, some people may say it's only a few blocks. But we know in August, when it is at the height of heat, nobody really likes to walk that. It's a hard . . . it is a hot walk for people.

So again, this has to be led . . . it is not within the plan itself, but the City of Hamilton has to keep this in mind now, since I do not think they objected. They have obviously been heavily involved in the process. They have to put their money where their mouth is in respect of these things.

Let's see . . . if you bear with me for one moment.

Again, we have touched on the pedestrian zones.

Oh, a practical point. And it is essentially putting a ban, almost a ban, on roller shutters. And there would have to be very good reasons for that. Well, that

has to align with the guidance from the police. And it has to align with the guidance that we are getting from the security companies that say exactly the opposite. If you talk to your local parish constable, he is going to tell you, put your roller blinds on if you want to stop your windows getting bashed in. And if we really do not want to do that, we have to make sure that other agencies are aligned to say, look, that's not actually what we're looking at.

I think what the plan is envisaging is roller blinds and security blinds put on the *inside* of windows for all the obvious reasons. For anyone who goes away, and you see roller blinds, they instantly become covered in graffiti, and it becomes very unpleasant. It makes the place look like it's unwelcoming. So, no doubt that's the reason behind that potential plan.

In relation to parking . . . we have dealt with that.

And finally, yes. Is the ageing infrastructure within the City of Hamilton? And of course, with more residential developments anticipated, with further and higher buildings, the issue that you have is an ageing physical plant. Will it be able to keep up? And how much investment is the city going to have to make to fulfil this plan? When we are envisaging to make sure that wastewater is dealt with properly, the sewage issues that need to be dealt with, and we all know very well what happens if that is not handled in the correct manner.

If too much fat, oil and grease are put down the drains and those kinds of things from numerous restaurants, you end up with issues that I will not talk about at the moment, but we all know what an ageing physical plant means. So, there is going to be needed massive investment to get this off the ground in terms of that physical plant.

Overall, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, great, great work. I know the planners spent a good couple of years (at least) on this. And, again, let us lead by example and do the things that we can, or that the Government can do and the city can do to demonstrate effectiveness.

Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Deputy Premier and Member from constituency 29.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let us hope that tonight is a precursor for the rest of the years to come.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Because it was very good to see Members on the other side in full support of this plan.

But I will say, before I touch on some of the things that I want to touch on, that I am not in much disagreement with what the Shadow Minister of Housing and Municipalities had to say. I think a lot of the things he said make sense. And the good thing about it is that us, in this House, we have the power to change things—and change things quickly if we so desire. I am sure that as the Member said, there is a lot of work that has been put into this plan. But I would suspect that there are going to be many tweaks to come.

I would like to say to Minister Rabain, *You have made history tonight, Minister*. You should be proud of it. We have been talking about building up in this country for years. And, Madam Deputy Speaker, my first week as Minister of Housing and Municipalities, I met with the Housing Corporation, Bermuda Land Management Company and the Corporation of Hamilton, within that first seven days. And it is funny, because I said to all three of them that my task is to build housing in this country for our people. And I told each and every one of them that I want them to start thinking up, not out.

You would probably be aware, Madam Deputy Speaker, that in the country we have about 181 acres that is zoned residential 1, 2, or rural land—182 acres. So, we have space in this country to build out, but a lot of that space is not all government space. So, I can tell you that we have had serious conversations within the Ministry about how we are going to build housing in the country. And whilst this House has been informed of the plans that we have—and you will hear more about that on Monday, so I will not give too much away—I can tell you that everyone associated with my Ministry knows that I want to go up.

And it is not only in the city. You will know that . . . *You would know, Madam Deputy Speaker, there is a complex called Harbour View down at Southside. Only the first phase has been done. That is another task that I will put to our people. They said, Listen, pull out the plans, dust them off, and let's start doing some pricing* because that was a project that I think having not run on to the times that we did (and you can talk about COVID-19 and everything or the other challenges) . . . But I have already (and I will put it on public record) told the Premier *You want housing? I am going to need money*. Whether it is inside the city or outside the city, we are going to need money, and we need it quickly. So, everyone that I have talked to within my Ministry and within the quangos knows exactly where I am heading.

The good thing [about] this plan is now we will hear no more complaints from developers, construction owners, individuals, [or] organisations. You will not hear the word *No* anymore. Now we need to start putting visions into actions. And I am really, really excited about this. And some of the things that . . . Lord willing, if I live long enough, we are going to see it to fruition.

The great thing about this, Madam Deputy Speaker, is that this is going to create short-term opportunities [and] employment opportunities (Minister of Economy) and it is going to have long-term employment opportunities. It is going to cut down (hopefully, if we can get to the pedestrian dreams that we have) on traffic in the city. But one thing it will do, it will add a buzz to the city. The more and more of these developments that we can get up and as quickly as we can get them up, [the more] it is going to add buzz to the city. We all know what it is like—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, we do have buzz. A lot of buzz, too.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hats off to him. I will tell you what; Mr. Buzz himself will be happy, I am sure. He seems to get his fingers in a lot of pies. But hats off to him. He is a hustler. That is for sure.

So, I think that this will be great. If you think what this Government has done with this plan, with the creation of the economic zones that we have created under this Government, we know that we have reduced the importation duty on construction materials. All these things that this Government is doing is going to create economic activity in the country.

We know that Brookfield is building down on Front Street. Hopefully, this, along with some of the other things that this Government has done, is going to encourage more overseas investors to look at Bermuda seriously. And I have to believe that as the concrete gets poured, as we sit here tonight, on that building on Front Street that there are other developers and other overseas investors looking at doing the same.

The other good thing that I am really hoping that this creates . . . and as the Minister of Culture . . . I do not see him. Oh, he is still here, the Minister of Culture. This gives us the opportunity to create a culture, a mix of cultures. And it does. It gives us that opportunity to give a mix of cultures in the city, living together, mixing together, and really making this Island a buzz of mixture of culture that could be great for us. So, I think that is another great opportunity that this will create.

With regard to some of the things that the Shadow Minister said . . . and he will be happy to know that I have the ear of the Minister responsible for Planning quite often. He would know that a lot of these conversations we have had . . . So, as you spoke, I said: *Man. Everything that MP Fahy is saying, he is right on point.*

And you are.

And as a developer in this country, I can tell you that for one of the buildings that I built a few years back, Madam Deputy Speaker, I waited eight months—eight months!—after I purchased property. I came to

find out (you talk about consultation!) . . . I found out that you have to have an artifact of some kind if you built a building on Front Street. So, you can imagine, right? You look at the little artifact that Sir John Swan has in front of his building. Ask him why it is there. He had to put it there. And some of the laws that we have on our books (I am sure because I have had conversations with the Minister) we just have to get rid of.

And as the Shadow Minister said, whether it is the arts [or] whether it is the architectural features, these are the things that just discourage folk from wanting to develop. At one stage, I can tell you before I even dug a hole down on Front Street, I said, *You know what? Do we want to go through this? We have been waiting six months. Do we want to continue?* But those are the types of things that I know that this Minister is going look at like he is looking at everything else.

Now, the other thing that the Shadow Minister talked about and he was concerned about was the size of a studio of 275. I am surprised that he did not mention the size of the ones, twos, threes, and fours because they are small, too, in my view. Right? So, I would think . . . and again we are the Government; in this House, we make laws. We can change things.

So, whilst a lot of work went into this document and a lot of good work and a lot of good things are in this document, I foresee that a lot of things will have to be changed and tweaked because the world is changing. And one of the Members that spoke (I do not know if it was this side or that side) spoke about the historical labelling of buildings in the country.

I do not know if anyone is familiar with the Chelsea Apartments down in St. George's. I mean, they look like they have been there for 800 years, and if the termites stop holding hands, they are going to fall down. It is a listed building.

Anyway, the Minister and I have had this chat, so he knows where I am going on that. I remember . . . some folks might remember there was a building on Front Street called the Queen of the East—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Right? Members, the building called Queen of the East . . . What is there now? Right? It is an apartment complex.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Right? Well, I did not buy that, and I did not develop it. I got there too late.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But it is things like that, though, that I think that as a Government (no matter who is in Government), it is things like that we need to look at. There are a lot of old rules that you cannot blame the Department of Planning for 100 per cent. A

lot of times, you cannot blame them at all because they have criteria by which they have to make decisions. And if the book says they have to turn this down because, you know, that wall has to be blue and not pink, they are going to turn it down. Those are the types of things that we need to change, and we need to change quickly.

So, Minister, thank you for making history tonight. Let's just hope that your children know that you made this history because in 30, 40, 50, 60 years from now, I hope that we have many, many buildings in the city that are very, very high and that many of our people have places to stay—affordable places to stay.

And you have other folks that want to . . . Whether they work in international business or otherwise, they want to stay in maybe a 2,500 square foot penthouse, that they have the opportunity to do so, and I think this is the springboard for that.

Thank you, Minister for bringing it to this House, and we look forward to tall buildings in the city in the future.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And before I get into this, it is public information, but I do have the benefit of some commercial real estate in Hamilton. And for those listening, you can look information up on the parliament.bm website. It says it is not new information, but I think people ought to understand it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It is always good to be clear.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. So, I urge them. I urge members of the public to go to that website and take a look.

I will try to keep it tied to things that have not already been said. If we want things to change, we have to change how we do things, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, this plan is a great step in that direction, and I join in saluting the department for producing it.

I do want to preface my remarks. I am a big fan of the traditional Bermuda architecture. It evolved in a way that was suited to our climate, to our geography, to our places. I am a huge fan of green space. In fact, that is why this plan is very important, so we do not have to encroach upon our open spaces.

So, let's use the spaces that we have such as in Hamilton. And that is something that the OBA has talked about before. And like I said, although I love that traditional Bermuda architecture, and you know, all else being equal, it is what I would prefer.

You know, people say, *Why? Why did they knock that building down in Hamilton? Why is that*

building empty? Those are clearly people who have never had to break out the chequebook to renovate that building or find a tenant who wants to rent that building. They do not work. They do not work anymore. Technology has changed. What people want has changed, and therefore we must change.

So [I am] very pleased to see this plan. And I think there was a line in there that I wanted to quote which is, "The city needs to become a destination." And so, we can look forward to that.

And another way of thinking about it is if a developer would not develop in Hamilton, where would they develop in Bermuda?

An Hon. Member: St. George's.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, that would be a close second, I think.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That would be a close second. Maybe Southampton or Warwick.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And the plan also talked about a cyclical process of getting the energy and development going in Hamilton. And often when I talk to people, and they say, *Well, what are your plans? How can we grow the economy? How can we get things going?* And it looks like nothing will work. No one wants to come here; there is no economic activity. Because no one wants to come here, there is no economic activity. What do you do? It is a chicken-and-the-egg problem. And that is why I liked that I saw in the plan it talked about that cyclical process. So, you can get one project going, and it gets a little attention. Then you can get that next project.

And I was so glad to hear that the Minister of Housing talk about—I am going to paraphrase but he used the words—*mix of cultures*. And we—

An Hon. Member: *He?*

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Honourable Member referred to the mix of cultures—

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

And then it makes me reflect, Madam Deputy Speaker, on, *If you build it will they come?* So, how do we attract people? We have to build housing for people

we have here now. But we probably have to build housing to attract new people.

This is not really the venue for this discussion, but I hope that the Government will think about its immigration plans as it considers how that may interact with this plan and what we want to do here because—

[Crosstalk]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —like I said, if we want things to change, we have to change how we do things.

[Crosstalk]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I will now turn to a couple of specific points. Many have been covered. I did read this last night. It was pretty thrilling reading after my dinner.

Climate change. Definitely we have to plan our buildings to deal with climate change, heat, islands. [I am] very supportive of that. I do not think Bermuda needs to worry about its impact on climate change in the sense that, yes, in a perfect world we would make our decisions so that we are minimising our impact on the climate, but that is not where we are. Our impact on that is low.

Where we are now is, Madam Deputy Speaker, we have cost-of living-issues. We have investors trying to figure out how to make projects work, which we have heard some aspects of that. And I will talk about a few others. So, I would humbly suggest that perhaps the climate change impact should be less about making sure projects do not contribute to climate change and focus [more] on how projects can be adaptable or handle climate change.

And when we think about renewable energy, you know, if it works for the project, if it works for the developer, if it is an amenity for the people in that building, if it checks a box for an investor, go for it. But I do not think forcing people to include it because of a contribution or no contribution to climate change is particularly suitable for us right now where we are today in Bermuda where costs are very important.

Speaking of cost, I saw the reference to development viability statements, and I think we also have heard here from the prior speakers, Madam Deputy Speaker, about difficulties perhaps in making some projects work. So, I think that could be an important component for developers or people sponsoring projects to take their information to the department and explain what the issues are that they need to make a project work.

I was a little concerned because the way I read the plan, I found a couple of things very specific. *Well, if you did a building on this lot here, it ought to have this feature. It ought to have that feature.* And I am sort of like, you know—again, I am not a Planning expert, but it is going to be hard enough to get some of these projects to work, and be nice, and be attractive and get residents, and tenants, and investors. And perhaps,

you know, maybe the Planning Department might reserve its judgment until it sees what people come up with. Not that they are wrong, but like I said, we might not want to put up roadblocks just yet.

And one of my colleagues alluded to sort of process issues. And I like, you know . . . We have talked about what is positive about this being not too rule based. But of course, when you need to do a design, you need to know ahead of time, is this design going to get passed? Because it is very expensive to spin up designs—architects, engineers, you know, you are printing money at that point, Madam Deputy Speaker. So, I was heartened to see that there will be Guidance Notes coming.

And I was heartened to hear the comments about you [being able to] go for pre-consultation. So that will be important, that people can get a cost-effective process in trying to decide like, *Can I even . . . Could we purchase this lot? Could we put together a building that we could rent out that people want to live in?*

And I think probably the last comment I want to make is [about] parking. I am a big fan of the residential aspect, the pedestrian aspect. I think we all are. When I was reading in the retail core . . . I am a big fan of the mixed-use. I was surprised to see, though, it did not seem like this plan would allow buildings that are in the retail core to have residences that could get an assessment number for a car, while at the same time the plan says there is an abundance of parking in the city. And the reality is, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is just one more thing that is going to get in the way of, say, marketing a project or take away some options from developers.

So, I bring these points up not to be negative about this plan but just to highlight some issues because I think we have already heard about all the good things about the plan and our general support for it. So, we certainly are looking forward to seeing this plan create many successes in Hamilton and to become that vibrant place for Bermuda that we all want it to be.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I heard someone interpolate this is not a St. George's plan. It is the City of Hamilton plan. And I declare my interest. I am a Member of

Parliament representing the parish that hosts the historic first capital of Bermuda. And I think we have some experience on the balance that is required between being a residential city and a working town.

And I did not invent that saying *working town*. It was told to me by a former resident who I used to canvass way back in 1998, the late David White. The editor of *The Royal Gazette* used to say, *You know, there is an important thing that you need to have in a town like St. George's. You have to be a working town as well. It is important to provide jobs for those residents.*

I think Hamilton at one time embraced that and embodied that. If you walk around the city of Hamilton, if you go to North Hamilton as it is referred to now, I remember when Cleve Wassy used to always refer to it as North Hamilton back in the 1990s, and I believe that that saying took hold in that.

And as I reflect on the historical environment that is contained in this particular plan, . . . But anyway, let me just reflect on one historical spot that is just outside the boundary of the City of Hamilton. Because the City of Hamilton, as we move towards getting more residential again, will not have per capita, the number of open spaces that would make it as viable as I would like to envision it. But I do know an area from a historical point of view . . . I am no pond dog, and I do not play one on the radio on a Wednesday. But I will tell you this, that in the back of Hamilton there is [what is] respectfully referred to as the Pembroke Marsh. And if you want to have the Central Park of Bermuda, there it is. *There it is.*

I remember 40 years ago in this very House when I used to come. I used to listen, and I used to read budget debates that included much of what would be done with that particular area. That is an opportunity that maybe we need to wrap our minds around because it will provide opportunity for us to make the City of Hamilton even far more dynamic and vibrant when it comes to having outdoor activity for persons who are residents, to encourage families to live there as well.

You know, I heard someone say golf. Geoff Parker on Parson's Road had a golf driving range. My friend Nick Mansell who lives in Durham, England today used to be there. He learned golf there working for Geoff Parker. Geoff Parker's parents, [were some] of the greatest people in golf development in Bermuda at one particular time.

So let us not lose sight of how important it is to put back on the radar screen a very important part, and not for the reason of those persons who had to endure the smell, but to be able to of the pond . . . as the wind, [as] the southern wind blew north. But let them look over those houses at Government Gate and look down and see a vibrant Bermuda-version of Central Park, right there to the north of Middletown and to the south of Government Gate.

You know, in 1992, 1993, thereabouts, I visited Hong Kong to represent Bermuda, and driving from the

city out to Fanling where we were playing at Royal Hong Kong Golf Club as it was called then, it was very depressing passing through all those high-rises and the like. I never thought I would live to see the day sitting in this House where I would be in favour of the fact that we have to go up. But as we go up, let us be mindful that there are many young professionals in Bermuda who on the other side of the recession and on the other side of the pandemic would like, in the cellars that they are in today, to be able to afford a piece of Bermuda. Who, if you encourage . . . find ways to encourage them to buy a property, maybe a condominium and the like, they would be the ones who would then enjoy living in Hamilton.

And when buildings come up with mixed-use, make it be an economic benefit. A developer understands concessions. Let it be a concession that if you put X amount of housing in there according to your ARV (and the folks that you pitch to) that you will get some concessions to put the onus on them. You know, everybody looks to the Government to build houses, but I am old enough to remember when it was Benny Rego, and after him John Swan, and during that time Dorchester Realty. You pick up your paper, and you see houses that you can purchase up and down this landscape.

And in addition to that when the need came, housing was built through Government to supplement. You see them in St. George's in the day. And you see them at Loughlands. I remember when Loughlands was coming up and the like was very controversial but look what it is today.

So, as we look towards the City of Hamilton, let us look . . . It is all right for us to want those things, but we have to . . . Look, I declare my interest. When I was a younger man, social science was one of my majors when I was playing golf representing a major United States university back in the 1970s.

You have to appreciate what the impact socially is in this country. Now, if we have more people living in the city, if we have more mixed-use responsibilities in those particular buildings that we are encouraging to go up, there is a natural synergy to make sure people are not sleeping in the fronts of buildings—that they have got to go . . . Nobody [is] going to police an area more than a landowner or a household resident. They are going to get that person up and moving skippy.

We need to appreciate the value of having some of those young professionals in Hamilton, but you cannot have them living there unless you have some things to keep the city vibrant as well. Bermuda is known to appreciate the arts and the theatre. We have many Bermudians who go overseas today and do very well in the arts. You know, we can sort of be . . . Do not have the dramatic society all the way over . . . I thank them for where they are over by Mount Saint Agnes. It could very well be that these plays are right in the heart so that locals are encouraged to come into the city to

see a play and then have a meal either before or after, depending on the age that they are. Those of us a little older tend to go home earlier, so we come and get our meal before they play. You know, those are some of the things that we have to consider.

And you cannot talk about having parking in town and stuff and look at the real elephant in the room. We have got to get people off of the roads, period. We have got to get people commuting to Hamilton by ferries. Let me say that again. We have got the best waterways in the world. We need to move the needle to be able to get people, transportation management, to be commuting into the city. We see businesses. I know one in particular. I declare my interest. You know. I teach on a freelance basis at Newstead Belmont Hills, and for selected times, they commute their guests to the City of Hamilton on a daily basis, Monday through Sunday, to the City of Hamilton and back. And with some cooperation with business and residents there are opportunities for more commuting by water to get people to the City of Hamilton.

We need to, you know, we talk about whether or not on the waterfront . . . You know. We have not talked about really ever since . . .

[Laughter]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: A former speaker that was there, the Shadow Minister came to this House and reversed the plan. But the waterfront houses the container docks. Do we want the container docks there? And if not, where? That conversation needs to be had and needs to be had in a real way for the future of this town.

And while we are on down that area, I have said this . . . and I know we are not supposed to reflect on another debate, but this was another debate in another House. And it was a couple of decades ago. It is criminal that we are sending greaseballs off of Grape Bay. Most beautiful . . . most beautiful . . . And [given] the amount of money that the Corporation of Hamilton has spent on building sewage plants that are not affluent plants, we should be taking that sewage and turning it into at least water that we can irrigate with. But no! We break it down and we pump it out to sea. That is the type of sustainable Bermuda that we need to ensure happens.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And it is a serious thing. You cannot sit up here and quip at things like that and then in the next breath say you want a sustainable Bermuda. The whales are coming back. They are not coming back for those greaseballs. They are coming back because are not doggone hunting them anymore. A hundred years ago they used to. So, the environment, the climate, changed towards them in the Bermuda waters. We need to change the way we look at the city as

we are doing. And I want to commend the Minister because you heard the tone. He set the tone from the very beginning, and it followed.

In the City of Hamilton, we need to have opportunities for those persons who we are going to encourage to live there to be able to walk to their recreation whether or not it be indoor tennis, whether it be indoor pickleball, whether or not it be bowling allies and things like that. We need to go there. We need to go to places.

I remember (boy, I'm getting old now) back in 1979, going to the national championships in Davis, California, and seeing at UC Davis an entire university campus that was completely devoid of motor vehicles. Unbelievable! But the will to have that existed because the mind-set was different. And you know in California they are a little bit more laid back, and you know, they are a little bit more liberal in some respects. It is not too far, and if they did not like to get it in the air, they could go not too far and get it with a glass of wine. But such was that they knew the importance of having a little bit more laid-back community.

As we look at this bold initiative, I feel that there are still things that we must do. As I speak to that important green belt out there that has been a challenge to us for decades now. We must look at the waterfront and the container port and really come up with a solution.

And you know, things are happening in St. George's with that original capital. And some of these very things are some of the things on a smaller scale that I believe that we can get on and do as well. And I am sure those of us responsible that . . . there we will be keeping a watching brief and looking to see how we can incorporate that.

But people make a city. But the people who invest in a city need to be encouraged to be able to have things that incentivise them to achieve some of the things that we need to have happen. And you know, there is a school of thought: build it and they will come. I do feel that we have enough people in Bermuda in need of housing right now. We have enough young professionals who could afford to be able to take up some of the economic investment that a person would make outlay if part of their floors were for . . . This very building here is a prime example. This building here could very easily be . . . each floor be . . . the five floors could have been made into condominiums and sold to five different business owners. Those are the models that we need to look at, but not from a government, you know. As long as the legislation . . . and I know the Minister is very much versed in this because you know his field is akin. So, he will definitely get it. But you know Ministers change. And so, the legislation must reflect the type of sensitivity that he brings to it.

But I am here to say that if you can incentivise for a potential investor . . . And I say that this country survives economically on inward investment from overseas. Not necessarily . . . inward investment that can be multifaceted because in the City of Hamilton over

100 years ago had several hotels scattered around Bermuda.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I read about them. I appreciate them. Presidents of the United States used to come here and enjoy them. And they will come again too and the people who follow what they do—influencers. Influencers have been coming to this country for over a century, and I appreciate that. And so, in the City of Hamilton . . . And I would venture to say that additional hotels would also look to occupy here as well, which would provide . . .

And one final point. I hear folks talking all the time about the need to get greater inward investment through people. I am going to say this. I have said it once; I will say it again. The Bermuda College presents an opportunity like the university in Grenada, St. George's University, to cause folks to come to this Island to study for one, two, three years a couple of different disciplines that are generic to Bermuda, that are very significant in Bermuda, one being hospitality because with the Princess coming on and other properties (right?) you are going to need persons. There might be young people willing to learn in that field. And insurance—they could come to Bermuda and learn insurance in the City of Hamilton because you have already got in the City of Hamilton housing on Par-La-Ville Road for a hotel over on Pitts Bay Road.

And I just finished saying that 100 years ago, you had hotels scattered around this city, and there is no reason why it could not happen again. And you could educate people from afar who would come here and learn and get a synergy for the country, and then after their two or three years they go. Educational tourism has brought many people to many countries, (e.g., Saint Martin where they are going to live). And we just finished talking about the need to give mixed-use housing incentives to persons who are going to build.

Man, I . . . Anyway, Madam [Deputy Speaker], I am happy to support this, but you have to have a vision beyond. And that vision, I tried to share some of that today as it relates to open space, which goes a begging in the north of Hamilton, as it relates to how we can through education cause people to come to Bermuda and study, as it relates to mixed-use of buildings that are going to be built higher. Some of it could be incentivised for entrepreneurs because the Government cannot do it all. You have got to find a way to excite inward investment.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

No other Members. Minister?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Members, for that robust debate. I want to thank you all for your thoughtful contributions. It is heartening to hear support for the City of Hamilton Plan. As we encourage . . . I am encouraged by the shared vision that all of us have spoken to. This will emerge as a more dynamic, liveable, and forward-looking capital once this plan comes into place and we start to put the things in place. Many of the comments today reflected a genuine care for our community and our city. And I want to thank everyone that did speak.

Whether they touched on vagrancy, transport infrastructure, or the appearance of vacant sites, all these matters are critically important and necessary. To reiterate, the City of Hamilton Plan is a development plan, and it focuses on the land use. It does not determine bus routes or security enforcement. It does not control when a government building is renovated, nor does it set policy for loitering, or the placement of bike racks. But however, Madam Deputy Speaker, this plan does provide the strategic foundation upon which this city can be renewed, block by block, site by site, project by project.

And now, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to reply to some of the questions that were put forth.

On building height, yes, I am happy to see we all support building higher, but where appropriate. That does not mean that height is unchecked, and we will have [a] 100-storey building floating around here somewhere. All proposals will be addressed using robust criteria—design quality, visual impact in an urban context. Discretion lies with the Development Applications Board guided by the plan, not the whim or persons' personal preference.

On dwelling type . . . And that was interesting. Thank you for bringing it up, Member from constituency 20 and reiterated by my Deputy Premier. But on the question of size of units, the figures referenced are based on the current building code requirements. And I will say that we are in the process of revising the building code requirements as we speak as well. So that is another thing you will be seeing me come here to get approval from Members to move forward. But in reality, the department seldom receives units of that scale. And for clarity, those figures do not relate to the former LPG building conversion, which was amassed as a dormitory-style conversion, meaning those sizes were just for rooms and the other amenities were shared—so shared bathroom, shared communal areas, shared kitchens, and the like.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: On residential growth, the plan strongly encourages the creation of homes within the city. An increased residential population means a larger customer base for city businesses, more vibrant streetscapes, [a] more viable future for Hamilton's economic core. We must build for those who are here now

and for those we want to come. The plan anticipates growth and prepares us for it.

On private open space, we have removed the burdensome communal space requirements from the 2015 plan to improve developmental viability, but we do encourage balconies and similar private outdoor areas recognising their proven mental health and liveability benefits—lessons made abundantly clear during the pandemic.

On Heritage concerns, I almost heard the ghost of Colonel Burch speaking when I listened to the Member from [constituency] 20 speak about this.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: While it is true Chelsea Apartments for instance is a listed building, there are fewer than 10 listed buildings in the city, and all are public owned. The plan supports sensitive development around these assets and actively encourages innovative architecture that draws from Bermuda's traditions without replicating them. We are not demanding carbon copies but thoughtful integration. And I will agree with the Member from next to me (constituency 10) that I do hope that we get back into the House. As a matter of fact, it is something we were discussing upstairs just earlier today when I noted that I was there with (I think it was) about six other MPs that have never stepped foot in that House.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, it was interesting to say, to actually know, that there are MPs who have been MPs have never stepped foot in that House, and there probably will be more. But we cannot . . . Because this plan does not speak to whether properties are developed or not, it just helps to guide the development of those properties.

On pedestrianisation and parking, the plan provides [a] strong foundation to improve walkability and active areas within areas like the waterfront, City Hall parking lot, [and] the parks of Reid and Burnaby Streets. Within the retail core, the plan intentionally prioritises pedestrian movement. This area is critical to Bermuda's retail economy, and in the face of global e-commerce competition, we must protect it. Encouraging a high-quality pedestrian experience helps retail businesses stay viable, and in this context, it is not considered unreasonable to limit residential parking in this area.

On preapproval, clarity, and investor confidence, I echo the comments that developers need clarity up front. That is precisely why we continue to promote preconsultation. And yes, we are developing guiding notes and assist with understanding expectations especially on strategic development sites. These sites are governed by design principles not rigid

requirements, giving architects flexibility when aiming for excellence.

On adapting to climate change, the plan embeds sustainability from the outset. We are less focused on Bermuda's contribution on global emissions and more on resilience ensuring buildings are ready for increased heat, stronger storms, and higher insurance costs. This is not theoretical; it is essential for our survival.

On changing how we operate, I could not agree any more. This plan is one piece of a broader shift. In coming weeks, I will bring forward statements, ministerial directives, and legislative amendments to address the very barriers of outdated processes that cause frustration for those trying to get projects off the ground. We are speaking with data. We are acting with purpose. And this speaks specifically to the Member from constituency 20 when he mentioned some of the statistics that we heard in the conference last week.

I only received on Monday in preparation for some other things a listing of all of the outstanding building permits because I wanted to know what is happening there. I was dismayed to see that currently there are 372 building permits being worked on. Fifty-two of those applications are still awaiting information from the agent because they were deficient. And the average age of those applications that are awaiting information is 171 days old.

An Hon. Member: Wow! Wow!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: That is the things that we are facing. And so, when people say, *Why is my plan not coming out?* sometimes it is the fault of the officers; sometimes it is the fault of the agents who are just not submitting the information even when asked for the information. I am thankful that we are looking at AI processes to kind of catch some of these things at the front end. So, what happens now [is] they have to wait. They are processed by a human, and then there is a process. They are processing it and then sending that information out. And that process has to wait to come back. So, we are looking at how we can streamline some of those processes.

And finally on design quality, the plan requires design statements for many applications ensuring that proposals align with place-making goals. This is not red tape. This is a signal that design matters and that quality development is worth doing it right.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, Plan 2025 will not solve every problem, but it unlocks potential. It removes unnecessary red tape. And it sends a clear message that this Government in partnership with the Corporation and with the people of Bermuda is ready to deliver a city worthy of Bermuda. Let's adopt this plan not just for the policies it contains but for the possibilities it enables. Let Hamilton rise. Let it flourish. Let it be a place that we not only work but live, gather, innovate, and thrive.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Members, for your support, and I look forward to seeing the City of Hamilton move forward and thrive with your approval of this City of Hamilton Plan 2025.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Members, I put to you whether or not you approve the plan. Aye for if you approve; *nay* for if you do not.

So those who approve?

Some Hon. Members: Aye.

The Deputy Speaker: Those against?

[No audible response.]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion is approved.
Thank you.

An Hon. Member: Yes!

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

[Desk thumping]

[Motion carried: The City of Hamilton Plan 2025 was approved.]

The Deputy Speaker: Members, that brings us to (I guess) the end of the day, there being no other matters on the Order Paper.

Deputy Premier?

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House now adjourn until Monday, May 26 at ten o'clock.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we adjourn till Monday, May 26. Those in favour?

Yes.

And those who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Minister from constituency 16. Minister, do you wish to speak on the motion?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: On the motion to adjourn, yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Yes.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: That is it! That is the motion.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

BERMUDA DAY—SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today with a heartfelt message to the people of Bermuda. In the world that I currently occupy every chance I get, especially before we get to a holiday, I feel it is necessary for me to get up and say something. But as we approach one of our beloved holidays—which is Bermuda Day—I am always compelled to speak not just as a Member of this Honourable House but as a proud Bermudian.

Bermuda Day for me is not just a holiday. Like most of us, it is the celebration of our identity, our culture, and our community spirit. So, what began . . . I will give a little history. I cannot give too much because the Minister of Culture will be speaking himself. But what began as Empire Day and then Commonwealth Day was reshaped on the 24th of May, and eventually it became Bermuda Day.

And I smile when I talk about this here because I know that the 24th of May will always be referred to until a certain generation, age-wise, of people pass on. You know they are stuck on different names and identifications for what we now refer to Bermuda Day. And that is something that we have to really . . . It is time for us to start to really own it, because that is an acknowledgement of who we are.

So, in 1979, we know that Bermuda Day, the title, became official. After the riots of 1977, we had to do something to try to bring us all together, and hence we came up with Bermuda Day.

And that, Madam Deputy Speaker, is supposed to be a reflection of our pride and unity and our cultural expression. Things like when we are out there, we see the half marathon making their way through different parishes, and if other people are like me every year (not so quite much these last few years but before) when I get caught up in the excitement of the marathon I would always say I am going to run next year. But that has never materialised. But it is never too late, you know, for me or anyone else.

And I take note of our parade that goes up and down Front Street, the families lining the roadsides in tents and flags, and the aroma of different flavours like fish cakes and chicken and the like. So, Bermuda Day reminds us of who we are and all that we share.

But the reason I am on my feet, having said all that, . . . I have to shift gears for a minute because it is my duty to speak of a word of caution. While we celebrate, we must also take care. We must be safe. We must be responsible, Madam Deputy Speaker. And we must be aware.

So, I must implore people, *Do not drink and drive*. And I need to say this with absolute clarity. We should not drink and drive. We say it every year. I have

been saying it ever since I have been privileged to be in this role. But we must start to live it this year and every year. If we are going to drink, plan a ride, use a designated driver, call a taxi. And walk if you must. Our roads are too narrow. Our Island is too small. And our people are too precious to lose a life to a preventable tragedy. One life lost, Madam Deputy Speaker, is one too many.

And I cannot get on my feet and not reiterate *if you see something, say something*. Madam Deputy Speaker, to everyone out there, *If you see something, say something*. If you see reckless driving, if you see violence, or potential violence, if you see someone in need, you see that senior or vulnerable person who needs assistance, do not look away. We must call the authorities or step in safely, but we must say something. I have given the numbers before about crime stoppers: 800-8477, or you call 911. Because here in Bermuda, we have to move past the habit of saying that *it is not my business* because here in Bermuda we are each other's business.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, our shared responsibility starts with our parents. I implore the parents to guide and look out for their children. I implore friends, *Look out for one another*. And when a stranger is coming by, offer kindness and care.

And I am reminded of an experience that we had last year. I was walking on Front Street with my wife, and I remember stopping to see another float. And I happened to stand on the sidewalk in front of a camp. And somebody said, *Hey, Minister, you know I like you, but how long are you going to stand there because I have been in this spot for 20 years?* And I am reminded of that because we do these things, like we have spots. There has been tape outside my office for the last month.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, you know. And all that is well and good because people have that affinity to our parades and whatnot, but we have to have affinity to self and to other people who are also enjoying the festivities.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I see you slumping in your Chair. It is not going to be long.

The Deputy Speaker: Oh no, no. That is not why. I am listening. I am focused on you.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay. Yes. You know?

So, I am here to say that public safety is not just the responsibility of the police or the emergency services. It starts with each and every one of us.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, let this holiday be different. Let this Bermuda Day be remembered for laughter and not loss, for music and not sirens, for

memories and not mourning. Let's celebrate without regret. Let's ensure we all make it through the weekend together whole, safe, and proud.

So, Madam Deputy Speaker, let the spirit of Bermuda shine. Let the beat of the Gombeys, the colour of the costumes, the rhythm of the floats, and the respect for our culture remind us of what we are here to protect and to celebrate on this Bermuda Day—celebrate each other.

So, in closing, Madam Deputy Speaker, let's all be safe, be responsible, and be kind, be Bermuda. So, as I take my seat, I wish everyone across this country and in this Honourable House, a joyful, meaningful, and a safe Bermuda Day weekend.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Member from constituency 15. Minister, you have the floor.

BERMUDA DAY—FROM THE STREETS TO THE SOUL, WHY BERMUDA DAY MATTERS

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. And as we go closer to Friday's main events—as they call it the Heritage Day or Bermuda Day, or even though it is not May 24th there are people that still will always refer to this holiday as May 24th—I want to just align myself with the remarks given from my colleague the Minister of National Security. And while he [is], as he likes to call himself and he is, a pond dog, and as he represents a constituency right next to the constituency that I represent, I think it is fitting that I come behind my colleague. And I speak to the topic this evening, Madam Deputy, From the Streets to the Soul—Why Bermuda Day Matters.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I see Minister Hayward likes that one. But in all seriousness, Madam Deputy Speaker, I chose this year not to give a traditional press conference. And I felt that with this being (I guess) the first time that I am in this place, in this role, I would use my 20 minutes in Motion to Adjourn to speak to what it means to actually celebrate Heritage Day in Bermuda. Or as individuals would say, Bermuda Day.

Just a year ago, Madam Deputy Speaker, I invited two parliamentary colleagues from other jurisdictions to join us here for Bermuda Day. And while they graciously accepted the invitation (one was a Minister from the Cayman Islands, and the other was a Minister from Saint Kitts and Nevis), they said, *Well sure, we will come to Bermuda, and we will celebrate Bermuda Day*. But for the three days that they were here, Madam Deputy Speaker, they could not imagine what it actually

meant to be in Bermuda for a celebration of our heritage.

You would think that we were just a small island, 21 square miles. And you would think that our celebrations are small in nature. But what we heard from these visiting legislators from other jurisdictions was that they had never been a part of a celebration of heritage like they witnessed in Bermuda. And that is a big comment coming from especially the Minister there responsible for culture in Saint Kitts and Nevis, because you know they have their jazz, and they have, you know, their version of Gombey on stilts and everything else. But they were blown away by the way that we celebrate our culture. So that brings me back to where I am this evening, and it reminds us from *streets to the soul* and *why Bermuda Day matters*.

The streets on Friday, Madam Deputy Speaker, will be full of colour. They will be full of music. They will be full of laughter. And yes, as I just looked at a chat group, [there will be] plenty of tape on the sidewalks. And Madam Deputy Speaker, let me just say that for me, although I am not part of the Corporation of Hamilton who have to go and clean that up if you do not remove it, I do not actually mind the tape on the sidewalks. And I will tell you why, because it is a representation of families saying, *This is where we would like to be*, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is representative of our tradition. It is a representation that says [that] this is our spot and it is our community that is claiming their space year after year.

Now some may complain about various aspects of the parade, Madam Deputy Speaker, like the gaps or when you hear people shouting, *Where is the next group?* That is not just impatience, Madam Deputy Speaker, that is passion. That is Bermudians caring enough to want to see the next majorette group whether it be Hamilton Parish Hot Peppers, whether it be PHC Majorettes, whether it be Dust who have been practicing weeks and months at Devonshire Rec. That is Bermudians saying, *This is what I came for, and this is what I am waiting for*. Whether it be your favourite Gombey troupe—H&H, Place's, SMS, Evolution, Gumby Warriors—whether it be your church group, your school group who are waiting to proudly make their way through Hamilton, it brings us back to what it means to celebrate heritage in Bermuda where you take it from the streets to the soul, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Let's talk about what some people wake up early in the morning to do, and that is watch the Bermuda Day Derby, the half marathon. We know it started way back on Empire Day, but only in this country, only in Bermuda do individuals wake up a week before the event . . . I heard my colleague say that he says every year, *I am going to run this next year*. But people wake up. I know the great Skolachy, if I may, has done this race. And there are people who wake up a week before, two weeks before, and say, *I am coming down*. That was the terminology. And do you know why they do it,

Madam Deputy Speaker? They only do it to hear people say, *Looking good! Looking good!* from the roadside. Because that is what it means to take it from the streets to the soul, Madam Deputy Speaker. We do it because we wish to affirm each other. We do it because that, Madam Deputy Speaker, is the soul of Bermuda Day.

I want to go a little deeper in the time that I have left because Bermuda Day for some is a little bit more important. And Bermuda Day has never been just about a parade, Madam Deputy Speaker. Bermuda Day is about people. It is about how we celebrate people and why we celebrate in the first instance. As my honourable colleague, the Minister of National Security quite rightly pointed out, because of the civil unrest that we saw in the 1960s and 1970s, the Pitt Report in 1978 gave us the truth. It told us what many people did not want to stand up and say. *Our country was divided*. Unfortunately, some may say it still is, Madam Deputy Speaker.

People were hurting at the time of the Pitt Report, and Bermudians themselves called for a new day. Bermudians themselves called for this holiday so that it [would] bring us together. A day for us to reflect what it means to be Bermudian. And that takes us back to the point of why I am making this appeal. I want individuals to remember that it comes from the streets to the soul, Madam Deputy Speaker.

So, for too long we were told that Bermuda does not have any culture. For too long we were told that, you know, we are just a small 21-square mile[s] out in the middle of the Atlantic. But this, Madam Deputy Speaker, is why culture matters. This is why, as I said in an earlier debate, culture and investing in our culture matters. And that is why the theme for this year is very fitting . . . The Future Is Now.

We have got rhythms of the Gombey. We have got [the] poetry of our storytellers. We have got pride in our parade groups. We have got the joy of our dance groups and the talent of our athletes and artists. So, no one can tell me, Madam Deputy Speaker, that Bermudians have no culture. We reject the idea that culture is something that is nice to have. We believe in this Island that culture is essential. And I am proud, Madam Deputy Speaker, to be a part of a Government, the Progressive Labour Party Government, that is backing the belief in what real investment in its people actually looks like, Madam Deputy Speaker.

As we heard earlier, this Government is funding MakerSpace. It is funding cultural entertainment events. It is funding more investment into the Bermuda National Library, youth service, elite athletes, sports clubs, [and] community hubs because this country, this Island, is built on discipline. This Island is built on unity. And this Island is built on dreams. See, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will remind you that Bermuda Day matters, and culture matters because we take it from the streets to the soul, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Every dollar that we take from government and we put into Bermudian talent, it matters. It shows us that the same respect that the actuary on Pitts Bay Road will get should be given to the creative. The dancer from UDP, or [United] Dance Productions matters just as much as the developers who we were talking about earlier. Let me say this very clearly, Madam Deputy Speaker, culture builds community. It creates jobs. Culture can heal trauma, Madam Deputy Speaker. Culture can fuel joy. And when we choose, like this Government has done, to fund culture, quite simply, Madam Deputy Speaker, we are choosing us. We are taking it from the streets to the soul.

So to every parent on this Wednesday evening who is up and they are gluing sequins together for that costume, Madam Deputy Speaker (you may have done this at once or twice in your life before for some little people in your life), to every individual who is going to be marching on Friday whether it be sunshine or whether it be raindrops, to every Bermudian who holds this day, Bermuda Day, in their heart, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Minister responsible for Culture just wants to get up this evening and say, *Thank you*.

We are proud of you, Madam Deputy Speaker. We see you. And together we are writing the next chapter of Bermuda's story, a story rooted in resilience, a story filled with creativity, and a story driven, Madam Deputy Speaker, by pride.

And I will close here. I wish all Bermudians to have a safe, joyful, and love-filled Bermuda Day, Madam Deputy Speaker. Enjoy it whether you get up early, whether you get up halfway through the day, or whether you stay home and watch it on television. Remember, Madam Deputy Speaker, the future is now. And Bermuda Day matters because here in these islands we take it from the streets to the soul.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise the Member from constituency 8. Member, you have the floor.

BERMUDA DAY—HONOURING OUR HERITAGE

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you and good evening, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I just want to give a few brief words as we are leading into this Bermuda Day holiday. I think everybody here has a different version of what makes this holiday important to them. You have memories from growing up in Bermuda and what it meant to you. And each person here will celebrate the holiday in a different way. But I do think it is important that we reiterate some of the things that have been said by the Minister of National Security and the Minister of Culture.

There are a lot of people who have spent the last year preparing for this day, the people who have

been building floats and doing training so that they could run in the race, but for all those things they end up being the entertainment for the people who are going to go out and enjoy this day, for many people who will be there to cheer them on. There have been times that some of the people who are there enjoying those activities have been negative towards some of the people who are actually participating, creating that entertainment. And I think it is important that we make sure that we respect the runners, we respect the people who are participating because they are doing this for the benefit of us as a community.

And you have to point out those negatives only because I think everybody here wants this to be a positive day. We have had several really negative days, and I think the community is ready for a positive experience. And that is what we are looking forward to in two days' time. So, I would also like to echo thanking all the people who will be participating in the run, in the parade, for everything that they have done and the entertainment that they will be giving to our community over those days, Madam Deputy Speaker, over Friday.

I also want to make sure to encourage people to have a designated driver because this is a period where people will be celebrating. We are expecting them to celebrate but let this be a weekend where you are safe—safe in your car, safe on your bike, safe on our roads.

But with some of the behaviour that has been happening in our community, we also want to make sure that our young people are safe, that some of the behaviours that have really torn our community apart are not going to happen over this period. Because, Madam Deputy Speaker, what tends to happen is when we get close to holidays there has been a trend that we start to see some of that behaviour. Anybody who are in those communities, please make sure that you are speaking to each other and saying *this is not the time for that*.

This is a time for us to be celebrating our heritage, for us to be as a community coming together. This is a time for family and friends in whatever way that you want to celebrate this holiday, do it in a safe manner. And I wish everybody in this Chamber a happy Bermuda Day. And all of our community. Let's make sure that it is a safe and happy one so that next week we can come and talk about what a great event happened on Friday and what a wonderful, safe weekend we had. Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

I recognise Minister De Silva, Member from constituency 29. You have the floor.

BERMUDA DAY—HONOURING OUR HERITAGE

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I too will join the chorus of Members on both sides in wishing all our people both near and far as we celebrate our unique culture, our spirit, and the beauty of our island and our people . . . Whether you are running in the marathon derby, whether you are going picnicking, whether you are going to spend time watching the parade [OR] spend time with family, I wish everyone a very happy *Bermudaful* Bermuda Day. Let's honour our heritage, uplift our community and have an awesome weekend.

To the runners, as someone who has run it several times, please start slow, because it is a long run.

And I would like to finish, Madam Deputy Speaker, by saying to everyone here and in the country, let's say a quiet prayer for all the families that have lost loved ones over the past few months and over the past year. And I will end on that. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion?

So, Members, let me just take a moment to echo the sentiments of all of those who spoke with respect to Bermuda Day, and hopefully each of us in our own unique way serve as a model for all that it means to be Bermudian.

Please do have a safe holiday. Happy Bermuda Day when it comes.

Thank you, Members.

[At 10:19 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Monday, 26 May 2025.]

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**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
26 MAY 2025
10:01 AM**

Sitting Number 11 of the 2025/2026 Session

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

The Deputy Speaker: Good morning, Members.
We will start with prayers.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

[Gavel]

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 21 May 2025]

The Deputy Speaker: We have the Minutes from 21 May. Are there any objections or corrections?
There are none. Thank you, Members.

[Minutes of 21 May 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Deputy Speaker: **[Honourable]** Members Rabain and Adams have sent their apologies.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PETITIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.
I think we have four statements.
And I will be calling on the Minister for Housing [and Municipalities], Minister De Silva, Member from constituency 29. You have the floor.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

**BERMUDA LAND MANAGEMENT CORPORATION
UPDATE 2025**

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. Good morning to you.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today to provide an [update on the Bermuda Land Management Corporation](#) (BLMC). I am pleased to report that the merger between the former Bermuda Land Development Company (BLDC) and the West End Development Corporation (WEDCO) is now complete, with the exception of the formal winding-up process of BLDC.

As Honourable Members may recall, BLDC was formed under the Companies Act 1981, which outlines specific legal requirements for dissolution. This process is well underway and based on current progress we anticipate that BLDC will be fully dissolved by July 2025.

Madam Deputy Speaker, a particularly positive aspect of this merger process was the minimal cost incurred, as the majority of the work was carried out by employees within BLMC, the then Ministry of Public Works, and Attorney General Chamber's personnel. The primary expenses were related to external legal fees for changing bank accounts and the ongoing BLDC liquidation costs. The total estimated expenditure for the merger is expected to be under \$35,000.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to remind Honourable Members and the public that BLMC is now responsible for managing all properties and operations formerly overseen by WEDCO and BLDC. In the west, BLMC is ensuring a smooth start to the cruise ship season while managing a significant capital project at the North Arm. This project aims to repair and enhance tug dock berthing facilities and is expected to be completed by the end of this year.

Additionally, I can confirm that BLMC—together with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture, and Sport, and in partnership with Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL)—will undertake a major redevelopment project at King's Wharf dock. Scheduled to commence in October 2025 and conclude by March 2026, the project is estimated to cost \$22 million and will be fully funded by NCL as part of a port infrastructure upgrade initiative.

The redevelopment will involve expanding the dock by approximately 100 feet in both directions, extending to the existing berthing dolphins. It will also include the addition of berthing on the inside of the north camber, adjacent to the tour excursion dock, to accommodate the NCL ferry, *Spirit of St. George's*.

This expansion of the wharf will yield several key benefits

- improved fendering systems for all cruise vessels;
- increased docking capacity, matching that of Heritage Wharf;
- ability for ships to use two passenger gangways simultaneously; and
- access to service doors for potable water supply and sewage discharge.

Madam Deputy Speaker, BLMC continues to successfully manage its commercial and residential properties, maintaining an occupancy rate of over 95 per cent.

The BLMC owns 89 residential units, all of which are currently occupied except for four that are undergoing active renovations. These units are expected to return to the market by the end of July 2025. BLMC, similar to the Bermuda Housing Corporation, maintains a waiting list for residential units, which currently includes 30 pre-approved clients. Each of these individuals has submitted a completed application with all required supporting documentation, including references from previous landlords and proof of financial capability. The Business Development Department has confirmed that all applications have been thoroughly vetted, and approved tenants will be able to move in as soon as a unit becomes available. In addition, the BLMC continues to receive numerous housing inquiries each week, underscoring the sustained demand for its residential offerings.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the east, the Water and Waste Infrastructure Project is nearing final completion. Potable water is now being supplied to the Government Water Section responsible for potable water distribution in St. George's. BLMC sewage collection is connected to the St. Regis Hotel and is 98 per cent complete in connecting sewage collection from the Town of St. George's to Southside in St. Davids.

The remaining tasks before sewage transfer from St. George's to Southside can commence are as follows:

- final pump configurations at Market Square/King's Square;
- final adjustments to the new Sewage Treatment Plant.

This work is currently ongoing, and sewage transfer to Southside is anticipated to begin in June.

Madam Deputy Speaker, Honourable Members may recall a commitment to offer the 38 leasehold residential homes in St. David's the ability to transfer their unit from leasehold to freehold. BLMC has commenced this process and will over the course of the

coming weeks and months be meeting with the leaseholders to explain the process and requirements involved in completing this long overdue promise. The timeline for completion is, assuming the leaseholder agrees to the transfer from leasehold to freehold, by the end of this fiscal year.

Madam Deputy Speaker, beyond these major capital initiatives, BLMC continues to manage its day-to-day operations without the need of an annual Government operating grant. All operating costs as well as minor capital projects are fully funded by the corporation's own revenue streams.

This significant and consistent achievement, Madam Deputy Speaker, is one that many members of this House and the general public may not be aware. The fact that BLMC is truly self-funded is commendable and speaks to strong financial and operational stewardship of the board and management.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to thank and acknowledge the Board Members: Chairman, Hon. Neville Tyrrell, JP, MP, our Whip in this House; Deputy Chairman, Dennis Lister III, JP, MP; Mr. Jermon Reid; Mrs. Elena Strong; and Mr. Kevin Smith; as well as I would like to welcome new member, Mr. Paul Wilmot JP, MP.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to take a moment to recognise and celebrate the dedicated staff of the Bermuda Land Management Corporation. Of the 58 employees—including managers, supervisors, maintenance technicians, plumbers, and landscapers—53 are Bermudians and 5 are spouses of Bermudians.

This is truly an example of local empowerment and BLMC stands as a model of what can be achieved when an organisation and its leadership is committed to hiring, developing, and promoting Bermudians.

I would like to formally commend CEO Andrew Dias for his steadfast leadership and unwavering commitment. However, I know he would accept this recognition only in the spirit of shared accomplishment, recognising that every success is the result of the dedication and hard work demonstrated daily by the entire BLMC team. I look forward to our continued collaboration as we collectively advance the corporation's mandate: *Facilitating commerce, preserving history, and sustainably developing the vested lands*.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as the newly appointed Minister responsible for BLMC, I am pleased with the Corporation's current fiscal and operational performance. I am confident in its strategic direction and future prospects.

In closing, I wish to assure this Honourable House and the public that this will not be the last update on BLMC to be given this fiscal year. The board and management are currently evaluating several promising opportunities both in the east and west ends of the Island, and I look forward to sharing more in due course. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

I call on Minister Darrell. I think he has some papers he would like to present.

Minister, you have the floor.

SHORELINK: REAL-TIME INFORMATION— LAUNCH OF PHASE 2

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, today I stand before this House with excitement and optimism to announce the next phase of Bermuda's digital transformation in public transport. We are officially entering [Phase 2 of the Digital Fare Media project](#), our brand Shorelink, which will bring Real-Time Information [RTI] to our buses and ferries. This will allow Bermudians and visitors to track the precise location of their buses and ferries and plan their journeys with ease and confidence. I am pleased to inform this House that Real-Time Information application is set to launch Tuesday, 5 August 2025.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative represents a significant leap forward in making our public transport system more connected, more efficient, and more user-friendly. As the world around us is rapidly changing, Bermuda is embracing technological innovation that directly benefits the people we serve. The introduction of real-time updates empowers commuters to make smarter decisions about their travel, reducing wait times and creating a more seamless experience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this development is part of a larger, vision-driven effort to modernise our entire transport network. The Digital Fare Media project, starting with Phase 1, has already revolutionised the way we pay for fares. Passengers now have the option to purchase fares online or through the mobile app Shorelink, providing more convenient, efficient, and secure ways to complete transactions. As of 20 April 2025, the Digital Fare Media project has achieved the following milestones:

- 16,851 new users (including both registered and anonymous customer accounts);
- total sales of \$579,343.

These figures highlight the early success of the system and the growing adoption of digital fare options by Bermuda's commuters.

Madam Deputy Speaker, however, this is just the beginning. Phase 2 builds on this foundation by providing the ability for passengers to track the real-time location of their buses and ferries. This is not just an upgrade—it's an entirely new way of interacting with public transport, one that propels Bermuda into a new era of innovation.

Madam Deputy Speaker, our vision is to create a transport system that fully supports and enhances the lives of our residents and visitors. As we look ahead, Phase 3, which is anticipated to launch in November of this year, will bring an exciting new development: Card

Present payment. In this phase, all ferries and buses will be outfitted with validators, allowing passengers to pay directly by tapping their debit or credit card to purchase or pay for a fare. This seamless option rounds out our offering and provides the most convenient way for passengers to complete their transactions.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as we progress with these changes, we are also aligning ourselves with the global trend of embracing technology to solve everyday challenges. Bermuda is not just a place of rich history; it is a place of forward-thinking innovation, where our people are at the heart of progress. With the introduction of Real-Time Information, we're empowering our citizens to take control of their journeys and enhancing the overall transportation experience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in the coming weeks, the Ministry will be sharing detailed information with the public about how the Real-Time Information applications actually work. This is part of our efforts to ensure everyone is well informed ahead of their official launch. We encourage the public to stay tuned for updates and guidance on how to access and use the RTI system effectively.

Madam Deputy Speaker, this initiative represents much more than just a [technical] upgrade, it's about creating an environment where technology is not a barrier, but a bridge to greater connectivity, convenience, and sustainability. Bermuda's future in public transport is here, and with each step forward, we continue to elevate our Island to new heights.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Minister, I believe you have a second paper you would like to present.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I do indeed. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

TOURISM INVESTMENT

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, today, I stand before you to reaffirm the Government's commitment to responsible and resilient [tourism development](#) through strategic investments that benefit our Island community. Bermuda, with its rich history, incomparable landscape, and vibrant culture, remains a premier global destination, and it is our collective responsibility to ensure that we continue to enhance its appeal and resilience.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Tourism Investment Act 2017 was enacted to stimulate investment in Bermuda's tourism sector, an industry integral to our economy and cultural identity. The Act provides a framework to attract, facilitate, and support investments in tourism-related projects, aiming to maintain Bermuda's status as a world-class destination while ensuring, Madam Deputy Speaker, that tourism growth and community are inclusive.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Act, which enables the establishment of a Tourism Investment Order (TIO), offers a suite of tax concessions and provisions that support job assurances for Bermudians. These measures are designed to reduce barriers to investment, enhance competitiveness, and ensure that tourism development supports Bermuda's long-term prosperity and delivers meaningful benefits to our people and the economy.

Madam Deputy Speaker, tourism projects frequently generate employment opportunities for Bermudians across sectors such as construction, hospitality, retail, and management, while also helping to build valuable skills that serve individuals well throughout their careers. However, it is essential to recognise, the Act specifically provides provision for new hotels that receives a TIO, after six years of commencement of operations, the hotel must annually verify in writing that no less than 70 per cent of its staff are Bermudian. This provision is a critical safeguard to ensure that it invests in the local workforce and contributes meaningfully to the development of Bermudian talent in the industry. By requiring formal verification, the Government maintains a mechanism to monitor and enforce compliance, thereby promoting sustained employment opportunities for Bermudians.

Additionally, Madam Deputy Speaker, this Act also mandates that new and refurbished hotels and new restaurants that are awarded TIOs, must annually verify that they maintain a management training programme specifically designed for Bermudians. This ensures that qualified Bermudians are not only employed in the hospitality sector but are also being prepared for leadership roles within it. Through structured and continuous training, Bermudians are equipped with the skills and experience necessary to advance into management positions. This provision reflects the Government's vision of a hospitality industry led by Bermudian professionals and supports our broader goal of economic empowerment and upward mobility for our people.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in 2024, our most active and dynamic year to date, we saw numerous TIOs operationalised which include:

- Tourism Investment Order—Azura Bermuda became operational in March 2024. Azura Bermuda is the former Surfside Beach Club, South Shore, Warwick. It consists of nine hotel residences and is operating as an upper mid- to high-quality condominium hotel. The seaside pool at Azura Bermuda, according to the premium international magazine, *Vogue*, published by Condé Nast, is one of the best in the world.
- Tourism Investment Order—Hamilton Princess and Beach Club which became operational in May 2024. This hotel is owned by the Green family which has been based in Bermuda for over 70 years and has developed a long-term

investment plan for the hotel based on their extensive knowledge of the Island. I have been advised that the redevelopment of the Bermudian wing, which began in November 2024, has been completed.

- Tourism Investment Order—Rosedon Hotel became operational in December 2024. The property was purchased in 1954 and converted into a small bed and breakfast. The hotel is now operated as a small hotel. It boasts 27 bedrooms, a well-frequented pizzeria, Clarbells and Huckleberry and Scott's are the two fine-dining restaurants.
- Tourism Investment Order—Swan Pyrotechnics Limited became operational in December 2024. Swan Pyrotechnics Limited (SPL) is a professional entertainment operation specialising in safe and high-quality pyrotechnic displays for community and private events. This is the first TIO awarded by the Government for an attraction.

Madam Deputy Speaker, you will note that two new Tourism Investment Orders, namely for the Grotto Bay Resort and Spa and the Hillcrest Boutique were recently presented to this House and was enormously welcomed by all. These two orders are additional and clear indicators of increasing investor confidence and a growing interest in tourism-related development in Bermuda. They reflect the positive momentum in the sector and signal strong belief in Bermuda's potential as a premier destination for tourism investment and growth.

However, Madam Deputy Speaker, I must again highlight that newly established restaurants and attractions are equally eligible to receive these benefits. In fact, we currently have two applications under review for new attractions, which serves as further evidence of the growing interest and continued investment in Bermuda's tourism sector.

Madam Deputy Speaker, given the significant success of TIOs to date under the Act, you will recall that the 2025 Throne Speech announced an initiative to expand the scope of the legislation. This expansion aims to include additional critical sectors, such as smaller guest houses and health and medical tourism facilities, making them eligible for the full range of concessions available under the Act.

Madam Deputy Speaker, the Government is keen to invest in tourism as well as Bermudians. This is exemplified by the Tourism Investment Act which underscores our dedication to building a resilient, diverse, and sustainable Bermuda. We are committed to creating an environment that attracts innovative investments, supports our community, and ensures that Bermuda remains a premier destination in global tourism.

Madam Deputy Speaker, before I conclude, allow me to bring this closer to home with a real-life example. There is a young Bermudian man who attended The Berkeley Institute, who I happened to teach, and resides on Glebe Road. Today, he is employed as a

successful and thriving bartender at the St. Regis Hotel, an opportunity made possible in part by the Tourism Investment Act 2017. This young man not only possesses the potential but also has a clear opportunity to advance within his professional environment, with a viable path to hotel management. His story is just one example of many of how this initiative is not only attracting investment but also creating meaningful employment opportunities for our people. It is a reflection of this Government's mission to ensuring that Bermudians benefit directly from the growth and revitalisation of our tourism sector.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister Darrell.

I call on the Minister from Economy and Labour. I believe he has a paper he wishes to present to the House.

Minister, you have the floor.

EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS THROUGH ENTERPRISE BERMUDA INCUBATOR PROGRAMME

Hon. Jason Hayward: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I rise today to share an update on the [Enterprise Bermuda Incubator Programme](#). It is a key initiative of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation (BEDC) that continues to foster the development of early-stage entrepreneurs and equip them with the resources, knowledge, and support to scale their businesses sustainably.

Madam Deputy Speaker, in April this year, the BEDC proudly celebrated the graduation of the 6th Cohort of the Enterprise Bermuda Incubator Programme. The ceremony was held at Four Ways Inn and welcomed over 40 attendees, including BEDC Board members, team members, mentors, family, and friends, who gathered to recognise the accomplishments of the programme's latest graduates.

Enterprise Bermuda Incubator:
A Pipeline for Innovation

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Enterprise Bermuda Incubator (EBI) Programme was established in 2018 to provide start-up founders with the tools and environment needed to take their businesses from idea to operational. Now in its sixth year, the Enterprise Bermuda Incubator has supported over 50 entrepreneurs, many of whom have gone on to become key contributors to Bermuda's economic landscape. The programme runs for up to 12 months and provides participants with subsidised office space, intensive training, personalised mentorship, and access to local and international networks. The Enterprise Bermuda Incubator is designed to create an environment where entrepreneurs can focus full-time on turning their ideas into viable

businesses. Through BEDC's partnership with the Accelerator Centre in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, the programme delivers internationally recognised training and mentorship that positions Bermuda's entrepreneurs for long-term success.

Participant Impact and Satisfaction

Hon. Jason Hayward: The most recent cohort of Enterprise Bermuda Incubator participants reported significant value gained from the programme. Madam Deputy Speaker, 91 per cent rated the programme positively, indicating it was either satisfactory or very satisfactory. While 55 per cent felt the programme was well-paced, and 36 per cent believed it could benefit from an extended timeline. Notably, 81 per cent said the programme met or exceeded their expectations.

Business Development Outcomes

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Enterprise Bermuda Incubator has had a clear and positive impact on business growth. All participants indicated their businesses experienced growth, with 36 per cent reporting significant improvements and 64 per cent noting moderate gains. Growth areas included revenue, customer acquisition, new hires and export activity, among other business gains.

Skills Gained and Programme Strengths

Hon. Jason Hayward: In addition to these business gains, participants reported notable enhancements in entrepreneurial knowledge. Top areas of learning included branding and marketing, customer discovery, and pitching and strategy. Other valuable insights were gained in fundraising, product development, and legal considerations related to intellectual property.

Participants also praised the quality of mentorship, the value of international exposure—including site visits such as the trip to New York City to attend the Fast Company Innovation Festival—and the opportunity to learn from real-world examples. The cohort cited a strong sense of community and peer support as essential to their development.

Conclusion

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Enterprise Bermuda Incubator programme is a cornerstone of BEDC's work in supporting Bermuda's start-up ecosystem. It equips entrepreneurs with the skills, confidence, and resources needed to succeed in a competitive market.

I commend the BEDC team and our partners for their ongoing dedication, and I congratulate the graduates of the 2024 cohort. Their success highlights the progress we are making towards a more resilient and self-reliant Bermuda. This Government will continue to support such progress through programmes

like the Enterprise Bermuda Incubator. The development of a thriving entrepreneurial ecosystem aligns directly with the "Entrepreneurship and Small Business Development" pillar of the Economic Development Strategy.

Fortunately, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Enterprise Bermuda Incubator will continue to play an important role in supporting local entrepreneurs by providing essential knowledge, skills, and mentorship to enhance their business capabilities. Applications for the 7th Cohort of the programme are open now, and I strongly encourage all interested entrepreneurs to visit www.bedc.bm to learn more and to submit their applications. The deadline for submissions is 23 June, and there are 10 available spaces. The programme runs from 10 July 2025 to 12 March 2026.

The Enterprise Bermuda Incubator is unsurpassed in its offerings and its results. I look forward to welcoming another group of innovative entrepreneurs who will contribute positively to Bermuda's economic growth and development.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Deputy Speaker: I have a couple of Members who did put their names down. The first Member who has questions for you, Minister De Silva, is Member Fahy.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA LAND MANAGEMENT CORPORATION UPDATE 2025

Hon. Michael Fahy: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. Firstly, thank you, Minister, for your statement. A few questions on each section.

The Honourable Minister made mention of the extension to the wharf in Dockyard being fully funded by NCL to the tune of \$22 million. One question is presumably NCL will get first dibs on berths, is the first question.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I would think so. I can double check it, but I would think so.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So supplementary.

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary, okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael Fahy: With that in mind, which I would assume is the case, there has to be an arrangement in place if someone is putting in \$22 million to get the berths on the times that they wish. When other cruise ships are coming as well, again, are they paying an additional fee for their berthing, given that they are not putting any monies into that project if it's exclusively funded by NCL? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I will get that for you, too.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. All right, thank you. Next question.

The Deputy Speaker: Second question?

QUESTION 2: BERMUDA LAND MANAGEMENT CORPORATION UPDATE 2025

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, thank you.

In relation to the information on the BLMC and the 89 residential units, can the Minister advise as to what the average waiting time is on the list of BLMC residents, given that there's a waiting list of 30? What's the anticipated time that those people would have to wait for a unit?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, I don't have a crystal ball. I wish I had that answer. But we can get you an average and let you know what it is, like over a period of time, yes.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael Fahy: Supplementary, in terms of the 89 units, what's the average time that people are residing in BLMC units? Given that one would anticipate the idea is that people move through housing stages and housing ladders. Is it once someone gets into a BLMC unit that they simply remain there until such time as they decide they wish to move on? I'm not sure how that would work.

Maybe the Minister could shed some light on that.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I can tell you that most of the residents have been there for a lengthy period of time, and the number of residents that have challenges with paying the rent are at a very minimal.

QUESTION 3: BERMUDA LAND MANAGEMENT CORPORATION UPDATE 2025

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay, thank you. Third question, in relation to the ongoing sewage treatment issues in St. George's, and the statement made mention of the fact that come June, I think the sewage treatment will

be over at Southside. Can the Minister advise, when that is completed, or that the sewage is being treated at Southside, if the outflow pipe off Tobacco Bay will be shut off?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, it will.

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. I'm sure the Honourable—

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, thank you very much. One supplementary, and that is in relation to revenue streams in relation to that pipe. I know in the Corporation of Hamilton there's a sewage tax. Is it anticipated that there will be some form of taxation from St. George's, based on the fact that there is now and will be an operating sewage plant? Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Minister?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That is possible.

[Laughter]

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Hon. Michael Fahy: And if it is possible, is the Minister aware, and has he had any discussions as to what that rate may be? Thank you.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Why, Craig, you're pretty good. Not yet.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I don't think I heard an answer. I heard the Shadow Minister of Works give an answer.

The Deputy Speaker: The Minister said he's . . . not yet.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. All right. Thank you. I have no further questions.

The Deputy Speaker: Your questions have expired. You've reached your full limit.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I've reached my limit. Okay. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: There have been no other Members who have put their names down for questions from Minister De Silva. So, we move on to Minister Darrell. I think MP Cannonier has questions.

QUESTION 1: SHORELINK: REAL-TIME INFORMATION—LAUNCH OF PHASE 2

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you. Good morning, colleagues and Madam Deputy Speaker.

On page two, the Minister mentions the last sentence here. Not the last sentence on page two, but as of 20th of April, 2025, the Digital Fair Media Project has achieved the following milestones, and it goes on to say 16,851 new users and total sales of \$579,000-plus. Just curious, what were the measurements used to say that this was a milestone? I don't know how many users there are of the bus, but what was the measurement to say that this is a milestone using Shorelink?

The Deputy Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. While I will venture to get those specific answers, I would say this, that when you start at zero and it is not in place and you get to these numbers that we see, I am taking the liberty to call that a milestone, Madam Deputy Speaker. I will ask what matrices were used. But I think that in the spirit of both of the Statements that I gave this morning, I think that we should always recognise progress and recognise success.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Member, another question?

QUESTION 2: SHORELINK: REAL-TIME INFORMATION—LAUNCH OF PHASE 2

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, a second question. And thank the Minister for clarifying that, not knowing the measurements, he still considers it a milestone. Maybe progress; but I'm not sure about milestone.

The second question I would have is Shorelink . . . we are moving into the second phase, and by using Shorelink, will this result in potentially increased fares? I don't know what Shorelink costs, but I am assuming that it is not going to. But I do want to ask the question that . . . do we foresee any increases as we move through the phases for using the public transportation?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Deputy Speaker, while I often have used the term doom and gloom, I am

surprised that this is the path of which the Shadow is going down. But as he would know, those decisions come from the—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, point of order.

The Deputy Speaker: Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, point of order. The Honourable [Minister] is misleading the House. I'm not sure what path he's suggesting. We are just looking for clarification, that's all. There's no path being set here, just clarity, that's all. So, for him to depict it as a path of doom and gloom is unjust and unnecessary.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: We suggest he's doom and gloom.

The Deputy Speaker: Minister?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. As I was saying, the Honourable Member from the other side would know that tax increases of the like come under a different Minister, and I've gotten the indication with the shake of a head that there will be no increase in the fares once this is put.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Are there any other questions, Member?
No other questions? Member?

[Crosstalk]

The Deputy Speaker: Member Cannonier, speak to the Chair.

Are there any other questions?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: No, no, no.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay, thank you. I don't think any other Members had questions on the Shorelink. There was no one who put their name down to ask questions on the Tourism paper, and that moves us to Minister Haywood.

Member Campbell has a question for you.

**QUESTION 1: EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS
THROUGH ENTERPRISE BERMUDA
INCUBATOR PROGRAMME**

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, and good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Minister mentioned that the participants in the Incubator programme have access to resources. Just for clarification, are any of those resources loans?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The answer to that question is yes. They have access to all resources that BEDC actually offers. BEDC actually supports grants which support loans, and so they can benefit from that as well along with the array of services that BEDC provides to entrepreneurs and small and medium-sized enterprises in Bermuda.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Second question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Supplementary.

The Deputy Speaker: Supplementary.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Vance Campbell: Does the Minister know whether or not the terms of those loans are standard or specific to each individual?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The terms for the loans will be consistent with all other loans that entrepreneurs would actually receive during the budget period. I did outline the volume of loans that were provided to small businesses in the last fiscal period and the way in which those loans were getting repaid as well.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Second supplementary or second question?

**QUESTION 1: EMPOWERING ENTREPRENEURS
THROUGH ENTERPRISE BERMUDA
INCUBATOR PROGRAMME**

Mr. Vance Campbell: Second question. The Minister outlined that over 50 entrepreneurs have been supported over various cohorts. We have 10 more participating in the next cohort.

Of the over 50 entrepreneurs, does the Minister have any statistics on how many of those businesses are still existing?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: I can endeavour to get the historical success of the businesses in the programme, but what I would say is that the likelihood of those businesses surviving based off of being in this programme is actually higher. When you look at what small and medium-sized enterprises need in the start-up phases to actually survive, it is this ecosystem that the BEDC has created that enables them to be sustainable in the early stages of their lives. And so notwithstanding what may happen in future years in terms of persons may determine that they want to pivot, I would say that these programmes are invaluable as it pertains to ensuring that there is a solid foundation for our small, medium-sized businesses to actually thrive.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Supplemental or third question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: Yes, supplemental.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Vance Campbell: I accept what the Minister has said as far as the tools that people are equipped with, but given our population challenges, we can be as prepared as possible, but we still need a customer base in order to be successful. And does the Minister feel that our current population challenges could be detrimental to those who are currently graduates of this programme as well as those who might be graduating in the next cohort?

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.
Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The challenges that this Ministry has highlighted as it pertains to our population, is as a result of our ageing population. Our population is ageing rapidly. That's not to say that our ageing population are not consumers, but when we look at the business statistics, the wholesale and retail sector is doing better than it was doing prior to the pandemic, which means that that sector continues to grow year over year.

When I outlined the numbers for small and medium-sized enterprises that were seeking resources from the BEDC during my budgetary submission, I did indicate that there was an increase of small businesses. When we look at the numbers as it pertains to local businesses registered, we see that that number is increasing and not decreasing. So notwithstanding what the espoused challenges are regarding our population, we still see progress being made in our business community.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister.
Is there a third question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: No, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. That ends Question Period.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Deputy Speaker: I recognise Minister Darrell.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise today and I ask that the House send a letter of condolences to the family of Mr. Ralph Eugene Bean, Sr., affectionately known in the community as "Gumbo." And I would like to associate the Premier, Minister De Silva—the entire House with these condolences.

As we would know, Gumbo, Sr., was affectionately known as a legend in this community for his career on the football pitch, mainly with North Village Community Club at a point in his career winning the Triple Crown, along with many other accolades. Mr. Bean played for the national team, and he also had a brief stint overseas professionally. And while I would say this, Madam Deputy Speaker, I never saw Ralph, Sr., Gumbo, Sr., kick a ball, but I could only imagine as I am a good friend of his son, Ralph "Gumbo" Bean, Jr., and when I watched him play, it was a joy to watch him on the pitch, and it was often said by many people in the crowd, *You are almost as good as your father*. So, with that said, I could only imagine, and from what I've heard from individuals like my father and others, that he was a class act on the field.

But as I said, I never saw him kick a ball. I want to speak to the man that I knew him to be. He was a humble man. He was one who loved all sports, especially golf and basketball. And some of my memories going over his house as a teenager was watching him sit in the living room and just enjoying sport.

He was also a man of God at his church, the First Church of God, where he was a deacon. And to his wife, Ms. Carol Bean, his children, Nikki and Ralph, Jr., his grandchildren, Jonté Smith, Hailey Smith, and Rhylen Bean, to the entire North Village Community Club family, to his extended family, his friends, you have the deepest condolences from me for your loss.

And in the 30 seconds that I have left, Madam Deputy Speaker, I'd like to send congratulations to the winner of this year's Bermuda Marathon Derby, Mr. Sean Trott, it was his first, and the first female, Ms. Gayle Lindsay, on her three-peat.

Also, I would like to send a shout-out to some individuals who ran as to try to get personal best. The Grateful Miles Run Club, co-founded by one of my constituents, Mr. Ezekiel Stoneham, as well as

congratulations to all organisers and participants of the Bermuda Day holiday.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members? I recognise the Member from constituency 33.

Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. Good morning, Bermuda, and good morning, colleagues.

I would just like to raise today to extend my thanks and gratitude to the organisers, the volunteers, everyone who helped make the recent Bermuda Day festivities a roaring success. I encourage you to continue to grow from strength to strength, and I encourage you to not be dissuaded by those who criticise just to criticise. A lot of good work was done, and you deserve your praise for it.

I also rise today to extend a hearty 80th birthday greeting for a former member of this Chamber, a former member from Sandys North, Mr. Lionel Simmons, who happens to be my father. He will be celebrating 80 years today, and I want to thank him not just for his service, for putting in some good work on me.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you. Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Minister from constituency 16. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I rise this morning to start off on a sad note. I would like to be associated with the remarks for the passing of Ralph "Gumbo" Bean. Not only was he good to watch, a standout to watch on the field, he was truly a class-act off the field, and my condolences go out to his family and friends and the North Village community as a whole.

But, Madam Deputy Speaker, I want to highlight my uniformed services over this past weekend. I would like to start with the Royal Bermuda Regiment, who worked throughout the whole weekend, the Bermuda Day weekend, tirelessly, not only with the race in the morning, the parade, the Coast Guard, they even had a marching band playing music in the parade. So, hats off to Colonel Simons and his team for the stellar job that they have done over this past weekend to make sure that we keep Bermuda safe.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would also like to highlight the police for their role in keeping our Island safe and, for the most part, incident free during this past weekend. Not only were they out and about serving the community, they took part in the parade. And, as a

matter of fact, their float was awarded the most beautiful float. And I would like to personally highlight PC Kim Spring, who is the architect of that float, and with her passion and knowledge of Bermuda Day and her love of Bermuda Day, she orchestrated that float. So, not only were the police out and about doing their job, they were actually participating in the parade and mingling with our people. That's a testament to what we do in the Uniformed Services. And, as always, it gives me the opportunity to say, anyone that is looking for a career, look for a career in the Uniformed Services.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Minister. Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to start off by offering congratulations to Mr. Quinton Sherlock, Jr., who is a golf professional and is opening a new golf school in St. George's at the GOLFZON Leadbetter Golf Academy at the St. Regis. It's a great addition, and we wish him well. And I know I'll associate fellow golfer, the Deputy Premier, and [Member] Tyrrell, who is a regular golfer as well.

On a sadder note, I have a number of condolences. To the family of my dear friend, Ivan Swan, Jr., who I first met at Allen Camp in 1969, and a friendship grew out of that, whose father, Ivan, Sr., I knew very, very well, frequenting St. George's Golf Club for many years before he passed.

Mr. Alfred Ambrose Scott, who was a regular talk show caller, sharing history. He, at one time, worked at Camden. He was the consummate well-dressed, very polite, and diction, outstanding diction, as he articulated. Always shared history with me about the Odd Fellows' halls around Bermuda and his concern about them.

Condolences to my cousin, Colin Thompson, Jr., and the family, and Barbara Bean on the passing of Zaire Bean. I grew up with Alan Stacy Gilbert. Condolences to his family. Member Scott Simmons would know him very well from going to school, but I knew his brothers, Kimball, the great boxer, and Derrick, his brother Jungle, from cricket at Somerset Bridge, and football with Somerset Eagles.

My cousin, Charles Ratteray, who passed, siblings of Oda Mallory and Kerwin Rattray, his wife, Joan. He carried the legacy of the name Charles Roach Rattray, our patriarch, from 1799 coming to Bermuda from Bahamas.

And I would like to be associated with the condolences to the masterful Ralph "Gumbo" Bean, who could weave his way through a defence like no other. A great footballer who was probably one of the most humble, great athletes I had ever come to know, and

just a great gentleman, and that wasn't lost on him. I worked with his brother at Gosling Brothers. It's a wonderful family. May he rest in peace.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 26. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Good morning, Madam Deputy Speaker. Thank you for recognising me, and good morning, colleagues.

Madam Deputy Speaker, just previously, the term *ageing population* was used, and I'm here standing on my feet to send some congratulations to some of my ageing constituents. All in their 90s, all in their 90s.

The first one is Ms. Thelma Smith from Jones Village, who went 92 on Saturday. And then there was Ms. Dorothy Latimore from Whale View Lane, who went 96, in fact, today. It's today.

An Hon. Member: Well done.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Ms. Vernetta Simmons, tomorrow, will celebrate her 95th birthday. And the last one, I have to declare my interest. It's my favourite aunt, my aunt Ursula Tyrrell, who will be 94 today.

So, I wish congratulations go to all of them.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: I wish to send congratulations to all of them, but while I'm on my feet, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to be associated with the condolences to my very good friend, Ralph "Gumbo" Bean. The young Minister only mentioned North Village that he played for, but I can certainly attest to Ralph "Gumbo" Bean playing for Devonshire Lions, and against me at one time, scoring a hat trick. So I certainly want to associate with those condolences and wish his family all the best on his passing. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member. Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member Tucker. Member, you have the floor from constituency 30 *[sic]*.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Seven.

The Deputy Speaker: Thirty . . . oh! I keep getting you wrong. From constituency 7.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

First, I realise that the whole House was associated with the condolences to Mr. Ralph "Gumbo" Bean, but I specifically wanted to get up and just simply express my personal condolences to his family.

Most of his, certainly his younger family, grandchildren and even his children, wouldn't know me, but certainly his wife and some of the others will, because I was one of those children that was dragged around to football games—every football game that North Village probably played, I was likely at between . . . sometime in the 1970s. My family were staunch North Village supporters. I have seen Ralph "Gumbo" Bean play more times than I can count. So, I just wanted to express condolences specifically from me to his family.

Also, Mr. Tyrrell, sorry, I don't remember what constituency he's in—

The Deputy Speaker: [Constituency] 26.

Ms. Robin Tucker: MP Tyrrell from constituency 26 expressed congratulations to his aunt, Ms. Ursula Tyrrell, for her 94th birthday.

An Hon. Member: Favourite aunt.

Ms. Robin Tucker: His favourite aunt, I beg your pardon, I stand corrected. I believe that is Ursula Tyrrell who used to work at Conyers, and I love her.

I also used to work at Conyers, and she is an absolute lovely lady. So I would like to associate MP Scott Pearman as well. Ms. Tyrrell is absolutely a fantastic lady, and I can understand why she is his favourite aunt. So, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak? I recognise the Member from constituency 36. Member, you have the floor.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, to my colleagues, and to the listening audience.

I would like to take the opportunity today to give congratulations to Dr. Yannick Majumair, who happens to be my daughter, who just finished her medical degree and graduated from the Wake Forest University Medical School. It was truly an honour to be present, and she also completed four years of having served as Dean's Ambassador. At Wake Forest, each incoming class, an outstanding student is selected to serve on the admissions committee and as Dean's Ambassador. And I'd like to congratulate her on her accomplishment and wish her well as she begins her residency in the field of neurology.

I would also like to take the opportunity today and congratulate our colleague, Bishop Dr. Leroy Bean, on his accomplishment on his recent graduation from Regents University with a Doctor of Philosophy degree in the area of psychology and counselling

studies with an emphasis on trauma and crisis. And also, to congratulate him and applaud him on the work that he continues to do in this community.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and I yield. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I wanted to associate myself with all of the comments congratulating the athletes, the performers, the participants, and the spectators who brought the energy for the festivities on Bermuda Day. And I'm sure that the whole House would like to be associated with that as well.

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the member from constituency 29. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, last week I asked the House to give congratulations to the Bermuda Snooker League for bringing the International Snooker League tournament to Bermuda. Well, it finished last night, and I have to give thanks to the Bermuda Snooker Association's team, Paul and Victoria Fedden, Steven Bremar, my partner in the doubles championship, of which we are currently defending champions. And, of course, I declare my interest, as my sister, Penny, also is on that committee.

I would also like to declare some further interest in thanking my partners at Island Construction for supporting the tournament, along with the Bermuda Tourism Authority and the Minister for their support. Last night, Madam Deputy Speaker, three-times world champion and current runner-up world champion Mark Williams scored, and if anyone knows anything about snooker, there are 15 red balls and six coloured balls, all of different value. The highest score one can make is 147. That means when they shoot, they pool every red ball and a black ball to go with each, and then pool the six coloured balls, which have to be pooled in a specific succession. And if you do that, you score 147.

He actually did it twice last night, which was unbelievable. I do not know if it has ever been done before in such a short period of time by one player. So, it was

absolutely phenomenal, and I would like to thank his coach, Lee [Walker], for also coming to Bermuda, and for them being really responsible for bringing almost 50 visitors to the Island. Half of them are repeat visitors. So, we are looking at . . . this has been an unprecedented tournament with this many visitors, and it seems to be growing and growing as time passes.

So, I would certainly like to thank Paul and his team at the Bermuda Snooker Association for bringing people to Bermuda.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I did.

I declare another interest, I did play the champion myself last night, and I scored one point before he cleaned the table on me.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But I will say that everyone that he played had one or two shots, maybe three. I think Steven Bremar, who is the current . . . he won the scratch tournament, by the way. But I think he pooled the most balls, and I think he made a 15 break, and that was his total score, and that was it.

But he was certainly a phenomenal person to watch, and I thank him and his team. Thank you.

[Timer chimes]

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 12. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I just want to say congratulations—happy birthday to our youngest member in the House, MP Dwayne Robinson.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: It's his birthday. Unfortunately, he's at work right at the moment. I know he's listening because he's been going back and forth with me, but happy birthday to him.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Sorry? Yes, yes, yes. No, I'll leave that up to you, Minister.

And to the Minister of Tourism and also Culture, I just wanted to say that May 24th was a lovely day. I know that we expected a bit of rain, but to all of the participants and for the Minister for putting on a fantastic opportunity for us to celebrate Bermuda Day and to

see all of the wonderful festivities that took place. It was really, really a proud day to be Bermudian. Thank you.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 18. Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, and good morning to you.

I wish to be associated with the condolences which were offered by the Minister of Tourism, Transport, Culture and Sport on asking for a letter to be sent to the family of the late "Gumbo" Bean. And certainly, would like to associate myself with those particular remarks.

In addition to that, I'd like to associate myself to the condolences that were offered for the late Mr. Ambrose Scott. As you would know, someone who well known to many of us, the former caretaker of Camden. In addition to that also is the father to the assistant to the Minister of Finance and also the Financial Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, Ms. Carol Martin. And so certainly would like to be associated with those remarks. His home going service will be at the St. Paul AME Church this weekend and to celebrate a life well lived, unquestionably.

Finally, I would like to be associated with the congratulations that have been offered to the Minister of Tourism, Transport, Culture and Sport and to his team at the Department of Culture and for all the work that went into this weekend's Bermuda Day festivities.

I think it's important to note, Madam Deputy Speaker, that there is a lot of work that goes into putting on a Bermuda Day holiday. And I know upon the Minister's appointment, one of the things, it is his favourite holiday. Mine is Cup Match, his is Bermuda Day. But on that particular holiday, he had come in as Minister of Culture with a goal to expand the parade, to make sure there are more participants, to make sure there's more support that was offered. And to see the wide range of groups who came back, the spectacular costumes. It's interesting, people complain about the length of the parade with the record amount—not the record, but the significant number of entries that were in the parade. But those entries would not have been there without the hard work of the Minister and his particular team. So certainly, want to extend congratulations to him.

And also associate with the congratulations to the first-time winner, Mr. Sean Trott. This year was the first year that I was not at the finish line of the Bermuda Day Marathon, as I like to spend it with my family. But what I would say is that Mr. Trott has been a runner-up for many times. Perseverance and endurance certainly paid off. And congratulations to him on his first Bermuda Day half marathon derby victory.

And as I extend the congratulations to, or offer my congratulations to the Minister and his team, I also

want to offer congratulations to the half marathon derby committee led by my constituent, Dr. Gina Tucker. And all of those persons who worked to make sure that the atmosphere on Court Street for the closing of that race, including Mr. Elmore Warren, was a great success.

So well done for all, and happy to be associated with those remarks, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Are there any other Members? There being none, that ends congrats and/or obits.

MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

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

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

INTRODUCTION OF BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: I do believe we have two Bills to be introduced.

Premier?

GOVERNMENT BILLS

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

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

Madam Deputy Speaker, I am introducing the following two Bills, which according to section 36.3 of the Bermuda Constitution require the Governor's recommendation so they may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting.

The first is the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 and the second is the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

OPPOSITION BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

PRIVATE BILLS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Deputy Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Deputy Speaker: That brings us to the Orders of the Day, and it takes us to a resumption in Committee. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we move into Committee of Supply.

Are there any objections?

There being none, I call on Member Simmons to come take the Chair.

House in Committee at 11:12 am

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Chairman: Good morning, Members. We will be starting this debate in the Committee of Supply at about (what time is it?) 11:12 am. This is a five-hour debate.

Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, 88 under the Ministry of National Security. The Minister in charge is the Honourable Michael Weeks, JP, MP.

Minister, you have the floor.

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

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

The Chairman: Good morning, sir.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads: Heads 83, Ministry of National Security Headquarters; Head 6, which is Defence; Head 7, which is Police; Head 12, which is Customs; and Head

88, which is National Drug Control, be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Are there any Members that do not agree?

There are none, Minister, proceed.

HEAD 83—MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY HEADQUARTERS

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

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The mission Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Yes.

Mission

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The mission of the Ministry of National Security is *Working together to keep you safe*.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$4,966,000 has been allocated for this Head, which represents an increase of \$1,796,000 from the previous year and constitutes 4 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

The increase reflects the funding required for various projects and initiatives the department will be implementing, such as the Uniformed Services Training Programme, grants and the educational support programmes. The department will also be filling six posts to provide critical resources in Administration, Cybersecurity and Disaster Risk Reduction and Management. Further details are provided in the business unit cost analysis.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-265 of the general summary you will note that there are four business units within the Ministry Headquarters. The estimate for business unit 93000 for Administration is \$2,797,000, an increase of \$795,000 or 40 per cent. This comprises of \$80,037 towards the salary uplift; \$319,931 to cover one Security Manager, and one Information Security Systems Officer and one Cybersecurity Analyst for the Cybersecurity Team; and one secretary for \$61,929; one political aide for \$87,148; and one relief administrative assistant for \$66,059. The remaining amount will form part of the budget towards a stipend for 10 trainees for the Uniformed Services Training Programme of \$92,836, \$14,650 for staff and head of department training, \$33,000 for overseas conferences and training, \$15,000 for advertising and marketing, and \$24,410 for increase in Public Radio Safety maintenance fees.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 93002 for the Parole Board and 93003 for the Treatment of Offenders Board are no longer being used as both boards have been transferred to the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for business unit 93004 for the Police Complaints Authority is \$31,000 and has no change from the 2024/25 budget.

Mr. Chairman, the estimate for business unit 93007 for Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team is \$422,000, \$232,000 or 122 per cent increase over the 2024/25 financial year. The increase is to fund one National Events Coordinator post for \$86,345, one consultant for \$108,000 to oversee supply chain disaster management and \$37,655 for conferences and tabletop exercises.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 93008 relates to the Gang Violence Reduction Programme with an estimate for the financial year 2025/26 of \$1,716,000. This represents a \$924,000 or 117 per cent increase over the financial year 2024/25. The increase will fund educational programmes for individuals, counselling for victims of violence, work placement programmes to provide an alternative to gang activity and grants to fund community programmes in sporting clubs and community-based entities.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Liquor Licence Authority was transferred to the Ministry of Justice in September 2024; however, the payment of fees and collection of revenue continued with the Ministry of National Security until 31 March 2025. As shown on page B-266, the adjusted revenue projection for 2024/25 was \$1,012,000, a \$99,000, or 11 per cent increase over the projected revenue collection of \$913,000. As of 31 March 2025, [\$997,667] was collected, a \$14,333 decrease over the adjusted revenue projection.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates of the Ministry of National Security is found on page B-266. I will highlight the material object code descriptions increases and decreases.

Salaries increased by \$705,000. This is attributable to the three posts to be filled to provide administrative services to the Minister and Permanent Secretary, the Cybersecurity Board and the Police Complaints Authority. The Cybersecurity Team will have three more funded team members to bolster the cybersecurity efforts, and the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team will be fully funded for the National Disaster Coordinator and the National Events Coordinator.

The decrease in wages of \$279,000 is attributed to the Ministry not having the Uniformed

Services Training Programme in progress. The planning and design for this programme are well advanced and we are hoping to launch it during this fiscal year. The funding in the amount of \$371,344 for the cohort for the financial year 2025/26 will be allocated to Professional Services.

Professional Services saw an increase of \$1,098,000. Mr. Chairman, \$687,664 will be used towards marketing of anti-violence messaging, educational bursaries and counselling services and \$371,344 will be used towards a stipend for two cohorts of 10 people for the Uniformed Services Recruitment Programme and \$38,992 for the part-time teachers of the programme.

The increase of \$171,000 for other expenses will be allocated as follows: \$30,000 will be allocated towards the Mothers on a Mission (MOM) Group to provide resources for support services to mothers of victims of gang violence and \$26,590 for safe house, airfare and emergency passports for individuals in imminent danger of gang violence. Cybersecurity costs include \$2,000 for subscriptions, \$8,000 for penetration testing and \$80,000 for centralised logging and monitoring system and \$24,410 towards an increase in public safety radio network fees.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, as shown on page C-14, the Ministry received \$1,140,000 for capital acquisitions. Mr. Chairman, \$177,782 will be used towards the upgrades of the Island-wide public safety radio network and \$962,218 will be geared towards the completion of the CCTV network and the start of the Speed Camera system. As I have previously reported to this Honourable House, the installation of the Speed Camera system is contingent upon the complete installation of the CCTV network.

Manpower

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The department's increase of six full-time equivalents reflects the increase in funding of three posts for administrative support, and three posts for the Cybersecurity Unit.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report the outcomes of the department's forecasted performance measures for fiscal year 2024/25 that were largely achieved. These are found on page B-267.

Business Unit 93000, Title Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This business unit is responsible for providing support to the departments in the form of policy development, project management, financial oversight and cybersecurity governance. One

of the key functions of the Cybersecurity Team is to develop and implement policies. During the 2024/25 fiscal period, the team achieved 80 per cent of approving Information Systems Risk Management Programme Policies and are as follows

- Policies for the updated Cybersecurity Act, Cybersecurity Regulations, and Computer Misuse Act were finalised and approved by Cabinet.
- The Cybersecurity Act and Computer Misuse Act based on approved policies were drafted and approved by Parliament.
- The updated Information Systems Risk Management Programme Policy has been developed and is awaiting review by the Cybersecurity Advisory Board and Cabinet Cybersecurity Committee.

The Ministry conducted monthly meetings both in a formal and informal setting with its Heads of Departments (HODs) and DEOD Manager. The formal meetings were held to provide Heads of Departments with pertinent information that included:

- updates from the Public Service Executive;
- updates on the status of Cabinet Memorandum;
- update DEOD primarily around recruitment and the status of the exercises; and
- financial updates relating to budget, year-end and procurement.

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

Business Unit 93007, Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This business unit is responsible for the oversight of stakeholders' completion of disaster recovery plans. The team is also integral in staging disaster exercises and the coordination of entities during times of disaster such as before, during and after hurricanes.

Between April and September 2024, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team (DRRMT) advanced Bermuda's national disaster preparedness and operational resilience through a range of strategic initiatives, legislative support efforts, stakeholder engagements, and critical operational developments.

A substantial focus was placed on strengthening disaster readiness and emergency management operations. Key activities included the planning, coordination, and execution of the Port Security Tabletop Exercise [TTX] as well as participation in the Government House-hosted Sanctions [TTX]. These exercises were designed to enhance inter-agency coordination, develop operational readiness, and refine information extraction processes through structured scenario debriefs. Preparations and assessments of the

Emergency Measures Organisation (EMO) room at the Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service (BFRS) remained ongoing to ensure that technical systems, infrastructure, and operational capabilities remained mission-ready.

Mr. Chairman, in addition to exercise and operational readiness work, the DRRMT contributed to the advancement of Bermuda's legislative framework by assisting in the further development of Disaster Management and Emergency Measures Legislation. This supported efforts to modernise Bermuda's legal basis for national disaster response, ensuring that contemporary principles and operational best practices are reflected in statutory frameworks.

The DRRMT also developed a comprehensive business case for the establishment of an all-encompassing Emergency Measures Operations Centre (EMOC). In support of this initiative, the team drafted Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to guide the management, functionality, and activation of an operations centre. Further, SOPs for the oversight and operation of the Public Safety Radio Network were prepared, ensuring that communications resilience remains a priority across Bermuda's emergency response infrastructure.

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

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

Mr. Chairman, strategic research initiatives advanced significantly during the reporting period. Notably, the team pursued evaluation of national emergency alerting systems, explored enhancements to Bermuda's public emergency messaging capabilities, and initiated preliminary planning for Bermuda's National Risk Register (NRR). Work focused on disaster preparedness for vulnerable populations, aligning national planning efforts with a commitment to inclusive and equitable disaster risk reduction.

Mr. Chairman, stakeholder engagement remained a cornerstone of DRRMT operations. The team

participated actively in numerous forums, including Port Security Meetings focused on maritime and infrastructure vulnerabilities, Supply Chain Meetings to ensure critical goods continuity during disasters, and Public Health preparedness meetings aimed at strengthening the health sector's resilience to emergencies.

Furthermore, the DRRMT took responsibility for maintaining Bermuda's Emergency Broadcast Studio, ensuring that public communication systems were operational and reliable. The team chaired the Public Safety Radio Users Group, providing leadership in co-ordinating multiple agencies' use of the radio network and addressing critical issues promptly. International engagement continued through FCDO Disaster Manager briefings and UK Met Office hurricane updates, ensuring Bermuda remained closely connected with global resilience efforts.

The DRRMT supported critical incident response during the period, particularly following the impacts of Hurricane Ernesto. The team coordinated stakeholders in the rapid repair and restoration of the Public Safety Radio Network, ensuring critical communications infrastructure was brought back online efficiently. Additionally, the team conducted high-level meetings to plan for the potential impacts of a strike by the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA), focusing on continuity of operations and mitigating potential disruptions to Bermuda's import-dependent supply chain.

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

Policy Development and Strategic Planning

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, we drafted and submitted the National Risk Register (NRR) with Phase 1 training completed in February 2025. A PowerPoint presentation was shared with stakeholders, and the second phase is currently being scheduled. We worked with Policy Analysts to address legislative concerns regarding the authority to declare a disaster, ensuring alignment with the Governor's existing powers.

Operational Frameworks and SOPs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We developed and submitted EMO Operations Centre Standard Operating Procedures, drafted the Public Safety Radio Standard Operating Procedures in collaboration with BPS and Corrections. We initiated a comprehensive Event Safety

Framework and event checklists, including oversight of major national events such as the PGA Golf Tour, Chubb Race Weekend, Cup Match, and Bermuda Day preparations.

Community Preparedness and Exercises

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We coordinated participation in Exercise Caribe Wave (March 2025), with a debrief scheduled for April 10. We engaged in planning and evaluating cruise ship tabletop exercises and mass rescue operations in partnership with Marine Operations and UK/US Coast Guard support.

We hosted Hurricane Preparedness Planning sessions to address vegetation management, worksite safety, and post-strike coordination across utilities and public works and continued evacuation planning for Ferry Reach, incorporating emergency plans from stakeholders like Rubis and SOL.

Business Unit 93000, Title Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: This business unit is responsible for Gang Violence Reduction Team 2025 Update.

Mr. Chairman, in 2025, the Gang Violence Reduction Team (GVRT) continues to stand as a beacon of resilience and transformation, leading Bermuda's fight against gang violence and youth disenfranchisement. In a time where communities face deep-rooted social inequalities, fractured family systems, and barriers to opportunity, the GVRT, under the leadership of our Bishop Leroy Bean, (now Dr. Bishop) MP has remained unwavering in its mission: *to intervene, uplift, and empower*.

The GVRT is not simply a response mechanism—it is a force of intentional change, working to dismantle cycles of violence and rebuild pathways toward hope and healing. Through tailored interventions and robust outreach efforts, the GVRT has embedded itself in schools, communities, workplaces, and homes, meeting individuals where they are and walking with them toward better futures.

Mr. Chairman, the core mission of the GVRT remains focused on:

- Guiding individuals away from delinquent peer groups and toxic environments.
- Transforming behaviour patterns of those involved in gang activity and fostering reintegration into society.
- Preventing youth gang involvement by restoring social and familial bonds.
- Opening employment pathways for marginalised youth.
- Connecting individuals with mental and social health resources.
- Strengthening interpersonal relationships and community accountability.

School Outreach

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Acknowledging that schools often serve as recruitment grounds for gang activity, the GVRT has amplified its school presence across the island. This year, our outreach included

- Daily High School Lunch Engagements: Regular presence at school lunch hours, offering mentorship and informal check-ins.
- Restorative Mediation Sessions: De-escalating tensions and promoting peaceful resolution among students.
- Incident Response and Crisis Management: Post-incident school support, planning, and security assessments.
- Case Management and Tailored Youth Sessions: Individualised support plans and interventions for vulnerable students.
- Small Group Programming: Targeted skill-building and emotional resilience workshops.

Early Intervention: "I AM" & G.R.E.A.T. Programmes

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Early engagement has proven pivotal in changing life trajectories.

The "I Am" Programme highlights:

- Launched in 10 schools, with a new curriculum piloted at Dellwood Middle School.
- Over 116 structured sessions have been held from September 2023 to June 2024. Eighty-eight sessions were delivered between September 2024 and April 2025.
- One hundred and sixty-two boys across nine primary schools and one middle school has participated.
- Thirty-five crisis supports, 36 mediation sessions, and 140 individualised supports delivered.

G.R.E.A.T. Programme

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: G.R.E.A.T. stands for, Mr. Chairman, Gang Resistance Education and Training.

- Continues to engage primary school boys with structured, values-based education aimed at fostering resilience and resistance to gang influence.

Work Placement and Mentoring Programme (WPMP)

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Bridging school to work-force:

- Fifteen youth participants, with 14 completing the eight-week placement.
- One hundred and thirty job coaching sessions provided personalised support.
- 85 per cent business partner satisfaction and interest in future participation.

- Eight youth received extended paid work; four secured jobs post-programme.
- There was no involvement in antisocial or criminal activity throughout the programme.
- 100 per cent of parents observed positive growth in their children.

Redemption Programme: A Path to Personal Reinvention

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: In 2024/25, the Redemption Programme continued as a transformative space for young men:

- Eighteen trainees completed the 25-week programme.
- One hundred and thirty-seven one-on-one case management and job coaching sessions were conducted.
- Seventy-six sessions on career, personal development, and job readiness.
- Six secured employment; one enrolled at Bermuda College; one entered university.
- Ten crisis interventions managed with ongoing support for four active participants.

Street-Level Outreach and Case Management

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Serving 78 young adults (ages 18 to 35):

- Tailored, client-centred case management addressing housing, employment, legal, and mental health needs.
- Safe housing, relocation support, prison visits, and court advocacy have been offered.
- Quarterly community mediations and inter-agency collaborations facilitated systemic wraparound care.

Mr. Chairman, in the aftermath of violence, when fear grips families and uncertainty ripples through neighbourhoods, it is the Coordinated Crisis Response Team (CCRT) that steps forward to restore peace, stabilise emotions, and help communities begin the process of healing.

Functioning as a rapid-response arm of the Gang Violence Reduction Team, the CCRT is mobilised immediately following serious violent incidents—whether a shooting, stabbing, or other traumatic event. The team is composed of experienced professionals and trusted community figures who work together to deliver compassionate, coordinated support in real-time.

In the past year, the CCRT was activated following 28 violent incidents requiring hospital-based intervention, and an additional one community activation in response to heightened tensions on the ground. In total, the team delivered 104 targeted post-incident support sessions to survivors, close friends, and immediate family members impacted by violence.

Gang Violence Reduction Team: Leading the National Violence Reduction Strategy

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, today, I am pleased to provide an update on the significant progress made since the launch of Bermuda's National Violence Reduction Strategy (NVRS)—a strategic framework that marks a bold step forward in addressing violence in our community through prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: It is important to note, Mr. Chairman, that the Gang Violence Reduction Team (GVRT), under the Ministry of National Security, was not only instrumental in developing this strategy but also led its drafting and presentation to Cabinet and the House of Assembly. The NVRS was officially tabled in the House on 15 November 2024 and passed with full support following a debate on 6 December 2024.

Strategic Leadership and Governance Framework

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: To ensure effective implementation, the NVRS is structured across three operational tiers:

1. National Violence Reduction Steering Committee (NVRSC). Chaired by the Minister of National Security and composed of Permanent Secretaries from the Ministries of National Security, Health, Education, Legal Affairs, and Youth, Social Development and Seniors. This committee meets regularly and ensures high-level alignment and resource coordination across ministries.

Bear with me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Not a problem at all, Minister.

Just to remind Members that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates and Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

We are now debating heads in the Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, and 88. The Honourable Michael Weeks, JP, MP, is in charge.

Minister, you have the floor.

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

2. Inter-Agency Gang Enforcement Team (IGET). Focused on intelligence-led enforcement and coordinated interventions, IGET works closely with law enforcement, the courts, and other agencies to mitigate gang activity in real time.
3. Inter-Agency Community Response (IGCR). This prevention-focused tier drives education, youth engagement, and community partnerships to disrupt the root causes of violence.

Major Programme Highlights Under the NVRS Educational and Vocational Pathways (Empowering Futures)

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Addressing root causes such as economic disenfranchisement, the NVRS has prioritised access to education and job training:

- GED Programme: In partnership with C.A.R.E. Learning Centre, grants are being issued to youth pursuing their GEDs. Discussions with the Adult Education School are underway to further expand access.
- Workforce Development: In collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Labour, apprenticeships and industry certifications are being provided in high-demand sectors.
- Bermuda College Sponsorships: A new initiative is underway to sponsor associate degrees or certifications for youth from underserved backgrounds.

New GVRT Staff and Sports-Based Violence Prevention

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: A new GVRT team member has been hired to implement violence reduction strategies within local sports clubs, leveraging athletics as a vehicle for positive engagement and gang prevention.

Public Messaging and Youth Engagement Stop the Violence Campaign—March 2025

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: In collaboration with 7 South Productions, a multimedia campaign will launch across Bermuda featuring:

- video reels and podcasts;
- student-led campaigns on social media;
- mental health and anti-violence messaging by youth for youth.

We have a plan to recognise that safe spaces are essential for prevention. To that end, the NVRS is also:

- Funding youth-centred organisations such as Transitional Community Services, Future Leaders, The Family Centre, Women's Resource Centre, and Money Muse to scale their outreach and impact for groups working directly with young people.

Conclusion

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: In conclusion, Mr. Chairman, the National Violence Reduction Strategy represents our Government's clear and coordinated response to the crisis of violence. The Gang Violence Reduction Team remains at the heart of this mission—not only as the strategy's author but as its most consistent engine for impact.

With over 80 strategic actions already underway, this work is changing lives and rebuilding communities. Through education, mentorship, crisis response, and real opportunities, the GVRT is leading Bermuda toward a future that is safer, more resilient, and filled with hope.

We extend our deepest appreciation to all stakeholders, ministries, and community partners. Together, we are building a Bermuda where every young person has a reason to be hopeful—and has a path to succeed.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of National Security is developing the Uniformed Services Training Programme (USTP) as a strategic initiative to address long-standing recruitment challenges within Bermuda's uniformed services. The programme is designed to support Bermudians who narrowly fall short of the academic or physical fitness requirements for entry into the services. Open to individuals aged 18 to 49, the Uniformed Services Training Programme will provide targeted training and development aimed at increasing the pool of qualified, service-ready candidates.

Mr. Chairman, the programme will be delivered over a three-month period at Warwick Camp and will include a structured combination of academic instruction, physical fitness training, and personal and professional development. Participants will engage in modules focused on numeracy and literacy skills, interview and résumé preparation, and character development, alongside familiarisation placements within the Bermuda Police Service, Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service, Customs Department, and the Department of Corrections. The curriculum is currently under development, with input from professional training experts to ensure alignment with the operational and cultural expectations of Bermuda's uniformed services. Participants in the programme will also receive financial compensation during their training period.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry will deliver two cohorts of the programme during the 2025/26 fiscal year, with each cohort comprising up to 10 participants. The first cohorts will be populated by individuals who were recently unsuccessful in recruitment processes and narrowly missed the qualifying thresholds. These individuals will be directly invited to apply to the programme. The initial cohort will serve as a pilot, allowing the Ministry to refine delivery based on participant outcomes and operational feedback. The programme also benefits from the support of internal government resources, making it both cost-effective and sustainable.

The Uniformed Services Training Programme represents a significant investment in the future of Bermuda's public safety infrastructure. By focusing on trainable individuals who demonstrate potential but have not yet met entry standards, the programme

enhances recruitment outcomes, strengthens organisational resilience, and promotes meaningful opportunities for Bermudians to serve their community with pride and professionalism.

Mr. Chairman, as we look at the year ahead, the Gang Violence Reduction Team (GVRT) will remain a central pillar in the ongoing implementation of the National Violence Reduction Strategy (NVRS). As both architects of the strategy and active agents of its delivery, the GVRT continues to be a driving force behind Bermuda's efforts to reduce violence and build a safer, more inclusive society.

The GVRT's work is not theoretical. It is practical, personal, and profoundly impactful. Through education, mentorship, crisis response, and real-life opportunities, the GVRT is changing lives, restoring communities, and guiding young people toward hope and purpose. Our next steps reflect a commitment to deepening this impact and expanding the reach of our programmes in alignment with the eight strategic goals of the NVRS.

Mr. Chairman, the GVRT will:

- Continue leading and implementing core violence prevention initiatives in direct alignment with the NVRS, serving as key stakeholders across all three strategic tiers of the National Violence Reduction Strategy (Steering Committee, Inter-Agency Gang Enforcement, and Inter-Agency Community Response teams).
- Support community-based prevention and early intervention through:
 - o Grants to sports clubs to provide after-school homework assistance, life skills development, and violence prevention workshops for young people.
 - o Funding youth-centred organisations that offer trauma-informed, wrap-around support to vulnerable children and families.
 - o Expanded counselling services and therapeutic programmes to address mental health needs and support emotional healing for people affected by violence or violent incidents.
- Launch the "Stop the Violence" multimedia campaign in collaboration with 7 South Productions, featuring:
 - o Video reels, short films, and podcasts
 - o Student-led social media campaigns
 - o Messaging that addresses gang violence, emotional health, and youth empowerment
- Host the "Stop the Violence" Youth Conference this June where students from across the Island will be mentored by local creatives to design and present youth-led anti-violence campaigns, while reinforcing peer advocacy and resilience.

- Expand our Youth Mentoring and Work Placement Programme, supporting 25 students with employment readiness, mentorship, and work-place experience in a safe, structured setting.
- Grow the Redemption Programme to support 25 young men through a 20-week curriculum of personal growth, life skills training, conflict resolution, and career exposure.
- Advance educational and vocational pathways under the Empowering Futures initiative, which includes:
 - o GED programmes in partnership with C.A.R.E and discussions to expand offerings through the Adult Education School.
 - o Apprenticeships and industry certifications through the Ministry of Economy and Labour and other local training programmes and partnerships.
 - o Associate degrees and certifications through new sponsorships at Bermuda College.
- Support the broader NVRS implementation, including:
 - o Violence prevention workshops for community leaders and service providers.
 - o Parenting support programmes, including culturally relevant workshops and targeted fatherhood support groups.
 - o “Through-the-gate” re-entry support packages for individuals transitioning from incarceration, tied to community-based care models.
 - o Community roundtables to gather feedback, build local partnerships, and identify service gaps.
- Uphold the NVRS Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, ensuring every action taken is guided by measurable goals, accountability, and evidence-based practices to deliver meaningful results.

Mr. Chairman, the Gang Violence Reduction Team will continue to serve on the frontline—offering guidance, intervention, and opportunity to those who need it most. We remain committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure the effectiveness of the National Violence Reduction Strategy and, most importantly, to build a Bermuda where safety, dignity, and opportunity are not the exception, but the expectation.

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

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And as I move on, I would like to thank the staff of the Ministry Headquarters for

their yeoman work, led by our Permanent Secretary, Colonel Edward Lamb.

The Chairman: So noted. Thanks, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I shall now present my budget, Mr. Chairman, for Head 6.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Which is Defence.

The Chairman: Yes, go right ahead.

HEAD 6—DEPARTMENT OF DEFENCE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, found on pages B-268 through B-272 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

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

Mission

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The mission of the Royal Bermuda Regiment is, *To provide military resources in order to protect Bermuda's interests.*

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

Department Objectives

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

- Force Protection—Measures and means to minimise the vulnerability of personnel, facilities, equipment, material, operations and activities from threats and hazards in order to preserve freedom of action and operational effectiveness thereby contributing to mission success.
- Humanitarian Aid/Disaster Relief—The organised response to alleviate the results of a catastrophe, the consequences of which put lives and livelihoods at risk and exceeds the responsible agency's ability to cope using its own resources.
- State Ceremonial—Provide state ceremonial and musical support for the government and to

promote Bermuda, through ceremonial parades, national events and musical displays, as we saw this past weekend, Mr. Chairman—

training and operations, in accordance with the Commanding Officer's directive and our Throne Speech initiatives.

The Chairman: Yes, we did. They did a fine job.

Business Unit 16000, Finance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —for Bermuda Day. Thank you, sir.

- International Assistance—Upon request, the Regiment will provide military skills and resources to assist UN, NATO, regional, or international peace support operations or training thereby enhancing Bermuda's reputation in the international community.
- Enhancing Bermuda Society—The Regiment will continue to provide an important role in supporting the integration and development of Bermudian society.
- Coast Guard—In order to secure Bermuda's territorial waters out to 12 nautical miles and eventually to defend the EEZ (200 nautical miles), in compliance with the Defence (Coast Guard Unit) Amendment Act 2018 and international obligations, the Royal Bermuda Regiment will expand its full-time Coast Guard capability that can achieve the following mandates:
 - o Law enforcement of Bermuda's in-shore waters.
 - o Search and rescue coordinated by the Bermuda Maritime Operations Centre.
 - o Support HM Customs to interdict marine smuggling operations.
 - o Support the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to enforce fisheries regulations.
 - o Support the Department of Marine and Ports to enforce maritime regulations and ensure maritime border and port security.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, a total of \$9,810,000 has been allocated for this head, which represents an increase of \$982,443 from the previous year, and constitutes 8 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

The total current expenditure is estimated to be \$9,809,000 for 2025/26 and represents an increase of \$982,400 or approximately 11 per cent, higher than the budget of 2024/25. This change is due primarily to an increase in full-time staff salaries in line with Government-wide increases, part-time wages, transport, travel, and operational expenses with additional expenditure focused on the Coast Guard, St. David's sub-station. This increase will allow the Royal Bermuda Regiment to return to its original full-time equivalent and allow the Royal Bermuda Regiment to support

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Finance cost centre covers the Defence Department which holds three civilian full-time staff and one Regiment full-time staff and serves as the accounting function for the Royal Bermuda Regiment (RBR).

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$358,000, which represents an increase of \$15,000, or 4 per cent when compared to the last fiscal year. This is solely due to the salary uplift.

Business Unit 16005, Recruitment

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Recruitment cost centre covers the advertising, promotion, and related recruiting expenses.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$94,000, which is a decrease of \$21,000, or 18 per cent from the 2024/25 financial year. The sole contribution to this is the reorganisation of the Regiment, which resulted in the wages being reallocated to cost centre 16030.

Business Unit 16010, Regimental Headquarters

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Regimental Headquarters cost centre covers all the Regiment FTEs for Defence, liabilities such as employee-related expenses and liability insurance for the marine fleet, vehicle fleet, and public liability.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$5,095,000 which is an increase of \$640,000, or 14 per cent increase over the 2024/25 financial year. This increase is to account for an increase in FTE salaries, rising insurance costs, and increases to medical costs for FTEs. We have also re-funded four vacant unfunded posts.

Business Unit 16020, Quartermaster

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Quartermaster cost centre covers all the operational and logistical services for the Royal Bermuda Regiment in relation to facilities for land and sea forces.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$1,517,000, which is an increase of \$5,000, or less than 1.0 per cent (0.7 per cent, actually) over the 2024/25 financial year. This is due to the transfer of Medics and Communications to Headquarters under the new reorganisation. Given the increases to the cost of goods and materials, this is not a dramatic increase. We have reduced training time to meet the budget ceiling, without any impact on operational readiness of troops.

Business Unit 16030, Ceremonial

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Ceremonial cost centre covers the ceremonial and the humanitarian and disaster relief training expenses. In addition to this, 16030 now covers the cost of Headquarter Company under the new organisation. This includes the Band, Medics, Communications, and public engagement aspects of the Royal Bermuda Regiment.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$352,000, which is an increase of \$64,000 or a 22 per cent increase over the 2024/25 financial year. This is due to an increase in the part-time soldier's wages and increase in soldier numbers with the new reorganisation. We have reduced training time to meet the budget ceiling, without any impact on operational readiness.

Business Unit 16040, Internal Security

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Internal Security cost centre covers the training expenses related to internal security and military aid to civil authority.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$235,000, which is an increase of \$10,000, or a 4 per cent increase over the 2024/25 financial year.

Business Unit 16060, Bermuda Cadet Corp/Junior Leaders

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Cadet Corp cost centre covers the training and youth engagement of the Junior Leaders programme. As part of the curriculum, staff of the Royal Bermuda Regiment facilitate adventure training, drill, camp craft and similar military activities to young Bermudians below the age of military enlistment. The main aim is to enhance the leadership and decision-making skills of school-age cadets in order to make them better citizens. The programme runs weekly throughout the school year and incorporates meetings, weekend camps, and an annual exercise.

Mr. Chairman, were you a Junior Leader?

The Chairman: I was not a Junior Leader. I was a Police Cadet. I enjoyed being a Police Cadet as opposed to a Junior Leader.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: You served our community well.

The Chairman: I never had that opportunity.

Minister, as you take a short break, I will simply say that we remain in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates and Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

Minister, by note, it looks like about 20 minutes is left before we will soon be breaking for lunch. I will let you continue.

The Minister continues on Head 6, which is Defence, and he is going through 16010 all the way to, I believe, by the time we get to the end of 20 minutes to 16085.

Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and for your service as a Police Cadet.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$43,000, which is a decrease of \$9,000, or 17 per cent when compared to the 2024/25 financial year. This is due to the Commandant of the Junior Leaders becoming the Full-Time Adjutant, and the replacement Junior Leader Officer is also covered by salary under the new reorganisation.

Business Unit 16075, Overseas Camp

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this year the overseas camp took place in Jamaica in April 2025. Since the formation of the unit, the two-week overseas camp has been the culmination of the annual training cycle and remains a mandated requirement by the Governor. The exercise provides tangible evidence that the Royal Bermuda Regiment is fit for role and able to operate at the scale and intensity required to complete their missions and tasks. The complexity and range of activities conducted, on land and at sea, are not possible to achieve within the confines of Bermuda; therefore, it is essential that the camp is conducted abroad. It is also a primary component in the retention of Royal Bermuda Regiment personnel as it is engaging, and an exciting and impactful opportunity for Bermudians to travel abroad.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$904,000, a \$209,000, or 30 per cent, increase over the 2024/25 financial year. This increase is due wholly to increased wages and a more expensive charter due to travelling to Jamaica rather than North Carolina as the Royal Bermuda Regiment did in the 2024/25 financial year.

Business Unit 16080, Training and Validation

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Training and Validation cost centre covers the expenses related to the training of recruits and promotion courses. To ensure our military personnel are current, qualified and competent, it is essential that the selection and training system provides development and assessment opportunities at all levels, for all specialisms. The Training and Validation budget ensures these courses and qualifications are delivered in the most appropriate and cost-effective way possible, only seeking external instruction when it is not possible through local resources. All routine training exercises subscribe to the UK Armed Forces recognised assurance system, the Defence System Approach to Training, to ensure safety and consistency.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$555,000, which is an increase of \$20,000, or 4 per cent over the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Business Unit 16085, Marine Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Marine Operations cost centre covers the costs associated with the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard's operating expenses and part-time wages. The unit has 14 full-time staff, consisting of 12 soldiers and two officers. They are supported by part-time staff who train and operate on weekends and public holidays in order to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters 24 hours a day throughout the year.

The 2025/26 budget estimate is \$657,000, which is an increase of \$50,000, or 8 per cent from the 2024/25 financial year. This is exclusively due to increases to the cost of electricity and gasoline.

Subjective Analysis

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

Salaries have increased by \$470,000, or 11 per cent for the 2025/26 financial year. This is largely in part due to salary uplifts, and the funding of four frozen FTEs.

Wages have increased by \$69,000, or 3 per cent, for the 2025/26 financial year. This is due to the fact that part-time soldiers have increased alongside the salary uplift.

Employer Overhead has increased by \$4,000, or 4 per cent for the 2025/26 financial year.

Other Personnel Costs have increased by \$128,000, or 188 per cent. This is budgeted due to increased housing allowance to fall in line with BPS rates.

Travel has increased by \$204,000, or 50 per cent. This is wholly due to the increased cost of the charter flight for the overseas camp and increased costs of flights.

Communications has increased by \$5,000, or 7 per cent. This is due to the increased cost of goods and services.

Professional Services has increased by \$18,000, or 25 per cent. This is due to the increased cost of goods and services.

Insurance has increased by 12,000, or 15 per cent. This is due to the increased cost of insurance Island-wide.

Energy has increased by \$57,000, or 15 per cent. This is due to the increased cost of gasoline and electricity, and the anticipated costs for the expansion of the Coast Guard St. David's facility.

Materials and Supplies has increased by \$16,000, or 4 per cent. This is due to the increased cost of goods and services Island-wide.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Regiment is due to purchase a modernisation programme for the rifle range at Warwick Camp, which is utilised equally between the Royal Bermuda Regiment and Bermuda Police Service. The portable turning target system will enhance training for both services, at the cost of \$21,510. Additionally, \$1,300,000 has been allocated to Phase 2 of the Coast Guard Station in St. David's. Utilising the St. David's Post Office structure, this will give increased operational coverage to the Coast Guard that will allow more coverage of the Eastern end of the Island, as currently all Coast Guard operations originate from Watford Island. Funds will be spent on renovating the building and making the site secure for military operations. This is expected to be operational by the end of this financial year.

Manpower

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Regiment currently employs 39 full-time staff and four civilians. With the increased budget ceiling, we are in the process of funding an additional four FTEs to re-fund vacant PIDs. This brings the total FTEs for 2025/26 to 47 which is reflected on budget page B-271. The Coast Guard is currently at full capacity in terms of FTEs. In addition to the full-time staff, the Royal Bermuda Regiment part-time strength is 240. This brings our total numbers to 279.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

16000, 16005, 16010, 16020, 16030, 16040, 16075, 16080—Finance, Recruitment, Headquarters, Quartermaster, [HADR, MACA], Overseas Camp, Training Wing

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Regiment successfully completed its preparations and training for the past Hurricane season. In February, the Regiment held a successful Recruit Camp with 27 volunteers, and the Royal Bermuda Regiment is in the planning stages of holding a second Recruit Camp in summer 2025 where we aim to bring in an additional 25 recruits.

In April of 2024 the Royal Bermuda Regiment sent a contingent of [110] soldiers to North Carolina, where they represented the Island in Exercise Island Warrior 24. They have also dispatched training teams to deliver sub lethal Public Order training to the seven nation Regional Security Service based in Belize. The Regiment is also intending to send up to 121 soldiers to Jamaica for their annual overseas camp to develop advanced soldiering and tactical skills, alongside other Overseas Territories Regiments from the Falkland Islands, Cayman Islands, and Turks and Caicos Islands. This camp continues to be a lynchpin in cooperation between our sister units in other British Overseas Territories, and Bermuda takes pride in the Royal Bermuda

Regiments' ability to lead and organise this on a yearly basis.

16085—Maritime Operations

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I am pleased to report that as of 31 March 2025, the Royal Bermuda Regiment Coast Guard has completed another successful year of operations. The unit represents a continued commitment by the Government to provide safety and security on and in Bermuda's waters for recreational users and those who depend on our Blue Economy. During the 12 months of January 2024 to December 2024, the Coast Guard conducted 1,149 patrols, observed over 16,158 vessels, conducted 100 search and rescue missions, and enforced Environmental Protection Laws such as fishing and lobster licence checks. These are significant achievements from a relatively small resource.

The Chairman: Clearly. They sound busy, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So be careful, Mr. Chairman, if you are out on the water.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: My boys are watching.

The Chairman: I will make sure I have all in order.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Working with local and international partners, including US Coast Guard, HM Coast Guard, and the Royal Navy, the Coast Guard continues to provide the following services:

- a) Search and rescue or recovery.
- b) Interdiction of illegal maritime operations.
- c) Deterring criminal activity on the water.
- d) Enforcement of natural resource regulations.
- e) Enforcing regulations in relation to maritime border and port security.

Mr. Chairman, the Regiment is also mandated to conduct the following duties:

- a) Force Protection. These are the means and measures to minimise the vulnerability of people, infrastructure, and high-value assets from threats and hazards. This ranges from military security and public order to Explosive Ordnance Disposal.
- b) Humanitarian Aid and Disaster Relief. This is the organised military response to alleviate the results of a man-made or natural catastrophe; the consequences of which put lives and livelihoods at risk. Ranging from hurricanes to oil spills and fires, the priorities are saving life, relieving suffering, and limiting damage, restoring essential service, and setting the conditions for recovery.
- c) Ceremonial. The Regiment provides the only local professional standard Military Band and

accompanying troops to conduct National Ceremonial and Civic Events, i.e., Bermuda Day.

- d) International Assistance. Upon request, the Regiment can provide military skills and resources to assist the UN and NATO, and regional peace support operations or training which enhances Bermuda's reputation in the international community.
- e) Enhancing Bermudian Society. Since its inception, the Royal Bermuda Regiment has provided an important role by supporting the integration and development of Bermudian society in the form of:
 - o A common military experience for volunteers from across Bermuda's society.
 - o The opportunity to enhance life and vocational skills through direct provision of training or providing funding support for specific qualifications.
 - o Involvement in Regimental and wider community sporting and social activities.
 - o Youth engagement through Junior Leaders, and in partnership with the Bermuda Police Service the facilitation of the Outward Bound Adventure Training Centre.

The Chairman: I did the Outward Bound programme, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes? How was it?

The Chairman: It was good. It was a very good programme.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. We are now reimplementing—it laid dormant for a few years but we are putting some more energy and funds into it.

The Chairman: Very good.

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

Major Achievements for 2024/25

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

- Fulfilled its mandate through Hurricane Ernesto in August 2024.
- Supported the US Navy for a 12-week maritime surveillance exercise during Summer 2024.

The Royal Bermuda Regiment was a principle logistic enabler for the Navy, providing accommodation, transport and acting as the principal liaison for the Bermuda Government.

- Facilitated crew transfer and support between the Royal Navy River class ships HMS *Medway* and HMS *Trent* in September 2024.
- Actively pursued the Government's commitment to Blue Shield.

I take leave from you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: You are on Defence in Head 6. It does not appear you are winding it down, are you, before Police?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: No.

The Chairman: But no, that's fine. No, that's fine, Minister. We can adjourn for lunch break.

If you can just move that we go ahead for lunch break until two o'clock. But go right ahead, Minister. We stand at your leisure.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I move that we adjourn for lunch and return to the House promptly at 2 pm. Thank you very much, Minister.

The Chairman: The House stands adjourned until 2 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:30 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:00 pm

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

HEAD 6—DEFENCE

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Honourable Members and members of the listening public. I hope you all had a nice, short adjournment.

We are listening to a five-hour debate in the Committee of Supply [considering the] Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2025/26. And this five-hour debate concerns the Ministry of National Security, more specifically, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12, and 88. And when we broke for lunch we were in the capable hands of Minister Michael Weeks.

Minister, if you are ready, please proceed.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Good afternoon.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: How much time do I have left?

The Chairman: Well, I think you were one hour and 15 minutes into it.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: So, some time to go still. I think—

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Four hours.

The Chairman: Well, I think it's five hours and I think the conclusion is . . . I'll double check but I think it's something like 5:45. But I'll check.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: No problem.

The Chairman: I'll check the conclusion time for you.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I was just asking that for the listening public.

The Chairman: Excellent. Not nearly long enough is the answer, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Right. Okay.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Plans for the upcoming year is where I left off, Mr. Chairman.

So, Mr. Chairman, the coming financial year will see the Defence Department conduct Recruit Camps which are scheduled to be conducted in July 2025 and February 2026.

Just for the record, Mr. Chairman, I could say that we stopped off on the Head 6 which is the Royal Bermuda Regiment.

The Chairman: Thank you. Head 6.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay?

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Over 100 soldiers have just returned from overseas camp 2025, in Jamaica. Additionally, a smaller overseas camp, Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, is scheduled for June where our JNCO Cadre [Junior Non-Commissioned Officer] will be taught essential leadership development skills before

the successful candidates are promoted in December. This rite of passage is essential for the future of the Regiment as the last financial year lacked a JNCO course.

A Junior Leader Summer Camp is also planned for summer of this year. These leadership skills are useful not just within the gates of Warwick Camp but impact management positions in the Island's private sector. Skills learned on these camps will go on to assist Bermudians in their full-time employment. Operationally, the Coast Guard will continue to uphold its mandate and is in the early stages of developing an unmanned systems unit to further protect the shores of our Island and assist in search and rescue operations and give Bermudians peace of mind when on the water.

Ceremonially, we continue to prepare for multiple parades throughout the year. The Royal Bermuda Regiment Band has been invited to perform overseas in Birmingham for their Annual International Tattoo in February 2026. The Royal Bermuda Regiment Band has a rich history of representing the Island overseas and also introducing the joys of music to the youth, as the band continues to embrace school-aged musicians.

Mr. Chairman, this year we will celebrate the milestone 60th anniversary of our beloved military unit with a number of activities. The Royal Bermuda Regiment's 60th anniversary will serve as an opportunity to reflect on the unit's 130-year history. From the overseas wartime service of the Bermuda Militia Artillery and Bermuda Volunteer Rifle Corps, in the First and Second World War, to the crucial role that the Regiment has provided throughout challenging times at home, we expect 2025 to be a celebration of those who have served this Island and an invitation to those who may wish to join it in the future.

I hasten to add, Mr. Chairman, my sincere thanks on behalf of the Government and people of Bermuda to all those who have served our country through the Royal Bermuda Regiment in the last 60 years

Closing Remarks

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, this past year has showcased our Regiment as a force of professionalism, reliability and adaptability both ashore and afloat within Bermuda and alongside Caribbean allies. They have notably enhanced the Coast Guard unit's operational capabilities while offering substantial personal and professional growth opportunities for our soldiers.

The year has reaffirmed the Royal Bermuda Regiment's stature as a steadfast, honourable and skilled entity efficiently delivering critical services to Bermuda in regular periods and emergencies. On both land and sea, we have also proven that our abilities can match and support our larger allies adequately despite our small size. This year we proudly continue our 130-year military tradition celebrating the Royal Bermuda Regiment's 60th anniversary. Our Island's Regiment

stands as a key pillar within our community and a source of collective pride for all of us.

Mr. Chairman, in closing I wish to commend Lieutenant-Colonel Duncan Simons and his outstanding team for their continued dedication and service to Bermuda. Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 6, Defence.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Does that take us on to Head 7?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, it does, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Excellent. Minister, when you're ready you have the floor.

HEAD 7—BERMUDA POLICE SERVICE

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 7, the Bermuda Police Service, found on pages B-273 to B-276 of the Budget Book. The mission, Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Bermuda Police Service is, *Making Bermuda safer*. To make Bermuda safer, the Bermuda Police Service strives to

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

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service [BPS] carries out its objectives by aligning its organisational structure to maintain its community safety agenda and the prevention of criminal risk (locally and internationally) through a funded establishment of 482 employees as shown on page B-276. This represents an increase of nine police officers, or 2 per cent (full-time equivalents) over the original budget for 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service continues to advance its 2021–2026 Strategic and Operational Plan. This will allow the following several key initiatives to progress:

- The Bermuda Police Service Gang Targeting Team continues to work with the Ministry of National Security's Gang Violence Reduction Team to reduce the threat in this area and seeks to divert persons from gang-related criminality. However, significant risk to the community remains from gun/gang-related violence and the Bermuda Police Service continues to strive to deter such acts through effective use of intelligence and specialist policing.
- The Bermuda Police Service continues its work regarding standards of professional behaviour and anti-corruption policy and procedure to which relevant best practice is being utilised by the National Anti-Corruption Committee in

support of other government departments and the United Nations Anti-Corruption Self-Assessment for Bermuda.

- The BPS also continues its work in support of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC) to prevent financial crime, money laundering and counter-terrorism funding, with a strategic focus to maintain its excellent Caribbean Financial Action Task Force [CFATF] grading.
- The BPS further continues its work to prevent and respond to cybersecurity matters and help maintain Bermuda's reputation as a premier international financial jurisdiction.
- The BPS is working to implement a framework for greater multi-agency collaboration on the problem of domestic abuse. We seek to enhance communication and improve training with a view to improving service and reducing victimisation.

Expenditure Overview

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

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The total current expenditure for the 2025/26 financial year is estimated to be \$69,769,000. This represents an increase of \$4,931,000, or 8 per cent from the 2024/25 financial year. This change is due primarily to salary increases, resulting from negotiations between the various unions and the Bermuda Government. Salary and wage increases were necessary because of pay freezes, furlough days and not keeping up with CPI increases over the last 14 years. Proposed salaries of \$54,860,000, which can be found on page B-275 represents an increase of \$4,653,000, or a 9 per cent increase year over year.

Programme 0701, Commissioner's Office

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the BPS is focused on the protection of the Island's property and its people. To ensure such protection, we require boots on the ground—that is manpower. Officer salaries represent a primary expense in programme 0701. Total funding for programme 0701 as shown on page B-274 is \$54,592,000. The Commissioner's Office represents 78 per cent of the BPS total budget and covers proposed costs for 410 officers and four civilian staff. Funding for this programme increased by \$4,431,000, or 9 per cent.

The budget also includes funding of \$4 million for police overtime costs and other benefits for officers

as mandated by the Police (Conditions of Service) Orders 2024.

Programme 0702, Corporate Services Division

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

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

Funding for programme 0702 for the 2025/26 financial year is \$6,696,000, an increase of \$191,000, or 3 per cent year over year.

Mr. Chairman, the department under the Corporate Services Division that requires the most funding is Information and Management Services. We have total funding of \$2,692,000 which represents 40 per cent of the budget for the programme. As the world becomes more reliant on technology, so does policing. And the cost of technology is increasingly pricey as the world veers away from vendor-owned software applications into the world of paying for software licences for periods of time. In addition, computer hardware is deemed obsolete, typically in five years or less, and therefore needs constant replacing. Computer hardware and software are the primary drivers of expenditure in the Information and Management Services Department.

Mr. Chairman, in keeping with our mission of making Bermuda safer, we cannot do so without competent officers safeguarding people and property on the Island of Bermuda. The BPS must constantly recruit as we lose officers through attrition and other reasons. Funding under cost centre 17010, Human Resources, of \$1,254,000 provides support for recruiting and various medical benefits as mandated by the Police (Conditions of Service) Order, or COSO.

Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget for finance and administration has been set at \$1,522,000, on page B-274. This is an increase of \$143,000, or 10 per cent. Finance and Maintenance provides \$271,000 for maintenance of the numerous properties of the Bermuda Police Service. Included are the police barracks located in Prospect, Somerset Police Station and Southside Police Station, as well as various offices located at our Prospect site. But the bulk of the budget \$904,220 covers salaries for 11 full-time equivalents as found on page B-276. Staff under this budget are responsible for BPS payroll, vendor and other payments, stores and facilities. In addition, there is a provision of \$100,000 for the securing of overseas witnesses.

Programme 0703, Operational Policing Division

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, programme 0703 previously consisted of four separate departments. The departments were merged under one

cohesive unit in the 2024/25 financial year under the title Community Policing Unit. Funding for this unit is set at \$2,216,000. This on page B-274. [There is] funding of \$1,005,000 in salaries for the 17 full-time equivalents who support the Bermuda Police Service officers and their policing duties. The unit pays for the cost of station duty officers who whilst civilian, provide critical support for officers.

In addition, the budget funds rent and associated costs of \$264,000 for the Southside Police Station as well as cleaning services and various other costs incurred with running offices for the department.

Programme 0704, Operational Support Division

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

- 17090—Court Liaison Unit
- 17120—Technical Operations
- 17130—Garage and Workshop
- 17160—Forensic Support

The total budget for this programme is \$3,523,000, an increase of \$218,000, or 7 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, while personnel for policing are important so are our operational vehicles which are on Bermuda's roads 24/7. The cost of which is funded under 17130, Garage and Workshop, in the amount of \$1,524,000, an increase of \$176,000, or 13 per cent year over year. The increase is necessary to fund increasing costs for vehicle parts.

Cost centre 17130, Garage and Workshop includes wages and salaries for garage mechanics, and the fleet manager, as well as \$774,000 for inventory, spare parts, fuel, and insurance for the Bermuda Police Service fleet. The budget for garage and workshop represents 43 per cent of the total budget under the Operational Support Division.

Programme 0708, Serious Crime Divisions

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

- 17140—Serious Crime Units;
- 17150—Drugs and Financial Crime Department;
- 17170—Intelligence Division.

The Police Support Unit as shown on page B-274 is now incorporated under programme 0703, which is why there is a zero balance shown for this unit. The budget for programme 0708 is \$2,460,000, an increase of \$36,000, or 1 per cent year over year.

Mr. Chairman, within the Serious Crime Division lies the Serious Crime Unit [SCU] with a budget of \$1,077,000, which represents 44 per cent of the total SCU budget. Prominent in the Serious Crime Unit are costs for overseas consultants at \$683,000. These consultants are a critical part of the BPS, providing skilled and experienced investigators who assist both

Intelligence and Financial Crime Units, as well as Forensics Support Officers who deliver essential crime scene response services. These highly skilled professionals are required because they bring capacity, capability and specialised expertise not locally available. Their contribution ensures that BPS maintains operational effectiveness in complex investigations and serious cases while meeting international standards of evidence collection and analysis.

0710, Bermuda Reserve Police

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, 0710, Bermuda Reserve Police with a budget of \$282,000. The budget primarily funds bounty payments and associated costs for Bermuda's Reserve Police Officers.

Revenue Overview

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

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

The BPS is responsible for the provision of firearm and explosive licences on Island. In addition, the BPS reviews and approves licences to the various security guard services. The BPS also provides barrack housing facilities at a nominal cost at the Prospect location. With our active recruiting efforts during the last two years the availability of such housing is critical as a benefit and incentive for new officers. In addition, the BPS provides fingerprinting services, police and traffic reports for the public. Because the BPS is not considered (nor should they be) a revenue generator, money earned from these sources are nominal. Therefore, the impact of such revenue is presumed unchanged from the prior year at \$698,000.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Subjective Analysis of current account estimates of [Head] 7 is found on page B-275, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I will highlight the material changes year over year.

Mr. Chairman, with a projected budget of \$69,769,000, Salaries and Wages represent 79 per cent of the Bermuda Police Service budget. The budget for salaries is \$54,860,000, an increase of 9 per cent. The budget for wages is \$646,000, an increase of 5 per cent. The funding is for 482 full-time equivalents

comprised of 410 officers and 72 civilian staff, as shown on page B-276. The increase for salaries and wages is a result of recently negotiated salary uplifts.

Mr. Chairman, repair and maintenance is budgeted at \$2,390,000, an increase by \$101,000. The increase is for additional funding required to repair and maintain various Bermuda Police Service properties throughout the Island. With the ageing buildings and increased repair costs, it was necessary to increase their budget.

Mr. Chairman, materials and supplies have increased from \$1,912,000 to \$2,057,000. The increase of \$145,000 is because of increasing costs for vehicle parts and the costs of outsourcing the maintenance of some vehicles, otherwise there were no changes.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: We will start with capital development costs. Mr. Chairman, as shown on page C-7, the Bermuda Government is funding various capital projects for the Bermuda Police Service in the 2025/26 financial year. Most importantly, the Government has provided \$2,000,000 for renovations to the old headquarters building in Prospect. It is the desire of the BPS to move senior command and the Serious Crime Unit back to its base in Prospect. In so doing, the BPS can eliminate rent and associated costs at the Front Street location, allowing the courts the use of the fifth floor of Hamilton Police Station and bring staff back to their original home. This is an ongoing, massive undertaking and is projected to be finished in August 2026.

Capital Acquisition Costs

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the BPS has been provided with \$1,275,000 for capital acquisitions as shown on page C-15. Mr. Chairman, \$300,000 has been provided to purchase new vehicles. As a 24/7 operation, BPS vehicles endure severe wear and tear and each year some must be replaced for safety reasons. It is anticipated that the BPS will purchase nine new operational vehicles in the 2025/26 financial year.

In addition, the BPS has been funded \$900,000 to replace switches for its network. These switches are well beyond end of life and if not replaced the service risks a complete shutdown of its information systems. As stated earlier, today's police service is technology-driven and information systems are integral to our operations. Therefore, the replacement of these switches is critical to BPS operations.

Mr. Chairman, the BPS has also been allocated \$30,000 for the acquisition of computer equipment. And \$45,000 for the replacement of ageing, out-of-warranty, body armour.

Staffing

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: As previously mentioned, the BPS has budgeted for 482 officers and staff for the 2025/26 financial year. This number consists of 410 officers and 72 civilian staff members. This represents an increase of nine additional funded posts when compared to the original submission for the 2024/25 budget.

Service Initiatives

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Police Service has a strategic and operational plan for the period of 2021 to 2026 with five key priorities:

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

As we move toward the conclusion of this planning cycle, in 2025, the Bermuda Police Service will begin a comprehensive internal and external consultative process to form our next five-year strategic plan. This forward-looking initiative will gather insights from officers, staff, community members, and partner agencies to shape our priorities and approaches for 2026 to 2031.

Mr. Chairman, I just need to raise this a little bit because being a little tall it is starting to take its toll.

The Chairman: Sure. As the Minister is just getting himself organised or more organised, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimated Revenues and Expenditures for the budget year 2025/26. This is currently a five-hour debate on the Ministry of National Security and we are hearing from the Minister of National Security, [Honourable] Michael Weeks. It is as I said, a five-hour debate.

And earlier, Minister, you asked me for the end time. I estimated it was 5:45 pm. It is in fact 5:42 this afternoon when this debate will conclude.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: There we go. You have three minutes less . . . three minutes less. This debate has five heads, Head 83, 6, 7, 12 and 88 and at the moment we are on the third of the five heads, Head 7, Police.

Minister, if you're ready, please continue. You have the floor.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you.

This forward-looking initiative will gather insights from officers, staff, community members, and partner agencies to shape our priorities and approaches for 2026 to 2031.

A key input to this process will be the findings from the upcoming Security and Defence Review—a Throne Speech initiative that examines what capabilities, capacities, services and resources the BPS needs

to best position itself to meet Bermuda's security needs over the next 10 to 15 years. This review will help us align our future strategic planning with broader national security considerations and ensure the BPS is prepared for emerging challenges.

The consultative process will be guided by our commitment to community satisfaction and confidence, ensuring that public input helps shape our future direction. By combining professional expertise with community voice, we aim to develop a strategic plan that builds on our current achievements while adapting to evolving security threats and community expectations.

Performance Measures

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures, which are shown on page B-277, for fiscal year 2024/25 were achieved.

Public satisfaction with the Bermuda Police Service represents the cornerstone of our performance framework. At 6.2 against our target of 6.0, this measure—independently assessed each quarter through comprehensive surveys—transcends all other measures for a fundamental reason: policing exists only through the consent and support of our community. When citizens express satisfaction with our service, it signals their trust in our approach, their confidence in our abilities, and their willingness to partner with us in *Making Bermuda Safer*.

Traditional metrics like crime statistics, while relevant, only tell part of the story. They measure what we do, not how we do it. A police service can achieve technical objectives yet fail in its primary mission if the public feels unheard, unfairly treated, or unsafe. These independent quarterly measurements capture the people element of policing that no procedural measure can quantify. Simply put, if the community is not satisfied with their service, the BPS is failing, no matter what the other numbers suggest.

Policing Issues for 2025/26

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, like many police services globally, the Bermuda Police Service faces ongoing staffing considerations that require careful management. While the current staffing level of 382 officers presents challenges, we are pleased to report that funding is not an issue and that we are making great progress in increasing the number of police officers in the Bermuda Police Service. For example, last year there were 360 officers, which means that we have increased the number of officers by 22, or 6 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the BPS has implemented several promising initiatives to address staffing needs and, as is shown in our increased numbers, these efforts are starting to bear fruit. I am pleased to report that the Bermuda Police Service passed out 22 new police officers on 8 May 2025; and there are currently 14 new cadets

undergoing training who will be ready for deployment in September. Moreover, we began another recruitment drive in April 2025 and after initial vetting was completed, there are 139 applicants still in the pool. The next recruit foundation course is expected to graduate in March 2026, further bolstering the number of officers in the ranks. Further, Mr. Chairman, we are on course to start another recruitment drive in June or July 2025.

Mr. Chairman, local recruiting efforts have redoubled with the assistance of a government-led cross-ministry recruiting initiative that is showing positive results. Additionally, the Government has expanded local recruiting opportunities to include resident non-Bermudians, which will increase numbers and reduce demand on barrack accommodations as these candidates are already housed within the community.

Once all local recruitment options have been exhausted, overseas recruitment may become necessary. There is a strong commitment to take whatever steps are needed to ensure the Bermuda Police Service is sufficiently staffed to meet the Island's security needs.

These proactive measures will help address expected retirements over the coming years while ensuring the Bermuda Police Service maintains appropriate staffing levels to fulfil its mandate of *Making Bermuda Safer*.

Mr. Chairman, despite these staffing constraints, we face several significant public safety challenges that require targeted action this fiscal year. The scourge of gang and gun violence continues to impact our community with concerning developments. We are now witnessing the first-generation gang member's children coming of age and choosing to carry forward their fathers' destructive legacy, often with greater levels of violence and disregard for community safety. This intergenerational cycle demands renewed intervention strategies focused on at-risk youth to divert them from this path. Knife crime is also rising at an alarming rate and addressing this trend will be a priority for the Bermuda Police Service this year.

Domestic abuse remains a concern requiring sensitive handling. We will continue the work already started in partnership with other agencies to ensure community members feel confident to report these sensitive matters. Our goal is to build more confidence in the police for victims to seek help while providing the specialised response and support when they do come forward.

Mr. Chairman, the summer months will bring additional challenges to community safety as residents and visitors socialise in larger numbers on beaches, on the water, and within bars and restaurants. These challenges include increased tensions between rival gangs, antisocial behaviour, and impaired driving. The BPS will maintain an intelligence-led approach to target the most violent and prolific harm-causers.

Additionally, vagrancy and its associated crime continue to impact the look and feel of Bermuda,

particularly in the City of Hamilton. Business owners lament lost revenue, intimidation, and concerns about the safety of unaccompanied women. While the roots of this complex social problem extend beyond policing alone, the BPS remains committed to addressing reported crimes while working with our partners to pursue longer-term solutions.

Each of these challenges requires not just enforcement action but community partnership and trust—the foundation upon which effective policing is built. Our independently assessed public satisfaction rating of 6.2 reflects a measure of community confidence in our approaches to these issues, but we recognise there is always room for improvement. We will continue to ensure our responses are visible, effective, and build public trust across all communities, even as we work to address our critical staffing needs.

2024/25 Accomplishments

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I will now provide this Honourable House with some sobering statistics on what the Bermuda Police Service dealt with over the calendar year (January through December 2024).

Mr. Chairman, in *Making Bermuda Safer*, between January and December 2024, the Bermuda Police Service responded to approximately 12,700 events/incidents. Included in that figure, the BPS responded to an average of twenty-five 911 calls every day.

Mr. Chairman, there were 1,853 arrests during the period. Notably 201 involved the arrest of an impaired driver, with some drivers being double, treble or even more than four times over the limit (389 was the highest DUI in 2024).

Mr. Chairman, 3,719 crimes were recorded and investigated, including nine murders, four of which were committed using a firearm, and five of which were committed using a knife. Of note, there was a knife-related triple homicide.

Mr. Chairman, the BPS dealt with 1,461 road traffic collisions of which seven were fatalities and 128 involved serious injury. In the last 10 years, 109 persons have died on our roads and 1,0[40] have been seriously injured.

Mr. Chairman, 6,942 traffic tickets were issued, with 1,718 tickets issued for speed. Of note is that 393 of the speeding tickets were issued for persons driving 70 kilometres per hour or more [than] double the speed limit.

Mr. Chairman, Stop and Search is a powerful tool that allows police officers to stop, question, and if required, search persons for weapons. The tool is used proportionately, as and when tensions, particularly gang tensions, increase. The Bermuda Police Service issued 1,0[66] Stop and Search forms to reduce opportunities for violence.

Mr. Chairman, despite these challenges, we should remain optimistic about the future of policing in

Bermuda. Our women and men work with dedication and integrity every day to serve this community. The trust placed in them—reflected in the independently measured satisfaction rating—is something we value and strive to strengthen with every interaction. We know that public confidence is not just a metric; it is the foundation that enables everything they do. As they move forward with the plans and initiatives outlined today, they do so with a firm commitment to transparency, accountability, and genuine partnership with the people of Bermuda. When the community and police stand together, we create not just a safer Bermuda, but a stronger one.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 7, Bermuda Police Service. And as I close and go on to my next head, I just want to commend the Commissioner of Police and his team for the job that they do every day, 24/7, in keeping Bermuda safe.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister. As you prepare the next head, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for budget year 2025/26. The specific debate this afternoon is the debate on the budget for the Ministry of National Security.

We have been listening to Minister Michael Weeks on Heads 83, 6, and 7 which has just concluded regarding the police. We are now going to go on to Head 12 and then Head 88. Head 12 is Customs.

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

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

HEAD 12—CUSTOMS DEPARTMENT

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

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

The objectives of the department are to

- assess and collect customs duty and fees on imported goods;
- enforce customs laws and administer other statutes controlling the international movement of goods and people;
- prevent the smuggling of drugs and other illegal commodities, enforcing international conventions for environmental protection and money laundering, and agency work for Immigration, Health, Transport Control, and Environment; and
- provide information and assistance to the public regarding customs laws and regulations.

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

Mr. Chairman, to make this vision a reality, strategic goals have been set for Customs:

Strategic Goal 1: Staffing, Stability and Training

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

Strategic Goal 2: Legislation and Operational

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

Strategic Goal 3: Policy, Procedures and Future

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

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

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I would now draw your attention to the current account estimates for Head 12, which can be found on page B-278. A total of \$19,493,000 has been allocated for Head 12 for the financial year 2025/26. This represents an increase of \$1,121,000, or a 6.0 per cent increase of the original budget for the financial year 2024/25. The most significant driver of this increase is the 4.8 per cent pay rise given to staff.

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

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

Business Unit 22030, Airport Arrivals–Travellers

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Airport Arrivals[–Travellers] has an estimate of \$5,632,000. This represents an increase of \$520,000, or 10 per cent. This increase pertains entirely to staff costs. The amount provided for base salaries has increased by \$268,000. The amount provided for other staff costs, that is overtime and other contractually agreed allowances, has increased by the remaining \$252,000. The increase in overtime cost is a result of increased traffic at the airport outside of normal hours and on public holidays.

Business Unit 22050, Investigations/Audit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Investigations/Audit has an estimate of \$1,080,000. This represents an increase of \$11,000 or 1 per cent. This increase pertains entirely to staff costs. Given the pay rise and the fact that the staffing levels are expected to remain static, the increase is, perhaps, less than expected. This is explained by the fact that some members of the team are expected to change in the coming year, and this will lead to the transfer in of more junior officers at a lower pay grade. Specifically, one of our Senior Customs Officers is expected to retire and a Customs Officer promoted into that position. Also, it is expected that one of the newly graduated Customs Officers will be placed within this section as part of the annual officer transfer programme.

Business Unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Hamilton Commercial Ops has an estimate of \$1,309,000. This represents a decrease of \$20,000, or 2 per cent. You will note from the employee numbers on page B-279 that this section has a planned decrease in staff of two officers, from 17 to 15. The decrease is due to a re-evaluation of the volume of work and the resources that have been re-deployed to the interdiction section.

Business Unit 22080, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Administration has an estimate of \$5,182,000. This represents an increase of \$73,000, or 1 per cent. The Administration business unit is deemed the headquarters of the department, and a majority of the operational budget is allocated to this unit. For brevity and to avoid repetition, I will elaborate upon all the notable budget changes during my presentation of page B-279; however, I will briefly comment on the movement in staff costs in this section which have increased by \$38,000, or 2 per cent. The cost of the pay raise in this section has been

offset by the reduction in planned employee numbers, as seen on page B-279, of one Customs Officer; from 23 to 22 due to the redeployment of an officer from the Internal Policy Section to the Vessel Clearance Section.

Business Unit 22090, Vessel Clearance

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Vessel Clearance has an estimate of \$1,951,000. This represents an increase of \$146,000, or 8 per cent. This increase pertains entirely to staff costs and is attributable to the staffing level for this unit increasing by one officer.

Business Unit 22100, Interdiction

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, Interdiction has an estimate of \$3,100,000. This represents an increase of \$319,000, or 11 per cent. The increase is partly due to the planned staffing levels in the section increasing by two officers, from 32 to 34. You will recall that I advised that the redeployment of positions would come from the Commercial Operations section. This move was made in response to an evaluation of the operations within the courier and post office facilities where it was identified that additional resources were required to manage the workload.

Business Unit 22110, Seaport Enforcement Team

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Seaport Enforcement Team has an estimate of \$1,239,000. This represents an increase of \$72,000, or 6 per cent. This is primarily due to the pay raise already mentioned.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-279, on the table headed Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, we see how the allocated funds are intended to be spent. Just over 84 per cent of the budget, \$16,462,000, has been allocated to pay for salaries and a further \$200,000 for other personnel costs. The allocation for the salary expense line has increased by \$1,090,000 or 7 per cent.

If we momentarily turn our attention to the table headed Employee Numbers (Full-Time Equivalents), we observe an increase in the number of estimated Customs staff from the 2024/25 original of 180 to the 2024/25 estimate of 181.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Got that?

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The additional position is planned to be used at the airport. The total approved establishment of the Customs Department is 228 positions.

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

- Other Personnel Costs are estimated to be \$200,000, an increase of \$7,000, or 4 per cent. The Other Personnel Costs in question are, primarily, allowances provided for Customs Officers being on-call and called out. As you will be aware, the Customs Department has to be prepared to respond around the clock to provide its border control service. From time to time, unscheduled flights and vessels arrive into Bermuda and, therefore, the Customs Department pays an on-call allowance to retain a skeleton crew to respond to emergency out-of-hours calls.
- Training Costs are estimated to be \$10,000, a decrease of \$3,000, or 23 per cent.
- Travel Costs are estimated to be \$44,000, an increase of \$11,000 or 33 per cent. The planned travel comprises of Bermuda Customs participating in the World Customs Organization and Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council conferences as well as attending overseas [ACAMS] training. The planned increase is primarily due to an additional expected trip for [ACAMS] training. ACAMS is the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists, and this training is beneficial to Customs in several ways. For example, expertise in money laundering techniques, trends, and detection methods allows the Customs Department to provide up-to-date training to officers on the ground with respect to conducting investigations. This expertise is also useful in developing intelligence on the financial side of smuggling which makes the identification of suspicious activities more readily identifiable. Further, it aids in the development of policies that satisfy the requirements of the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force, or CFATF. This in turn benefits the economy of Bermuda as it increases the likelihood of receiving a favourable rating as part of the National Money Laundering Risk Assessment.

Communications costs are estimated to be \$133,000, an increase of \$7,000, or 6 per cent. These costs represent telephone and Internet costs and are reflective of the preceding financial year's actual expenses.

- Professional Services are estimated to be \$358,000, a decrease of \$10,000 or 3 per cent. The main driver of this expense type is due to the expanded use of retired Customs Officers to perform immigration primary functions. These support officers have the training and

years of experience but are employed at a reduced cost rate and on a part-time basis. As a result, this allows the department to work more efficiently as it frees full-time Customs Officers from performing some immigration functions and allows them to focus on the core aspects of the Custom Officer role.

- Rentals are estimated to be \$607,000, a decrease of \$3,000. This expense line covers rent for buildings in the amount of \$597,000 and equipment for \$10,000. The Customs Department occupies two buildings for which it pays rent:
 - o Custom House at 131 Front Street, which houses its headquarters, administration, commercial operations, investigations and audit sections; and
 - o Building 110 at Southside, which is a replacement for the training and administration space that Customs formerly occupied within the old airport buildings.
- Repair and Maintenance are estimated to be \$1,234,000, an increase of \$32,000, or 3 per cent. This heading includes software costs, and the increase is due to an anticipated increase in a software maintenance fee. The software in question pertains to a maintenance contract associated with CAPS, the Customs Automated Processing System. In December 2025, the existing five-year software maintenance contract with IBM will expire and it is expected that the fees will increase with a new maintenance contract.
- Energy is estimated to be \$143,000, an increase of \$13,000, or 10 per cent. The increase is reflective of actual costs during the preceding financial year.
- Clothing, uniforms and laundry are estimated at \$67,000, a decrease of \$53,000, or 44 per cent. In recent years, the department has been impacted by supply chain issues with respect to sourcing uniform supplies. In the 2024/25 budget, it was anticipated that there would be a significant increase in the costs of procuring uniforms; however, the department was able to work with new suppliers and, in actuality, the increase in expenditure was not as high as expected.
- Materials and Supplies are estimated at \$235,000, an increase of \$31,000, or 15 per cent. This category of expense is broad and diverse and includes office supplies, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, food and supplies for canines, computer supplies, consumables for detection equipment and other miscellaneous items. The estimate is reflective of the actual expenditure in the preceding financial period.

Performance Measures

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

First, on page B-280, you will note that no performance measures have been provided, and no budget allocation has been allocated to business units: 22020, Airport Commercial; and 22040, Airport Shift “B.” These business units were folded into 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops; and 22030, Airport Arrivals–Travellers, respectively, some years ago.

For the 2023/24 year, business unit 22030, Airport Arrivals–Travellers, collected forced duty in the amount of \$41,188. It is forecasted that during 2024/25 that forced duty in the amount of \$50,000 will be collected. The target for 2025/26 is \$40,000.

For the 2023/24 year, business unit 22030, Airport Arrivals–Travellers, seized illicit items on nine occasions. It is forecasted that during 2024/25 that this unit shall seize illicit items on 30 occasions. The target for 2025/26 is 20.

For the 2023/24 year, business unit 22050, Investigations/Audit, completed 50 cases and collected additional duty of \$16,300 and expects similar results during 2024/25. The target for 2025/26 is 100 cases dealt with, and additional duty collected of \$20,000.

For the 2023/24 year, business unit 22070, Hamilton Commercial Ops, met its prescribed Quality Service Levels with respect to the timeframe of releasing imported goods 80 per cent of the time on 996,000 processed declarations. It is forecast that during 2024/25 this unit will achieve 70 per cent on 872,000 processed declarations.

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Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-281 for the 2023/24 year, business unit 22090, Vessel Clearance, prepared invoices to collect revenue from arriving vessels in the amount of \$1,747,[839]. The forecast for 2024/25 and the target for 2025/26 is \$1.2 million.

For the 2023/24 year, business unit 22100, Interdiction, seized 347 illicit items and achieved 90 per cent of positive results from search and detentions undertaken. It is forecast that during 2024/25, Mr. Chairman, 350 items will be seized and the target for 2025/26 is, therefore, also 350 seizures.

For the 2023/24 year, business unit 22110, Seaport Enforcement Team, reviewed 98 per cent of import cargo manifests and scanned 80 per cent of imported containers. It is forecast that during 2024/25, those percentages will be 98 per cent and 90 per cent,

respectively, and the same target has been set for 2025/26.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Customs Department has three planned Capital Projects.

First, on page C-8, Mr. Chairman,—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —a capital development project, business unit 75372, Building Dock Scanner Hall, \$395,000 has been allocated to replace the Hamilton Dock Scanner Hall Building. The existing building has been in place since 2012 and has fallen into disrepair and is in urgent need of replacement for the safety of those working in and around the building and for the safety of the equipment contained therein.

Turning now to page C-15, Mr. Chairman,—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —business unit 76473, Office Furnishings/Fittings, \$10,000 has been allocated for the purchase of replacement office chairs.

Also, on page C-15, business unit 76500, Heritage Wharf Scanner, \$127,900 has been allocated to purchase a new X-ray scanner to be used at the Heritage Wharf at Dockyard. The scanner will be used selectively to scan the luggage of disembarking travellers from the cruise ships and is a replacement for an existing machine which has reached the end of its useful life.

Initiatives for 2025/26

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

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

- The Customs Department intends to complete promotions and a recruitment exercise during 2025/26. This will bolster the activities across the department but with particular focus being placed on enhancing marine and airport operations.
- The department will continue to utilise the excellent training modules developed by the World Customs Organization which are provided as part of Bermuda's membership.
- Additionally, Customs will engage with the UK Home Office for strategic planning and training opportunities.
- Customs will work on updating staff job descriptions to ensure that they are in harmony with current operational realities.

- With the export control scoping study well underway, it is the intention of the department to commence staff training to undertake this new role which plays an important role in the combating of international terrorism and organised crime.

With respect to Strategic Goal 2—Legislation and Operational:

- The Bill in relation to Advance Passenger Name Record [PNR] data is a high priority in the importance of cross-border movements and security. Work has already started and progress on drafting instructions will advance in the coming year.
- It is also intended that consideration will be given for the Customs Department to be included within legislation as an essential service. The Customs Department provides an essential service in protecting our borders and are on call 24 hours a day, every day of the year and it is appropriate that this is taken into consideration when discussions are held pertaining to this vital role.

With respect to Strategic Goal 3 Policy—Procedures and Future—

- During 2025/26, it is our intention to continue to work to provide support to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee in its important work of preventing money laundering and terrorist financing. Customs plays a very critical role in this area as the enforcement body responsible for the cross-border movement of cash and goods.
- As mentioned earlier, it is also our intention to develop an export control process which will further mitigate the risk to our reputation and society arising from money laundering.
- The department continues to work with software developers to create an API which will allow the submission of Customs Traveller Declarations using a smartphone application.

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

Mr. Chairman, this concludes the current and capital estimates for Head 12. I shall now present the budget brief for . . .

The Chairman: Head 88, I think. National Drug Control

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Head 88, National Drug Control.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you, Honourable Minister. If you want to take a quick break, I will just remind the Honourable Members in the Chamber and the members of the listening public that we are the Committee

of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2025/26.

And the current debate is a debate relating to the budget for the Ministry of National Security. And we have been hearing from the Minister of National Security this morning and this afternoon on various budget heads, including the National Security Headquarters, Defence, Police, Customs. And we are now moving to the fifth and final head that the Honourable Minister Michael Weeks is presenting, which is Head 88, National Drug Control.

And Minister, when you are ready to commence again, I will look forward to listening to you on the interesting topic of Head 88, National Drug Control budget.

Thank you, Minister, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Chairman, as you have said to the listening public and to our colleagues here in the House, this is the final head that I will be presenting for the Ministry of National Security.

HEAD 88—NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: It gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 88, the Department for National Drug Control, found on pages B-285 through B-289 of the Budget Book.

Pages B-285 through B-289.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good. Okay.

The Chairman: Yes, we have it. Thank you. Sorry, my microphone was off. Yes, we have it. Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, our mission. The mandate of the Department for National Drug Control is to *Lead efforts to reduce the negative impact of drug misuse/abuse on children, families and the community.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Our Expenditure Overview is on page B-285. Mr. Chairman, a total of \$5,035,000 has been allocated for this head, which represents an increase of [\$981,200] from the previous year, and constitutes 4 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole.

The total current expenditure is estimated to be \$5,035,315 for 2025/26 and represents an increase of

[\$981,200], or approximately 24 per cent, higher than the budget of 2024/25. This increase is due primarily to increases in salaries, the addition of overtime, increased grant allocations and an increase in the general cost of living for operating costs.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The Subjective Analysis of current account estimates of the Department for National Drug Control is found on page B-285. I will highlight the material object code increases and decreases as per business unit.

Business Unit 98000, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Administration allocation of \$1,317,000 is a 46 per cent increase from the 2024/25 allocation. The increase is due mainly to an increase in grant allocations by \$100,000 and various increases in operating costs by \$316,000, including the negotiated salary uplifts.

The Administration budget covers employee salaries for two staff and other operational expenses (such as: facilities, utilities, maintenance costs, supplies and training). And the following grants of \$100,000 for Salvation Army Harbour Light and Community Life Skills programme; \$169,000 for Shift (formerly PRIDE); \$330,000 for Focus Counselling Services; and \$150,000 for Pathways Bermuda. Mr. Chairman, see page C-21, Grants and Contributions.

Business Unit 98010, Community Development

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the allocation to Community Development, business unit 98010, is \$233,000, which is a 2 per cent, or \$4,000, increase from the 2024/25 allocation.

The Chairman: Yes, and that is at page B-285.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Okay.

The increase is related to negotiated salary uplifts for one staff.

Funding is allocated to facilitate activities that are primarily targeted towards public education, community development, information dissemination and to support a grant of \$60,000 to the Council on Alcohol and Drug Abuse (CADA) to support alcohol awareness and to provide TIPS Training. (See page C-221 *[sic]* Grants and Contributions.)

The Chairman: Sorry. Page C-15, Grants and Contributions.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I'm sorry. Yes.

The Chairman: No. I'm with you.

Business Unit 98020, Prevention Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay.

Mr. Chairman, an allocation of \$247,000 is provided to support the Prevention Unit efforts in business unit 98020. This is a \$6,000 increase in the allocation from 2024/25 due to the negotiated salary uplift for one staff.

Funds in this business unit are utilised to improve coverage of drug prevention measures within the community, to improve opportunities for school-based prevention interventions, and to increase access for young people to targeted prevention programmes. Funding is also utilised to support training of Prevention professionals and community members to support drug prevention efforts.

Business Unit 98030, Treatment Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit, business unit 98030, is allocated \$419,000 in financial year 2025/26. This is an increase of \$65,000, or 18 per cent. The increase is related to salary uplifts for two staff and an increase in operational costs including promotions, food supplies and rental costs related to professional training and events.

Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit funding allocation is used to facilitate the implementation of key activities geared towards achieving the goals of the National Treatment Strategy, including Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF) accreditation fees and resources, addiction specific training; Recovery Month (which is in September) activities; and the AccuCare, web-based client management system licences and training. Funds are also allocated to support the grant for the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB] at the cost of \$80,000. (See page C-221 *[sic]* Grants and Contributions.)

The Chairman: Sorry. I think it should be C-21, not C-221. Yes?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Page C-21, yes.

The Chairman: National Drug Control. These are the grants and contributions.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: Yes. Sorry.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I will have to be a little more clear because I did say C-21.

The Chairman: My mistake. I thought you said C-221.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay.

The Chairman: I'm with you. But anyway, we are in the same place.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Minister.

Business Unit 98050, Research and Policy Development Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: All right, Mr. Chairman.

Moving on. The Research and Policy Development Unit, business unit 98050, on page B-285, has an allocation of \$326,000, which is a 20 per cent, or \$55,000 increase, from the previous fiscal year. The increase is due to negotiated salary uplifts for two staff, funding assigned to support the implementation of required National Surveys, and the evaluation/needs assessments related to the National Drug Control Masterplan.

Mr. Chairman, funding in this cost code is used to facilitate information gathering and analysis, monitoring and evaluation, as well as any relevant legislation and policy development initiatives prioritised within the department and/or Ministry.

Business Unit 98060, Men's Treatment Programme

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Men's Treatment programme, business unit 98060, on page B-285, was allocated \$1,138,000, an increase of \$227,000, or 25 per cent, from the previous fiscal year. The increase is related to salary uplifts for eight clinical staff. Overtime related to operations of a 24-hour programme and overall cost of living operating costs for food, electricity, et cetera.

Mr. Chairman, the funding allocation for Men's Treatment provides the operational and staffing cost required to provide services to meet the treatment/rehabilitative needs and goals of adult males needing residential treatment at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility.

Business Unit 98070, Women's Treatment Centre

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Women's Treatment Centre, business unit 98070, on page B-285, has been allocated \$1,355,000 for the 2025/26 fiscal year. This represents a \$208,000, or 18 per cent, increase from fiscal year 2024/25. This increase relates to salary uplifts for eight clinical staff as well as the salaries for the administrative assistant, residential cook and maintenance person, servicing both the Women's and Men's Programmes.

The increase also includes funding for overtime related to operations of a 24-hour programme and overall cost of living operating costs for food, electricity,

et cetera. The funding allocation provided is utilised to meet the treatment and support needs of women in residential substance abuse treatment along with rent for the Supportive Residence paid by the Department of National Drug Control [DNDC] to the Department of Public Works in the amount of \$60,000 per annum.

The Women's Treatment Centre provides both residential treatment for women at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Centre as well as supportive residency at a separate site. The Women's Treatment Centre is the only residential treatment facility for Women in Bermuda.

Business Unit 98080, National Drug Control Master Plan

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, business unit 98080, on page B-285, is in place to provide for the effective implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan; cross-ministry initiatives with the Police, Customs and Corrections; evaluation of the Master Plan and to encourage cooperation and involvement of other Government Departments and civil society in the implementation of the Master Plan initiatives. This business unit has not been allocated any funding in financial year 2025/26.

The Department of National Drug Control is required by the National Drug Control Act 2013 to "oversee the implementation of the action plan and monitor and evaluate the performance of the plan." Without funding and high-level support, it is extremely challenging to implement and monitor the action plans and achieve the goals of the National Plan as legislated.

Previous funding in this cost code was utilised to support the development of services identified as gaps and priorities and to provide critical training for the Government Laboratory, Police and Customs staff to enhance their mandates; for example, fentanyl and its handling; the purchase and training of K9 dogs for Corrections and Customs; and attendance of Customs officer to the ACAMS Conference to support NAMLC obligations.

Funding was also previously provided to complete the evaluation and needs assessments for the National Drug Control Master Plan and to support media campaigns to highlight the outcomes of the National Plan. Without this funding the added support to supply and demand reduction agencies is depleted and the development of new initiatives cannot be supported.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Capital Expenditure is on page C-15, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes. Page C-15.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2024/25, the Department of National Drug Control was

provided with \$3,000 to upgrade the security system in the main office. This was completed. In fiscal year 2025/26, the Department of National Drug Control has been provided with \$10,000 to upgrade the data management system used to support the implementation of national surveys and the Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN) by our Research Unit.

Manpower

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the department employs 27 staff. The Department Headquarters is presently staffed by a director, five technical officers and one full-time administrative staff.

Direct staffing support to the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility is provided by one Treatment Coordinator that oversees both the Male and Female Residential Treatment Programmes along with 16 clinical staff (Clinical Coordinators, Addiction Counsellors, Junior Addiction Counsellors and Addiction Counsellor Technicians) and three support staff, (Administrative Assistant, Cook and Maintenance) currently assigned to the Women's Treatment Centre and Men's Treatment Programme.

There are currently three vacancies within the Men's Treatment Programme (Clinical Coordinator, Addiction Counsellor and Addiction Treatment Support Worker). The Addiction Counsellor and Support Worker are in active recruitment; the Clinical Coordinator post is due to be filled in the 2025/26 fiscal year. There are three vacancies within the Women's Treatment Programme (Addiction Counsellor, Junior Addiction Counsellor and Addiction Treatment Support Worker) due to be filled in the 2025/26 fiscal year; one vacancy in Head Office (Treatment Coordinator) will be recruited in the 2025/26 fiscal year.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Performance measures by business unit.

The Chairman: So, we are now moving on to page B-288?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department's forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2024/25 were achieved in the majority of funded cost codes. Some initiatives were unable to be completed due to staff vacancies. The performance measures for the Department for National Drug Control (as you have said, Mr. Chairman) are listed on pages B-288 and B-289.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

As the Minister is getting himself a glass of water, for the benefit of the listening public, we are in the

Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for budget year 2025/26. The debate we are currently hearing from is in relation to the Ministry of National Security. It is a five-hour debate, and we are coming up to the end of the third hour. The listening public has been hearing from the Minister Michael Weeks in relation to Heads 86, 6, 7, 12 and we are now on the last and final head, namely, Head 88, National Drug Control. And the Minister was just addressing us in relation to performance measures at pages B-288 and B-289.

And Minister, I see we have some technical officers in the Chamber. If you want to pay thanks to them [and] recognise that they are in the Chamber with you. Thank you. Go ahead, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Thank you for that, Mr. Chairman. I too would like to recognise the A-Team. Because that team leader makes me look good, and sound good when I am up on my feet—my PS and my comptroller.

Business Unit 98000, Administration

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Business unit 98000, Administration. Administration provides the organisational framework in support of the mission and mandate of the Department of National Drug Control. Its resources are aimed primarily at recurrent expenditures, and grants and contributions to the treatment and prevention partners that provide services for, and on behalf of, the department. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of financial transactions were completed in E1 within Financial Instructions for the year 2024/25, and 100 per cent of performance appraisals were completed for the 2024/25 period.

As a result of supplemental funding in 2024/25, Mr. Chairman, six grants were disbursed compared to the five disbursed in 2023/24. The Department for National Drug Control is established, in part as a service delivery unit, but cannot provide all of the needed services required within the community and depends heavily on acquiring services in the treatment and prevention areas through grant allocations to realise its mandate. Shift, (which was formerly PRIDE) CADA, Salvation Army Harbour Light and Community Life-Skills [Training] Programme, Focus Counselling Services, Pathways Bermuda and the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB] all received grants and provided required services as per their grant agreements during the 2024/25 fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, Shift, formerly known as PRIDE, provides evidenced-based life skills programming within five of the public primary schools to support drug education and drug prevention activities. In 2024/25, Shift received \$119,000. This level of funding created major challenges with their ability to retain staff and facilitate their programming in the schools. Shift will be granted \$169,000 for fiscal year 2025/26—

The Chairman: Yes, that is at page C-21 of the Budget Book.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

And a 42 per cent increase from fiscal year 2024/25 with the goal of increasing their reach for programming in more schools and restoring programme facilitator levels. The Salvation Army received \$50,000 for the Harbour Light and life skills programmes in fiscal year 2024/25. This funding level challenged their ability to hire needed staff and their ability to provide their programmes effectively. Harbour Light and the life skills [programmes] will receive a grant in the amount of \$100,000 in fiscal year 2025/26, a 100 per cent increase, to continue to provide residential drug treatment and community life skills programming for 10 males and hire needed staff.

Mr. Chairman, Focus Counselling Service provides transitional/supportive housing for up to 28 recovering males. These individual adult males have participated in primary drug treatment at other treatment facilities (such as the prison, hospital, inpatient or outpatient services) and require assistance in re-integrating back into the community. The goal is to return participants back to the community as productive citizens, thus improving the number of individuals maintaining a drug free lifestyle. Focus Counselling Services received \$180,000 initially in fiscal year 2024/25. An additional \$150,000 was awarded as a supplemental bringing their grant to \$330,000. Focus Counselling Services will receive the same level grant of \$330,000 in fiscal year 2025/26.

Pathways Bermuda provides outpatient substance abuse treatment and aftercare services within the community, servicing approximately 81 individuals. Pathways received \$150,000 as part of the supplemental funds awarded in fiscal year 2024/25 and will receive a grant of the same level, \$150,000 in fiscal year 2025/26 to enhance their services and hiring of a Clinical Supervisor.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. And all of these grants can be found at page C-21 of the Budget Book.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

Mr. Chairman, CADA works in collaboration with the Department for National Drug Control to provide community education on alcohol misuse, as well as to provide the server training programme (TIPS) which is mandated within the Liquor Licence Act 1974, as amended in 2011. A grant of \$60,000 was provided to CADA in fiscal year 2024/25, which mainly supports the implementation of the TIPS programme.

CADA will receive the same level funding of \$60,000 in fiscal year 2025/26 to support these activities. Grant funding of \$80,000 was provided to the Bermuda Addiction Certification Board [BACB] in fiscal year 2024/25. The Bermuda Addiction Certification Board provides international certification testing for

both prevention and treatment professionals locally; funding also supports addiction specific training to enhance workforce development in this specialty area on Island; supports re-certification of professionals and helps to maintain membership in the International Certification and Reciprocity Consortium (IC&RC). Certification is required for registration of Addiction Counsellors to practice under the Allied Health Professions Act 1973. There are currently 56 certified and registered Addiction Counsellors (an increase of seven from the previous year); 12 of the Addiction Counsellors are also certified Clinical Supervisors, (an increase of one from the previous year) and there are two Prevention Specialists, which is a total of 58 certified addiction professionals working in Bermuda. There are also five Associate Alcohol and Drug Counsellors holding that designation under the board. BACB will receive the same level grant of \$80,000 for fiscal year 2025/26 to continue their work.

The highlighted agencies have provided an integral part of the drug prevention and drug treatment continuum of services for Bermuda for many decades in collaboration with the Department for National Drug Control. (See page C-21 Grants and Contributions.)

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Business unit 98010, Community Development.

The Chairman: Okay. So, we are going back to pages B-288 and B-289?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, sir.

The Chairman: Yes.

Business Unit 98010, Community Development

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the goal of this unit is to educate the public about the harms of alcohol and drug use, to ensure the provision of clear and sustained messages to our young people that *no use of alcohol, cannabis, tobacco or other drugs is acceptable*. And to involve families, schools and community organisations in alcohol/drug prevention efforts.

Other initiatives for the Community Development unit are to assist in highlighting drunk/drug driving and road safety initiatives through public education and to continue awareness campaigns directed at underage drinking, adolescent drug use (which is alcohol and cannabis) and emerging drugs, such as fentanyl and synthetic drugs, edibles and vaping.

Throughout the 2024/25 fiscal year, the Department of National Drug Control Prevention Team collaborated with the Department of Education to bring awareness and education on the harms of vaping to both high schools and middle schools in the public and private sectors through web-based presentations and

training with overseas specialists. A total of five training events for students and teachers were held. Two multimedia campaigns were focused on vaping and cannabis with ads occurring on radio, television and on the Internet targeting the adolescent population.

Grassroots activities included work with the Court Street Market Community group festival, participation in health booths at both senior schools and the City of Hamilton.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 98020, that is on Prevention.

The Chairman: Yes.

Business Unit 98020, Prevention

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Prevention Unit is responsible for providing drug prevention programmes for schools and the wider community with the goal of stopping use before it starts.

The Prevention Unit facilitates the implementation and integration of the AI's Pals programme at the pre-school level at all public schools and one private school. AI's Pals is an early childhood curriculum and teacher programme that promotes resiliency at the early childhood stage with explicit instruction to develop social competence, autonomy and problem solving. The DNDC supports the AI's Pals programme within schools by funding initial teacher training, refresher courses and by providing resources/supplies for all educators implementing the programme at a cost of approximately \$15,000 per year. Approximately 296 students have participated in the programme from the pre-school level in the public schools, an 8 per cent increase from last year and 48 in the private schools (a total of 344 students). Currently there are 42 teachers trained and providing the AI's Pals programme.

Mr. Chairman, the unit also provides the Teen Peace programme that supports three public schools for P7 and M1 school-age children as an afterschool programme. Currently there are 50 students participating in the Teen Peace programmes, a decrease of 15 from the previous fiscal year due to the closing of one middle school. The programme allows students to be interactive with positive, prosocial adults and affords them the opportunity to further develop, operationalise and practice social-emotional learning skills at a vital stage when children are transitioning developmentally, cognitively and emotionally.

The DNDC hires and trains facilitators for this programme as well as provides all supplies and resources. Teachers facilitating have received the Botvin's LifeSkills training, which a research-validated substance abuse prevention programme proven to reduce the risks of alcohol, tobacco, drug abuse, and violence. The programme targets the major social and psychological factors that promote the initiation of substance use and other risky antisocial behaviours. There are six

trained facilitators implementing the Teen Peace (Bermuda) Afterschool Programmes.

Mr. Chairman, the Adventure Education programme, that utilises an experiential approach to learning, is used as part of the annual Summer Camp for emerging M1 students. The Adventure Education programme engages young people physically, emotionally and mentally encouraging them to explore appropriate risk-taking behaviours and play that predicts unpredictable outcomes through adventure, fun and learning. Adventure educators use a specific framework to facilitate learning which include the "Adventure Wave" which surges between three basic phases: Brief, Activity, and Debrief, helping to develop anti-bullying, anti-drug, communication, compassion, critical thinking, health, leadership, respect, responsibility, self-esteem and team building, tolerance and trust, to name a few. Four facilitators have been trained to provide the programme during the summer. Thirty students participated in the Summer Camp last year, a decrease of 29 from the previous fiscal year, due to DNDC only able to fund one session.

Mr. Chairman, the Parenting 101 programme for at-risk parents is led by a certified Parenting facilitator and the DNDC Prevention Officer. The programme provides a step-by-step guide to building positive parenting skills and family relationships to prevent problem behaviours. Parents learn how to prevent problem behaviours from starting, how to communicate and how to help their [child] to solve problems and make good choices as they grow. Stress management and positive discipline are also included. Effective strategies that have been proven to work are learned and can be used immediately by the parent. All the tips and tools are based on research.

The Prevention Officer and a senior educator are the only facilitators of this programme at an approximate cost of \$5,000 annually. The Transformational Living Centre closed during the fiscal year resulting in our inability to complete the Parenting 101 programme with them.

Mr. Chairman, all the drug prevention programmes are evaluated throughout the year by observation by the DNDC staff (Drug Prevention Officer and the Community Development Coordinator) to ensure fidelity and appropriate implementation by the facilitators.

Business Unit 98030, Treatment

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Treatment Unit is responsible for overseeing substance abuse treatment island-wide by ensuring quality care through accreditation of programmes, workforce development and training and public awareness of available services. The Unit is also responsible for maintaining a continuum of care and advocating for gaps in services. In fiscal year 2024/25, the focus was on maintaining Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation

Facilities (CARF) Accreditation for the Men's Treatment Programme, the Women's Treatment Centre and Turning Point [Substance Abuse Programme] (operated by BHB) as required by the National Drug Control Act 2013. All these programmes have maintained the "gold star" CARF accreditation status throughout fiscal year 2024/25. CARF accreditation is spearheaded and funded by the Department for National Drug Control island-wide at an approximate cost of \$20,000. Compliance surveys are completed every three years. Quality improvement reports are submitted annually.

Mr. Chairman, efforts have continued to consolidate the use of the AccuCare web-based client management system in all drug treatment programmes across the Island to assist in standardised, best practice care. Five treatment facilities out of the six on Island utilise the system at cost of approximately \$21,000 annually. Required treatment specific training such as CPR/First Aid and Safety-Care Prevention Techniques also took place during 2024/25.

Unfortunately, due to staff vacancies, awareness campaigns such as [National] Recovery Month and programme spotlights were unable to be planned and implemented during 2024/25.

Business Unit 98050, Research and Policy

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the primary activities of the Research Unit are geared towards collection and dissemination of reliable data through the Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN); identifying emerging trends and patterns of drug use; evaluation of the current drug control efforts, and providing co-ordination, implementation and evaluation of the National Drug Control Master Plan and Action Plans.

Mr. Chairman, during financial year 2024/25, the 14th Annual Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN) meeting was held with all network members at BUEI [Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute] on 1 November 2024. This annual event continues to greatly increase collaboration, understanding and information-sharing between all agencies involved in demand and supply reduction activities. The 2024 Annual Report of the Bermuda Drug Information Network (BerDIN) was released to the public in November 2024 following the meeting. The report can be found on the Government website.

Mr. Chairman, the Treatment demand indicators, consumer satisfaction surveys, stakeholder feedback surveys, employee climate survey and quality records reviews were completed within the Department for National Drug Control, Women's Treatment programme, Men's Treatment programme and the Right Living House operated under the Department of Corrections during the 2024/25 fiscal year.

The National School Survey (a primary research study) was completed in fiscal year 2023/24 with the report being prepared for release in the first quarter of the 2024/25 fiscal year. The Prison Survey,

initially delayed for two years because of COVID-19 restrictions, began on 1 May 2023. The study examining the correlation between drug and alcohol consumption and traffic accidents, as well as fatalities, began at KEMH on 1 May 2023. This initiative is a joint effort with the DNDC Research Unit and the Emergency Department at the King Edward Memorial VII Hospital.

Mr. Chairman, 75 per cent of BerDIN members submitted their information on time, however, numerous agencies faced difficulties in submitting their data sets last year.

The postponement of data entry adversely affects the annual report by creating gaps in previously supplied information, leading to an inaccurate representation of Bermuda's drug situation. Steps are being taken to address this issue moving forward.

Almost there, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Almost there.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: I hope you heard all the cars tuning out for your speech.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Tuning out or beeping?

The Chairman: They were tuning, beeping and tuning.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Oh, okay.

The Chairman: There was no doubt, they were so excited about the speech being given in Parliament today that they were—

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Have mercy.

The Chairman: —hitting the horns.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Okay.

Business Unit 98060, Men's Treatment

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, and members of our listening public, the Men's Treatment programme is a Residential Substance Abuse Treatment programme for men 18 years and above in Bermuda. It provides long-term, comprehensive primary treatment for addiction disorders. The programme's primary treatment is delivered over a 12-month period using a phased approach. During the last phase, a transition plan is developed which includes participating in volunteer services, job shadowing, and referral to transitional supportive residency programme and/or after-care services.

The Men's Treatment programme had 12 admissions and nine discharges to the community during the 2024/25 fiscal year with six completing the 12-month programme, a completion rate of 50 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, life skills training remains a key component of the programme, especially in the transition phase. Mr. Chairman, 100 per cent of the clients received life skills training with six receiving after-care services. Family counselling is also a key part of treatment with six family members receiving support in 2024/25.

The MTC programme has been accredited by CARF since 2015 and has received the gold star 3-year award since then. Preparations have already begun for the next accreditation survey scheduled for 2026.

Mr. Chairman, business unit—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Business unit 98070, Women's Treatment.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. We are on page B-289 of the Budget Book for those in the listening public.

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

Business Unit 98070, Women's Treatment

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, the Women's Treatment programme provides long-term, comprehensive treatment for addiction and related disorders. The programme is delivered over a 12- to 15-month period using a phased approach. The phased approach to treatment delivery enables the client to reach short-term goals and celebrate accomplishments, thus motivating them to continue in treatment. Community involvement and re-entry is gradual and includes a partnership with local businesses and organisations to facilitate volunteerism in our clients. Admissions have been low over the 2024/25 fiscal year with two admissions and one discharge.

Life skills training remains a key component of the programme, especially in the Transition phase; all of the clients receive Life skills training.

There are three women receiving after-care services. Efforts will continue towards improving the admission rate by including a campaign to assist in increasing participation in the women's programmes through focus groups, public awareness and by partnering with community programmes that women access. This will occur in the upcoming fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, the supportive residency facility and programme provides a safe environment for the re-integration of women back into the community who have completed a programme of substance abuse treatment at the Women's Treatment Centre or who are accepted by the Women's Treatment Centre. All transitional clients are females who have been drug-free for at least one year. The programme is managed by the Women's Treatment Centre and is located within the general community. There are two clients occupying

the transitional home, both of whom are working within the community and actively engaged in life skills training to facilitate their move back into the community as productive citizens.

The Women's Treatment Centre programme and supportive residence has been accredited by CARF since 2009 and has maintained the Gold Star 3-year Award since then. Preparations have already begun for the next accreditation survey scheduled for 2026.

Business Unit 98080, Master Plan

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Chairman, business unit 98080, on page B-289, is in place to provide for the effective implementation of the National Drug Control Master Plan; cross-ministry initiatives with the Police, Customs and Corrections; evaluation of the Master Plan and to encourage cooperation and involvement of other Government departments and civil society in the implementation of the Master Plan initiatives. This business unit was not allocated any funding in financial year 2024/25 and again in 2025/26. No funding results in no financial support for actions laid out in the National Drug Control Master. The DNDC is required by the National Drug Control Act 2013 to "oversee the implementation of the action plan and monitor and evaluate the performance of the plan." The required evaluation of the [National Drug Control] Master Plan 2019–2024 has been planned to take place over the early months of fiscal year 2025/26. Some funding will need to be sourced from within the Ministry to meet this legislative requirement.

The Steering Committee to oversee the implementation of the actions of the Master Plan was approved by Cabinet and needs to be convened in fiscal year 2025/26 to ensure that priority actions get addressed.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. If I could pause you just there. I know that you are still addressing the Chamber on Head 88, being the fifth and final head of your five heads in the debate on the Ministry of National Security.

We are going to have a change in the Chair. And you will have the pleasure of MP Renee Ming.

There is about one hour and 45 minutes left in the debate until 5:42. And thank you, Minister. And to everyone else who is assisting in relation to this debate. MP Ming.

[Pause]

[Mrs. Renee Ming, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members and listening audience.

We are currently in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditures. We have the

Minister for National Security up right now and he is doing Head 88 of his brief. We have approximately one hour and probably about 40 minutes left.

Minister, would you like to continue? And thank you for your patience.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Good afternoon, Madam Chairman. How are you today?

[No audible response]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: It has been a long debate.

Madam Chairman, we are page B-289, but I am just moving on to plans for the upcoming year.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, we shall

- continue critical recruitment efforts with the goal of filling all vacancies by the end of the first quarter of the fiscal year 2025/26;
- continue the provision and monitoring of Grants to Drug Treatment and Drug Prevention Partners within the community to enhance the national demand for reduction efforts;
- establish the Steering Committee to oversee the National Drug Control Master Plan actions;
- complete the evaluation of the Master Plan and commence the needs assessment processes to create the next five-year plan as required by the National Drug Control Act 2013;
- implement the Pregnancy, Alcohol and Drugs Survey planned for August 2025;
- implement the National Household Survey on Alcohol and Drugs planned for October 2025;
- continue to provide residential substance abuse treatment for both adult males and females at the Nelson Bascome Substance Abuse Treatment Facility;
- commence preparations to re-implement an Adolescent Addiction Treatment Programme as per the November 2024 Throne Speech, with the goal of implementing in the following year. Programme development and staff positions will be identified during this process;
- continue to expand and enhance drug prevention efforts within schools through collaboration with the Department of Education, training teachers, and providing drug prevention materials and support;
- continue to educate the public and bring awareness about the harms of drug and alcohol misuse/abuse; and
- hold a community engagement event to enhance community-based efforts addressing substance abuse and other antisocial issues within the community.

Madam Chairman, the Department for National Drug Control will continue to work collaboratively with other key ministries such as Health and Education, as well as with various departments such as Corrections, Court Services, the Bermuda Police Service, Customs and international partners to ensure the implementation of a balanced approach to efforts made in achieving a healthier and drug-free Bermuda.

Madam Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 88, Department for National Drug Control.

In closing, Madam Chairman, I would like to commend Ms. Joanne Dean and her hard-working team for their sterling work throughout the year. This ends, Madam Chairman, my presentation for the Ministry of National Security.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Minister Weeks. We appreciate you getting that brief sorted.

At this time, I would like to ask if any Member would like to speak.

I recognise the Member from constituency 10, Mr. MP Robert King.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Chairman, Honourable Members and the listening public.

I will be brief. I will ask questions just for clarification, et cetera. I don't anticipate being up here a long time because it was a very comprehensive brief given by the Minister for National Security.

First of all, I want to echo his sentiments regarding the persons in National Security for the hard work that they do, the uniformed services, support staff, families of those persons and persons who have decided to avail themselves of the necessary treatment services to choose a better life and not hurt people as much. So, thank you to the service. Your work is valued.

I think we can all agree that when we are looking at the state of this Island as it relates to young persons, that we are in a state of crisis. And I am encouraged by some of the initiatives that were outlined in the ministerial brief today. But I have some questions in terms of the execution of some of those plans which some of them appear to be lacking in strategy and in terms of having a cohesive and defined framework. But I will get to that.

I am looking at page B-264, Head 83, National Security Headquarters. I am looking at Professional Services with the amount of \$2.403 million and training \$150,000. I am looking at Defence, Head 6, page B-271, where we have training for \$35,000. I don't see any professional services for that, so I suspect that they do not use consultants very much.

Police, Head 7, page B-273. The Professional Services budget is \$2.735 million. And we have Training with a budget of \$337,000. And for Customs we have, Head 12, page B-279. We have Professional Services at \$358,000 and we have Training at \$10,000. For National Drug Control, Head 88, page B-286,

Professional Services. We have \$523,000 and we have Training with a budget of \$43,000.

So on the face of it, it would appear that the emphasis is more on paying consultants than it is on paying for training of staff to progress and get the necessary skills to carry out the duties and responsibilities of their respective posts, understanding that the risks and the environment as it relates to criminal justice, substance abuse treatment, drug interdiction and keeping the citizens of this Island safe ever changing.

I would like the Minister to provide some clarification on why the training budgets for those heads are so lean in comparison to the Professional Services. I think for the ease of answering and keeping the flow, it would be best if I allowed Minister Weeks to answer the heads and then continue on. Would that be agreeable to you?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Good.

The Chairman: Minister, just for the sake of clarity, so you have agreed to answer each of the heads that the Member has just spoken to as it relates to Professional Services and Training first?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: I just need to wait until I hear from my team.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Well, in that case, just in the interest of time, I will keep it going and then you can answer as you get the answers. Is that agreeable?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes.

The Chairman: Member, I just want to make sure that the Minister understands that if he is answering that way and for you, from a time expediency—

Mr. Robert King: Sure.

The Chairman: —you may not have all the time that you want. So, you can choose basically if you want to do one question/one answer.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Or you can just pose all your questions and then the Minister's team will have enough time—

Mr. Robert King: That sounds good.

The Chairman: —to provide you with those responses. I think that better serves—

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no. I agree.

The Chairman: —the listening public as well.

Mr. Robert King: I am going to run out of time, I can see that.

The Chairman: Yes. So, we recognise—

Mr. Robert King: No worries.

The Chairman: —the Member from constituency 10, MP Robert King.

Mr. Robert King: Regarding the National Drug Control, and the work that they do with treating persons with substance use disorders and it was actually . . . I thoroughly enjoyed when Minister Weeks was speaking about that because that used to be your wheelhouse. Right, sir?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, it was.

Mr. Robert King: Yes. So, what I picked up on was basically the general regard and . . . yes. So that was encouraging to hear that.

So, regarding the Treatment Courts, the way they currently operate, understanding that it is an intensive programme, and rightly so, because of the risk needs associated with substance use disorders. As they currently operate, the person who is being recommended for a Treatment Court has to undergo a period of observation which seems to be a bit counterintuitive because the choices and decisions that were being made by that person led to conflicts with the criminal justice system in the first place.

So, it almost appears the way the system is set up, it is a setup for failure, giving them the false impression that it is a choice whether or not to engage in the programme, when it is the choices that actually caused the problems in the first place. So, I am wondering, as part of the National Drug Control's role, if there will be some consideration to amending the way that persons enter the Drug Treatment Court programme, so that persons will be engaged in treatment much earlier and it will be a more fluid system and more efficient for the sake of the clients getting the help that they need and also the community being safeguarded.

Understanding as well that the persons who are . . . who have contact with the Criminal Justice System, lower socioeconomic homes, adverse childhood experiences, trauma, et cetera, many of those persons are receiving financial assistance. They are housed in Bermuda Housing Corporation properties, et cetera. And we do know that there is a correlation between growing up in those environments and being exposed

to certain antisocial behaviours and the resulting generational trauma and being caught in the system.

So, I am wondering if there is going to be consideration for persons who are receiving government services to undergo some assessment for substance use and receiving those services whilst also receiving the services, whether it be housing, financial assistance or some other. So not being excluded but that is part of the intact process to ensure that we are going to get good outcomes.

Regarding the NDC and CADA—

The Chairman: Member, just asking if when you are speaking, just let us know the page and the—

Mr. Robert King: Oh, sorry, sorry, sorry.

The Chairman: —that you are on so that we can follow you.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, yes.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Okay. I am referring to the NDC, so that would be Head 88, page B-286. And what I am speaking to basically is the overarching philosophy as it relates to . . . the Minister made a statement about CADA and the stats that he was giving in terms of the correlation between drinking and driving and accidents.

So, I am wondering if, as part of the National Strategy, consideration is going to be given to increasing the penalties for said offences and also amending the legislation so that sobriety checkpoints will not need to be gazetted in the current format because persons are basically being informed *don't go in these areas, drink in those areas*. So, if we are going to do something meaningful it would suggest that with some tweaking of the laws people can be encouraged to be responsible.

I am going to go to Head 88, NDC, page B-266, and business unit 93000, performance measure, Info System Waste Management Policies, approved, zero, 2023/24, 90 per cent revised, 2024/25 target outcome 90 per cent, estimate 2025/26. The question I have is, what is being measured and how can a risk management programme be implemented without a comprehensive report on the cybersecurity breach which occurred in September 2023. The report was completed in November 2023. Are they utilising the recommendations that came out of that report to guide policy decisions?

I am also looking at the performance measure, Percentage of meetings held with quorum, instead percentage of objectives met, it was achieved. So, they are measuring meetings, but they are not . . . the measurement is not measuring the substantive reason for the meeting in terms of what are the objectives that we are trying to achieve.

We just, *Oh, we had a meeting, we had a number of people*. It does not appear to encourage an improvement in service. And you are also looking at some of the performance measures which . . . and this a general for all the heads with the exception of (I want to say) Fire Service and the Customs. But I will go ahead and clear that up as I go.

The performance measures seem to be counterintuitive as well. Whereas you would be aiming for 100 per cent, what we are seeing in some of these performance measures across the board here is that the numbers are actually reduced, or they are held static. So, it appears as though the process of determining what the performance measures should be, it appears to be an arbitrary process as opposed to a measure that is being used to guide performance, to measure performance towards the achievement of the goals. So, the performance measures need to make sense for the objectives that are being set and are part of the roles and responsibilities of each Ministry head.

Page B-267, 93007, performance measure, Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team contingency plans progressed. Again, what is being measured? How could a risk management programme be implemented without a comprehensive report on the cybersecurity breach which occurred in September (as I stated before)? So, things are happening. Decisions are being made in an absence of a report that there appears to be no urgency, understanding that this an issue of national importance that the public has a right to know so that we can protect ourselves.

Business unit 93008, Gang Violence Reduction Programme. In 2023/24, initial expenditure was \$689,000. In 2024/25, it was revised to \$1.151 million. Estimate in 2025/26 is \$1.716 million. Question: How many employees are there in the Gang Violence Reduction Programme, understanding that there is a serious need? And is Pastor Bean still the full-time coordinator of the programme and does he receive full compensation as a government employee? Or he is a consultant? I am just unsure of that.

Performance measure, page B-267, business unit 93008, Percentage of survey questionnaire data showing improvement in knowledge and skills achievement among at-risk youth participants of prevention programmes. Question: How many participants are in the programme? What age range? How long is the programme? What is the actual programme? What data is being collected and how does it map on to arrests, convictions, and deaths? So how many persons graduated and what is the relationship between graduating from the programme and recidivating or not?

Might I suggest a better measure? A number of gang reduction programmes offered in schools, correction facilities. Measure what we want to improve on; don't measure something that is not important or meaningful, consistent with the roles and responsibilities of the Ministry and department. It is basically wasting people's time. If we . . . imagine if we went to school and

they said that they were going to do away with grades. You are going to be . . . you know, *We are more concerned about you wearing the uniform properly*. I suspect that kids are going to lose interest because they are not being pushed towards challenging themselves to learn and do the difficult things because we have lowered the bar so far.

Minister Weeks, I'm on page B-276, with the numbers 69600 The Minister explained that they had been amalgamated or merged into another area. So, I am okay with that. Oh, a question for you though. Business [unit] 17042, Western area command, 17041—

The Chairman: Member, just what page are you on?

Mr. Robert King: Oh, yes, sorry. Head 7—

The Chairman: MP King, excuse me. What page are you on?

Mr. Robert King: Page B-274. Sorry. Page B-276, sorry.

The Chairman: Page B-276.

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

The Chairman: You may proceed.

Mr. Robert King: Eastern area command, Western area command. The question I have, Are those police stations operational with a full-time staff?

In terms of Head 7, page B-275, Revenue source, Firearms, \$9,000, \$19,000, \$19,000—I was a bit confused. It reads as though we are selling firearms, but I am sure that is not the case.

In terms of the police . . . let me get the page for you. Head 7, page B-275 [*sic*], 17008, Bermuda Police Service, performance measures, satisfaction. If I heard the Minister correctly, it sounded as though the measure was 6.3 out of 6.0. I would just like clarification because I think I must have heard that wrong.

The Chairman: Member, are you on page B-275, which is either the subjective analysis or the revenue summary. Or are you on the performance measures which are actually on page B-277?

Mr. Robert King: Page B-277, I stand corrected. Sorry about that.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: I will make sure that I have it open.

So, when we are looking at customer satisfaction, like I said, in terms of what is the actual metric, I think the public would be more concerned about the response time, apprehension rates, weapon seizures, how many, quantities—some specifics in terms of what

is being measured. Arrests resulting in successful prosecutions. Are performance measures consistent with other jurisdictions? Do the performance measures measure what we are trying to achieve? Or is it just an administrative function?

Head 12, Customs, page B-278. Business unit 22090, Vessel Clearance. I am not sure if the Minister mentioned, where did this section go? And who has assumed responsibility? Is this a merger? Has it been merged or amalgamated with another section? Has it realised the efficiencies and results anticipated?

Customs, Current Account. The Minister made mention of the fact that in the Customs Department retired persons are being brought back as consultants. Understanding that the training budget for Customs was meagre at best, wouldn't it make sense to increase the training budget so that you have persons who have received the requisite training who can then assume the role and progress within the career and respond to the changing needs of that department? So, training is of paramount importance to ensure that we deliver quality public service to the people of this community. Especially when you consider the sensitive and important nature of the work that these persons do in these various departments.

Airport Commercial. That is page B-280. Airport Commercial, business unit 22020, Maintenance to client base, 90 per cent time measured by quality of service levels, zero, zero. Target outcome zero. Please explain.

It is also concerning that with a document of such importance and having the requested extra time to submit the budget that there are so many clerical errors. It would also suggest that there are accounting errors according to the culture of performance that currently exists. Better measurement suggested, quantity of drugs seized. What drugs were seized? Illegal items, specific. Guns, weapons, plants, et cetera.

Prohibited animals. Percentage increase or reduction from budget of year before. Identify trends to show if what we are doing is working and where resources are needed, measuring performance against stated objectives.

Page B-281, business unit 22100, Interdiction. Percentage of positive search and detentions from total search and detentions undertaken to exceed 50 per cent. Ninety, ninety, ninety—target outcome. How many searches out of . . . a better measurement would be perhaps how many searches out of a total number of searches resulted in seizures of specific items and weights. There is nothing to aspire towards, improvements in service results. The performance measures, like I said, the theme is, it appears to be an arbitrary process because it is not measuring the performance related to the objectives and goals.

NDC, Head 88, page B-289. Number of clients in the programme compared to the number who completed, who stayed clean—

The Chairman: Which . . . what business unit are you referring to? —

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: We have . . . you said page B-289 which is the performance measures. So just let us know which business unit you are referring to.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Of course, you don't know. Lost probably. You need some help?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, it is a big book there.

The Chairman: Member.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, the consultant didn't you give that?

Mr. Robert King: No, no. You have got all the consultants. We don't have—

The Chairman: Excuse me, Members. Speak to the Chair. Thank you.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Note, I said, Members—with an "s."

[Laughter]

Mr. Robert King: Thank you for that.

Well, I will withdraw that question because it is covered in the other. So that is fine.

What we have also seen is that the current approach is not working. So in terms of the police budget, the money has stayed consistent. Employee numbers have increased or stayed the same. So, with the strategic plan—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Member, we are on . . . we are doing Head 7, Police, now?

Mr. Robert King: Actually, I am going to go back to the Ministerial Statement, the brief, regarding the NDC Master Plan.

The Chairman: So, you are going back to his brief related to the budget?

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: So, the NDC brief spoke about the Master Plan for the NDC not having a budget. And to me that is very concerning because that would be one of the first things that would be considered in a strategic plan to make sure that you have got the necessary resources in terms of equipment, personnel, building—whatever resources are required, you need to have a budget so that you can make sure that those things are fulfilled. You don't suggest that this is a strategic plan and not have those things in place. So, the question I have is, When will the strategic plan, the complete strategic plan be brought before the House so that we can have a discussion on it?

I have a question regarding the cybersecurity incident in 2025, \$3.092 million—

The Chairman: You just need to let them know—

Mr. Robert King: Oh yes. Regarding the brief.

The Chairman: Yes. Which head did that come under?

[Pause]

Mr. Robert King: That would be 93007, Disaster Risk Reduce and Mitigation.

The Chairman: Yes, just provide me the page number.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-266.

So, cybersecurity, how does it relate to the disaster risk reduction and mitigation team contingency plans being progressed?

Those are my submissions. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak to the debate that we are currently having in regard to the Ministry of National Security. And we are debating Heads 83, 6, 7, 12 and 88.

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. MP Dr. Douglas DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. I am looking on Head 6, Defence. And I do have some questions—

The Chairman: Member, can you just give us the pages—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Oh, of course.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: We do that we can follow with you.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I will start on page B-269, which is the department objectives. And I just note under Objective 8, Recruiting, it refers to a standing

deployable force of up to 420 personnel. And on page B-272, the performance indicators for the second business unit listed, 16010, Regiment headquarters, refers to a regiment establishment of 265. And then lists the percentages against that 365.

My question is related to this topic. Clearly, we are by the forecast for this year, only at 77 per cent of the 365, which is also well short of the 420. Growing to 82 per cent next year as predicted. I looked at the number of volunteers listed above, and I sort of did some math and I guess there must be some . . . I am getting to the question, but I am just trying to help explain. Actually . . . well, my first question would be, Are there any particular areas that are particularly understrength compared to that 77 per cent, or that the Regiment is particularly concerned about. That is number one.

My second question is, I see the forecast for the number of volunteers which is the first item there on page B-72, under Finance Recruitment. This is unit 16000, and I see the target outcome is for 40 volunteers. I am assuming that is brand new volunteers. Is there an attrition number that the Regiment has in mind that they plan for? Like the number of personnel who are leaving the unit? That would help me understand how to connect those percentages and numbers together.

And I guess I did not precisely put it, Madam Chairman, correctly. Another question is, please explain the difference between the 420 under the department objectives and the 365 under the performance measures. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Yes, I recognise the Member from constituency 31, MP Linda Smith.

Ms. Linda Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I am referring to page B-265, just to mention the gang reduction budget. It is \$1.7 million. On page B-267, one of the performance measurements is measuring the percentage of survey question data showing improvement in skills development and prevention programme. And I may have missed something, but I didn't really see any other measurement with respect to the gang reduction violence programme. It is a hefty budget of \$1.7 million. And it would be nice to have some performance measurements that actually tell us something. I don't know whether there is something in there that perhaps, you know, could shed some light on here but I just didn't see it. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak at this time?

I recognise the Member from constituency [22], MP Scott Pearman.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Chairman. And thanks to the Minister for his very detailed presentation.

My question is a straight-forward one and it is in relation to the police. And it is the presentation in relation to Head 7. At one point during . . . and more specifically, if I could take you, Madam Chairman, to the employment numbers page B-276. If you look there for the 2023/24 actuals you see a number of 447. And then we have the originals and the revised for last year, 473 and 443. My question is . . . during the Honourable Minister's presentation reading his brief, he said that last year there were 360 officers. And I am just looking for some clarity as to the differences between the number that was read in his brief and the number that is shown on the total line of employee numbers at page B-276.

I am not sure if the differential is because of the use of the word "officers" and that there are more employees of the Police Service who are non-officers and that is the difference. Or if, alternatively, the difference is that these numbers here at page B-276 are roles and posts most of which are unfilled or of which a number are unfilled, leaving only 360 officers actually filled. So that is my first question.

My second question, still on this topic is in relation to the 360 officers. Is the Minister able to share with us how many of those might be off, whether for sick leave or for disciplinary leave, or whatever it may be? So, in terms of if there are 360 officers, how many would we say are active? So thank you, Madam Chairman, those are my questions.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak to this debate?

No? Minister, I believe you have a few questions to answer at this time.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Thank you, colleagues, on the other side. (I'm just trying to get things in order.)

The Chairman: Just for the benefit of the listening audience, we are currently in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. Today we are debating the Ministry of National Security. And that will be Heads 83, 6, 7, 12 and 88.

Thank you, Minister.

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

I will take a stab at trying to satisfy all the questions. If I don't give you the answers that you wanted, I have no problem getting on with you to clarify the question for me.

The first answer I have here is around professional services versus training. I said in my brief that professional services are increased by \$1 million. And that was supposed to be used toward marketing of anti-

violence messaging, educational bursaries and counselling services. So, it is not that we are using monies focusing more on professional services rather than training. I think that at this point in time we have to be mindful that in order for us to put in place the [Bermuda] National Anti-Violence Strategy, Madam Chairman, the way we want, we have to employ some outside expertise.

So, we do not want to give the impression that we are focusing more on professional services and less on training. It has to go hand in hand. Because some of the expertise that we need is not always in-house. So that is why we are putting the money in the budget to address some professional services that are needed.

We had another question on the Treatment Courts. The question was—and I am jumping all over the place. I'll try to get all the answers. So, everyone, bear with me. How can we improve the process for the admission of clients from Drug Court? The answer, Madam Chairman, is that Treatment Court falls under Court Services. So, clients are accepted to the Department of National Drug Control Residential Treatment based on their will to be admitted.

As the Member from constituency 10 had said, that is my wheelhouse. And I think we both understand that no matter what service we provide when it comes to rehabilitation services, Madam Chairman, if the client in question, be it male or female . . . one of the key components of it is their willingness to come into treatment to get those services. But as it stands now, it comes under . . . the Treatment Courts fall under Court Services. But the actual treatment, the client, the person who needs the treatment, needs the rehabilitation services, his/her will is paramount in the success of the treatment.

[The Member] asked a question about the Police Service training versus consultants. For the Bermuda Police Service, consultants deliver actual services. There are always efforts underway to try and meet the needs from within local staff; however, that is not always possible. So, the BPS would at times employ consultants to deliver actual services whilst they are attempting to increase staffing and raise skill levels amongst our local team. So, there is always the option . . . it is always the intent (I should say) of the Bermuda Police Service to increase the skill level of those officers and other staff members who are in-house. But until such time that is why we get consultants to come here, and they come and hit the ground running. And until such time when we raise the skill level, we would have to employ some level of consultation from overseas.

There was a question relating to the cyber report. The cyber report is subject to a parliamentary committee, and it is still in the process of being ratified. Therefore, no National Drug Control decisions are guided by the recommendations of the cyber [report], obviously, until the report gets ratified.

There was a question in reference to drinking and driving. Drinking and driving, potential legislative

changes. Changes to legislation inclusive of penalties are being considered along with other opportunities to curb impaired driving.

The [Member] talked about consultants for the Department of National Drug Control. The answer requires speciality training often not available on Island. Local trainers are always used when possible. Consultant fees for AccuCare licences are also included in that number.

Again, I just might add a little addition. I too come from that world, and I remember when I had to go overseas to get a level of training so that I could come back and be the best possible counsellor that I could be. But wherever possible, we do training here on Island. And training in that realm of rehabilitation is ongoing. It is constant. It is constant because it is always a moving target. And I take this opportunity to take my hat off to those who are drug and alcohol counsellors. They are on the front line, and it is not a cut-and-dry approach to dealing with those who are looking for help in drug and alcohol rehabilitation.

A question for Customs. Are we spending funds on consultants instead of training new officers? Customs professional services is broken down as follows, Madam Chairman. [There is] \$100,000 on consultants regarding the advancement of export control. This would include training for staff. This is a new area to Bermuda. So, the expertise does not exist here already to utilise; therefore, it is necessary for us to use a consultant to get us up to speed.

Madam Chairman, \$216,000 on contractors. This pertains to vendors fulfilling non-Customs officer functions primarily immigration and cashiering. This frees up officers to perform their core functions. Also, the rate per hour for vendors is lower than for Customs officers.

Madam Chairman, \$42,000 on membership fees. These are memberships of World Customs Organizations and Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council. Within our membership for these are free, but excellent, training provided. Also, Madam Chairman, the training is therefore comparatively low because much of our training is carried out in-house and is provided freely by our memberships of the WCO [World Customs Organization] and CCLEC [Caribbean Customs Law Enforcement Council].

We had a question, Madam Chairman, I can't remember which Member asked it. I think it is constituency 31, asked about GVRT [Gang Violence Reduction Team]. Member Smith, is she constituency 31?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes. Is Pastor Bean as coordinator of GVRT a full-time government employee or a consultant. The answer: Pastor Bean serves as a government-appointed consultant.

How many individuals currently make up the GVRT? The GVRT currently consists of five members.

There was a question for the Regiment. I am not sure who asked that question, but—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Who was it? Dr. DeCouto. Yes. He is "doctor"? You are a doctor?

Yes? Okay. All right, Doc.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Chairman: Proceed, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Dr. DeCouto from—

The Chairman: Constituency 25.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Constituency 25.

Professional services versus training, on page B-271, \$91,000. This is all medical fees covering full-time staff, copays, and costs associated with uninsured part-time staff soldiers.

There was another question for the Bermuda Police Service, [regarding] firearm licensing. MP King from constituency 10 started off the bowling [with] his question on firearm licensing. The Bermuda Police Service does not sell firearms. They do however charge the public to process firearm applications.

I think the same Member asked about drinking and driving. Potential legislative changes. Changes to legislation inclusive of penalties are being considered along with other opportunities to curb impaired driving.

There is another question, and I think that may have come from the Member of constituency 10 in reference to the GVRT. Can you provide clarity on how many young people are involved, their ages, what are the programmes? And how do they support the Ministry's goals? The response to that, Member, is that the Ministry of National Security delivers several school-based intervention programmes to its frontline team, working daily in Bermuda's public schools. These programmes include youth work placement and mentoring programmes, focused on career readiness and mentorship for students ages 15 to 18, offering real-world job placements and personal development support.

We have a programme called the G.R.E.A.T. programme. And G.R.E.A.T. stands for: Gang Resistance Education and Training. That is delivered in primary and middle schools for ages 8 to 13. Teaching life skills, conflict resolution and positive decision-making.

The GVRT also engaged in school visits, mediations and restorative sessions, providing crises support, conflict mediation and relationship building across all age groups. The individual support, tailored case management and mentoring for students identified as at-risk.

We have another programme, Madam Chairman, called the I AM programme. A youth

empowerment initiative that builds self-worth, identity, and positive mind-set through workshops, group sessions and mentorship, primarily targeting middle and senior school students. So collectively, these programmes engage over 150 students per school term across ages 8 to 18. Each programme is tracked with specific metrics and reported on regularly.

All initiatives align with the Ministry's prevention and intervention goals by maintaining a consistent presence in schools, building trust with students, offering hands-on support and guiding them to a positive life path.

There was a question referencing the Department of National Drug Control. Who was that?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay. Constituency 10. Constituency 10 was bowling, wasn't he?

Why is there no funding for the Master Plan? The answer was that the 2019 to 2024 Master Plan has finished and is currently being evaluated by overseas speciality consultants. This will be followed by the needs assessment with all stakeholders and partners. All data will be used to develop the next plan. The new master plan will be made available in 2026/27.

There was a question on how the cybersecurity relates to the DRRMT team [Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation Team]. The Disaster . . . I don't know who asked that question.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay. I'm going to refer all my answers to [the Honourable Member for] constituency 10. He can direct me to where it has to go.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay. All right.

So, the question was, How does cybersecurity relate to the DRRMT. The Disaster Management Plan address protections of critical national infrastructure more broadly, while the cybersecurity unit focuses specifically on the protection of the computer systems that support and service the critical national infrastructure.

There was a question on Customs, Vessel Clearance, Amalgamation, amalgamated with Marine. I am going to assume it was [from the Honourable Member for] constituency 10 and he can direct me.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay. All right. So the answer to that question is that Vessel Clearance is marine. It is . . . are you referring to the transfer of funding or positions from interdiction to vessel clearance? If so, it has made no difference and the reason is because it was merely an accounting budget change reflective of the

actual operational reality, i.e., it did not make sense to have part of a section recorded under one cost centre and partially under another. There has been an increase in seizures due to the additional cruise ship visits.

Also, for Customs, explain the accounting and seizures. The zeroes were explained in the brief. Those units are no longer in use. The budget has not been provided so they cannot be expected to produce performance.

There is another question for GVRT. I am not sure if [the Honourable Member for] constituency 10 asked many GVRT questions.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: You did? It was between you and [the Honourable Member for] constituency 31.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Okay.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: All right. All right. That is the score back there, Madam Chairman.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: The survey related to the Gang Violence Reduction programme appears to be the only noted measure, or metric. Are there any others? There is no single standalone Gang Violence Reduction programme. Rather, gang violence is addressed through the broader National Violence Reduction Strategy which encompasses multiple programmes and initiatives. Each of these has its own success metrics and reporting mechanisms tailored to its specific objective.

There was a question on the strength of the Regiment. The historic unit strength of 420 is not correct. The correct number is 365. However, this is under review. The Regiment aims to recruit 40-plus soldiers a year and plans for an attrition rate of 30 soldiers. Retention remains high and the Regiment is doing more than ever with fewer people. Although there are no critical gaps in capability, there will be challenges providing operational mass over time. Managing through succession planning over the medium- to long-term continues to be a challenge.

There is another question, Madam Chairman—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Madam Chairman, point of clarification.

The Chairman: Let me ask the Minister first if he will yield to your point of clarification.

[No audible response]

The Chairman: I recognise the Member from constituency 25.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, I am seeking a point of clarification. I didn't quite hear the retention rate or the attrition rate. If he could repeat that I would appreciate that. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.
Minister.

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

And for my learned doctor, the Regiment aims to recruit 40-plus soldiers a year. And plans for an attrition rate of 30 soldiers. Retention remains high and the Regiment is doing more than ever with fewer people. Although there are no critical gaps in capability, there will be challenges providing operational mass over time. Managing through succession planning over the medium- to long-term will continue to be a challenge.

Our next question, Madam Chairman. I am not sure who it came from, but it was, What is the Bermuda Police Service's actual staffing as opposed to the funded establishment? Bermuda Police Service, as of 19 May, currently employs 381 police officers [with] police staff of 59, for a total of 440. In the 2025/26 budget they are funded for 482. The difference is the understaffing gap. And the Police Service, I may add while I am on my feet, is actively recruiting. As a matter of fact, they have a recruit class going on now. There is another advertisement going out in the next couple of months. So the police are actively doing all that they can to try to get the numbers up to bolster their boots on the ground.

That, Madam Deputy Speaker, were all the questions that I have so far. If anyone has felt slighted, it is not personal. You can ask me again or just remind me and I will get the answers in the remaining time.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. I actually believe you answered all the questions. I was recording them as well.

Does any other Member wish to speak to the debate that we currently have going on?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Mr. Robert King: For Minister Weeks, when can we anticipate that we will learn of the recommendations of the cybersecurity report? That's all. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak to the debate at this time?

Minister, no one. So, I guess you can answer that question.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Madam Chairman, I think there is a joint committee that has been put in place by the Speaker of the House. Once that Committee reconvenes and does what they have to do, I think that that report will be tabled right after that happens. Okay?

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: So, if there are no other questions—

The Chairman: Let me just ask, does anyone else wish to speak to the debate that we currently have which is the Ministry of National Security, Heads 83, 6, 7, 12 and 88?

I recognise the Member from constituency 12.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Just over on page B-267. I know that under Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation, in reference to the cybersecurity, I was just curious. I didn't . . . in going through the numbers here, it didn't mention or show that there was any potential ransom that had been paid. Can we assume then that there was not one that was paid? Since I couldn't find [the numbers] in Finance. I couldn't find the numbers in National Security Headquarters. The question is, Is it safe to say that we did not have to pay one?

Ah—okay.

The Chairman: I'm sorry. Did you have any further question? Or was that your final, your only question?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, one more question.

The Chairman: Okay. Well, you can ask it at this time.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: In reference to the . . . the Minister said, his answer was that they would be looking forward to the Joint Select Committee forming to answer questions concerning the report that was done on cybersecurity. I guess I was just wondering, if we continue to wait to ratify this by the Committee, are we saying then that . . . I would assume that there are still risks that we need to fill. If we have to wait for the [Joint] Select Committee to ratify the report, does that continue to put us in jeopardy because we are waiting for the Joint Select Committee to meet to ratify the report?

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Member.

And just for the sake of clarity, the Minister did say that . . . not the formation of the Committee, he said

they will reconvene the Committee in the new Parliament.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes.

The Chairman: But I will allow him to answer the questions.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Correct. My apologies.

The Chairman: That is what you meant?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Correct.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you.
Minister.

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

I will answer the first question first, concerning any ransom or whatnot. I think those kinds of questions should be held offline, actually. And that would better be served by the Finance Minister.

And second, because the Committee has not been reconvened in Cabinet and reinstituted, does not mean that we have not been putting safeguards in place to make sure that to the best of our ability the kind of stuff that happened in 2023 does not happen again.

And as I sit down, the cyber ransom question, as I said, is for the . . . it is a question that the Joint Select Committee would answer.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to speak to the current debate?

I'll ask one last time. Does any other Member wish to speak to the debate?

Minister, I don't see any show of hands or anyone rising to their feet.

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

I now move that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12 and 88 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 83, 6, 7, 12 and 88 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. Agreed to.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of National Security, Heads, 83, 6, 7, 12 and 88 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister Weeks, and to your team.

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

The Chairman: We will just give the Minister for Housing and Municipalities one minute to get himself settled.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Good afternoon, Members, and the listening public.

We are currently in Committee of Supply with the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure. We are about to start the debate on Housing and Municipalities. The heads that we will debate for the next three hours will be Heads 90 and 53. Our start time is 5:15, which means our finish time will be 8:15.

I call on the Minister Zane De Silva to begin.
Thank you.

MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move the following heads. Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities; Head 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister, you can proceed.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I am trying out these new glasses to see how I make out.

[Pause]

HEAD 90—MINISTRY OF HOUSING AND MUNICIPALITIES

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, I am grateful for the opportunity to lead the debate and present the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities. This is found on pages B-319 through B-321, and also page C-22 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26.

Ministry Headquarters is comprised of one business unit, 10000, Administration, which supports the Minister's office and directs the development and implementation of policy and legislation. The Ministry Headquarters also provides leadership and coordination for its affiliated bodies which are the Bermuda Housing Corporation, the Bermuda Housing Trust, the Bermuda Land Management Corporation, the Corporation of Hamilton, Corporation of St. George's and the Morgan's Point Development Company.

The mission of the newly formed Ministry of Housing and Municipalities is *To enhance Bermuda's quality of life through affordable and sustainable*

housing, vibrant communities, responsible land stewardship and innovative urban development. To achieve the mission the Ministry Headquarters has the following objectives:

- Guide and coordinate the Ministry's initiatives through collaboration with Government agencies and key public and private stakeholders.
- Deliver essential logistical, financial and administrative support to the Ministry Headquarters and its constituent entities.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, as noted on page B-321, the Ministry Headquarters has been allocated a total budget of \$913,805 for the 2025/26 fiscal year. This amount represents approximately 12.1 per cent of the Ministry's total estimated budget of \$7,554,000. For clarity, the other 87.9 per cent, or \$6,640,000, is allocated to the operational grant for the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

Of the Ministry Headquarters' allocation budget, \$465,000, or 50.0 per cent, is designated for salaries and \$388,000, or 42.0 per cent, is earmarked for professional services to support studies and specialised assistance. And the remaining \$60,805, or 8.0 per cent, is allocated to Operations.

Madam Chairman, as the Ministry is newly formed, there are no changes in the subjective analysis to report in the 2024/25 current account estimates.

Revenue

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Ministry Headquarters will not collect any revenue this fiscal year.

Manpower

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the manpower estimates for the Ministry Headquarters as outlined on page B-321 is five full-time posts. This includes a policy analyst, comptroller, executive assistant, and two special advisors to the Minister. Currently, the two advisor positions are unfilled.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Ministry Headquarters does not anticipate purchasing capital assets during the fiscal year 2025/26.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, as shown on page C-22, the Ministry Headquarters has an allocation of \$22,960,000 for grants and contributions. This will support the following entities, including the

Bermuda Land Management Corporation, the Corporation of St. George's and the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

The specific grants and contributions are as follows:

For the Bermuda Land Management Corporation (BLMC) the following grants are to facilitate payments on three projects currently secured through one single loan with Clarien Bank.

- Cost centre 75054, the Bermuda Land Management Corporation (BLMC) \$1,254,000, increased from revised estimate in 2024/25 of \$1,112,000 for the affordable housing project and infrastructure project at Victoria Place. This includes the installation of sewage collection and reclaimed water supply as far as Boaz Island Village.
- Cost centre 75334, BLMC South Basin Land Reclamation, \$3,061,000 increased from the revised estimate in 2024/25 of \$2,715,000. This, Madam Chairman, for the Cross Island reclamation project for the America's Cup 2017.
- Cost centre 75346, BLMC King's Wharf, \$845,000, increased from the revised estimate in 2024/25 of \$749,000 for the King's Wharf dock and terminal upgrade.

The increase of each loan is due to the rising Clarien Bank loan interest from 4.5 per cent to 6.0 per cent. For the Bermuda Housing Corporation, fulsome details will be provided in the budget statement for Head 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation. However, at this time I would like to provide the following highlights.

Cost Centre 75320, BHC Residential Housing Grant

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Over the past two years the Government has taken bold and strategic steps to address Bermuda's need for affordable housing. In 2023, the Government allocated \$4.3 million to the Bermuda Housing Corporation [BHC] under the Residential Building Programme. In 2024, this investment was raised to \$5 million, reinforcing our strong and consistent commitment.

For the 2025/26 fiscal year, we have deepened that commitment by allocating \$6.5 million to the Residential Housing Grant, an increase of \$1.5 million over the previous year. This expanded funding will allow more Bermudians to access quality, affordable housing and directly improve living conditions across the Island.

Madam Chairman, the BHC has outlined a comprehensive renovation plan to bring much needed housing units back into service. In 2025, a total of 16 units will be refurbished, including 12 units at Harmony East, six studios, and six one-bedroom apartments, and four two-bedroom units in Middletown.

Looking ahead to 2026, an additional 33 units are slated for renovation. [There are] 16 units at

Harmony North and 12 units at 18 Battery Road, comprising of four two-bedrooms, six studios, and two one-bedroom units. [There are] also five family-sized units at Chelsea, two three-bedroom and three two-bedroom units. And you will be happy about that, that is in your constituency, Madam Chairman.

Cost Centre 75332, BHC Capital Grant

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Additionally, the Bermuda Housing Corporation has been allocated \$10.5 million in its annual capital grant, an additional \$2.7 million compared to last year's original estimate of \$7.8 million. We are also making significant repairs to BHC-managed facilities and some of those include the following:

- a new roof, kitchen and electrical upgrades at Gulfstream Rooming House in St. David's;
- bathroom and room refurbishments at Langley House, St. David's;
- elevator installation at Prospect Apartments, Alexandra Road; and
- transformer and related infrastructure work at Fenton's Drive and Perimeter Lane.

These are not just maintenance projects, but investments in dignity, security and quality of life. The St. George's Corporation will receive a grant, cost centre 75003, of \$800,000 for fiscal year 2024/25, consistent with last year's revised estimate. This funding will support key infrastructure improvements with the municipality of St. George's. You are happy to hear that, Madam Chairman. Planned initiatives include:

- resurfacing and bricking of the Ordnance Island car park;
- various road resurfacing projects across the municipality; and
- renovation of a three-bedroom dwelling located at 26 Wellington Street.

These upgrades aim to enhance the town's infrastructure, improve public amenities and contribute to the overall revitalisation of the area. The overall decrease in capital loans of approximately \$4,644,263 is primarily attributed to a reduction from the \$27,604,263 in fiscal year 2024/25 to \$22,960,000 in 2025/26. This decline reflects the elevated loan requirements in 2024/25 which were necessary to complete the conversion of the Grand Atlantic into the Bermudiana Beach Residences.

Output Measures

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, as this is a new Ministry established in February 2025, there are no performance measures to report on for fiscal year 2024/25.

Major Policy Changes

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Again, Madam Chairman, as this is a new Ministry established earlier this year

there are no major policy changes to report on the fiscal year 2024/25.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the establishment of this new Ministry reinforces Government's commitment to developing and implementing solutions for affordable housing and effective management of the Island's quangos and municipalities.

I will briefly highlight some of the Ministry's priorities for the fiscal year 2025/26.

Development of a housing strategy: Bermuda's housing challenges demand urgent, inclusive and long-term solutions. Too many families continue to face difficulty securing adequate housing and the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities is fully committed to addressing this issue through a comprehensive national strategy. The recent Bermuda Infrastructure and Development Summit held by the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation and the Urban Development Authority highlighted the critical need to approach housing as a cross-sector issue.

From executives relocating to the Island to essential workers, middle-income earners and those in urgent need of shelter, our strategy must provide for all. This budget supports the development of a long-term, data-driven housing strategy to guide future investment, planning and home ownership opportunities. A three-year coordinated delivery framework is being developed to address the Island's housing needs. At the heart of this initiative is the creation of an integrated strategy that aligns the efforts of Government agencies, non-profits, and the private sector around shared objectives.

As an initial step, the Ministry is establishing a working group comprising public and private sector representatives and launching an island-wide housing survey to identify trends, assess needs and ensure that future development is targeted, effective and inclusive. Madam Chairman, these next steps will include

- convening the House Strategy Working Group;
- launching the island-wide housing survey and beginning data collection;
- analysing the survey results to identify key challenges and opportunities;
- engaging stakeholders in developing a draft housing strategy and deliver framework;
- conducting public consultation to validate priorities and proposed actions; and
- finalising the housing strategy and presenting an implementation plan to the Cabinet.

Affordable Housing and the Bermuda Housing Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, we are not going to wait for a completed plan. We must act now. The Bermuda Housing Corporation continues to

play a vital role in delivering safe, affordable and accessible housing for Bermudians across all sectors.

With three grant allocations totalling over \$23 million for operational support, capital works and new residential construction, BHC is well-equipped to advance its mission with urgency and impact.

These funds will drive continued renovations to existing units, expand the residential building programme and enable targeted upgrades to transitional housing facilities such as Gulfstream and Langley House.

The successful HomeStart Programme in partnership with Clarien Bank is also helping more Bermudians to achieve first-time homeownership. With 88 units completed or in progress, and additional development planned at Harmony Terrace, Chelsea Apartments, Battery Road and other strategic locations BHC is proactively addressing rising housing demand, reflected in a growing wait list of over 376 applicants.

Support for our seniors and our most vulnerable remains a top priority. Through initiatives like interest-free home improvement loans and the long-standing H.U.S.T.L.E Truck programme now in its 18th year. As economic pressures continue, the work of BHC is more critical than ever. The corporation is ready and resolute meeting Bermuda's evolving housing needs through data-driven planning, strong partnerships and decisive investment. The time for action is now and we are delivering.

Bermudiana Beach Residencies

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, as of 19 May 2025 the Bermudiana Beach Residences has reached 35 per cent secured occupancy with 23 units currently occupied and an additional 10 leases in progress. This includes a mix of studio, one-, two-, and three-bedroom units reflecting steady interest and positive momentum in tenant uptake. With 94 units available, the current figures represent 24 per cent occupancy and 11 per cent in-progress leasing. The continued activity in lease signings indicates growing confidence in the development and suggests a promising trajectory for full occupancy in the months ahead.

Master Planning for the Neighbourhoods of Alexandra Road, Mary Victoria Road and Cedar Park

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Ministry, working in collaboration with the Bermuda Housing Corporation and the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, is committed to developing a comprehensive infrastructure master plan for the Devonshire neighbourhoods of Alexandra Road, Cedar Park and Mary Victoria Road. This initiative will address long-standing and critical issues including water supply, sewage and street lighting.

Preliminary work is already underway. A town hall meeting has been held, and engagement continues

with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment on water infrastructure. Discussions are ongoing with the Bermuda Housing Corporation to address water-related concerns, and coordination with BELCO is in progress to improve street lighting.

As part of our commitment to inclusive community engagement, we are actively identifying multiple ways to consult with the residents. In due course, a dedicated government forum platform will be launched to facilitate issue reporting and information sharing. Additionally, a working group comprised of government representatives and interested residents is in the process of being established to guide the development and implementation of the master plan.

Water testing with the assistance of the Ministry of Health is ongoing for interested residents. A survey on dog ownership is also currently underway to inform future community planning and policy development.

To report non-emergency issues in the interim, residents may call the Ministry of Housing hotline, newly formed Ministry of Housing hotline, 246-8400. For emergencies, the Bermuda Housing Corporation should be contacted directly.

In the coming weeks we will provide further updates on the next-steps, timelines and how residents can remain informed and engaged throughout the planning process.

Legislative Reform

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Ministry will be pursuing amendments to the Acquisition of Land Act 1970 and the Bermuda Housing Act 1980 with the objective of streamlining the process for reclaiming vacant and derelict properties. The intent of these legislative changes is to provide a mechanism to increase the available housing stock.

To this end, the Ministry will work in close partnership with the Ministry of Public Works and Environment, as well as the ministries responsible for the Department of Land Valuation, Land Title Registry and the Department of Planning.

Municipal Reform

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Government remains committed to modernising and strengthening Bermuda's municipal governance to better serve our communities. While it would be premature at this time to outline any definitive changes to the structure of the municipalities, we are awaiting a ruling from the Privy Council. Until that decision is handed down, the Government will continue to support the ongoing operations of the municipalities and provide assistance at a strategic level to ensure alignment with broader public policy objectives. Once legal clarity is achieved, we are prepared to move forward in a

deliberate and effective manner, engaging in full consultation with the municipalities throughout the process.

Bermuda Land Management Corporation

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: In the year ahead the OMC will focus on completing several major infrastructure projects, advancing key strategic initiatives. The North Arm tug dock enhancement is on track for completion by early 2025, while the \$22 million redevelopment of King's Wharf fully funded by Norwegian Cruise Line, is set to begin in October 2025 and conclude in March 2026. In the east, final works on the water and waste infrastructure project will enable sewage transfer from St. George's to Southside by June.

Additionally, four renovated residential units are scheduled to return to the market by the end of July 2025, contributing to BLMC's continued residential occupancy rate of over 95 per cent. The corporation will also finalise the leasehold to freehold transition for 38 residential units in St. David's during this fiscal year. With strong financial self-sufficiency and sustained housing demand, BLMC remains well positioned to support growth and to deliver on its mandate across both ends of the Island.

Morgan's Point Development Company

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, as you are aware, the Morgan's Point Development Company, a government-owned entity established under the Morgan's Point Development Company Act 2022, is leading the phased and financially self-sustaining redevelopment of the former Caroline Bay site. This initiative follows the collapse of the Caroline Bay luxury resort project which left the Government with significant financial obligations under the original developers, after the original developers defaulted on a \$165 million guarantee, resulting in over \$200 million in public expenditure and annual interest payments of approximately \$7.7 million.

In response, MPDC has identified key priorities for 2025/26 including commissioning a formal land valuation, finalising legal easements, and rights of way, reestablishing a cohesive site vision and architectural design, complete the assessment of future use of the five partially developed residential units (R1 through R5) conducting a construction compliance survey and undertaking site cleanup to ensure safety and readiness for future development phases.

In closing, Madam Chairman, this Government stands firmly on the principle that every Bermudian deserves a safe, secure and affordable place to call home. As we move forward with purpose and determination, we are guided by a simple yet powerful truth, our people come first.

The Ministry has significant work ahead in the coming year and we remain fully committed to the provision of affordable housing for all those in need.

Madam Chairman, this concludes my presentation on Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister, you said "on Head 90." So does that include Head 90 and Head 53? Or are you about to start Head 53?

[No audible response]

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

HEAD 53—BERMUDA HOUSING CORPORATION

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I would like to go ahead and present the budget for Head 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation, found on pages B-322 and C-22 of the approved Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mission

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the mission statement of the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *To provide accessibility to adequate, affordable housing and promote independent living to enhance the quality of life in Bermuda.*

The vision statement of the Bermuda Housing Corporation is, *Every Bermudian will reside in an adequate and safe environment.*

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation, BHC, will be receiving three grant allocations this fiscal year to support both its operational and capital requirements.

First, Madam Chairman, the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities allocates and an operational grant that is utilised to subsidise the following:

- the annual cost of repairs and normal maintenance of the BHC properties;
- support services for families and individuals;
- rental assistance via rent-geared-to-income clients of the corporation; and
- for the continuation of the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck Programme.

BHC is budgeted to receive an operational grant of \$6,640,000 as noted on pages B-322 and C-22. This represents an increase of \$90,000 which will help cover operational costs including energy and other related expenses.

The second grant BHC is budgeted to receive is a capital grant, cost centre 75332 of \$10,500,000 found on page C-22. An increase, Madam Chairman, of \$2.7 million from the previous year. The capital grant will be used to pay for the interest and principal amounts due on the corporation's outstanding bank loans. It will also be used for small capital projects on BHC properties, such as

- new transformers for Fenton Drive and Perimeter Lane, \$450,000;
- the addition of an elevator at Prospect Apartments, \$200,000;
- roof, kitchen and electrical repairs at Gulfstream, \$900,000;
- bathroom and room upgrades at Langley House, \$571,356;
- BHC building upgrades about \$300,000;
- Vehicles, \$90,000;
- computer and equipment, \$80,000;
- and furniture and fixtures, \$30,000.

The third grant BHC is budgeted to receive is the BHC Residential Housing Grant, cost centre 75320 in the amount of \$6.5 million, that's listed on page C-22. This funding will be allocated to phase four of the Residential Building Programme.

I invite Honourable Members to recall that in October 2022 the Government announced the launch of the Residential Building Programme as previously stated. Over the course of this three-and-a-half-year initiative spanning the fiscal years 2022/23 through 2025/26, BHC is set to complete the refurbishment of 137 residential units. This includes the addition of 77 new affordable rental units with the overall project estimated at a cost of \$21,605,000.

Madam Chairman, there are no other changes between the 2024/25 and 2025/26 grant allocation. As a reminder, Madam Chairman, the primary functions of the BHC are to provide housing in Bermuda, to promote home ownership, to undertake and carry out housing schemes, and to undertake such other functions in connection with housing as the Minister responsible for Housing may require.

The Bermuda Housing Corporation administers a range of programmes in pursuit of its mission including the management and leasing of a substantial inventory of properties comprising of houses, apartments and building blocks. These properties include both those owned by the corporation and others leased from the private sector. The BHC manages approximately 533 government and private sector residential units Island-wide and eight transitional homes comprising 177 rooms. In addition to these, the BHC also manages 151 leasehold units at Alexandra Road, Mary Victoria Road, Greenwich Lane and Cedar Park, along with 94 new units at the Bermudiana Beach Residences.

Madam Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight several of the programmes and initiatives currently being implemented by the BHC to maintain, support and expand its housing stock. The corporation has entered into a public-private partnership with Clarien Bank, known as the HomeStart programme to support hard-working Bermudians in achieving home ownership. To date, the programme has successfully assisted over 30 Bermudian families in becoming first-time homeowners. The initiative has proven effective in making properties available for

purchase at affordable prices. I am pleased to report, Madam Chairman, that the number will soon rise to 32 as two additional families are expected to complete their closings in the coming weeks.

Through this partnership properties within the portfolios of either Clarien Bank or the Bermuda Housing Corporation that require repairs are listed on the BHC website under the HomeStart programme. The initiative is designed specifically for first-time homeowners and offers 100 per cent mortgage financing. The BHC provides a guarantee to Clarien Bank on the first 25 per cent of each mortgage making the programme both accessible and secure for new homeowners.

The corporation in partnership with Age Concern and the Government of Bermuda continues to support our valued seniors and persons with disabilities through a programme designed to help families care for their vulnerable loved ones. This initiative enables individuals to remain in their own homes with dignity by providing interest free loans up to \$15,000 repayable over a period of no more than 10 years. This funding is for the purchase of furniture, fixtures and fittings, and/or to make modifications or renovations to their home which would make it easier for them to remain there rather than be housed in a senior facility. As a reminder, the purpose of the fixture and fittings under this programme are duty free.

Since the inception of the programme, BHC has provided loans for 35 seniors, for a total amount of \$476,153, or an average of \$13,600 per loan. Applications for this programme remain available through the BHC website at www.bhc.bm or can be collected in person at the corporation's reception desk at the Seven Arches Building, 44 Church St., Hamilton.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation in partnership with the Bermuda Commercial Bank has launched a new programme to assist homeowners who have unoccupied units in need of minor repairs and bring them back into the Bermuda rental pool. The Private Sector Refurbishment Programme will fund up to \$125,000 in refurbishment for the unit with an agreement for a minimum of a seven-year lease to BHC making the unit available to BHC clients at BHC rents. The loan will be repaid within the first five years of this agreement. This is a win-win for all as it brings back previously unoccupied units, increases the value of property for the owner, and allows BHC to house tenants on its housing waitlist.

As of today we have 13 homeowners interested in the programme with a total of 24 units. We are working with the first two owners through the process and hope to have these units out to tender shortly. Once these are underway, we will start with the next two to three owners. If anyone is interested in this programme, they can apply through the BHC website at www.bhc.bm under the Private Sector Refurbishment Rental Programme and select the "Refurbishment" option.

Madam Chairman, the Bermudiana Beach Residences is now actively welcoming residents. As of 20 May 2025, twenty-three condominiums are occupied including four studios, nine one-bedroom units, six two-bedroom units, and four three-bedroom units. Additionally, 10 more leases have been signed with tenants scheduled to move in shortly. This represents a 35 per cent occupancy rate of the 94 available units which is a highly encouraging start, given that the property only opened in March of this year and has not yet required any advertising.

Final occupancy certificates have been issued for buildings B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and J confirming their approved use as condominiums under the condo hotel model. While classification codes vary, all buildings are intended for the same purpose—supporting both short- and long-term occupancy. A Change of Use application has been submitted to the Planning Department and is currently under review. This is required because the property is transitioning from a condo hotel use under the tourism category to a residential use only.

Madam Chairman, as mentioned previously, the BHC also manages and controls the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck Programme, the acronym for Helping the Unemployed Sustain Themselves with Limited Employment, which has been in successful operation since 2007. This year, Madam Chairman, marks the 18th anniversary of the programme. The programme has helped over 2,015 unemployed Bermudians in need with short-term temporary employment and assisted them with finding full-time jobs. In addition, the programme has provided much valued assistance to our seniors, community groups, churches, schools and neighbourhoods.

Madam Chairman, I'm pleased to give a final update on the work completed as it relates to the \$1,664,000 as part of the Government's Economic Stimulus Grant in 2021/22. There was a total of seven properties included in this programme all of which have been completed. And they are:

- 1 Rock Oven Lane, St. David's—four bedroom, two bathrooms, \$405,000
- 5 Captain Fox, St. David's—three bedrooms, two bathrooms, \$88,000
- 15 Tommy Fox, St. David's—four bedrooms, two bathrooms, \$43,000
- Ripon Cottage, St. George's—three bedrooms, two bathrooms, \$89,000
- Regent House, St. George's—four bedrooms, two bathrooms, \$95,000
- Harmony Block B, Paget—eight studios, \$800,000
- Battery [Road] Lofts in Saint David's—three studios and one two-bedroom, \$444,000

Madam Chairman, to date the Bermuda Housing Corporation has received a grant of \$13,550,000 for the first three phases of the Government's Residential Building Programme. These phases encompassed 25 projects delivering a total of 94 residential units, 49 of

which will be new additions to the BHC's rental stock while 45 involve the refurbishment of currently occupied units. The following 13 projects have been completed:

- 5 Aunt Jinny's Lane, St. David's—four bedroom, two bathrooms, \$350,000, completed June 2023
- 18 North Shore Road, Smith's—two apartment house, \$218,124, completed July 2023
- 3 Pan Bermuda Unit, Sandys—refurbishing of these three units in sequence, \$326,732, completed August 2023
- Beacon Hill Rooming House, Sandys—conversion of a house to a five-room, five-bathroom rooming house, \$425,000, completed in September 2023
- 3 Rock Over Lane, St. David's—three bedroom, two bathrooms, \$458,833, completed October 2023
- Wellington House, St. George's—three bedroom house, \$350,000, completed May 2024 Still more to come, Madam Chairman.
- Unit 25, 15 Mary Victoria Road—one unit, three bedroom, one bath, completed August 2024 for \$250,000
- 3 Alexandra Road—duplex, units 5 and 6, two units for refurbishing at \$250,000 completed June 2024
- 20 Battery Road—one bedroom cottage, August 2024, \$70,000
- 22 Cottage Hill—two Pan Bermuda units refurbishing, \$168,063
- 2 Alexandra Road—apartments, units 35, 36, 37, 38, 41 and 42 refurbished for \$280,829
- Moria Apartment number 5—refurbished, \$63,713, November 2024
- 5 and 7 Alexandra Road—new stucco, \$96,500 in July 2024.

The remaining 12 projects are in tendering and planning stages or are underway. These include:

- 18 Battery Road—12 units, \$3,350,000. Work has commenced and we estimate a completion date in early 2026.
- Harmony Terrace East—12 units, \$1,900,000. Expected completion is the end of June this year.
- Chelsea Apartments—five units, \$2.968 million. It's out for tender and we expect that to be finished in 2026.
- 7 Middle Town Road—a four-unit refurbishment out to tender, \$775,000. We expect that to be completed by the end of this year.
- 2 Alexandra Road—apartments 39 and 40, \$87,500.
- Harmony Terrace North—16 units, \$1.3 million and is in the planning stages and estimated for completion later next year.

- 3 Alexandra Road—three buildings, stucco, \$100,00. It is estimated to be completed this year.
- 3 Alexandra Road—units 3 and 4, refurbishing, \$300,000. We are awaiting relocation of tenants.
- 7 Alexandra Road—[units] 11, 12, 13 and 14 refurbishing, \$300,000, and awaiting relocation of tenants
- Elliott Street Apartments—[units] 1 and 2, refurbishment, \$600,000. Tender is for design work.
- Moria Apartments—units 1 to 4 and 6 to 8, refurbishing, \$1,020,000. And it is awaiting relocation of tenants.
- 8 Field View Lane—units 1, 2, 6 and 7. Refurbishing as well, \$400,000. And we are awaiting relocation of tenants.

Transitional Housing

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, transitional housing. As previously mentioned, the BHC operates eight rooming or transitional houses that contain approximately 177 beds. The various houses are located throughout the Island and provide a safe habitat for BHC clients. The rooming houses cater to households that need immediate, safe or emergency accommodation. These facilities are known as Langley House, Gulfstream, Victoria Terrace, Union Street, 7 Middle Town, 9 Middle Town, Roosevelt and Beacon Hill.

Madam Chairman, the Support Services Department holds regular meetings at the rooming houses to hear residents' concerns and address any complaints. Satellite offices at the largest rooming houses in the Southside are utilised for these meetings, as well as for conducting support classes for clients who have fallen on hard times. The support provided includes economic, social, and psychological guidance, all aimed at helping occupants transition from the facility into more traditional forms of living in Bermuda.

Gulfstream: Multi-Unit Rooming House,
Southside, St. David's.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the multi-unit rooming house is comprised of 79 rooms and currently houses 44 families. Some families have adjoining rooms to ensure adequate privacy for parents and children.

Madam Chairman, refurbishing work is under way at Gulfstream to improve the overall condition of the rooms and the infrastructure of the building. Refurbishing will be done in phases as we work on the six rooms per phase and move clients once each phase is complete. Once complete, each room will have its own washroom and will allow for greater privacy and security. At this point, we are pleased to report 12 rooms

have been completed and the tenants have moved into these refurbished units. During this fiscal year, plans are to refurbish the roof, kitchens, and the electrical.

Langley House

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Langley House is a multi-unit rooming house in Southside St. David's. Madam Chairman, building 632 Southside St. David's, known as Langley House, is a 63-bed rooming house facility located at Southside, St. David's. The rooming house is used specifically to house men in need of affordable, safe accommodation. There are currently 43 men residing in the rooming house. The corporation has qualified social workers working out of the satellite offices, including a former police officer, to monitor and correct any antisocial behaviours. Similar to the work at Gulfstream, we're in the process of carrying out refurbishing work at Langley House.

In the previous financial year, the project team refurbished a set of washrooms and showers, along with 10 of the residents' rooms, and these were all completed in March this year. We will continue this refurbishment with another 10 rooms and the second set of washrooms and showers on the first floor.

Harmony Club

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the corporation is in the process of transforming the Harmony Club property into studio and one-bedroom units, which will include intergenerational living, those 50 years and older who are mobile and can live independently. As previously stated, construction is completed on the Harmony Terrace West, with the completion of Harmony Terrace East expected by the end of June 2025. Work is also underway on the parking lot, the new electrical upgrades, along with the planning and design work for Harmony North.

The Harmony Terrace property is also used as the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck offices. Warehouse storage and the Bonnie-Jean Tweed House used to provide emergency accommodation for people in immediate distress or in need of immediate rehousing.

Bermuda Housing Corporation Staff

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation's head office is located at the Seven Arches Building, East Entrance, 44 Church Street, in the City of Hamilton, and presently consists of 50 personnel. Of that total, three H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck members operate from the office space at the Harmony Club, and five staff members under the Support Services and Property Operations Department operate off-site at the Satellite Office at the Southside Complex. The current structure of the BHC consists of eight departments: Project Management, Property Operations, Finance Collections and Homeownership Services,

Support Services, Administration, Human Resources, Information Technology, and the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck.

Madam Chairman, the Project Management Department assists with the advice regarding repair work, necessary on existing buildings and owned by the corporation to ensure longevity of the corporation's assets. Project Managers oversee the multiple dwellings that come under the BHC's remit to ensure effective and cost-conscious maintenance programmes keep the units in a safe and healthy state. The department consists of two Project Managers, one Senior Project Manager, and one Senior Property Administration Officer.

They are also responsible for the initial drawings of projected capital projects, as well as project management of the properties through to its completion. As mentioned previously, with the Economic Stimulus Grant, residential building programme repairs and the renovation of the rooming houses, day-to-day work on our rental units, including make-readies, this team performs at the very highest of standards.

Property Operations

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Property Operations Department is responsible for maintenance of BHC's current housing stock of 710 units, including the rooming houses Island-wide. The department's responsibilities include the regular maintenance of the buildings under the control of BHC and providing advice and assistance to clients of BHC on housing-related matters. The department is comprised of four Property Officers, six Maintenance Officers, one Build-officer, and one Administrative Assistant.

The department conducts regular maintenance checks of buildings under the management of the corporation and is responsible for small maintenance works, along with coordinating more difficult tasks with the trusted and able contractors. Last year, the Property Operations Department completed approximately 3,095 maintenance requests. The requests for maintenance that this capable department handles are wide-ranging. They tackle everything from simple plumbing, electrical, water, sewage, and roof repairs, to landscaping, painting, flooring, and major renovations. They do a great job.

The Finance Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Finance Department has a total staff of eight employees, consisting of one CFO and one Financial Controller, one Assistant Financial Controller, one Senior Finance Officer, three Finance Officers, and one Cashier. The Finance Department carefully monitors the corporation's spending and compliance, ensuring that policies and procedures are adhered to and that clients act responsibly in paying their bills in a timely manner. The Finance Department fields questions of financial

nature, providing mortgage advice, and assists clients with the understanding of their financial obligations to the corporation.

Support Services Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Support Services Department is the department responsible for ensuring that adequate housing is found for BHC clients. The department conducts regular inspections of BHC housing inventory to ensure clients are compliant with their rental contracts. The department consists of 14 people, one Manager, one Senior Social Worker, four Social Workers, one Senior Leasing Agent, one Leasing Agent, four Rental Inspectors, one Intake Officer, and one Intake Administrator.

There is a current wait-list for BHC's accommodation of 376. This number is steadily increasing year over year. The Support Services Department offers a myriad of services to clients that include money management, housekeeping, social and behavioural problem eradication, child care, and health and safety guidance.

In addition, the department offers advice on support from other agencies that stand ready to assist clients who are in need of professional counselling.

Administration Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Administration Department consists of the General Manager, one Executive Assistant, one Receptionist, two Office Assistants. The Administration Department is responsible for the orderly daily business of the corporation.

Human Resource Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Human Resource [HR] Department has a total staff of two. The HR Department ensures that staff members have the required skills to carry out their daily roles efficiently and successfully as the corporation ensures employee welfare and provides mentoring and training services.

Information Technology Department

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the Information Technology Department has a total staff of two. The IT Department ensures that the corporation maintains its high standard of delivery and support in the provisions of the IT service to all its stakeholders.

Helping Unemployed Sustain Themselves with Limited Employment—The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Madam Chairman, the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme has proven itself over the years, assisting unemployed persons who actively

seek work. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck headquarters operates out of Harmony Club and caters to 20 temporary employees per week.

The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck continues to be a valuable assistance to Bermuda with the ability to adjust to the needs of the community as they arise. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme allows 20 people per week through the year, with persons able to remain in the programme for up to three months per year, taking one week off each month to seek regular employment. At this level, the corporation is able to rotate through approximately 260 different people per year.

The programme is available for any unemployed Bermudians. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office keeps a database of information on the unemployed and their skill sets for the specific purpose of making a good fit when partnering with employers. The H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck office regularly receives requests from employers for qualified and suitable potential employees.

Upon receipt of requests, the database is checked and those people who have the required qualifications are sent to the interviews in the hope of achieving full-time traditional employment.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda Housing Corporation continues to play a vital role in our society by supporting some of our most vulnerable members of the community, including seniors, individuals with mental health challenges, former inmates, young people and those experiencing financial hardship. This commitment has remained steadfast, particularly in the challenging times marked by economic uncertainty, global supply chain disruptions and rising prices. The reality is clear. The more difficulties Bermuda faces, the greater the demand for essential services provided by the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Chairman Thomas Famous and the Board of Directors, CEO Mr. Paul Martin and the entire management team and staff of the Bermuda Housing Corporation for the tremendous work that they continue to do in the service for the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister De Silva, for your comprehensive delivery of your briefs.

At this time, I would like to ask if there's any Member who wishes to speak to the debate on Municipalities and Housing, Heads 90 and 53.

I recognise the member from constituency 20, MP Michael Fahy.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you to the Minister for his comprehensive brief. With the number of projects, I had to write furiously, so I seek early forgiveness if I'm asking some questions that may be repetitive because I can't make notes that quickly. With that said—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Hey, hey, no, no. That's okay. That's okay. The Minister has given a lot of detail on a lot of projects, which is very helpful.

Madam Chairman, I am going to leap around a little in terms of some of the questions, and again, bear with me on that. In the first instance, if we look at page B-322, which is the mission statement for the Bermuda Housing Corporation, that's Head 53. The mission statement, I just flagged this because it doesn't match what they say on the Bermuda Housing Corporation website as mission statement.

This mission statement says rental *and mortgage assistance*. The Minister's brief did expand upon that. The BHC website says that the [mission of the] BHC is *To provide accessibility to adequate and affordable housing and to promote independent living to enhance the quality of life in Bermuda*, and I don't think that was exactly what the Minister read either, so there's . . . maybe we can seek some clarity on that. It may be . . . but again, I'm only hearing as quickly as I can, but either way, it doesn't match this [Budget] Book.

And then again, the department objectives to provide affordable housing for Bermuda's residents. I suspect it's a little bit more narrow than Bermuda's residents, because I think, in fact, what the BHC's mission is in the department objectives is to make sure that every Bermudian has access to affordable housing, or words to that effect, which is obviously quite admirable. But again, just important to get these things correct, I think.

The Minister made mention of the numbers, which was the primary question, and that's, How many people are on the waiting list? I think the Minister said 376 for Bermuda Housing Corporation. And the question that comes from that is, presumably there is a system in place where individuals who are on the waiting list for, say, the Bermuda Housing Corporation, are not also on lists, I think, for example, with the Bermuda Land Management Corporation, some of the housing that may or may not be managed by that, and indeed the Bermuda Housing Trust. Are we making sure that there's not multiples listed in different waiting lists? And presumably the various civil servants and those involved in the various quangos are cross-referencing information.

In terms of waiting lists, particularly with the Bermuda Housing Corporation, What's the average waiting time for people on that list? And I posed similar questions this morning when a Statement was read by the Minister, so there shouldn't be any surprise that I'm going to press those questions again. And presumably the Minister had an opportunity from this morning to get answers to those other questions from his Statement this morning, because they're going to be the same. What's the average waiting time for people on these lists?

And this is quite important, Madam Chairman, because, again, the Minister did make reference to the Urban Development Conference last week (or maybe it was two weeks ago now, time flies) where a number of statistics were kind of presented by various presenters saying that, look, if we're going to grow the economy, if we're going to try and take care of those that are already in need, we need at least 2,500 homes, or ability for people to have a home in some way, shape, or form.

And notwithstanding the huge amount of work that the Bermuda Housing Corporation has to undertake, again, I just flag that it is the urgency and the requirement for further housing. When you're looking at numbers of 2,500 housing required, you've got people on waiting lists, it's an absolutely big deal. As it is, the BHC on those numbers is managing an incredibly large portfolio with, and you're not going to often hear me say things about whether or not there's the right number of staff, but given the Minister's brief, it sounds like they're doing a whole lot with not maybe a full complement of staff to undertake the work. And, again, a question that arises from that is their intent to increase those staff, given that there's likely to be more homes that are going to come online in time.

In terms of housing opportunities and a housing ladder, Are there going to be any plans based on the policy and objectives from the HQ? And I'm just going to read out that department objective, so I link it back, Madam Chairman, before you ask me where I'm going. It says one of the department objectives of the HQ, again, is to deliver essential logistical financial administrative support to the Ministry headquarters and its constituent entities, and obviously it guides the Ministry's initiatives through collaboration with government agencies and key and public stakeholders.

In a lot of jurisdictions, you have the kind of lease-to-buy, and the reason I'm asking this question is if the Bermuda Housing Corporation has, I think the number, again, was in excess of 700 units or 710 units on their books—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes. If individuals or families are staying in these units long-term, maybe they're there for years, again, what's the average time that people are in BHC housing, whether that's a studio, one-bedroom, two-bedroom, but what's the average time?

And the reason for that then becomes, is someone, once they're on the BHC ladder, always on the BHC ladder? In other words, maybe they join as a single person, they're not able to afford something, they're in a studio, they have a family, they have children, do they just stay in that? Or are there opportunities to say, look, we have a massive amount of expenditure on these 710 units. If people are there in those units long-term, Is there opportunity for purchase once they're paying some of that rent? And is that something that the Government would be prepared to consider even

further? I think that's something that I'd certainly like to see.

The private sector rental programme, this was from the BHC website, and that programme, if you decide that you wish to have your property listed, you go to the BHC, presumably, they look, and from what I could gather, they don't take on, quite rightly, properties that need major works, but guaranteed payment each month. BHC manages the tenants for you, and you can have a scheme of optional property maintenance. What are the fees involved on that particular scheme if people are asking for these optional property maintenance and things like that? Is there a fee schedule that people look at and say, okay, I'm prepared to go in with this?

Now, how many houses are in that scheme that people have said, I own this property, I'm going to hand it over to the BHC for them to manage and get tenants in, and it becomes not my problem? The website says that if you are part of that scheme, those properties are leased for a year. Again, is that the right amount of time? Is there consideration for more? Or is it, again, if you're on the housing ladder looking for more, maybe that's why it's a year.

But this was the interesting number, it says on that website, that rents for studios . . . again, this is about affordable housing, \$900 to \$1,000 for a studio, a one bedroom is \$1,100 to \$1,500, a two bedroom \$1,400 to \$1,900, a three bedroom \$1,650 to \$2,400. How are those figures calculated in terms of what that means?

I then compare that and those figures, Madam Chairman, to the Bermudiana housing complex (I will call it that) where I seem to recall what the Minister said is the numbers for those units started around \$3,400 or thereabouts, depending on the unit size, I suppose. Maybe the Minister could give some clarity on if this is about affordable housing, and if you are involved with the private housing scheme, or sorry, I forget the name of it—the Private Sector Rental Programme, and those are the numbers quoted of \$900 to \$1,100 for a studio, and taking those numbers, the numbers are off. That's not affordable.

Notwithstanding what the Minister's numbers are at the Bermudiana Resort, based again on his brief, because I can't get into the details in the Budget Book, I'm going strictly on the Minister's brief, that there's going to be uptake. We're looking at trying to have affordable housing, and we'll get into that a little bit more.

Again, just looking through the BHC's website, there were a number of properties there that were listed for sale that appear to be part of the HomeStart programme, where someone can purchase. And on that, there were only four units for sale. They were last listed in April, including a commercial building. Again, maybe . . . I'm just wondering how these homes get onto these . . . how are homes selected to get into that website, to go on and someone says, I am interested in purchasing this property from BHC? And is there a list of people who have indicated a desire to buy some of these BHC-

listed properties? What's the process of that? I just couldn't follow that.

And in that programme, how many were sold in the last fiscal year with the HomeStart programme? If that's . . . you go on the site and say you have an interest in the property, and how many might be thought about for the coming year?

I have a very specific question for the Minister, because I didn't hear anything in the brief when we talk about individual buildings. Now, I will say, the Minister and his team did provide a very comprehensive listing on our parliamentary questions a couple of weeks ago of the properties that are listed with BHC and the BLMC, Bermuda Land Management Corporation.

I just query about Bishop Spencer, and I'm wondering if the Minister can opine on that this evening, because the Bishop Spencer property over the years was designated for housing. I mean, in fact, I took a real interest in it when I was Minister. It wasn't my Ministry; and I worked with Minister Cannonier at the time on trying to find a solution for it. And it didn't work.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: We can get into that. There wasn't a lot of desire in some areas of government to have the Salvation Army run it, and sometimes you get blocks you just can't clear on time.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: With that said, and thank you, I'll go there later, because that's the type of property.

Now, I understand that that property is now a private entity that will have dormitories, presumably for staff, presumably for guest workers, and my question is not in any way disparaging whoever is, in fact, renting that property.

The Chairman: Member, can I just ask you to pause for one minute while I change over with MP Scott Pearman? Thank you.

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

The Chairman: Thank you to MP Renee Ming, who's just left the Chair, having chaired the beginning of the debate. This is a three-hour debate on the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities. We've heard from the Honourable Minister Zane De Silva. We're now hearing questions, initial questions, from the Honourable Shadow Minister Michael Fahy, and this is in relation to heads, I think, Heads 90 and 53.

Please continue, Honourable Shadow Minister.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

So, again, specifically about Bishop Spencer, and if it is leased, what's the length of the term of that lease? Because that seemed to be a major opportunity

for emergency or transitional housing. I think that's an opportunity lost.

In terms of the tabling of financials for BHC, I'm not sure when the last set, I didn't see the most up-to-date set online, I don't think. Maybe the Minister . . . it has not yet been tabled for BHC annual report and up-to-date audited financials. I would like to know where I can find them, if they're there, because I didn't find them. But when will they be tabled in the House? And that would be the same with the Bermuda Land Management Corporation. I presume that they would probably be tabled at some point as separate entities because this merger of WEDCO and BLDC has just come almost to completion.

Mr. Chairman, given that we have such a homeless issue in Bermuda, and I think we can all agree it is a very serious problem, I wonder if the Minister would comment on the annual report from HOME. And I say that, again, linking things back to the objectives, where the Ministry works with constituents, entities, and other parties, where their annual report said, for 31 December 2024, that at least 1,100 people are experiencing homelessness and if the Minister's departments agree with that assessment, and whether or not there would be increased collaboration with an entity like HOME. I specifically ask, because going through their report, and I can provide this to the Minister, but if I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to just quickly read a piece from that, and I can provide to the Minister.

The Chairman: Please.

Hon. Michael Fahy: HOME says in their report that, "Subject to appropriate approval of Government commitment and funding," (is going to,) "commence preparations for capital work and operations to provide services and accommodation to (a) men experiencing housing insecurity and their vulnerable children and (b) single men exiting the criminal justice system. Secure a property from the Government of Bermuda for the purposes of providing low barrier housing," (and they term that as) "to provide shelter to individuals experiencing homelessness by using a harm reduction approach and removing or diminishing barriers to entry and continued residency. Such a project depends on adequate inter-agency cooperation, resourcing and funding, and will not proceed without these dependencies in place."

I am just wondering if discussions have been held between the Ministry and HOME, given that HOME says in their report that they want to do all of these things, some of which will overlap with Government initiatives. And again, given that there is not an endless pot of resources for housing in Bermuda, that work is done in tight collaboration with HOME to make sure that we are not doubling up on the resources. And if, in fact, a property has been identified, that would

either be, I don't know, leased, given, sold to HOME for the purposes of what their initiatives are.

Again, the Chamber of Commerce, Mr. Chairman, has said Bermuda needs to build approximately 2,500 homes. That was one of their numbers that they provided, I think, at the Budget Breakfast. If the target population is around 70,000, based on numbers that the Government has said over time, that there is a desire to increase jobs, et cetera, and the Minister has said in his brief that, of course, housing is not just about emergency housing. It's also ensuring that we have adequate housing for everybody, essentially, that's coming into Bermuda and residents and Bermudians to make sure that we have the adequate support in place.

Again, would the Minister accept, based on the numbers that we are hearing, [that] 2,500 additional units [are] required? Because if in fact the Minister does agree, we have a drop in the ocean, and we have a massive amount still to do. So, I would look for some clarity on that.

Just turning briefly to the Bermudiana housing complex, I am just going to go through some notes based on what the Minister had said. And he said that in terms of occupancy, obviously, there are 94 units in total at that place, 35 per cent occupancy, 23 units are I think occupied, and 10 are in progress. Studio, one-, two-, three-, four- . . . sorry, studio, one-, two-, and three-bedrooms. Can the Minister advise if there are any further costs related to this development that have not yet been brought to this House? Because I think the last number we heard was about \$100 million has been spent on this. And again, not to be churlish, but if you have a \$6.5 million grant for capital contributions, and we are spending \$100 million somewhere else, that is a small amount of money, really, if it's going to cost \$100 million. I don't expect that housing that's supposed to be affordable will be costing what is now in excess of \$100 million. When you look at the numbers, that's what? One . . . Did the numbers 1.094, whatever it is, per unit on average? That's not sustainable.

So, again, the Minister is very keen, as are we on this side, to see housing be available and affordable. What, if anything, is the BHC going to put in place to ensure that this kind of, I guess, overrun doesn't happen again to the extent that it appears to have been?

Again, if we are investing in affordable units . . . because what we have also heard in relation to a requirement for further units of housing, Mr. Chairman, is that if we want more, if we need more people in Bermuda, then it is up to the private sector to kind of start helping and ensuring that there's more housing stock. But, again, you need to have the right policies in place to get people to build. It is a chicken-and-egg thing. So, again, it's not just a simple matter of throwing money. There is that requirement for a master plan.

Now, we did hear the Minister make mention of that, and the Minister says there's going to be a master plan; we're not going to wait for the master plan, because time is of the essence—or words to that effect.

The Minister can forgive me if I haven't got his quote quite correct, but I think it's close enough. What does that mean in practice?

Well, again, and I dislike when I hear these things. We are going to have yet another survey that we are going to hear about what's wrong, and we are going to have these people tell us, when we've done this consultation process, that we need more housing. It just seems to go round and round and round. We know that housing is required. We know that there should be ladders of opportunity. When you have housing people remain. And, again, we need to link all of those things together.

So, a question about . . . just going back to the Bermudiana. Perhaps the Minister can shed further light on this issue that was mentioned in his brief as to the improper designation for the Bermudiana. It would seem as if units have been sold and occupied, perhaps without the proper planning, final permissions in place. Has that had any effect on the individuals that are occupying those residences? And, if so, what are they? And, presumably, any applications would have had to have been conducted and undertaken by the BHC, not the individual unit holders. It started as a tourism project. I don't think that those units were then leased on the basis of a tourism project. I suspect it's an administrative oversight. But, if it is, what's the timeline now for the proper documentation to be in place?

Can the Minister confirm as well in relation to that particular development, as to whether or not all of the units that are rented, or likely to be rented, are reserved for Bermudians, or spouses of Bermudians? Or is it, *Look, this is the cost. It's not necessarily falling within the bands of what can be deemed affordable.* I'm not sure. Let's just get clarity on exactly what this development now is, because we also know that Government really probably shouldn't be involved in these kinds of schemes, where it's not just about affordable housing. It seems to be something that's more suited for the private sector. But, again, I'm sure clarity can be given.

So, a quote, if I may, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Please.

Hon. Michael Fahy: And the Minister will be familiar with this quote, because it's his. And it was from a press conference in April, where he said, "In the coming weeks," (this was, I think, at the Bermudiana housing estate,) "we will present a medium to long-term housing strategy focused on," (the following priorities,) "affordable rental developments," (targeted at) "low to middle-income households, rent-geared-to-income programmes for working families, innovative use of land and derelict buildings, public-private partnerships to expand housing opportunities, and new solutions to address the needs of single parents and young Bermudians trying to enter the housing market."

Is that the strategic plan the Minister is now saying will take some time? What's the timeline for that final plan?

There was a lot that was said in April. There was a lot that was said in the brief. Urgency is now. I accept that. The Minister has said words to that effect. But we are waiting. The people of Bermuda are waiting. And I'm not sure that we can wait six months, a year, eighteen months, for a strategic master plan that then takes, what, another eighteen months to implement.

So, the Minister wants to race forward, but he may very well be restricted in his ability to race forward, Mr. Chairman, based on the outcome of this strategic master plan.

The Minister has made mention of the grant. And again, I think if you look at page C-22 the BHC capital grant was \$10.5 million. Now, I think the Minister made mention of what those grants were for. I don't think that they were for new housing builds. I think what I had heard was that they were for transformers and other upgrades and things that are absolutely necessary. But maybe he can confirm that, in fact, it's not a new capital project of new builds with new homes.

Under the Bermuda Housing Act, Mr. Chairman, much like any of these corporations that the Minister has oversight and responsibility for, because it is a heavy Ministry on oversight of quangos, which is why the Budget Book for this Minister's Ministry is like four pages plus his grants, a lot of what's to be done is embedded with quangos. And just for the public, if I may, that's BHC, that's Bermuda Housing Trust, that's the Bermuda Land Management Company, it's the two corporations, and it's the Morgan Point Development Company. However, those entities can be given direction from the Minister, and there are pieces that come with that in respect of how a Minister is to use his direction powers to direct the quangos.

Now, perhaps, perhaps the Minister will be considering those powers, since the Minister desires moving quickly. Has the Minister given any direction to the Bermuda Housing Corporation under the Act of his ability to give direction? And did his immediate predecessor give any written directions on certain projects? Or have things just essentially been delegated to the board? Which is quite proper under the Act, by the way. I'm not insinuating anything here. I'm just curious, as given that the powers exist, we wish to move quickly, the Government wishes to move quickly, whether or not such considerations have been given.

I am just going to turn to municipalities. And more specifically, I'm going to look, put my correct glasses on and see if my colleagues from St. George's are in the . . . yes. Because I see under the budget grant, and again, I'll just take those that are following in the Budget Book. Again, it's the Grants under page C-22, the Corporation of St. George's is going to get an \$800,000 grant—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: —which is the same sum as the previous year.

Now, on Sunday, I went up to St. George's and actually had a wander around Fort Albert, which I have to say is incredibly impressive from the work that was done by the St. George's Foundation, I think. And it really is. I would encourage anyone that has gone up and is interested in forts to really explore it. You can.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: It says, "at your own risk." I'm not going to go there at nighttime. I can tell you, it would be a scary place. It's not well lit from what I can tell. But there's . . . it's very impressive. And I say that because we also have to be thinking about, under the municipalities, the Minister has the opportunity to give directions under the Municipalities Act. Section 7AA gives the Minister power to give directions to a corporation.

The reason I raise this is because there is also a report that I think the Minister, I am sure, has seen and read because it was tabled in this House a year ago, and that is the Historic Town of St. George's and Related Fortifications Study and Report of the Joint World Heritage Centre and ICOMOS Advisory Mission that was conducted through, or their study was conducted 25 to 28 March 2024.

Now, for anyone, honestly, who spends time in St. George's . . . there is so much history in St. George's. It's a wonderful place to go. There are Members that we hear from every week who tell us this, and I agree . . . for the most part.

An Hon. Member: Not as nice as Somerset.

Hon. Michael Fahy: But it's crumbling. St. George's is crumbling.

And notwithstanding anything that may or may not come out of a Privy Council decision—I'm not going there before anyone urges me to be careful—there are probably not sufficient sums for St. George's to do the type of works that are required to ensure that St. George's retains its UNESCO World Heritage Site status, especially surrounding forts and the like.

Now, I did hear the Minister say in his presentation that the \$800,000 grant is relating to road paving and some of those types of things. I suppose that grant has been given on the basis that it's going to be used for that, and maybe the Minister can confirm that that grant of \$800,000 has been given on the basis that other works such as road resurfacing and things are being undertaken.

But there is also, for those of you who don't remember, the [Corporation of St. George's] (UNESCO World Heritage Fund and Levy) Act 2013. And that is a tax that is essentially levied on fuel that comes into Ferry Reach for the benefit of St. George's. And the concern there, of course, is that it fluctuates based on fuel prices. And we have got a lower tax levy now. So

presumably the town of St. George's will get less money from that. And that money, Mr. Chairman, is to be utilised for the protection of the forts and things in and around St. George's. I believe it's around about \$300,000. That is not enough. So, if we are going to say that we . . . again, I'm treading a little bit outside, but it relates to the grant and the Minister's opportunity.

The Chairman: Yes, page C-22.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Yes, it relates to the Minister's opportunity to give directions.

If St. George's is going to be the kind of the jewel in the crown if you will, for international recognition, because of its UNESCO World Heritage Site status, we have to be doing a lot more. And no matter what happens in June, whichever form the governance of the town of St. George's takes, we need more money for the town of St. George's.

I felt that when I was Minister we did not have enough. And that was why, in 2013, we brought in the UNESCO World Heritage Fund and Levy Act under the, and I'm going to call them out, under the idea and thought of a former Member, Mr. Bascome. And I'm sure there were others who have thought about it over the years, but he pressured me greatly back then to bring something in for the town. We just need more. That fund is administered by the Corporation of St. George's, as is their grant. But again, the Minister can clarify in relation to that.

Now, given the Minister's responsibility for the municipality, so that's the Corporation of St. George's and the Corporation of Hamilton, and that section 7AA of the Municipalities Act 1923 as amended, the Minister—and this is just the section from the Act—[section 7AA(1)], “The Minister may give written directions to a Corporation, whether of a general or of a specific character, if he considers it to be in the best interests of Bermuda for him to do so, and the Corporation shall carry out any such directions.”

It is a very powerful tool. Has the Minister considered using those tools for the purposes of encouraging there to be grant money for housing or the like within the corporations? Because the Minister has said, rightly so, he wants to move swiftly. He has power under this Act within the corporations to move swiftly.

Now, on the flip side, people don't like to use those powers, Mr. Chairman, because they're open to criticism and all the rest. I get it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I absolutely get it. No, no. I get it. I am just generally saying. But we had a presentation with broad agreement in this place of the City of Hamilton Plan, as an example, heights of buildings.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Michael Fahy: And the Minister said in that debate that when we talked about floor space and the things that there's ways . . . we are Legislators. We can do things here. So can the Minister. So, I hope that he considers some of these things in a very fair and reasonable manner, given the powers he actually has.

It's important as well that we lead by example. And I made mention of that. And believe it or not, guess what? You might recall last week that I made mention of Government leading by example in Hamilton about the old police station building.

Well, there's an old police station building in St. George's that's derelict as well. And that comes within the town of St. George's. And again, I believe there's real opportunity there for the Minister, if things are not already moving in a good direction, to give direction, possibly for housing or for a better and much nicer town of St. George's.

And again, with the \$800,000 grant, I think we are still waiting to see audited financials from the Corporation of St. George's. And maybe the Minister will table them here under his powers as the Minister responsible for Municipality on both corporations. I think the Corporation Hamilton is up to date.

Again, we did speak this morning about sewage in the town of St. George's and the possibility of a sewage tax. And I think, again, I just continuously think about, How can St. George's be improved? And the Minister . . . I urge [him] to share any plans that the Government may have as soon as possible, post the outcome of the Privy Council case on governance.

Just one minute. I am just going to get a drink, if I may.

The Chairman: It is a good point to pause. We have about an hour and 25 minutes left in this three-hour debate on the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities.

And for the benefit of the Honourable Members, but also for the listening public, we have been listening to questions from the Honourable Shadow Minister, the MP for constituency 20, Michael Fahy. And before that, we were listening to the Honourable Minister, Zane De Silva, who presented his brief on Head 90, Ministry of Housing and Municipalities Headquarters and on Head 53, Bermuda Housing Corporation.

So, I will now pass it back to the Shadow Minister. MP Fahy, you have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. So just for the sake of clarity, if the Minister would give an answer as to whether or not he or his immediate predecessor has given any specific directions to the corporations as permitted under the Municipalities Act.

Turning to the Morgan's Point Development Company. For the listening public, Morgan's Point Development Company was passed by the legislature, or the [Morgan's Point Development] Company Act was passed by the legislature in 2022.

And just looking into some of the development that's there, and the Minister made reference in his brief to the five major units at that place. But it just seems, to my point of view, confusion as to what exactly is going to happen with those units there, because we have heard plans announced of what the Morgan's Point Development Company is intending to do. We recall that this particular portfolio moved from the Minister of Finance to the new Ministry of Housing and Municipalities as part of the responsibility of the Honourable Minister.

But in 2024, the Minister of Finance made reference to the development of the five units that are on site and said that they would be turned into 35 additional units to Bermuda's housing stock. And that was in 2024. And I can give the Minister the quote, but it's easily found.

We were told that there is supposed to be a retail sector as well on the development. And I just wonder, why make announcements in 2024 about turning Morgan's Point area into 35 additional units? Now, again, I scribbled furiously, as the Minister spoke about the Morgan's Point Development, and basically said, from what I gather, that there has to be an evaluation exercise undertaken, architectural designs, there need to be surveys undertaken, a site cleanup. And it just seems to me that maybe in 2024, we jumped the gun when we spoke about it, or the Minister of Finance certainly must have jumped the gun.

Is it the plan, notwithstanding the fact that all these things need to be done, to have 35 additional units to Bermuda's housing stock, as previously announced? And again, in this particular instance, as the Minister had said, the Morgan's Point Development Company is a government-owned company. In other words, the shareholders are two government ministries, I think.

Minister, I'm happy to, if I've got that wrong . . . I don't want to get that incorrect. But if I recall, it's the two of them. The Morgan's Point Development Company Act, under section 12, again, Mr. Chairman, I will just quote it.

The Chairman: Please.

Hon. Michael Fahy: It's easy to find. It allows the Minister to give directions to the Company—just like the Minister can under most quango setups.

So, has the Minister or his predecessor given any written or oral direction to the board of directors to do anything in relation to Morgan's Point specifically? Or are the decisions being left strictly to the board, as appointed, presumably, by the shareholders with input from the Minister? I can't recall what the Act said, but I'm sure it's a combination of that.

The Bermuda Land Management Corporation—perhaps the Minister can clarify if there is a master plan for the Bermuda Land Management Corporation. Now, this is important because the Bermuda Land Management Corporation is the combination, as we

know, of WEDCO and the BLDC, two very different areas. One of massive historical interests, and another of ability perhaps to build, because of the land mass there.

And when I think about Southside as your example, in 2018, there were announcements made about Marginal Wharf. Now, Marginal Wharf, Mr. Chairman, it's obviously the main wharf there coming on into St. David's on the left. Marginal Wharf might be turned into a cargo port—a cargo port and a power plant. And then we heard in 2021, it was going to be a fish processing plant. So, we have had a few announcements made by the Government. And perhaps the Minister can share with us if there are any plans now for Marginal Wharf. And if so, perhaps he would share, are there any RFPs? Are there any answers to RFIs, requests for information, in terms of that? Because it seems to me, again, there is a development there for housing. And if in fact that area is going to be developed further, again, is that part of a master plan? Or is it ad hoc? *We need housing, there's land, let's build.*

Because you do not just want to just build, you want neighbourhoods. You want places where people feel secure. You want people to integrate into the community—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Expensive.

An Hon. Member: It takes a long time.

Hon. Michael Fahy: But that wouldn't be retail, that would be commercial, I suppose. But the point is made that a master plan for both what was the WEDCO properties, and what were the BLDC.

And again, that also was a comprehensive list shared by the Minister, from a parliamentary question of the number of properties that are managed and owned by now the Bermuda Land Management Corporation, which are not insignificant.

Now, for those of you who are interested, again, you can go on the BLMC website and see opportunities there for development. There are 11 areas that are listed. And again, this is why a master plan is of importance. Because “Joe Blogs” can go on, presumably (when you can) and identify a property, and then what? Make a submission to the BLDC . . . sorry, I've got all these acronyms . . . BLMC, for development.

But is there specific development that the Minister would like to see at Marginal Wharf, or at BLMC properties at Southside? Or specific developments that the Government has in mind, given the power of the Minister to again issue directions if he sees fit in the public interest.

For example, Mr. Chairman, if you look at Dockyard, Victualling Yard has been available now for some time. And under the One Bermuda Alliance Government there were a number of proposals put forward from hotels to retail and other things in between. But

again, with some of these things, without a master plan it's very difficult to make a decision, because you don't want . . . whilst you want development, you want development that is cohesive and comes together in a certain way.

But given that on the other side we have 370-something individuals on a waiting list with BHC, we have 1,100 people facing homelessness, where is the priority? And what is the Government's priority, given that this Ministry has been created along with the Ministry of Home Affairs to lower costs, give people opportunity, have housing, better energy prices and the like? If there is that priority, I would like to hear it.

Perhaps the Minister . . . oh, some of the other properties, Cross Island, there are a number of vacant lots in Westcott Road and there are six or seven others.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: There are a lot there for development opportunities. Maybe Cross Island could be used for housing. Could be. I am sure that the Bermudiana Resort is high up there too.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: I am sure it is, at least per apartment it is.

So, we have, again at Southside, a number of developments. Maybe the Minister can just give an update. Forgive me if I missed it in the presentation. Triton House, dormitory-style housing. Channel House, the Shadow Minister behind me, from constituency 31, had asked questions about Channel House. I believe that was, at least with planning in February or March. Again, that was housing for seniors. I don't recall if that has now been approved.

In relation to the Bermuda Land Management Corporation, are there any residential entities that are responsible [under] the BLMC for rent? I did not see anything listed to say that there were, but it would appear that there's obviously the ability to do so because I suppose that the units in Dockyard that were under the remit of WEDCO have fallen within this new quango. And again, it would appear that there's no availability there.

The Minister said in his brief that the reason there are no performance measures is because it's a new Ministry. Okay. But perhaps next time, next budget, we will have some performance measures listed because it is difficult to measure success without the sight of quango financials. Rather, just simply based on what the Minister has presented today because by its very nature, as I said, the quangos are separate in their own way.

In terms of dormitory-style housing generally, is the Minister satisfied or is the Minister thinking that's a good way to go forward in terms of the dormitory-style housing? And presumably, again, what you want is if

this dormitory-style housing that people are eventually moved out of that dormitory-style housing into other units and that is why it is important to have that kind of ongoing turnover. So again, it goes back to those original questions. How long are people on average in BHC housing? How long are they in the dormitories? And what are the stages of that?

Just turning to some more specific notes from the Minister's brief. In the Minister's brief, as I had said earlier, he made mention of the fact that there's going to be this Island-wide survey to be launched for the issue of housing, a coordinated effort, long-term, data-driven. We have a problem because it now becomes an issue where you have a census that is due at some point in 2026, where the data comes out in 2027. We have another survey that's going to be data-driven to make decisions on housing. It could be very different depending on who you ask because this survey is going to be based on, who? Maybe the Minister can add clarity as to who the stakeholders who are going to be questioned for the purpose of the survey. Is it a general survey for the general public online? Is it architects? Is it BHC personnel? To get the information that the Minister probably already knows: there is a housing crisis. So, I'm just not seeing what the overall purpose . . . What's the likely cost of the survey?

And the Minister did not give a specific timeline, but what the Minister said was, *at the conclusion of the survey, we'll have answers to challenges and opportunities, and there'll be an implementation plan brought to Cabinet*. What's the timeline envisaged for that? Is it end of the year? Next year? Details would be nice.

I commend the BHC for the work that they have done on a lot of these renovations. It cannot be easy in any stretch of the imagination, Mr. Chairman, to manage the level of properties, some of them very aged properties, on a continuous basis. But what I would like answers to in relation to the water issues with some of the housing owned by the BHC and the Devonshire complexes is, How many residences were affected by the water issues that the Minister has made reference to and that have been raised in the press, and that have been long-term issues? And what's the likely timeline for rectification of those water issues?

I believe the Minister also made reference to sewage issues. That was in Alexandra Road, et cetera. Again, there was street lighting, collaboration with BELCO, all excellent for the tenants in that area. Again, timelines for the processes that need to be followed would be very helpful.

The Minister made mention that legislative reform is on its way. I think it was in part of the Throne Speech, where there will be derelict property acquisition legislation under the Bermuda Housing Act. Forgive me, I missed the other Act. But we just need to be very careful with that type of legislation, which is essentially assuming private entity/private property in some way being taken over by the BHC or the Bermuda Government.

I am not against the idea; and neither is the OBA as a whole. But we will look very carefully at what that legislation means to protect the rights of the homeowners going forward, because they are notoriously difficult, those types of things. And the Minister made reference to it previously, Mr. Chairman, that a lot of times properties are left derelict are caught up in trust disputes. There are property ownership issues. There are deeds issues. And an Act may not just be the solving of that. I doubt it. And that's the problem. What we don't want to do is say to people, *Look, this is going to be the panacea, if you will, to help get more properties onto the market.* It will be a very, very slow, drawn-out process.

It seems to me that the Minister could consider some form of tax penalty for derelict properties. They could encourage the corporations to implement a form of empty-unit tax to encourage development, perhaps by saying . . . for example, you have a property that could be rented through some of the BHC programmes that the Minister has made reference to.

The Minister made reference to the fact that whatever the outcome in June, there will be full consultation on the next steps. I just wonder if that means that the previous Bill won't happen anyway. So, either way, we'll look to see what that means in practice.

The Minister made mention in his brief about . . . sorry, I am skipping to the BLMC from the Minister's brief, about the tugs' dock and King's Wharf as well in relation to the Norwegian Cruise Line.

The Chairman: The grant at page C-22.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you very much. Thank you for pointing that out for more specificity.

I hope that the Minister can answer the question that I posed this morning about what that means in practice for Norwegian Cruise Line in terms of preferential berthing, given that they're making the major investment, if other cruise lines and cruise ships wish to utilise the berthing. Are they paying extra to either the Bermuda Government or the BLMC for the use of those berths, et cetera?

I think it's important that the cruise ship companies that benefit from being in Bermuda's waters and being essentially captive in Bermuda when they're here, that they do take the bulk of these projects. It goes on in other jurisdictions as a quid pro quo often, in terms of duty-free ports and things like that. But when you are doing port work, we know that it costs an absolute fortune, \$22 million for this project. We have been told that the Bermuda Government is responsible for nil of that or the BLMC or any other iteration of it.

I would implore the Minister to ensure that if there are any further developments to go with the BLMC to make everything possible that the cruise companies take the burden of the development and make sure the taxpayer does not take the burden of it. So, I flag that because you may recall that a previous

Government was the one that got the arrangement for the Norwegian Cruise Line (NCL) ferry to St. George's.

Those types of projects and those types of initiatives I think are very important. Again, the Minister can help give direction to BLMC in relation to issues over that.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, while you're looking at your notes, let me just recognise the Honourable Member from another place who's sitting in the back, Senator Fubler. We have been listening to submissions—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Senator Fubler. Yes, yes, Senator Fubler.

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: Yes, there you go. And you're getting a tap from the Honourable Minister. There you go.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

The Chairman: Yes, Shadow Minister, we are about two-thirds of the way through a three-hour debate. We have been listening to questions from the Shadow Minister for Home Affairs, Housing and Municipalities, Michael Fahy.

Shadow Minister, do you have any further questions you want to put before we open it to others?

Hon. Michael Fahy: Oh, I do.

The Chairman: Okay, please continue.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I said the Minister couldn't get off that easy, so I don't want him to get off that easy.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: In relation to, again, going to the Minister's brief, the Minister made mention of the HomeStart programme. Thirty Bermuda families have been able to utilise the programme with Clarien [Bank]. That will rise to 32. That's commendable. With 100 per cent mortgage financing, 25 per cent, I think, is paid up in terms of, I think, the guarantee of 25 per cent of the mortgage is what we heard. Have there been any defaults on those guarantees to date? I'm presuming not, but if there are, what's the cost of those defaults?

It was good to hear that the H.U.S.T.L.E. Truck programme is still running well, and I think that's a

success. Again, we are not here for doom and gloom—that's what we like to be accused of.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, we can say, *Look, the programme has worked*, and the numbers that were given were commendable.

I make mention of that because, of course, there's no specific line item within the Budget Book. It's buried, presumably within the BHC statements, which I hope will be tabled in this place so we can have an analysis of whether things are as effectively run as the Minister says. And I have no doubt that they are, but it would be nice to see those statements tabled.

The Minister gave a very good overview of staffing at BHC and project management, et cetera, and I made mention of the fact that given the numbers of units under management, I thought that maybe there would be more project managers and the like. And I wonder if that could be considered.

For the moment, Mr. Chairman, I do not have any other immediate questions. I am sure the Minister will opine, and maybe I will have an opportunity to ask more if I do not hear the things I am looking to hear.

Thank you very much.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Shadow Minister, Member for constituency 20.

Is there anyone else who would like to participate in the debate before we—

Oh, I see the Honourable Member from constituency 1. MP Ming, you have the floor.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and listening audience.

I thought that it would be a good idea to lend my voice to this debate tonight because each and every one of you know where my passion is when I sit in this place and others. And I particularly want to address page C-22 under the Capital Account, and it would be the grant that was granted to the Corporation of St. George's.

The Chairman: [That would be] 75003.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Absolutely, 75003.

The change is not there. And so, I think my colleague who spoke earlier said that St. George's is crumbling. I may disagree on the crumbling side of it, but I do agree on the aged side of St. George's. And if we're going to talk about St. George's, I think it would not be fair not to at least exemplify the historicalness of St. George's.

Each and every one of you in this room started in the east. So, whether you hail from the west now, support the west, live in the west, represent the west, Sir George Somers' boat didn't go Somerset. It came

down right off St. George's. So, you all started in the east.

And so, when I look at this and I think about my historic town that I live in, and I think I'm going to come up with that saying [hashtag] #thisiswhereweallstarted. It would be a very true statement. So, when you think about the age of the town, right, which is well above what any other part of the Island has, we have to look at infrastructure.

So, where am I going with this? The Corporation of St. George's does a phenomenal job on what they can within the town area. But when you come down and you look at our buildings, and even the design of the buildings, the closeness of the buildings, the simplicity of the architecture, the aesthetics of the town is representative of an era. And we are moving away from that era as we should. Right?, Because in the world you have trends, and we evolve.

But we cannot . . . in St. George's we want to maintain what our historic site is. But we also want to have a bit of modernisation with it. So, our age is something I think that any administration has to keep into consideration. Those buildings are not young. They supersede almost five and six and seven generations. And so, we—and I say “we” because I am not just saying it for this particular Government, I'm saying for any Government and even previous governments. I think that it's time that St. George's gets the respect that it deserves as the oldest and most historic place in the Island.

So, when I look at the grant for the Corporation of St. George's, I could hope that . . . unfortunately that number did not change. But as we move forward, we do see that number changing. And I do not mean in a negative way, I mean in a positively increasing way. Because we recognise, one, the historical aspect; two, the importance; and three, the fact that these things cost money.

And so, as the Minister . . . and I'm sure he will, because I'll be lending my voice to this every time I can, as he considers the increase to the grant for next year, maybe [he will consider] even a supplemental for this year, so that we can do more. I think, like I said to you, it's the age component that we have to think about. So crumbling, no. We will never let that happen. I think MP Fahy knows that. But we do have age requirements, we have infrastructure that's old, and we would definitely like to see an increase.

So, if I have to formulate that into a question, I would just hope that my question would be that, Minister, maybe at the next time around we could see an increase to that capital grant for the Corporation of St. George's.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Ming.

Is there anyone else who would wish to contribute to the debate?

I see the Honourable Member for constituency 9. MP Vance Campbell, you have the floor.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I just have a couple of questions and a comment, if allowed. For clarification purposes, the Minister mentioned that the Property Operations Department of the Bermuda Housing Corporation is responsible for the maintenance of 710 units, but he also mentioned in several spots of his brief that existing units were under renovation or refurbishment.

I was just wondering, are any of the 710 units offline because they are being refurbished or renovated? The other point for clarification as a question is, the Minister mentioned on a couple of occasions that items or projects were out to tender, and then he gave a cost. Either I misunderstood when he said they were out for tender . . . I just want clarification on that, because if they were out for tender, was that cost that the Minister mentioned the departmental estimate? Because if they were still out for tender, we would not know what those tenders would be. So just clarification was that the estimate, the internal estimate? Departments do that sometimes.

And also, thinking specifically about the Bermuda Housing Trust and methodology, construction methodology, it comes to mind. It's very important when choosing something that is not traditional to the local environment. And I think of the Bermuda Housing Trust. I know one of their properties, the maintenance cost is a burden on the rest of the parks, and it basically drains a significant amount of the revenue derived from those other parks to cover the maintenance costs in that one particular park.

Those are my questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member.

Are there any other Honourable Members who wish to contribute to the debate before we go to the Honourable Minister for a couple of bats back of some questions? I see none.

So, Honourable Minister, the floor is yours.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: About 45 minutes-ish, 50 minutes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: All right. Let's see what we can do to accommodate colleagues.

As I look through the host of questions, I will start by just saying that the Honourable Member MP Renee Ming, no one will ever say that as long as she was in this House she didn't fight for her constituents or her constituency, because when it comes to St. George's, there's no lack of fight in the Honourable Member Ming when it comes to her constituency and her constituents. So, the things that she said were well

noted, and we will certainly have further discussions in the future.

Now, Mr. Chairman, there are a lot of questions. I will do my best to work my way through them.

One of the first questions the Honourable Member Fahy had asked was about the 376 people on the wait-list and he wanted to know what the average waiting time was. I just want to say that the average waiting time is a very challenging question to answer, because you will know, Mr. Chairman, that they have basically three formulas for giving out housing in Bermuda at BHC. And it's a critical list, an urgent list, and just a regular list of folks who might be looking to find a less expensive place to live in. But the critical and urgent list is a moving target. An average stay for those folks is just not something that I think is a statistic that one can keep at their fingertips at any time.

So, I think that whilst I appreciate the question, and I can certainly understand the question, there are some folks who have been living in Bermuda housing facilities for a few decades. But, again, I get the Honourable Member's question in that wanting to know an average stay. There are some folks, as you know, Mr. Chairman, that not everyone's had the affordability of having education—I am going back decades now. A lot of our people had to just do what they could to get by. And so, therefore, you have folks who have been in Bermuda Housing Corporation system for a while.

So, we would like to see that change. I'm sure everyone in this House would like to see that change in the future. And certainly, if all of us had our way in this House, you know, we wouldn't have any of our folks having to live in affordable homes because they just couldn't get by. And making decisions between groceries and electricity bills and medication and things like that, we would like to eradicate forever.

So, that being said, I think the Honourable Member Fahy had asked about the waiting list at BHC and are we communicating with BLMC and the Bermuda Housing Trust. I do not think that they interview individual applicants. But I am sure that if someone is looking for a place and they might be over the age of 65 getting up to 70, I am sure that they will look at every avenue possible, which would include, it might be BHC, it might be BLMC, and also Bermuda Housing Trust. As you know, those are choices that people have, and I am sure that they make them.

Mr. Chairman, one of the things we will do as we move forward with the housing strategy is that we will explore all options for increasing housing stock, which might include some very innovative schemes such as lease-to-own if seen as a viable way forward. You know that years ago we produced the first phase at Harbour View down at BLDC and we had a lottery for homes and we know that those homes sold for around about a couple of hundred thousand and they actually cost, I think at the time, I think it was maybe 75 per cent more to build than what we actually sold them for. But those are the types of things that I can tell you.

The Honourable Member asked if . . . he talked . . . he read the Act and said, you know, I have the power to direct. And I said in this House even last week when we were having some questions over the Ministerial Statement that I made is that . . . and I stated publicly that all the quangos and committees and boards that I've met with so far, they know exactly what my goal is. And my goal is to produce housing for our people . . . and that's affordable housing for our people.

So, they know that my vision and the vision of this Government as laid out in our platform, as laid out in our Throne Speech, is to create affordable housing, which is why the Premier created a Ministry dedicated to housing in the country. So, with that being said, we know what our remit is, we know what our charge is, and we're pressing forward with that.

There was a question with regard to the Private Sector Refurbishment Programme and, What are the fees involved for optional property maintenance? How many houses are in the scheme? And as you might recall, Mr. Chairman, in my brief I did say that we had 13 homeowners with 24 units, and we are working with those two first homeowners now. So, I think that as word gets around with this scheme and people see what we are doing, I think you will get more people interested in participating.

There was also a question about the prices of studio, one-, two-, and three-bedrooms on the website, BHC's website, and there was talk about \$3,400 and \$900 is not affordable. But you have to remember for our subsidised affordable housing, we have a rental matrix, which has rents from studios at \$650 to four bedrooms at \$2,500. And as you will know, Mr. Chairman, four-bedroom homes in the country, if you can get one for under \$6,000, \$7,000, \$8,000, you are lucky. So what happens in that regard, is that we subsidise places from studios to four-bedrooms. And those are the price ranges we are at. And of course, they are subsidised.

Now, I have to make it very clear, Bermudiana residents are not subsidised. And there was talk about BBR, as we know, Bermudiana residences up there. And I just want to make it clear that unlike . . . first of all, had we not had the campaign of the great bogeyman, the campaign that these houses are going to fall into the water . . . and you had OBA Members in the newspaper, saying that they're going to fall off a cliff.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They're not . . . they're not . . . you know, don't buy them.

So, we had a campaign not only with some of the former OBA Members, and maybe some present. But we also had other entities. And the late Stuart Hayward was another one. Seems like he had an article in the paper every week, condemning that project. And we tried our darndest to get those units sold or pre-sold.

I mean, the prime example is Loughlands, right, which is a fantastic, fantastic arrangement for the people in this country. I have had the luxury of canvassing up at Loughlands. And the folks take pride. They seem to respect one another. They respect their surroundings. And it's a fantastic, fantastic site.

Bermudiana could have been just that. But we just had so many objections. So many, it was like, it was like the OBA did not want another successful housing complex in this country after the success at Loughlands.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You can do a point of order anytime you want.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You could. You know it.

So, the thing is, it was falling off a cliff when we had it. But when they had the Government in 2017, all of a sudden it was good enough to house America's Cup people.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But it was okay then.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Aah, the Honourable Member Cannonier says *we made lemonade out of lemons*. He tried. He was the one to try the hotel up there too. But he didn't see us in the newspaper saying, *look, it's not going to work. It's not going to work*. Not once. And I'll take a point of order because we encouraged it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I never said that. No, sir. But the fact of the matter is, the fact that—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The fact of the matter is this, we started a project. And the Honourable Member Fahy said, you know, we have spent a hundred million dollars up there on that site.

Well, you can't point one finger at us because the other three are pointing back at you and your party. Right? We went through consecutive years of challenges on that site. The OBA had five *[sic]* years. They could not do anything with it. They tried.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, four and a half years. I was trying to give you five years, you know.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You want to cut yourself short, right? But you had four and a half years. So, then we come back in. You have the pandemic that strikes. We were trying to do exactly the same thing. Get the taxpayers' money to work.

So where did we end up and why did we end up where we are? We had the experts in the country. Ernst & Young gave us a report, said this is the route you should take to get the best value for the taxpayers of this country. And that's what we have done.

An Hon. Member: The best value?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The best value for that property as it is. We could sit down, and we could . . . Look, we could have left it alone, you know. We could have left it alone.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right. But if we didn't have the nefarious threats and the bogeyman thrown at that project, it would have been, could have been a very . . . but we'll get there. We'll be okay. We will get there.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, the Honourable Member Fahy also talked about Bishop Spencer, and he wanted to know what I thought about Bishop Spencer. Well, my first thought is they had five years to deal with Bishop Spencer. In fact, the Honourable Minister, the Honourable former Minister even said that, you know, he was talking to his people. I don't know what happened. And the Honourable Member Ben Smith said it's four and a half years. It was probably one of the shortest governments in our history, I do believe. But the fact of the matter is four and a half years is four and a half years. So, you have four and a half years and you did zero with Bishop Spencer. Zero.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Point of order.

The Chairman: What's your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Michael Fahy: The Honourable Minister is inadvertently misleading the House.

The Chairman: Proceed.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Whilst it was not eventually a housing project, an exceptional amount of work was done in discussions with both the Salvation Army, with the various ministries, that is documented in many

places. We couldn't get it over the line, but to say we did nothing is absolutely false.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, you know what? I'll give you . . . I'll give you something for that. You probably did do a lot of work. The problem is you didn't produce anything. So, you may have done a lot of work. And we know how it works. We know how it works.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: We know how it works. But the fact of the matter, you didn't produce anything.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: By the way, it doesn't fall under my Ministry, but you asked my opinion.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But the fact is, in case Honourable Members didn't realise it, there will be some housing there as well.

An Hon. Member: Dormitories.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member is saying dormitories like it's a bad word.

The fact of the matter is dormitories in this country have a use too.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: They have a very good use. If we didn't have people . . . if we didn't have investors like the Green's in this country—

The Chairman: Members.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: If we didn't have investors like the Green's in this country that saw an opportunity to produce dormitories for their workers, where would—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Where would they be living?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, the fact of the matter is that dormitories have a place in this country.

As Members may know, there are many, many workers in this country where you have five and six and seven and eight people living in two-, three-bedroom

houses—foreign workers. So, dormitories have a place.

There was a question about the financials for Bermuda Land Management Company. Members will know that those are tabled in the House and in this next fiscal year, they will be tabled. So, you can look forward to that.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: There was also a question from the Honourable Member Fahy with regard to municipalities. We will get to that. But he did ask, had I given any directions for Bermuda Land Management Company? And I think I answered that by talking about the Harbour View project, which we did the first Phase. And I said it last week in case the Honourable Members forgot. I did ask the folks at Bermuda Housing to dust off the plans for Phases 2 and 3 and let's look at it.

And just to answer the other question about the three-year strategy, which we will develop, because we never know when my number's going to come up. So, we want to get that development strategy in place.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay, right. Well, we may go together. We may be playing cricket, you know, but mind you, I am going north. I don't know if you're going north or south.

But the Honourable Member asked about . . . took me right off my thing too.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I started thinking about who's going to be playing cricket, and where.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, no, no, no, no, no. Don't try that one. Where was I? Oh, I was talking about Harbour View.

And I've asked my people to dust off Phases 2 and 3 and that's what I meant when I said that, you know, we're not going to wait for strategy, a three-year strategy to be produced. We can chew gum and walk.

So, whilst that's being produced, and while we consult with everybody in the country, and by the way, there will be a working group announced, maybe as early as next week, with a very large cross-section of people in the country that I want to sit down with on a regular basis to discuss Bermuda's plans forward.

So, whilst we are developing this plan, we can do things like . . . and I gave you a host of things that we plan on doing. Sixteen homes will be ready by the end of this year. So, within the next six months, we will have 16 homes added to the stock. Next year, we will have 33 homes added to the stock. Whilst we develop

this three-year strategy for the country. We will dust off plans for Harbour View while we're doing that. And wouldn't that be fantastic for the people of this country if we were able to get going with, say, Phase 2 and produce some more homes for our people to own—not just rent, but own. So, all that's coming. Be ready. And all I say is put on your seatbelt.

So, with regard to that . . . so I answered that one about what is the plan with that.

And I think I answered the one you had asked about . . . you had talked about the Act and me having the ability to give direction. I think I answered that one.

The Chairman: Minister, as you're checking your notes, let me just remind the listening audience that this is a three-hour debate on the Ministry of Housing and Municipalities and we have 30 minutes left.

The debate is due to conclude around 8:15 pm.

Minister, you have the floor.

The Chairman: Thank you. Thank you. Gee, that goes by quick because I would . . . I know that MP Cannonier wants to have a little word. I am sure he does.

But I think the other thing I would like to touch on, because it was mentioned by the Honourable Member Fahy, is Cross Island. And he made a comparison to Cross Island and Bermudiana. Let me just be very clear. Bermudiana has everybody's fingerprints on it—OBA and PLP. Cross Island only has one set of fingerprints on it. And that's OBA. The most expensive real estate in the country.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Most expensive real estate in the country.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And sometimes I wonder about Members in the House when they [say], you know, we should take Cross Island and look at housing on Cross Island.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I just . . . sometimes I have to shake my head.

One thing I wanted to talk about is Alexandra Road, Mary Victoria and Cedar Park is that, for the first time in their history, Mr. Chairman, they actually had a public meeting with Ministers—myself, Minister Lightbourne, Minister Rabain, both of us, and Minister Jache Adams, all four of us. And my PS is here and even he said, *Look, you sure you want to do that?* I said, absolutely we are going to do it. Right? Because we want to feel the heartbeat and the pulse of our people.

And everyone in this House knows that those three complexes have been riddled with challenges for

decades. I lay down the gauntlet, right now, that if God spares life, we are going to fix a lot of those things up at those three complexes. And I've already told the Premier that we may need some extra money to do that. When you have people turning on their taps and water's coming out brown, we need to fix it. We cannot have our people having water come out brown. It's not happening. We are going to fix it.

Now, I will say this.

An Hon. Member: How long?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: How long? Not quick enough. But I'll tell you what, there will be no energy spared getting it done. Well, we're already doing it . . . the Honourable Member Fahy says, how long?

We have had a public meeting, first time in history, with the residents. We have already told them we would like them to form three separate condo associations. We are going to form a mixed association with government officials and the residents. And all that's coming. Might be sooner than you think, Honourable Member.

The other thing we've done is . . . we have already, the water testing is underway. We have had the reservoirs tested already. We have had our samples taken from the homes of the folks that came to the meeting. We recorded their names, we got their numbers, we called them and said, *Listen, we want to test your water.*

We found, just last week, in some of the work that we have been doing, just imagine a one-foot-wide PVC pipe diameter, one-foot-wide. Imagine that, pulling a root, a [soil packed] root, out of that pipe. In fact, I'll send [this] to some Members so they can see for themselves. But when you have a [soil packed] root that's somehow worked its way and busted into the pipe and is growing, it was unbelievable. It was like pulling a Snickers bar out of the package. That's what it looked like.

But these are the types of things when the Honourable Member says, *When?* We are doing it. *When?* We have met with BELCO. We've told BELCO that, look, we want something done with the lights. If it's the infrastructure that needs upgrading so we can get people better lighting, then let's have it.

When? We have got the cameras fixed where the trash bins are, so that we can monitor and see what's going on with the trash. If someone's putting out trash and they shouldn't, or they're putting things in the trash bin that shouldn't be in a trash bin, it should be taken over to Tynes Bay. So, we've actually done quite a lot already. But we're not going to stop. Let me make that very clear.

And I don't mind that people hold me to account. I say these things publicly and they can hold me to account. If we don't get it done, give me the licks that I deserve.

Now with regard to legislation that we're going to look at, I totally agree with the Honourable Member Fahy. We have to be very careful. And we will be. But there are too many people in the country, whether it be tenants and/or landlords that have challenges. So, we are going to look at that.

Now with regard . . . everyone, almost everyone in this house has had a conversation, I'm sure with someone in the last several months about the derelict homes around the country. Right? So, what we have to do is we . . . as Government and even Members oppose . . . I'm sure you share that. You know what? If we do nothing, nothing's going to happen. So, the goal is to try to do something. And Honourable Member Fahy is correct. We have to be very careful. But that's where we put the legal minds to work.

Let them come up with some proposed legislation where folks are . . . you might be three or four or five people in a family, they have one house between them. They can't seem to, you know, work out a deal between them to get . . . and what happens? The place sits there. We have all got relatives and friends that have experienced it. I have. Sometimes it's probate. As Honourable Member Fahy said, sometimes it's in trust.

And when you have trust, you have beneficiaries. And sometimes, you know, it's left to beneficiaries who have an equal say in the matter and cannot come to an agreement. So, you know, the devil's going to be in that detail. And, like I said, the Honourable Member is correct. And we will certainly be doing that. That's one of the things we're not going to race into. We have to be very, very careful. You're talking about people's property. And we just have to find a way in which to try to manoeuvre around it. But we have to do it in a way in which, hopefully, it won't cause too much angst with regard to the owners or beneficiaries that we may be talking to. But there will be wide consultation on that.

The Honourable Member talked about NCL and hoping that all cruise lines pay their fair share. Well, I think my record shows (certainly when I was Tourism Minister) that I did just that. Members might recall, I got a \$50 million ferry given to the country by the cruise lines. You might remember the infrastructure tax that I brought to this House, that's given the country millions and millions of dollars over the years and continues to do so.

But like the Honourable Member said, we have to keep their feet to the fire, because unlike our airlines, the cruise lines, they love Bermuda. And they love Bermuda because it's a very lucrative run. And I think we have a good partnership with all the cruise lines. And that will continue.

There was talk about the census from Honourable Members. I think, as Honourable Member Fahy did attend the summit two weeks ago, it was made very clear in the summit, that there's a lack of data on the Island. There's a lack of data. So, the goal is to do this survey, get it done, look at what we have. And we've got some pretty good information already. We have

some pretty good information already, which is going to help us going forward.

And again, as we put that together, all the available land that's on the Island, all the derelict homes, all the abandoned homes, we put all these things together, and we will produce a document that everyone in this House will see. And I'm sure [everyone] will be very pleased with what we envision and what we're going to do going forward. And all stakeholders will take part, whether it's the Chamber's Real Estate Division, the Department of Land Valuation, Land Title Registration, BEDC, BHC, BLMD, everyone will play a part in that going forward. And I would think that the working group that we will announce very soon is going to play a very big part in that as well.

Now, Mr. Chairman, one thing I didn't appreciate the Honourable Member saying was that St. George's was crumbling. Now, St. George's may have some issues just like the rest of the country, but I took exception to that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, the Honourable Member said it was crumbling. And I'm sure when they lost the Government in 2017, all of a sudden in the last eight years it didn't just fall apart.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: St. George's has long had challenges, and this Government . . . let's talk about what this Government did between 1998 and 2012 for St. George's. We did a huge amount of work in St. George's.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You had your turn. You had your turn. But if it's crumbling, what did the former Minister, MP Fahy, do in four and a half years?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: If it was crumbling, if it's crumbling now, it certainly must have been crumbling in 2017.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I know—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I know, which I can tell—

The Chairman: Members.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I can. If you want to call a point of order, I will sit down rather than sit over there and chirp.

The Chairman: Members.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And interrupt.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: MP.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, thank you.

So, the other thing the Honourable Member said is that with regard to municipalities and Bermuda Land Management Company, I have the power to direct and get things moving quickly.

Well, the Honourable Member hasn't been here that long, but I know that it seems like every time we bring something to this House and want to move quickly, we are accused of ramming it down their throats. So, I'm glad the Honourable Member is going to be on record saying that he wants to see us do things very quickly. I'll make sure I . . . I'll make sure I keep a copy of that Hansard report very much at my fingertips.

Now, there was a question with regard to the HomeStart and the mortgages. And there was a question whether or not there were any defaults. There have been no defaults. As I indicated when the Honourable Member was speaking, they have not been in existence that long, but there certainly haven't been any defaults.

There was also another question about the 710 units, if any units were offline when renovations were . . . and refurbishment had taken place. I did say in my brief, for example down at Gulfstream, what we [were doing] was we were doing six units at a time, refurbishing them. When we finished the refurbishment, six people moved in. And as I said, the goal is to try to get six units done every . . . in a short period, as short a period of time as we can, so that we can keep that moving because the folks are very, very happy that these renovations and refurbishments are taking place.

Now, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Member Fahy touched on Morgan's Point for a second. He said he's seen . . . it seems there was some confusion as to what's going on. And he was hoping that there would be some announcements in the future.

Well, the Honourable Member will be happy to know there will be some announcements in the future. But the Honourable Member says, *What's been happening and why haven't there been any announcements?* And I am sure you can appreciate, Mr. Chairman, [in] the short period of time I've been there . . . And certainly, you might know from a bit of history, because a lot of that was going on under the OBA and you might not have been privy to it. I can't remember when you were elected, to be honest.

The Chairman: In 2018.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: In 2018, so maybe, maybe—

The Chairman: Babe in arms.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. So maybe you weren't. But I was around. And one of the things that I have found is that . . . the Honourable Member says confusion as to what's going on. If he thinks he's confused, you might recall the former Finance Minister for the OBA, Bob Richards, saying that, you know, when he looked under the hood . . . when he looked under the hood . . . well, I could tell you when I looked under the hood for Morgan's Point, I found not only a box of frogs, but—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, it was . . . it was—the Honourable Member Kim Swan.

Now let's not go too far, but let's remember, as I said in my brief, because the Honourable Member Fahy talked about the cost of BBR, but he didn't mention anything about the cost to the taxpayers for Morgan's Point, which at this point in time now is approaching \$250 million—\$250 million!

And as I've said before in this House, everyone . . . if they want an example of what we got for \$250 million, take the map of Bermuda and look at Dockyard. Start at the gate at Dockyard by the old prison, by . . . you can even come up to the current prison and go out to the end.

For an example, for that \$160 million (now \$250 million) we didn't get all of Bermuda, you know. We got Dockyard.

So, Morgan's Point, we got that. A little piece of that entire property, which is all tied up in knots. And the Honourable Member says that . . . what did he say? Confusion as to what's going on.

We hope to have something for the Honourable Member and Members of this House and members of the country soon. We will have our first board meeting this week. So, information will be forthcoming.

And just talking about Morgan's Point for a moment, I spent three hours up on the site a couple of weeks ago, three hours. Those buildings, R1 to R5, that everyone says, *Oh, well, you know, those units are finished. We could rent them. We could do this. We could do that.* And the Honourable Member said, *Oh, the Premier came in and said, oh, we're going to put those in housing—we are going to do this, do that.* Well, when we got up there and we actually lifted up the hood and actually walked through the door, those buildings are almost ready for demolition. They are almost ready for demolition, believe it or not. They are in such bad shape.

They have splashpools on there that had three feet of moss growing out of them. Ceilings falling in. Elevators don't work—they are seized up.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member, the good doctor, the Honourable Doctor says, *who's fault?*

What? Are you trying to put Morgan's Point . . . I will take a point of order. Are you trying to put Morgan's Point on the Progressive Labour Party, Honourable Member?

Really?

Who's fault?

Mr. Chairman, \$250 million of the taxpayers' money.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, wait a minute now.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, wait a minute, let's just say this. Remember, that project was in default in January 2017.

An Hon. Member: Default?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It was in default in January of 2017. We took over in July 2017.

We found . . . wait a minute. They went default in January and never told the country!

An Hon. Member: No?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Never told the country that we were in default. We found out in July 2017 that guess what, \$160 million was due and had to be paid. But we never hear too much about that.

But we want to talk about BBR and what that costs the country. Morgan's Point, at least BBR, is now starting to turn over cash that's going to pay the mortgage and it's going to pay the debt. Morgan's Point is still accumulating debt. We're still paying heavily every month for liquidators, for trying to keep what's up there alive in terms of the marina.

Well, I think the people of the country love these answers I'm giving at the moment.

An Hon. Member: Put them in your brief.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Honourable Member says, *put them in my brief.* I did. I explained in my brief that we were over \$200 million heading to \$250 million in debt.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Members.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, if BBR is \$150 million, then Morgan's Point must be hitting \$350 million. If you want to . . . if you want to start throwing out numbers, that's —

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Members, come on.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Minister's just sort of putting the pin on the tail of the donkey over there. He's lost. You know, obviously, Morgan's Point has hit a nerve. Morgan's Point has hit a nerve, and it should hit a nerve.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: If I would, if I would—

The Chairman: Members—speak to the Chair.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: If I would have been in the OBA, Mr. Chairman, I'd be afraid to show my face around the country.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker . . . oh, Mr. Chairman, sorry.

The other thing is, Mr. Chairman, we talked about Dockyard for a moment. The Honourable Member Fahy also talked about the Victualling Yard. And there's a . . . some of the things the Honourable Member said leaves a lot of room for thought. I mean, you wonder where his mind is because he said that when he was in Government they were talking to hoteliers and a few other people about doing things in the Victualling Yard. But he had four and a half years, they did zero.

Well, I know that something is happening up in the Victualling Yard. It's coming very soon. You're probably aware too, Mr. Chairman. And maybe the Honourable Member Fahy is aware of what's coming, but I don't want to let the cat too much out of the bag on that one.

Mr. Chairman, how's time going?

The Chairman: I think you've got about 10 minutes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay. All right. Well, one thing, one thing else I have to touch on is the Honourable Member talked about the charity HOME and the 1,100 homeless people. And he said he—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: He said he hoped that I was going to reach out to them or have meetings and conversations with them.

The Honourable Member will be happy to know I've already met with HOME, with Arthur Wightman and Denise Carey. Yes, Denise Carey. And we've had one . . . we actually have another meeting on . . . today is what, Monday? On Wednesday morning.

So, you can rest assured that we are talking with those folks. I think that the vision that they have is one in which I would look forward to participating in. I've known Arthur Wightman a long time. I just met Denise Carey for the first time, but I know Arthur and I think he's very sincere and a genuine person. And I think he only means well for the country. And I will certainly look forward to our second meeting on Wednesday and look forward to us working together in the future.

And the same goes with the municipalities. Whilst we wait for that, as I said to the Honourable Member opposite just last week, we will wait for the ruling from the Privy Council, and we will then make decisions going forward from there. But no matter what that decision is, the intent is for us to work with the corporations in working our way forward.

The corporations were formed many years ago for different, a lot of different reasons. But I think that people will be, even Members opposite will be pleased with regard to what our plans are going forward. But maybe they won't. But we shall see.

So, let's see if I have anything else. I think I answered the question from Honourable Member Vance Campbell.

He was worrying about the units that were offline because of refurbishment. And I know he had mentioned the cost estimates, but the cost estimates that I gave were actually for refurbishments that we've done or we're about to do and we've received prices for. Anything that we're looking at doing, obviously we're not going to let out what our people have given us in terms of an estimate. We'll wait for those to come in when they're put out to tender. And several have been put out to tender already.

And that's it for me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you very much.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to contribute to the debate?

I see the Honourable Member, Shadow Minister of Fahy, constituency 20. You have the floor.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you to the Honourable Minister for some interesting lessons that he believes are correct versus some of the reality, as well, in terms of some of the projects that were undertaken by the One Bermuda Alliance and in relation to some of the work that we also tried to do.

The Minister has no doubt in the last . . . since 2017, can accept that some things won't get done immediately that you wish. I accept that. But the Minister

is saying he's doing his best to drive things forward. And we will take him at face value. There's no reason to say otherwise.

A couple of questions come from what the Minister had said. The Minister said that they're going to explore a lease-to-own. I'm grateful for that, because I think that's a programme that has been shown to work in other jurisdictions in getting people into non-subsidised housing. The whole point, I think, of housing is to get people moving through the ladders of opportunity in housing. I think that should be further explored.

When the Minister says the Government is going to produce affordable housing, presumably he means affordable to build and affordable to rent, because it has to be both. We could make further jives about Bermudiana, but I'm not going to be further tempted down that road.

In relation to the prices of properties, what percentage is subsidised under the rentals that were being referenced? For studios, it's \$800. We've also heard that at Bermudiana, that's not subsidised. Are we saying that the balance is subsidised and is paid for by BHC in terms of a regular BHC's rental versus market value? We say that whole amount is subsidised. Is that how that figure is calculated?

We didn't actually have any discussion this evening (I don't think) about the Landlord and Tenant Act specifically. I'd be curious to know when the legislation may be coming forward, given the Throne Speech promises of Landlord and Tenant Act changes. Because a number of the items that were mentioned in the Throne Speech about housing and about ensuring affordability and some of these other potential legislative pieces that we've talked about, that we've said be careful and the Minister accepts that we're going to have to be very careful. They are all Throne Speech initiatives, so presumably this year or at least until the next Throne Speech. We've got the Landlord and Tenant Act, we've got legislation that's going to be required in respect of taking over derelict properties.

In terms of, again, just confirming that there is someone that reviews the lists of individuals who are registered with different agencies, the Minister has made reference to the fact it's very difficult to talk about time that people are on these lists. I think that's a performance measure, because ultimately, I think the ideal is to have people get the assistance that's required and then move them through the system to make space for others. If we can't build the 2,500 units, that's almost impossible. Maybe it's just a different way of thinking about it, but it should be a measure of how long that waiting list is, how long people are in agency housing, et cetera, et cetera.

In relation to the water problems that we've identified, I mean that has gone on for years and years and years. I'm glad that the Minister has said it's going to be dealt with. We just looked at things, it was mentioned in 2018, it was mentioned in 2015, it was mentioned years before that. So, it's an ongoing issue.

Maybe it's the pipework, I don't know. But the residents there obviously deserve the clean water and clean systems to which they're entitled.

We will gladly hold the Minister's feet to the fire, as he's invited us to do, and wish him the honest luck to get that done as quickly as possible, because the residents of those facilities absolutely need to have proper housing, proper water, proper sewage. People don't deserve to live in an area or a place that isn't safe, isn't clean, isn't the way it should be.

So, the Minister will have our support in making sure that that happens swiftly, and that's where orders can be used, perhaps, if you're going to refer, if the Minister is going to refer to Hansard, it's going to be for issues like that, that we will certainly support—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: In an affordable manner. But I'll leave the Minister a few minutes to answer those questions. Thank you.

The Chairman: Minister, there was another Member in the back, but I don't know if he's going to yield.

Okay, Minister, you have the floor.

We have about three or four minutes left.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay, thank you, and I'll do my best to accommodate my Learned Honourable Member next door.

Well, thank you. First of all, thank you for the support. I believe you are genuinely sincere when you say that you will be supporting and wish me the best of luck sorting out some of those issues. I certainly felt—almost came to tears at one stage, to be honest, when you're listening to people and how they've been living. And it almost to me is, I almost felt like a certain segment of our community was put in a box and [they] said, *Look, we'll just leave them over there*. We cannot do that—cannot and will not. And I don't care what it costs. We will have some serious fights inside, but I know I've got support inside, so I think we'll be just fine.

With regard to the subsidised units, all of the units at BHC are subsidised or at a very low market rent except Bermudiana, obviously. So, the Bermudiana, those rates were given to us by EY [Ernst and Young] in their report as to what they thought we could get, and actually they hit the nail on the head. So, the rents that we are collecting are actually right on song with their predictions.

And as I said, you know, we're 35 per cent rented without any advertising. And with any luck we can get them all rented before the end of the year, early part of next year, and that project can start taking care of itself. And then we can have a surplus out of it, of which we can use that money to really assist us with the affordable housing plan that we are developing.

The Chairman: You have time for one more answer.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay, thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

That was it. The only other thing that I had was from Mr. Campbell when he talked about Dr. Cann's [Park]. I don't know if he mentioned it, but Dr. Cann's unit on the Bermuda Housing Trust. That is a maintenance issue, as you know, as a former . . . I think you were chair of Bermuda Housing Trust or certainly on the board at one stage. And I think lessons were learned there and they certainly won't be repeated in the future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[No audio]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 90 and 53 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. It has been moved that Heads 90 and 53 be approved as printed.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none, Heads 90 and 53 are approved.

[Motion carried: The Ministry of Housing and Municipalities Heads 53 and 90 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: Minister, would you now move that the Committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the Committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Committee rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

Is there any objection to that motion?

There being none, the Committee shall rise, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply agreed to rise and report progress and sought leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 8:17 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Deputy Speaker, in the Chair]

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2024/25

The Deputy Speaker: Good evening, Members. I understand that the Committee requested approval to rise

and report progress, [and sought leave to sit] again. And that indeed met with no objections.

So that brings us to the next Order of the Day and I understand that . . . I recognise the Premier. Premier?

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

Madam Deputy Speaker, I do believe that that motion will have to be carried over as the Member responsible is not in the House.

The Deputy Speaker: Okay. Thank you, Premier, for that notification.

The Member who was going to carry the motion this evening is unfortunately absent. And so, there being no other Orders . . . Mr. Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chair . . . I'm sorry, Madam Deputy Speaker.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I move that this Honourable House do now adjourn until Wednesday, the 28th of May.

The Deputy Speaker: It has been moved that we adjourn until Wednesday, the 28th.

Are there any Members who wish to speak to that motion?

I recognise the Member from constituency 2. Member, you have the floor.

SPIRIT OF VOLUNTEERISM

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Yes, thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I'm very moved to speak today on the motion to adjourn about the spirit of volunteerism which was sort of alluded to today on more than one occasion, but I have mentioned this on my radio programme, "Tourism in Focus," on more than one occasion. The example that's been set, shown by the St. George's Foundation, friends definitely of St. George's, and the restoration of the fortresses there—Fort Albert, Martello Tower, and others.

If anybody had ever seen those after Club Med left, those casuarina trees take hold of areas ever so quickly. They regenerate themselves to prolific speed and it has taken a love of Bermuda and a love of our history that has been demonstrated by those persons, with the support of donors in the corporate space and workers from different organisations. I do believe that Deloitte may have made a contribution at some times. I do believe a group of Sri Lankan workers in Bermuda

had made a contribution to help achieve that at one time.

I am thrilled—and in a space and a time when we hear a lot of complaints about this, that, and the other, you hear persons complaining about the roads and they complain about this, that, and the other, it's gratifying, and I think it's important to recognise persons who take ownership.

Charitable work in Bermuda has been a very prevalent thing for centuries now. Everyone knows the work of the LCCA, Lady Cubitt Compassionate [Association]. Just this past Bermuda Day, in celebration of 25 years of Project Action, I declare an interest. The charity my wife and the late Judith Stewart started in 1998 to buy a bus for the St. George's Parish Home. Because they used to go there and read and felt that persons should get out and see more, as the vision of the late Sir John Plowman told me to get those ladies up to talk to him over a cup of tea. And lo and behold the generosity of Mr. David Barber and his friendship with the late Sir John Plowman produced a six-figure check to buy one bus and then another one to buy a second bus—one painted blue and blue and one painted red and blue.

I believe the red and blue bus came first, and we couldn't have that, so the blue bus came shortly thereafter.

In the case of that charity, the majority, well over 90 per cent of all that has been raised over the years [was] through charitable tea parties and different events that have been held in celebration of royal events. Where honouring past first ladies like the late Mrs. Olga Scott and Lady Lully Gibbons and Mrs. Florenz Maxwell and Dame Jennifer Smith and the like. This has caused many Bermudians from a wide spectrum to come out and celebrate their beautiful dress, their lovely hats and help raise money for a charity that continues to go on.

But it's the spirit of volunteerism that doesn't stop there that's across this Island that we need to find ways to invest in. And I use that to springboard to . . . you know, even with housing. I've said here more recently that I am looking to see more . . . I'm looking to see more private persons get involved in building housing.

We need a lot of housing. Where are the modern-day John W. Swan Limited's? Where are the modern-day Benny Rego's? Where are the modern-day Dorchester Realty's that built houses and the like? And what it might take is for us to incentivise. We have a Hotel Investment Order that's in the House. We need a Housing Investment Order that incentivises, makes it attractive for private individuals to invest. Make it so that the cost of the build . . . we all know that building costs in Bermuda are well over . . . you know well over five, probably closer to \$500-plus a square foot. Find ways to make it possible for them to get all those materials in so that we can build . . . so that they can invest their money in these houses that are needed.

And look at ways to incentivise them and to incentivise landowners and homeowners, maybe even some seniors who are land rich and cash poor to be able to realise a way in which they can afford Bermuda. Because we know so many of them are living hand-to-mouth. They might have an asset but it's expensive to just be able to eat and feed themselves. So, they're making choices between a meal and medicine. And so, in that space . . . you know, and as I talk about that it just reminds me of talking about the volunteerism and how it's been manifesting itself in St. George's and in the forts.

Let me just share what I've said more than once and I'll keep saying it again. There is a space in this country to bring greater numbers of people in Bermuda. It's called educational tourism. And you know where it exists in this country? Right there in my constituency, BIOS. One of the largest employers in St. George's is now associated with Arizona State University. And you know what they did? They built housing. A lot of people driving along Ferry Road will never know that there is a 21-apartment building, three stories, tucked in the woodlands in there that houses . . . it's a composite of seven two-bedrooms, ten one-bedrooms and four studios.

Now I'm told that there are some drawbacks when you have an expectancy, maybe a 20-year expectancy. But for those people in need today you know that 20-year expectancy when you build those types of units that they built are our lifeline and that's what we need to do. We need to maybe even partner with other businesses and other organisations that have property that it wouldn't be cost prohibitive. And companies like that have US connections, international connections.

It could very well be that that money could very well come from other sources outside of Bermuda. We're always in need of getting foreign currency. But let's not underscore the fact that the opportunity that's being demonstrated to us in constituency 2 at the BIOS station with educational tourism could very well exist at the Bermuda College that has a physical plan and has space that could maybe even house . . . could even have some of those type of units built there, that will help solve the housing need and help create more younger people coming in this Island. To do what? To study what? Reinsurance, in fact.

We're a reinsurance capital. We don't have to let universities like Troy (my alma mater) send their students in reinsurance to Lloyd's of London. They can come to Bermuda.

We write all the policies to cover all . . . when the hurricanes come through those areas there. We need to partner up with those particular entities. And they can come also . . . to do what? Study hospitality. And work where? Those young people were . . . if we're going to be having a Fairmont Southampton and we know we're going to need some folks to come from overseas, they're going to need somewhere to stay.

And so, when we incentivise private entrepreneurs and investors, we can get their attention.

The Government cannot and should not be doing it all. It didn't do it all and it doesn't need to, but we need to find a way to excite that private money. And so, in that space, springboard and offer that spirit of volunteerism which is something I would like to applaud today and reiterate how significant it is and encourage others to follow that example. And encourage us to look as much as we can to the opportunities of educational tourism.

No need to reinvent the wheel. We have a lot to offer the world. And we can cause the world to come here and learn from us and solve some of our problems at the same time. And that's my contribution.

Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker.

The Deputy Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the motion? No other Members?

Well, Members, we stand adjourned until May 28.

[Gavel]

[At 8:30 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Wednesday, 28 May 2025.]

**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
28 MAY 2025
10:01 AM**

Sitting Number 12 of the 2025/2026 Session

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.
How is everyone this morning?
Ms. Beale is going to lead us in prayer this morning.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Ms. Beale, Deputy Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you, Ms. Beale.

[Gavel]

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

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 26 May 2025]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of the sitting of 26 May 2025 have been circulated.
Are there any amendments required?
There are none. The Minutes will be printed as confirmed.

[Minutes of 26 May 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: We have received notice from Minister Adams that he will be absent today.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: There are none.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Speaker: There are none.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: There are no questions this morning.

**CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY
SPEECHES**

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

MP King, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good morning, Mr. Speaker and Members of this Honourable House and the listening public.

I just want to extend congratulations to Ralph Scott, the young man who's attending a prestigious university where he's a basketball star. He potentially has a career in . . . thank you, the whole House will be associated with it. At a Seniors Tea I held yesterday, I actually had the pleasure of meeting the young man, extremely respectful and focused on doing his best for Bermuda and being a mentor as well. So, congratulations goes out to the family. Thank you.

Oh, I also have condolences to the Darrell family of Bridle Hill and the passing of Mr. Clyde Darrell. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other Member?

Mr. Whip, you have your three minutes.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Mr. Speaker, it's with some sadness that I ask for condolences to be sent to the family of Ms. Una Simmons of Spice Hill, Warwick. Ms. Simmons had been sick previously. She's in her 96th year and lived a very good life. And I would like condolences to be sent to her husband, Llewellyn Simmons, who is one of my best mentors in constituency 26, always has an interest in things that I do. So, I ask condolences to be sent to him and the family. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you. Any other Member?
MP Ming.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Welcome back as well.

The Speaker: Good morning.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Mr. Speaker, this morning I rise on my feet to just congratulate the 28 students from the Bermuda College that have been accepted to do an overseas Work, Study + Live [Abroad] programme. It's the first time that it's being offered outside of the UK, so it's been in collaboration with the United Kingdom and Bermuda College. And 28 students from the Bermuda College will go and reside, I believe it's for six weeks, in Belgium, Italy, and Cyprus. And it's an awesome opportunity, and they're extremely excited about being able to do so.

The Speaker: Very good.

Mrs. Renee Ming: So, we wish them all the best. I hope that they take every opportunity available to them and they get much from it. I'd like to associate MP Foggo with these comments as well.

The Speaker: Do the whole House on that one.

Mrs. Renee Ming: We'll do the whole House.

The Speaker: There you go.

Mrs. Renee Ming: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

There are no other Members? Thank you.

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

The Speaker: There's one Bill to be introduced this morning by the Minister of Finance.
Mr. Premier.

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, and welcome back.

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill which according to section 36(3) of the Bermuda Constitution requires the Governor's recommendation so that may be placed in the Order Paper for the next day meeting, and that is the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.

There are no other Bills to be introduced this morning.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: Mr. Premier, would you like to introduce, and for the listening audience today, the first matter offers the Cabinet Office to be debated this morning, and the Premier and Minister of Finance will lead that. Would you like to take us into Committee now?

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26.

The Speaker: Are there any objections? There are none.

I will call on [MP] Scott Pearman to Chair the Committee.

MP Pearman—you are the Chair for the rest of . . . for the start of this session.

Thank you, Members.

House in Committee at 10:07 am

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

The Chairman: Good morning Honourable Members and members of the listening public.

We are in the Committee of Supply for [further consideration of the] Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2025/26. And the first debate that we have up this morning is in relation to the budget for the Ministry of the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation.

We will be in a four-hour debate, listening to Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43, and 80. And this morning, presenting the debate initially will be the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance, I believe. Yes?

Honourable Minister, you have the floor.

CABINET OFFICE AND DIGITAL INNOVATION

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, and good morning to you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I move that the following heads be taken under consideration: Head 9, the Cabinet Office; Head 13, the Post Office; Head 18, Libraries and Archives; Head 32, Department of Planning; Head 43, Department of Information and Digital Technologies; and Head 80, Project Management and Procurement.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance.

It has been moved that Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43, and 80 be taken under consideration.

Is there any objection?

There's no objection. Please proceed when you're ready.

Hon. E. David Burt: Of course, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, with your leave, of course, I will do Head 9, and the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation will do the remaining heads.

The Chairman: Thank you, noted.

HEAD 9—CABINET OFFICE

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

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget for Head 9, the Cabinet Office, found on pages B-38 through B-44, and C-4, C-9, and C-17 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation operates at the centre of the public service, providing leadership and advice and guidance to ensure delivery of the Government's policies and Government services. This direction is supported by the budget tabled in this Honourable House and certainly under discussion today.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: I will move on to an expenditure overview and dealing specifically with Head 9 rather than the entire Ministry itself.

With regard to Head 9, a total of \$13,834,000 for fiscal year 2025/26 has been allocated for Head 9 and constitutes approximately 26 per cent of the budget allocated for the Ministry as a whole. This figure represents an increase of \$1,663,000, or approximately 14 per cent over the previous fiscal year's figure due primarily to salary uplifts as negotiated with union partners and additional spending under the heading of, or the business unit, digital transformation.

Revenue

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving to revenue. Mr. Chairman, the revenue estimate for this objective analysis of current account estimates for Head 9 is found on page B-41.

The material differences accounted for in the reduction of the estimated fees will be collected from PATI fees, anticipating that most requests will fall outside the requirement to charge any fees at all.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. E. David Burt: The subjective analysis of current account estimates for the Cabinet Office may be found on page B-41. The main material difference in this year's budget is due to salaries, professional services and other expenses.

Salaries for this head have increased due to the salary uplift noted earlier, and the addition of funding for an overall three new posts in the Cabinet Office, which can be seen on page B-41. The total increase in salaries is \$629,000, which is a 9 per cent increase over the previous fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, other notable differences is the increase in professional services, which reflects the investment required to advance the Digital Transformation Teams initiative, which accounts for the increase of \$1,064,000, and represents a 39 per cent increase over the previous year. For the sake of clarity, professional services within this cost centre also fund essential roles and partnerships that bolster Bermuda's global presence and domestic operations.

These include the consultants that are staffing the Brussels and Washington Offices, special advisor for Middle Eastern Affairs in Africa, additionally support services for the overseas office are covered, along with lobbyists in Washington, DC, and the Global Health Platform Partner for the Wellness Initiative (that is part of the Cabinet Office's Wellness Initiative for public officers as a whole), chairpersons for unit negotiations with the Public Service Negotiating Team (PSNT), and special contractors for the PATI/PIPA unit, and also international media engagement partners who work with the Government on overseas public relations—specifically in the European Union and the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chairman, there is one notable material increase from the previous year's figures of \$50,000 due to the funding allocated in 2024/25 for the foreign office anniversary celebration of five years not required for this year's activities, which is noted on page B-40 in the line item of the Brussels Office.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: Capital expenditure for this head can be found on page C-4 of the Budget Book. For capital development, it details \$1 million, which is allocated for community clubs and community investments.

Mr. Chairman, this programme is the renewal of a highly successful programme which was commenced in 2019 to award grant funding to community clubs for capital development. It's important that Honourable Members are aware that this is separate and apart from the operational grants that may be awarded to clubs via the confiscated asset fund.

These grants support facility upgrades and infrastructure improvements to our local community and sporting clubs. And just by way of information, the last time that this was done, over . . . in excess of \$1 million was given to a number of various community clubs around the Island, which enabled a number of those which had not actually been able to open to reopen their particular facilities. And if Honourable Members have questions, I'm happy to answer those questions when they come.

It is important to note that all of these capital development grants are allocated based on submitted applications to ensure transparency and equitable distribution. The reintroduction of this programme underscores this Government's commitment to empowering community and our community clubs, making them more financially sustainable and necessary to assist on providing alternatives to antisocial behaviour in our community.

Capital Acquisitions

Hon. E. David Burt: Capital acquisitions can be found on page C-9 of the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: And total \$520,000, with \$20,000 allocated for office furniture and equipment within the Cabinet Office and \$500,000 allocated for the Cooperative Food Supply Initiative.

Mr. Chairman, as part of our ongoing work to reduce the cost of living for Bermuda families, the Government is advancing the Cooperative Food Initiative, an important step to introduce greater fairness and competition in the food supply sector for essential goods, specifically. This year, the Government has committed \$500,000 in capital funding for the purchase of equipment and outfitting of the Cooperative Food

Store to be located at the former Heron Bay Primary School site.

This location is identified as the best site, readily convertible from the Government assets to serve the community and planning is already well advanced. To ensure this initiative is viable and sustainable, the Government engaged a Big Four accounting firm whose independent assessment has confirmed the commercial soundness of this model. This budget allocation demonstrates more than just intent, Mr. Chairman. It is a tangible investment in initiative that can provide real relief to working families for the cost of essential items. By supporting this direct supply food model, we can empower residents by introducing an alternative that prioritises affordability and community benefits over profits. The Government remains committed to doing all it can to ease the financial pressure on Bermudians, and this project represents an innovative approach to tackling one of the most persistent challenges facing Bermudians, high food prices.

Lastly, Mr. Chairman, I note that Grants and Contributions as found on page C-17 shows an overall allocation of \$78,000, which is the same as the previous year's fiscal allocation, with \$50,000 for Future Leaders, which includes \$25,000 for scholarships. Also captured in this category is a projected \$25,000 for regional hurricane efforts.

The Cabinet Office is a key partner and supporter of the Future Leaders Programme, a youth-centric initiative, intensive three-week summer programme dedicated to empowering bright and passionate young Bermudians. It provides a unique blend of academic study, hands-on community engagement, and invaluable mentorship, fostering a deep understanding of critical social issues from inequality to leadership. The programme's core aim is to equip these future leaders with the skills, knowledge, and confidence to drive positive change and contribute meaningfully to Bermuda's ongoing development.

Continuing Bermuda's commitment to Regional Hurricane Relief Fund is a tangible demonstration of regional solidarity and strengthens Bermuda's ties with the wider Caribbean.

Manpower

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, employee numbers can be found on page B-42 of the Budget Book, and overall, there is a net increase of three employees more than the previous fiscal year, or a 6 per cent increase in overall staffing. The overall staffing change results of decreases and increases across various business units.

Business unit 19000, General Administration, saw a reduction of two posts. A Senior Finance Officer moved to business unit 19040, and a Social Media Communications Officer. Conversely, additions included one Protocol Officer in business unit 19010, Protocol and Hospitality; one Administrative Officer in

business unit 19015, Policy and Strategy; two employees in the London Office, business unit 19035; and one Senior Finance Officer in business unit 19040, which was moved from unit 19000, as I just mentioned.

Mr. Chairman, I will now share more details of the business units with the estimates that can be found overall on page B-40. And I will not take them in the order that they are seen on the page, but I will take them in the order of the business units themselves. So, as you will see, I will bounce around a little bit, but there is a method to the order.

Business Unit 19000, Administration

Hon. E. David Burt: Business unit 19000, Administration, \$7.07 million, an increase of \$25,000.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 19000, Administration, serves the central pillar for the strategic leadership and operational oversight of Bermuda's public service. This critical unit funds the public service executive—as a note, all public service posts are actually funded under the Cabinet Office and are not funded in individual ministries. [This critical unit] funds the public service executive, encompassing key leadership roles, such the head of public service, deputy head of public service, and all permanent secretaries who are instrumental in driving ministerial objectives. Additionally, it supports the Cabinet secretary who serves the Government's principal advisor on policy and provides essential strategic support to the Cabinet.

The unit also covers the necessary administrative support staff, ensuring the proper functioning of the Government's highest level and the effective delivery of public services.

Business Unit 19010, Protocol and Official Hospitality

Hon. E. David Burt: Business unit 19010, Protocol and Official Hospitality: \$785,000, an increase of \$110,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Protocol and Official Hospitality function is essential for upholding the Government's international reputation and ensuring the execution of official engagements. This unit acts as a facilitator of diplomatic protocol and official etiquette. The core responsibilities of this unit include advising Government officials from the Premier to the Governor's Office on all matters of diplomatic conduct, such as precedence, forms of address, flag etiquette, and ceremonial gift exchanges, ensuring that Bermuda adheres to international standards.

The unit manages the logistics and ceremonial aspects of official visits by foreign dignitaries, coordinating everything from the arrival and departure, their official meetings, accommodations, and cultural engagements. Additionally, Mr. Chairman, the unit is crucial for the organisation of ceremonial events. This unit serves as a vital liaison with foreign missions, facilitating the accreditation of diplomatic representatives in Bermuda and fostering ongoing relationships. Finally,

the unit coordinates official welcomes for returning sports teams and other representatives.

Mr. Chairman, the unit's activities of the past fiscal year encompass significant events, such as the arrival and swearing into the new Governor, the precise coordination of two Throne Speeches in combination with the Legislature, and the annual Cup Match reception. On the international front, the unit assisted with the hosting of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee, which was a select committee of the UK House of Commons who visited Bermuda last year. And as you will note, Mr. Chairman, for the information of the Shadow Minister, I am covering the business units, but also in the covering of the business units, I will also cover some of the performance metrics, which can also be found on two subsequent pages inside of the Budget Book.

Business Unit 19015, Policy and Strategy

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving to business unit 19015, Policy and Strategy, which is a \$907,000 budget, an increase of \$241,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Policy and Strategy Unit (PSU) is central to delivering better policy-making across Government. The PSU enhances the policy-making capability of senior officers by providing training, including those in the Executive Leadership Programme. This support focusses on crafting and implementing public policy, and includes workshops on advancing Cabinet memoranda, emphasising inter-ministry coordination for a more joined-up and effective government. The unit also offers strategic and technical guidance to the Cabinet Office, supporting the Public Service Executive in proper record-keeping and tracking progress on public administrative policy initiatives.

A key function of the PSU is serving as the information officer for the Cabinet Office, and this entails managing the strict legal obligations under the Public Access to Information Act 2010, which requires the processing and responding to PATI requests within specific time frames, and annual reporting on the requests received.

Last year, the PSU achieved significant milestones, as can be found in the Budget Book, and the performance measures, of course, on pages B-43 and B-44.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: They played a central role in developing and implementing the Public Service Strategic Plan 2024-27, comprehensive blueprint for modernised public service with a focus on digital transformation and enhanced customer service, and I have spoken on that particular statement initiative in the House. Furthermore, the PSU was at the forefront of the policy development in crucial areas, such as the artificial

intelligence policy, ensuring its ethical and responsible use within Government operations.

Specific achievements from the past year include the ensuring of the recording of the Public Service Executive meetings, successfully delivering training initiatives on Cabinet memoranda, drafting and public policy development, providing comprehensive project support, including research and project management and report submission for the Ministers and Members of the Legislature Salary Review, which was done last year, recording and tracking of Throne Speech and platform commitments, and also offering project support to the Ministry of Economy and Labour for the ongoing implementation items for the Economic Recovery Plan, which, of course, is now the Economic Development Strategy.

These highlights underscore the unit's contribution to Bermuda's progress, and in the upcoming fiscal year, the Policy and Strategy Unit will continue to provide similar support for various government-wide initiatives reinforcing strategic planning and execution across the public service.

Business Unit 19020, Safety and Health

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to business unit 19020, Safety and Health, \$135,000, an increase of \$2,000.

Mr. Chairman, the Safety and Health business unit within the Ministry of the Cabinet Office plays a critical role in safeguarding the well-being of all public officers and ensuring the operational safety of government facilities. Its core functions develop, implement, and monitor comprehensive occupational safety and health policies and programmes across the entire public service.

This unit provides value by creating a safer working environment, which in turn reduces workplace incidents, minimises associated costs, such as lost time and medical expenses, and enhances the overall productivity and morale within government departments. Between April and August 2024, comprehensive safety and health audits were conducted across numerous government facilities, including Lyceum Pre-school, Westgate, the Farm Facility, Warrick Clinic, Dellwood Middle School, the co-ed facility, and several government administration buildings. These efforts extended to site reviews at correctional facilities and suspected sites impacted by mould, done in close coordination with the Environmental Health, with follow-up reports detailing corrective action plans.

In respect to safety policies and programmes, the Government's new drug and alcohol policy was finalised, with procedures drafted and thoroughly reviewed in collaboration with the Department of Employee and Organisational Development, the Government Laboratory, the Department for National Drug Control, and the Bermuda Industrial Union. The initial phase of implementing this policy, including policy-specific Q&A sessions and integration with HR systems

and training, roll-out planning by DEOD is now underway.

Regular monthly safety communications were also sent to health and safety communities across Government departments. Furthermore, Mr. Chairman—sorry, Mr. Chairman. Let me move on.

Mr. Chairman, the Occupational Safety and Health Officer also reviewed contractor safety practices and risk protocols during live electrical works, ensuring adherence to the highest standards. These efforts directly contributed to an increase in compliance and training with the Occupational Safety and Health Officer training delivered to multiple departments covering topics such as introduction to occupational safety and health, workplace acts and investigations, and health and safety committee duties. Guidance materials and safety orientation slides were also prepared for onboarding, and targeted support was provided to departments seeking assistance with health and safety engagements and compliance.

Looking ahead to fiscal year 2025/26, the Government plans to execute a comprehensive government-wide workplace safety audit across all ministries, excluding the uniformed services and judiciary. Additionally, a centralised risk registry will be developed to track performance and regulatory compliance and expand the training curriculum to include crucial topics such as chemical safety and hazard communications, workplace violence and harassment prevention, and fire safety and emergency evacuation.

Mr. Chairman, another aim for the upcoming year is to launch an internal health and safety hub, which will feature a digital incident reporting platform to streamline safety alerts and corrective actions, and re-launch of the ministry-level health and safety committees with refreshed teams, terms of reference, and accountability frameworks, a further testament to this Government's commitment to a safe and healthy public service.

Business Unit 19035, London Office

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to business unit 19035—

The Chairman: London Office.

Hon. E. David Burt: Which is the London Office, a budget of \$1.456 million, an increase of \$221,000.

Mr. Chairman, the London Office continues to drive forward Bermuda's relationship with the United Kingdom through the highest-level dialogue with the UK Government, and by continued engagements with departments of His Majesty's Government across Whitehall.

The office works in cohesion with governments of the Overseas Territories on shared policy areas and engaging collectively with both Houses of the UK Parliament; the United Kingdom Diplomatic Corps such as

embassies and high commissions; the United Kingdom Overseas Territories Association; the Commonwealth Secretariat; along with all UK-based Commonwealth associations; the general UK public, including the private sector, UK-based civil societies and those who have a general or vested interest in Bermuda (such as the Bermuda Society); and importantly, Bermudians living in the United Kingdom, including our students.

Mr. Chairman, the London Office continues to provide the necessary immediate assistance and guidance throughout its consular function to Bermudians living and studying in the United Kingdom, throughout Europe, and on occasion, Bermudians in other parts of the world. The budget contains a new position for the London Office of Deputy UK representative to facilitate delivering investment opportunities by working with the relevant UK government departments and other key stakeholders in the United Kingdom as part of the Government's economic diplomacy objectives.

This new position will also allow a greater focus for the increased amount of complexity of consular cases. And just by way of example, this is going to be a reassignment, but the intention, of course, is to make this post permanent. And what is important to note, Mr. Chairman, is that, of course, the UK can be very focused on titles, and having a Consular Officer is different than having a Deputy Director. And so this is viewed as a reassignment, an upgrade to the post, but which will be able to help in advanced matters and to assist the excellent director, Ms. Kimberley Durant, who's been in the office for a long time, to take some of the weight off of her shoulders and to make sure that the office has better recognition when dealing with not just the top of the office, but other levels of the office. The London Office will continue to offer placement opportunities for internships, as well as summer students, through partnership with the Department of Workforce Development, and that would be the additional post, additional creation of another interim post to support the work inside of the London Office.

Business Unit 19040, Ministry Administration

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to business unit 19040, which is Ministry Administration, \$385,000, an increase of \$118,000.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 19040, designated Ministry Administration, serves the central operational hub for the Ministry of the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation. Its core responsibilities include directly supporting the Minister of the Cabinet Office in digital innovation and coordinating all departments and units under the Ministry's purview. The key departments and functioning fall within a strategic and operational oversight. Of course, all the ministries, sorry, departments, under the Minister for the Cabinet Office—which is post office, libraries and archives, planning, information digital technologies, employee and organisation development, and project management and

procurement. As a note, communications falls under the Office of the Premier.

Business Unit 19045, Washington DC Office

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving to business unit 19045, Washington DC Office, \$462,000, no change from the previous year.

Mr. Chairman, the Washington DC Office is mandated to cultivate essential relationships with both business and Government stakeholders, championing Bermuda's financial services sector in the United States and engaging in constructive dialogue with US Government representatives to safeguard the Island's economic interests.

For fiscal year 2024/25, the DC Office successfully met all of its key objectives and those included engaging with vital contacts to inform US officials of Bermuda's pivotal role as an international financial services centre. The office also executed associated business development functions and provided guidance on navigating shifts within the United States Administration while monitoring emerging US policies impacting Bermuda, including those related to taxation, digital assets, financial services, and of course, trade.

Furthermore, it advised and managed on direct engagements by the Premier and Ministers with their DC contacts while also identifying opportunities to promote Bermuda's environmental initiatives. As a direct result of these efforts, the office was able to strengthen bipartisan relationships with US lawmakers to safeguard Bermuda's interests and also to maintain Bermuda's visibility inside of Washington, DC. The office successfully facilitated high-level engagements for myself and other Ministers to Washington, DC and to Wyoming, coordinating meetings with members of Congress, federal agencies, and also business leaders. It also actively promoted Bermuda's financial services, digital asset insurance, and reinsurance sectors with targeted efforts to attract family offices and individuals of high net worth.

Additionally, the office highlighted Bermuda as a premier destination for tourism and business through dedicated industry engagement and participating in US conferences to showcase Bermuda's regulatory leadership and innovation-friendly digital asset framework. Lastly, the office effectively advocated against US measures that could disrupt the Island's shipping and trade flows while advertised with the shipping fee proposal, which was put forward by the US trade representatives.

During the term, the office partially met some of its key performance measures, demonstrating considerable progress regarding the objective of engaging with US organisations in the digital asset and FinTech industries and to host at least one conference in Bermuda. The office held discussions with several digital asset conference organisers and assisted partners in

facilitating the [Bermuda] Digital Finance Forum, which was held earlier this month.

Concerning the goal of securing three business leads regarding and meaningful engagement and progressing of domiciling companies in Bermuda, the office successfully drew the interest of four companies to begin the necessary actions to explore domiciling Bermuda. Finally, for creating and maintaining an up-to-date database of Bermuda College students residing in the United States, the office, in conjunction with the relevant ministries, developed the framework for Bermuda College database with implementation sought for the upcoming fiscal term.

Looking ahead to the 2025/26 fiscal year, the DC Office's planned objectives are concentrated in three key areas: US political and government engagement, business development, and the image and actions of the DC Office.

Specific performance measures set out in 2025/26 include engaging with US organisers in the digital asset and FinTech industry or in family offices that result in having at least one conference or event host in Bermuda. They also aim to secure three business leads resulting in meaningful engagements or progressing in domiciling companies in Bermuda.

And finally, the office intends to finalise and implement and maintain an up-to-date database of Bermuda College students residing in the United States.

Business Unit 19075, Brussels Office

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to business unit 19075, Brussels Office, \$343,000, a decrease of \$50,000.

Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Brussels Office continues to be the maintenance of relationships with key stakeholders and decision-makers in Brussels while establishing and maintaining connections. The objectives of the Brussels Office for fiscal term 2024/25 remain as

- maintaining close dialogue with the European Commission; Council and the European Parliament and other EU institutions;
- facilitating access of the Premier and other Ministers to key persons and holding the government's presence in Europe; and
- working in cohesion with the Ministry of Finance and the Bermuda Monetary Authority support engagement with European Union institutions that are critical and important to maintaining Bermuda's position as a well-regarded international financial services centre.

And as I noted earlier in the brief, that decrease of \$50,000 is related to the funding that was placed in the budget last year for the fifth year anniversary of the Brussels Office, which is not in the budget for this year as we are not having a sixth year anniversary celebration.

Business Unit 19080, Head of the Public Service

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to business unit 19080, Head of the Public Service, \$456,000, a decrease of \$2,000.

The Office of the Head of Public Service holds direct responsibility for all internal operations within the Public Service. Its primary objective is to transform and modernise a service with a substantial focus on training and development of customer service and maintaining standards of excellence.

This Office's comprehensive mandate covers the full spectrum of public service management. The unit spearheads Government-wide reform initiatives such as the Public Service Strategic Plan 2024-27 and ensures that all ministries and departments adhere to the core values of being customer-centric and future-focused.

Mr. Chairman, a pivotal area of concentration is attracting and developing and retaining top talent within the Public Service. Over the past year, significant progress has been made in advancing the Reimagining Careers in Public Service initiative. This initiative addresses recruitment, retention, succession planning and training needs. The launch of a Public Service Career Guide accompanied by efforts by Public Officers acting as ambassadors to promote careers in the public service, raise awareness about the Career Guide and generate interest in various training programmes designed to attract trainees and apprentices to both technical and professional roles such as marine pilots, maritime controllers, engineers and a variety of industrial posts including plumbers and electricians. These initiatives are further bolstered through new formal learning agreements with signature schools and active participation in school, career days and assemblies.

And it's important to note that additional funding has been allocated not necessarily inside of this Ministry but in other particular ministries to boost these apprenticeship programmes. During the time of, I will call it austerity, some of these training programmes were reduced as we are finding the Public Service with a number of persons (due to our demographic profile in the country) approaching retirement. It is important that we make the investments in the apprenticeships and trainees to get young persons in the Public Service so they can be at a space to replace the retiring ferry pilots and to replace the retiring persons who have critical skills so they can actually learn from the persons who are doing these jobs prior to their retirement from the Public Service.

Continuing on matters related to current public officers, considerable emphasis has been placed on developing capacity at the executive leadership and mid-management levels. Over 20 public officers involved in leadership development programmes have benefited from exposure to executive coaching and advanced policy development protocols via participation in the United Arab Emirates Executive Leadership Programme which include both remote and in-person learning components, a programme of course, Mr.

Chairman, funded entirely by the United Arab Emirates Government.

At the supervisory level, a tailored supervisory training programme was created and launched specifically for industrial employees to ensure that they possess the necessary skills and knowledge to grow professionally and transition smoothly into supervisory roles which is something that was important with our partnership with the Bermuda Industrial Union. The interactions between the Public Service as an employer and its union partners have also been strengthened through collaborative engagement in joint training on interest-based bargaining techniques.

This initiative included all union partners and successfully commenced the negotiations season. Joint negotiations resulted in a framework agreement for salary increases over a four-year period across all unions followed by individual negotiations with each union to address non-financial causes of our seven collective bargaining agreements which is the current phase in progress.

While standard cost of living increase has been awarded to ensure that government employees restore purchasing power which had been eroded over the years owing to austerity measures and salary freezes, the work with PricewaterhouseCoopers [PwC] on the modernisation of the public officer post-evaluation framework concluded with the delivery of an assessment on salary competitiveness when compared with market value based on similar positions in the private sector and the delivery of a new job evaluation framework.

Now, Mr. Chairman, this is a massive undertaking that is actually looking at the review of all the particular roles and grading within the Public Service. The new competency-based model which replaces the framework that has been in use in Government for over 50 years will assess a job's duties, responsibilities, required skills, and overall contribution to delivery of public services. Implementation planning to transition to this new job evaluation tool is in progress. It is expected that the new tool and the new grading model will provide opportunities to address issues that are related to recruiting into hard-to-fill roles and the retention of top public service talent.

Now, of course, this is something I've discussed previously, Mr. Chairman, but in certain roles inside of the Public Service, which are specialist roles, whether they be in compliance, whether they be in engineering, whether they be in health care, challenged with attracting dentists into government, retaining engineers inside of government, and others needed to be addressed. Rather than looking at it in a piecemeal fashion, the Government decided to take on board an entire review of the compensation structure for all public sector roles, and this encompass . . . this sizable review, which will enable us to make sure that positions that have high value in the private sector can also be represented as high value in the public sector and not

necessarily be constrained to the traditional salary bands, which we have been using, which are published in the Budget Book, which we have been using, as I said, for the last 50 years.

Mr. Chairman, increased efficiencies have been realised via operational changes to support recruitment. Managers have been trained to conduct their own recruitment efforts, as opposed to being completely reliant on the resources at the Department of Employee and Organizational Development. And as we see more persons retiring from the Public Service, it is important that we continue to streamline the recruitment process to make sure that we are able to replace those persons who are retiring from the Public Service.

Further steps have been taken to implement a more streamlined recruitment process and also complemented by planned amendments to the Public Service Commission Regulations, which the Government expects to be tabled in the legislature later during this session.

Mr. Chairman, it is understood that measuring feedback is essential for improving customer service. Therefore, the Government website now features a customer feedback form, which is now also complemented by posters with QR codes, which are being rolled out to all Government departments, providing quick access to the customer feedback form for persons who may visit Government offices and may wish to record positive feedback or negative feedback.

The data is analysed to inform and identify problem areas requiring added resources or corrective actions to mitigate service issues and to ensure high quality and timely customer responses. While we're working towards meeting the response goals, plans include increased training in this area, and that is a focus of the Public Service plan to increase the customer service levels in the Government. The initiatives outlined under this particular business unit demonstrate the Government's commitment to fostering a modern, efficient, and responsive Public Service. By investing in our people, streamlining operations, and prioritising taxpayer feedback, we are building a Public Service that is well-equipped to meet the evolving needs of our country.

Business Unit 19085, PATI/PIPA Unit

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to business unit 19085, which is the PATI/PIPA Unit, \$862,000, an increase of \$23,000.

Mr. Chairman, business unit 19085, PATI/PIPA Unit, there was continued achievement of the established measures and expenditures remain largely in line with last year's figures. The PATI/PIPA Unit is responsible for both the Public Access to Information Act [2010] (PATI) and the Personal Information Protection Act [2016] (PIPA) and the Government's adherence to the requirements underneath those particular Acts.

For PATI, the unit continues to maintain and enhance the PATI administrative code of practice, deliver targeted guidance to public authorities and departments, and provide comprehensive information officer training. During 2024/25, the unit coordinated the update of the legislation and regulations and implemented significant updates to administrative procedures.

For PIPA, the unit continued to develop the Government's privacy programme. This included delivering training, establishing documentation and templates, and advancing our international privacy recognition strategy. A key focus was coordinating readiness activities ahead of PIPA coming into force on the 1 January 2025. Additionally, legislative activities supported the transition of personal information requests from PATI to PIPA and the harmonisation of the Electronic Transaction Act with PIPA.

Mr. Chairman, as this Honourable House is aware, the Government's operations require interaction with the public and international partners involving information exchange through both traditional and digital channels. This reality underscores the importance of embedding information rights and privacy principles throughout our operations.

Like the evolution of PATI, the Government also promotes the premise that privacy protection is not a destination, but rather a continuing journey that requires ongoing attention and adaptation. As processes change and technology evolves, new privacy challenges emerge, and the Government's privacy programme will continuously mature. Through consistent application of privacy principles and regular programme assessment, the Government strengthens its ability to deliver services while protecting the right to privacy.

Looking ahead to 2025/26, the unit's priority activities will encompass

- refinement of their organisational structure to optimise service delivery;
- implementation of necessary legislative updates and compliance measures;
- development of strategic and operational frameworks to support PATI and PIPA requirements;
- continued enhancements of guidance materials and templates, ongoing support to public authorities in meeting their statutory obligations;
- strengthening the relationships with regulatory authorities and expansion of training and awareness initiatives; and finally,
- enabling reciprocal recognition with comparable jurisdictions.

With PIPA now being fully operational as of 1 January 2025, its impact does extend across the entire jurisdiction. While the Privacy Commissioner provides overarching guidance, the unit works in collaboration with the regulator to establish international equivalence pursuits, elements that reach across the public

and private sectors, and identification of certification mechanisms that may be used to demonstrate compliance.

In today's interconnected digital economy, Bermuda's ability to participate in international data flows is essential for our jurisdiction's continued prosperity. Our business and government operations increasingly rely on cloud services and international data processing capabilities to deliver efficient and cost-effective services to our community. This unit plays a crucial role in enabling those operations by working to establish privacy equivalency arrangements with key international partners. Our efforts towards privacy and data protection, equivalence recognition, and participation in certification programmes and engagement with various jurisdictions demonstrate the commitment that this Government has to meeting international standards in this area, which is something that is important, certainly for our international business sector.

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner has communicated guidance to help organisations assess and document transfer impacts, implement appropriate safeguards, and maintain compliance while leveraging modern technologies. This balanced approach ensures that Bermuda can benefit from global technological advances while maintaining the appropriate protection for personal information, regardless of where that information is kept and or processed.

Effective records management forms the Chairman, sorry, let me start again. Mr. Chairman, effective records management forms the foundation of meaningful public access to information. During 2024/25, the unit undertook significant work to develop the PATI Records Management Code of Practice, which will provide comprehensive guidance on how public authorities should create, maintain, and preserve official records. This code is essential for ensuring that public records remain accessible, authentic, and reliable throughout their life cycle. The code looks to address challenges in digital record-keeping, including requirements for managing information across cloud platforms and collaborative systems. And this unit has worked closely with archives and the code of practice—the new code—provides detailed guidance on managing hybrid paper and digital environments, ensuring consistent handling of records, regardless of format.

These improvements directly support Government departments and public authorities in meeting their statutory obligations while promoting greater transparency and accountability in Government operations. The effectiveness of PATI fundamentally depends on the Government's ability to properly manage Government records, and this revised code provides a framework needed to better support that goal.

Mr. Chairman, the unit remains committed to supporting Bermuda's position as a trusted jurisdiction for information handling while ensuring effective protection of privacy rights. And the work of this unit directly

contributes to both our economic interests and the protection of individual rights.

I think I'm now moving to the final business unit, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Business Unit 19090, Digital Transformation

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Moving to the final business unit, 19090 Digital Transformation, \$975,000, a new allocation for this year.

Mr. Chairman, created in 2024, the Digital Transformation team is responsible for modernising how public services are delivered in Bermuda. Its core mandate is to streamline Government operations through digitisation, with a focus on improving service delivery and enhancing the residents' or taxpayers' experience with the Government.

The team leads the development of digital forms, supports departments in transitioning from manual to digital processes, and is implementing platforms such as the One-Stop Shop. The Digital Transformation team also plays a key role in piloting artificial intelligence tools, such as chatbots and automated workflows, to enhance responsiveness and to reduce administrative burdens.

Working closely with client ministries departments, the Department of Information and Digital Technologies, and other stakeholders, the Digital Transformation team ensures that digital initiatives are delivered in a secure and also scalable fashion across Government to reduce duplication. Since its formation in the previous fiscal year, with funding allocated during the mid-year review (which is the reason why there is zero in the original estimate, but an allocation in the revised estimate), the team has made significant progress in digital service delivery.

Key accomplishments include developing and launching over 30 digital forms and applications to streamline service delivery across a wide range of public-facing and internal Government functions. These include critical services, such as the Public Service Vehicle Licence and Accident Reporting at TCD, the Asthma Action Plan, the Financial Assistance Short-Term Relief Benefit. The team also built tools to support the public engagement and transparency, such as the Dog Licence Lookup, Bermuda National Hero Nomination Form, the Annual Occupational Safety Report. Internal Government processes were also digitised, including the new Cabinet Memo System, Privacy Registration Booking, and Feedback Form Enhancements. These forms collectively support operational improvements while also laying the groundwork for integrated, paperless public service delivery.

Continuing on to their accomplishments, launching of the One-Stop Shop, which is a centralised portal, offering citizens seamless access to Government services via forms.gov.bm, where any

Honourable Member or any member of the public can go online and see about the 80 different Government functions that are able to be transacted with the Government online.

Upgrade and development of the Social Insurance Site, which I did cover in my finance brief a few weeks ago, which is a digitised suite of forms, including a real-time lookup tool for social insurance numbers, modernising access to critical benefits, and of course, reducing calls to the department.

Continuing on their accomplishments, rollout of the Government Payment Portal, which enables secure online payments for Government services. This includes the parking tickets application, which allows the public to pay fines online. Ongoing development of the ShoreLink chatbot, an AI-driven tool designed to support digital customer service and provide automated responses to common queries. Continued work on digital literacy and public service upskilling, ensuring that Government employees are better equipped to use and manage digital tools.

Moving on to funding, Mr. Chairman, with the funding grants for fiscal year 2025/26, the Digital Transformation Team will focus on

- expanding the One-Stop Shop, adding new services and integrating single sign-on solution to improve the user experience;
- deploying the Unified Payment Platform, which is consolidating fragmented payment methods into one secure integrated system that connects with the E1 financial system;
- launching AI-driven service automation pilots and chatbot functionality to enhance customer service responsiveness, one that I got to trial and demo last evening, very exciting;
- further digitising forms and services with the goal of reducing manual processes and improving turnaround time for both internal and public facing requests; and
- engaging a digital transformation strategic partner to support highly technical work, particularly for payment platform integration and advanced artificial intelligence implementations.

The team will continue to work in close collaboration with client departments, IDT, and external partners to ensure that digital investments produce lasting value for the public and also the Government.

Mr. Chairman, before I conclude, I wish to thank the public officers and staff within the Cabinet Office, led by the Secretary to the Cabinet, Major Marc Telemaque, and also the Permanent Secretary for the Cabinet Office, Ms. Jeane Nikolai. Serving in the Cabinet Office is a privilege but also requires a tremendous amount of work. And no two days, not even Cabinet days, are the same. The team provides excellent support to myself as leader of the Government, and I am grateful for their dedication to the taxpayers of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation on the estimates for Head 9, the Cabinet Office, and I will now yield the floor to the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation, who will cover the rest of the heads.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier.

Minister, I think when you are ready, we're moving on to, is it the Post Office first? Head 13.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Head 13. Yes.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.
Please proceed when ready.

HEAD 13—BERMUDA POST OFFICE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I stand to present the 2025/26 budget for Head 13, the Bermuda Post Office, as outlined in the Budget Book, pages B-45 through B-51.

The Post Office is one of Bermuda's longest-standing institutions, with over two centuries of uninterrupted public service, and is 100 per cent Bermudian staffed. Today, even in the age of instant messaging and online platforms, it continues to serve 36,000 delivery points Island-wide with dedication and professionalism. This year's budget reflects our commitment to both honour that legacy and modernise the service to meet today's needs.

Mr. Chairman, the total allocation for the Bermuda Post Office in 2025/26 is \$10.13 million, as listed on pages B-146 *[sic]* and B-147 *[sic]* of the Budget Book.

The Chairman: I think it's actually just page B-46.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Page B-46.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This represents a \$510,000 increase, or 5.3 per cent over last year's original estimate of \$9.62 million. The increase is primarily driven by salary adjustments in accordance with negotiated agreements effective 1 April 2025. Salaries and wages continue to represent the Post Office's largest expense, totalling \$8.19 million, which accounts for 81 per cent of the overall budget. Staffing levels remain steady with 125 full-time Bermudian employees.

Mr. Chairman, the remaining 19 per cent of the budget covering day-to-day operations includes several important areas with both strategic and service-related implications. Transport costs rise to \$91,000, a 98 per cent increase. This corrects last year's underestimation and accounts for international freight, covers security vendor expenses for screening and X-ray outbound mail at the airport to meet international standards. It includes import costs for fixtures and fittings.

Equipment upgrades increased by 150 per cent to \$50,000. This allows for the replacement of depreciated furniture, fixtures, trays, mail racks, and tools that require upgrading. Training has increased by \$25,000, encouraging staff to participate in more online and regional courses while ensuring our workforce remains current and capable in a rapidly evolving logistics environment. Professional services increased to \$77,000, covering UPU and CPU membership dues, EMS co-op fees, and consultant support for upgrading the IPS system and conducting a customer service efficiency survey.

Energy costs, including electricity and fuel, slightly decreased to \$211,000, reflecting improved efficiency or stable rates. Repairs and maintenance rise to \$548,000, which includes building upkeep, cleaning contracts, and security services. Rent for the mail processing centre remains stable at \$396,000. Materials and supplies hold steady at \$224,000, covering stamps, paper, and office consumables. Communications stay flat at \$70,000, supporting delivery tracking and customer notifications. Travel and regional participation doubles to \$36,000, enabling engagement with regional postal bodies and training events. Advertising and promotion decreases to \$44,000, reflecting better targeted marketing efforts. Other expenses grew to \$59,000, which includes costs for World Post Day events, staff retirements, office supplies, and transaction fees for debit and credit card processing.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25, a year of achievement and quiet excellence. This past year, the Bermuda Post Office was recertified with gold status for postal security and also earned gold certification in disaster risk management, both awarded by the Universal Postal Union (UPU) following independent audits by international experts.

In terms of delivery, performance remained high—98 per cent of all letter mail was delivered within four working days [and] 99 per cent of customers were notified within two working days of international items arriving. These figures speak volumes, especially when paired with the remarkably low number of complaints. Just nine formal and five informal complaints across the entire year.

Mr. Chairman, this level of satisfaction is a credit to the hard-working, fully Bermudian staff who keep this service going day-in, day-out across our seven delivery offices and sub-post offices in Mangrove Bay, Southampton, Warwick, Devonshire, Flatts, Crawl, and St. George's. And Mr. Chairman, a particular point of pride is that Bermuda's Postmaster General now serves as the Secretary General of the Caribbean Postal Union, a recognition of our leadership in the region.

Mr. Chairman, looking ahead for the priorities of 2025/26, the upcoming year will focus on

- modernisation and sustainability;
- upgrading operational tools and equipment to improve efficiency;

- enhancing customers' experience via the [BermudaPost.bm](https://bermudapost.bm) platform, including tracking, mail forwarding, and retail purchases;
- expanding access to training and online courses with support from UPU and regional partners; and
- continuing to meet our universal service obligations even as traditional letter mail declines by approximately 7 per cent annually.

This isn't merely about logistics, it's about creating a postal service that stays accessible, affordable, and resilient, even in a changing communications landscape.

In closing, Mr. Chairman, the Bermuda Post Office continues to do what it's always done, serve the people with consistency, care, and quiet excellence. This budget supports that mission, balances fiscal responsibility with forward planning, and ensures the Post Office remains a vital public service, not just for today, but for generations to come.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my comments on the head for Post Office.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Head 13 for Post Office. I'll now proceed to Head 18, Libraries and Archives.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Please proceed. This is [page] B-52.

HEAD 18—DEPARTMENT OF LIBRARIES AND ARCHIVES

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the 2025/26 budget for Head 18, the Department of Libraries and Archives, found on pages B-52 through B-56 of the Estimates and Revenue Expenditure Book. The mission of this department is clear, *To facilitate access to information for research, inspiration, lifelong learning, and recreation.* And that mission is as relevant today as ever.

Mr. Chairman, for the fiscal year, the budget has been allocated \$3.393 million, an increase of \$146,000, or 4.0 per cent over the previous year. This represents 6.3 per cent of the Ministry's total budget. The increase is primarily driven by negotiated salary uplifts and a targeted reallocation of funds to strengthen key service areas.

Mr. Chairman, let's now turn to how those funds are distributed across the department's six core services.

- Collection Management, \$434,000. Boosted to support the digitisation of local publications and the preservation of work. The FTEs for this remains at three.
- Adult Services, \$623,000, up 16 per cent. Reflects salary increases and a new staff position, bringing the FTEs to six.

- Archival Services, \$341,000, up 2 per cent. Modest increase to support salary adjustments. FTEs remain at three.
- Youth Services, \$478,000. Covers mandated salary increases and the FTEs stand at four.
- Records Management Services, \$844,000. Supports Government Records Centre in St. David's. FTEs remain at four.
- And Administration, \$672,000, down 2 per cent. This decrease reflects a reallocation to support staffing in adult services. FTEs remain at four.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. And for the benefit of the listening public, FTEs are full-time equivalent employees.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, yes.

In total, the department operates with 24 full-time Bermudian employees, an increase of one over last year. Mr. Chairman, revenue remains modest. Just \$8,000 is projected, reflecting the seventh month closure of the youth library.

On the capital side, the department will receive \$5,000 for the purchase of new computers. For comparison, last year's capital allocation was \$129,000, which funded a new fire alarm system for the Bermuda Records Centre and new bookshelves at the Youth Library.

Mr. Chairman, key shifts in the operational budget include salaries increased due to permanent appointments and negotiated uplifts. Wages decreased as temporary staff transitioned into permanent roles. Transportation and communications funding increased, driven by higher trucking and phone costs. Professional services rose to support digitisation initiatives. Rentals and repairs dropped. The planned Internet centre did not move forward. Energy costs fell due to improved lighting and reduced AC use. And materials and supplies rose to support book acquisition and digitisation.

Mr. Chairman, collection management digitised five years of *The Royal Gazette* ahead of schedule and under budget, catalogued 90 per cent of new books within 30 days, and processed all 36 ISBN requests from local publishers within two days. Adult services engaged roughly 20 per cent of Bermuda's population as active members, delivered well-attended Lunch & Learn programmes, and received consistently high satisfaction in in-house surveys.

Archival services focused on expanding digitisation capacity with new high-resolution imaging equipment. Staff trained with British Library experts at the University of West Indies in Jamaica. Youth Services have served 60 per cent of Bermuda's under-15 population. The performance slipped due to a seven-month closure for renovations. However, the Youth Library reopened to the public on 8 April 2025, with a newly refreshed space.

Records Management continued supporting all Government departments in compliant records retention and storage. And Administration managed increasing challenges at the main library concerning security incidents, which rose from 53 to 60. The police were called 25 times and one incident led to a prosecution.

Now, looking at the year ahead. Mr. Chairman, the department will advance several key initiatives. They will launch a new website to improve public access and user experience, continue to digitise *The Royal Gazette* covering 1979 to 1983, finish setting up the new digitisation studio at the archives for online access to documents and images, and expand public services by installing a new digital microfilm reader, increasing available public use computers, introducing e-readers for seniors, expanding large print fiction collection, formalising home and outreach deliverable schedules.

So, Mr. Chairman, the department delivers extraordinary value by connecting citizens to information and democracy, preserving our heritage, bridging the digital divide, supporting childhood literacy and adult learning, providing secure and accessible public records. This is not just a place for books and records, it is a vital part of Bermuda's social fabric, cultural memory, and public service mission.

So in closing, Mr. Chairman, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the dedicated staff headed by Director Ms. Joanne Brangman, for their unwavering commitment to serving the public with professionalism and care. With this budget, we continue to invest in learning, culture, access, and community. Head 18, Libraries and Archives remains a small but mighty contributor to Bermuda's future.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. And just for the benefit of the listening public, the performance measures you just identified were at pages B-55 and B-56, and the capital acquisition you discussed for the libraries was at page C-9.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you. Please proceed. Is your next head going to be Department of Planning?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I've now concluded Head 18.

The Chairman: Apologies.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And I'll now move to—

The Chairman: I'm jumping ahead out of excitement.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'll move to Head 32, Department of Planning. Don't get too excited. I am not going to keep you long.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Not as long as some people would like for me to keep them.

HEAD 32—DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 32, Department of Planning, found on pages B-57 through B-61. The department's mission is straightforward and significant, *To ensure the sustainable management of Bermuda's natural and built environment.*

Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-58, for the fiscal year 2025/26, the department has been allocated \$4.049 million, an increase of \$211,000, driven mainly by Government-wide salary increases. You see a recurring theme there.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Revenue Outlook

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Revenue outlook. Mr. Chairman, turning to page B-59, the department expects to generate \$1.936 million in revenue, a 14 per cent increase over last year. This growth is driven by robust development activity across the residential, tourism, and commercial sectors.

Residential, tourism, and office development continues to be healthy, particularly with the high-end sector as evidenced by numerous applications for new residences, new blocks providing additional tourist units at Grotto Bay, and the Brookfield development on Front Street in the City of Hamilton.

Mr. Chairman, revenue changes include

- planning application fees at \$550,000, reflecting caution in some segments because it's down from what we had last year;
- building permit fees up \$110,000 to \$710,000 tied to sustained demand;
- planning searches up \$84,000 to \$234,000 driven by strong real estate market; and
- elevator licences up \$150,000 to \$350,000, linked to high compliance and inspection demand.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, subjective analysis of current account estimates of the department is found on page B-58. Salaries increased by \$96,000 to \$3.447 million. Rentals increased by \$43,000 due to the office move to 44 Church Street. Repairs and

maintenance increased by \$69,000, mostly for software and systems related to the new offices.

Staffing and Recruitment

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, staffing challenges have impacted service delivery. Retirements and vacancies, including in enforcement and inspections, left several units under-resourced. However, the department has responded decisively. They have recruited a new administrative officer, electrical inspector, enforcement officer, management accountant, and manager of administration during the last fiscal year, all of whom are Bermudian. [The department] promoted internally to fill senior roles [and] was successful in its nomination of a Bermudian student who received a bursary award for the last fiscal year targeted to the post of assistant planner to whom the department has provided and will continue to provide work experience to aid in his development.

[The department also] supports the youth employment programme of the Department of Workforce Development. The department will be providing work experience to a further three young Bermudians during this summer. In addition, the Department of Planning has featured at numerous school career days to promote planning as a profession to students and maintains just four work permit holders.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the department has faced public frustration, particularly around delays in permits and application processing. These concerns are real and are not being ignored. In the coming weeks, I will be announcing initiatives either in train or under consideration to address the frustrations faced by both the Department of Planning and the public they serve.

Business Unit 42050, Enforcement

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 42050, Enforcement, page B-60. This business unit is responsible for investigating claims of breaches of planning control, seeking remedies for unauthorised development and carrying out planning searches. In the past fiscal year

- they processed 353 planning searches, an increase of 79;
- issued 11 civil penalties totalling \$275,000;
- eighty per cent of enforcement complaints were responded to within two weeks below the 100 per cent target. The department has adjusted its goal to 90 per cent for the upcoming fiscal year; and
- twenty-nine enforcement cases were opened last year.

Performance was impacted by staffing shortages, including a retirement and temporary

reassignment. But with a new officer hired and the team now fully staffed, improvement is expected in 2025/26.

Business Unit 42050, Forward Planning

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 42060, Forward Planning, page B-60.

This business unit is responsible for the preparation of development plans and associated policies and guidance, including collating evidence through technical studies and surveys. For the fiscal year 2024/25, the department can report the following: The City of Hamilton Plan 2024, which we debated last week in this Honourable House, was completed with no objections, a milestone achievement. And as debated in these Chambers a week ago, this plan marks a shift from rigid controls to principle-based planning, encouraging investment and design flexibility.

Business Unit 42070, Development Management

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 42070, Development Management, page B-61.

This business unit is responsible for processing, planning and subdivision applications in accordance with the provisions of the relevant development plan and providing pre-consultation advice on development proposals. Highlights for 2024/25 are as follows:

- Processed 362 planning applications, nearly identical to last year.
- [Of these,] 61 per cent were completed within 12 weeks, below the 80 per cent target.
- Staffing shortages and increased workload contributed to this issue, but targeted recruitment and reassignments are addressing the problem.

Most planning applications continue to be for residential development with a noticeable trend towards applications for creating additional units through internal conversions and the installation of solar panels.

Notable projects include the Grotto Bay Development, the North Arm in Dockyard, the replacement of the Belvedere Building on Pitts Bay Road and the proposed [94] key hotel at 11 Victoria Street, which was granted on appeal.

Significant pre-consultation for tourism development has been conducted at the St. Regis Bermuda Resort and regarding the redevelopment of the Elbow Beach Hotel.

Business Unit 42080, Building Permits

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 42080, Building Permits, page B-61. Everybody wants to know about building permits.

This [business] unit is responsible for reviewing applications for building permits to ensure compliance with the building code, guaranteeing safe construction

and protecting public welfare and well-being. For the fiscal year 2024/25, the department can report the following:

- It received 799 building permit applications and 456 permit revision applications.
- It issued 551 building permits and 368 permit revisions.
- These permits represented 21 per cent commercial, 24 per cent residential and 55 per cent minor works.

Notable projects that received building permits in the past year:

- Southampton Princess Beach Club, a multi-story mixed-use development on Pitts Bay Road;
- the Brookfield Building; and
- further tourism development at Nautilus/Azur and Grotto Bay.

Business Unit 42090, Inspections

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 42090, Inspections, page B-61. This business unit is responsible for ensuring standards of construction in accordance with approved building permits and the relevant provisions of the building code.

For the fiscal year 2024/25, the department can report the following.

- It conducted over 6,395 inspections, including 504 elevators, 1,780 electrical and 4,183 building related.
- 664 commencement inspections indicate strong project starts.

And for the listening public, commencement inspection is when planning comes out and says you can start building.

Plans for the Year Ahead

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the department has a full slate of reforms and initiatives, including:

- New general development orders to reduce red tape and allow some changes of use without planning approval.
- Updated building code to raise construction standards and sustainability.
- Streamlining processes via better internal systems and more engagement with industry stakeholders.
- Launch of a digital platform to match underutilised land with prospective farmers, promoting local food production and land use efficiency.
- Vacant and derelict property database to encourage private investment in idle housing stock.
- Review of the listed building register to ensure that it is transparent, current, and fair.

- Policy research programmes underway focusing on housing, tourism, industrial land, and vacancy rates, forming the evidence base for the new Island-wide development plan.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Planning is taking action. We are recruiting, reforming, digitising, and collaborating. This year's budget supports that work and it supports our broader goal, a planning system that is efficient, effective, and responsive to both the needs of the developer and the rights of our residents.

To the director, Victoria Cordeiro, and her team, thank you for navigating the complexity with care and commitment. I look forward to sharing the progress that lies ahead. This concludes my comments on Head 32, Department of Planning, and I'll now proceed to Head 43, Information and Digital Technology.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

So, if we pause just for a second there, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for budget year 2025/26. This is a four-hour debate, and we have covered the first six heads. So, we're moving . . . excuse me, we've covered the first four heads, and we're moving on to the fifth of six heads, which is Information and Digital Technologies.

We are hearing from the Honourable Diallo Rabain, who is the Minister of Cabinet Office of Digital Innovation, who is now going to present Head 43, which can be found at page B-62 of the Budget Book.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I know it sounds funny, but it's Minister *for the* Cabinet Office.

The Chairman: Well, I stand corrected, Minister for the Cabinet Office and Digital Intervention.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Not sure why . . . why they say—

The Chairman: Did I say *of*? I said *of*.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, everybody says *of*.

The Chairman: There we go.

HEAD 43—DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION AND DIGITAL TECHNOLOGIES

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I rise to present the 2025/26 budget for Head 43, Department of Information and Digital Technologies, better known as IDT, as outlined on pages B-62 through B-65 of the Budget Book.

IDT functions as the central nervous system of the government, enabling everything from front line

public services to internal operations. The public rightly expects these systems to be reliable, secure, and resilient at all times. In today's rapidly evolving digital landscape, meeting these expectations requires more than maintenance. It demands strategic investment, modern infrastructure, and forward-thinking leadership. This budget reflects that commitment, a deliberate shift towards stronger protection, smarter systems, and a government built for the future.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Information and Digital Technologies has been allocated a total operating budget of \$9.211 million for the 2025/26 fiscal year, as shown on page B-62. This represents an increase of \$706,000 over the previous year's budget of \$8.505 million.

Mr. Chairman, a subjective analysis of the current accounts for the Department of Information and Digital Technologies can be found on page B-63. While the majority of new investment is reflected in capital expenditures, there are also key changes within the department's current account, particularly across three areas of strategic importance.

Communications, \$1.757 million, increased by \$242,000. This increase supports the expansion of the network data lines, ensuring sufficient bandwidth and infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing and digitally dependent Government.

Rentals, \$842,000, increased by \$182,000. This reflects the cost of relocating the department to a new premises with updated facilities better suited to IDT's operational needs.

And salaries, at \$3.447 million, increased by \$162,000. This covers Government-wide salary uplifts and funds the filling of a critical security analyst position, reinforcing our commitment to cybersecurity and digital service protection.

Mr. Chairman, the capital allocations for the Department of Information and Digital Technologies for 2025/26 is \$6.525 million, representing an increase, a 12 per cent increase over the previous year. And if you could assist me with the page number there, I don't see it. I know it's in [section] C somewhere.

The Chairman: Page C-2, I think, but I will double-check while you're go on.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: These funds are not merely an investment in technology; they represent strategic steps towards a more resilient and efficient and responsive Government. As part of its ongoing commitment to digital transformation and secure service delivery, IDT will continue investing in modernising the network infrastructure and enhancing cybersecurity capabilities.

The Chairman: Page C-9, it is.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Page C-9. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

These strategic initiatives are crucial for enabling a resilient, efficient, and data-driven Government.

Mr. Chairman, while some budget lines show reduced allocations, I want to be clear. These are not merely cutbacks; they are recalibrations. They reflect areas where previous investments have delivered, allowing us to redirect resources towards more urgent and transformational priorities.

Key areas of capital investment include:

- Network Upgrades, \$2.5 million. Replacing legacy network switches and upgrading infrastructure at Global House, implementing modern network monitoring tools, firewall enhancements, and unified communication systems, improving Wi-Fi reliability and connectivity across key facilities.
- Cybersecurity and Risk Management, \$930,000. Enhancing endpoint protection and real-time threat detection, supporting continuous monitoring, software licensing, and third-party penetration testing, strengthening Government's overall security posture.
- Government Portals and Digital Accessibility, \$505,000. Improving access to public services through a more integrated and user-friendly platform, supporting transparency, engagement, and efficiency.
- E-Government Initiatives, \$545,000. Focused on data centralisation, performance analytics, and smarter governance, reduced slightly to reflect consolidation with broader data infrastructure work, disaster recovery and continuity.
- ISeries Systems, \$295,000. Following a major refresh last year, this year's focus shifts to fine-tuning disaster recovery environments.
- Wintel Systems, \$950,000, supporting secure cloud transitions and identity management and continuity testing.
- Innovation and Hardware Life Cycle Development Projects, \$400,000. Sustaining innovation while streamlining focus on core initiatives.
- Infrastructure Computers, \$400,000. Reflects recent hardware modernisation and more efficient procurement planning, data infrastructure, establishing a centralised government data lake to power business intelligence, support evidence-based policy, and foster greater transparency and innovation across public service.

Mr. Chairman, these investments mark a shift from reactive management to proactive transformation that will strengthen our digital foundation, protect public assets, and enhance service delivery across every corner of Government.

Workforce and Recruitment

Bermuda House of Assembly

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Workforce and Recruitment found on page B-63.

Mr. Chairman, staffing stands at 50 FTEs (full-time equivalent employees), up by one. But we have 10 funded vacancies and filling them is essential. To that end, IDT has been working with DEOD on recruitment. These include a chief systems engineer, security manager, network engineer, four systems engineers, security analysts, support analysts, and operations analysts. We are addressing recruitment challenges head-on through a new apprenticeship programme, building a pipeline of young Bermudians, IT professionals, to not just meet IDT's needs, but also Bermuda's digital future.

And Mr. Chairman, I did do a Ministerial Statement on IDT's apprenticeship programme last week.

The Chairman: Yes.

Output Measures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Output Measures, pages B-64 and B-65.

Mr. Chairman, I will state up front that not all service targets were met. The team worked under pressure to manage a post-attack backlog while pushing forward critical upgrades.

Business Unit 53030, Device Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Performances this year, business unit 53030 Device Support—70 per cent of tickets resolved within targets, below the 90 per cent goal, but improving.

Business Unit 53035, Network Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 53035, Network Support, met 75 per cent target rising to 85 per cent this year.

Business Unit 53040, Service Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 53040, Service Support, held steady at 25 per cent first-call resolution.

Business Unit 53060, Business System Support

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit, 53060 Business System Support, achieved 70 per cent of the monthly review meetings; target is now 90 per cent.

Business Unit 53090, Security

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 53090, Security, delivered on 100 per cent goal, a critical win.
Projects in 2024/25

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, despite challenges, IDT made real strides. Microsoft 365 was deployed government-wide for more secure collaborative work. Infrastructure renewal [is] underway—improving system speed, uptime and resilience.

Network hardware replaced at critical sites, including the airport and Government Administration Building. Unified communications project completed at 95 per cent. Streamlining systems and lowering costs. And the ISeries refresh completed, ensuring our core financial systems remain stable and secure.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, IDT's 2025 business plan will focus on three pillars.

1. Strengthening cybersecurity, disaster recovery and incidents response. IDT's top priority is protecting government systems, data and users through a proactive layered cybersecurity approach. Key initiatives include:
 - a. advanced endpoint protection: state-of-the-art tools to secure all government connected devices
 - b. 24/7 threat monitoring: constant surveillance to detect and respond to suspicious activity in real time
 - c. vulnerability assessments and penetration testing: regular system reviews to identify and fix weaknesses before they are exploited
 - d. email threat detection: intelligent solutions to prevent phishing and email-borne attacks
 - e. cyber awareness training: educating public officers to serve as the first line of defence and updated disaster recovery and incident response plans ensuring business continuity and fast recovery during disruptions
2. Delivering high performance, scalable and resilient IT infrastructure. To support the government's growth and service expectations, IDT is modernising its core infrastructure with a focus on speed, stability and long-term reliability. Planned efforts include:
 - a. replacing legacy hardware: phasing out outdated systems to reduce failure risk and increasing performance
 - b. application consolidation: eliminating redundant software to streamline processes and lower costs
 - c. rewiring Global House: a critical upgrade to boost connectivity and improve network stability and prepare for future needs
3. Supporting data-driven decision-making. IDT is investing in tools that enable departments to

transform data into insights and actionable outcomes. Key outcomes targeted are:

- a. real-time operational insights for faster and smarter responses
- b. identifying trends and opportunities to inform long-term planning, and
- c. evidence-based decision across government. This will be enabled by user-friendly dashboards and clear comprehensive reporting tools to empower every department to measure, manage and improve performance

Mr. Chairman, IDT is simply not reacting to a crisis. They're using it as a catalyst for transformation. This budget represents a strategic shift away from patchwork fixes towards a coherent, protected and people-centred digital government.

To Acting Chief Information Officer, Gina Benjamin and the IDT team, I thank you. Your resolve in facing the unprecedented challenges has kept the Government running and allowed us to rebuild stronger. With this budget, we don't just recover, we leap forward.

This concludes my comments on Head 43, Information and Digital Technology and I'll proceed with your permission of course, Mr. Chairman, to Head 80, Project Management and Procurement.

The Chairman: Thank you and that, for those listening, is at [page] B-75 of the Budget Book.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: We're smoking, aren't we?

The Chairman: We are smoking.

[Laughter]

HEAD 80—OFFICE OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND PROCUREMENT

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I rise to present the budget for Head 80, the Office of Project Management and Procurement [OPMP] as found on pages B-75 through B-77 of the Estimates and Revenue and Expenditure Book.

The mission of this office is straightforward yet essential, *To provide oversight, guidance in project management and procurement, ensuring transparency, value for money and accountability across the Government.*

Mr. Chairman, the total expenditure listed on [page] B-75 is budgeted at \$925,000, representing an increase of \$51,000 over last year. The subjective analysis can be found on page B-76 and reflects the following as a result of the \$51,000 budget increase:

- Salary uplifts by way of an increase of \$44,000.
- Travel increased by \$1,000 for essential overseas training.

- Rentals increased by \$2,000.
- Materials and supplies increased by \$3,000.

Mr. Chairman, capital allocation currently stands at \$65,000, representing an increase of \$43,000 from last year. These details can be found on page C-10. This funding will support essential software applications and services that enhance digital tools and procurement platforms.

Mr. Chairman, the Office of Project Management and Procurement comprises of eight full-time staff, four Bermudians, one spouse of a Bermudian and two non-Bermudians. One post is currently vacant, a contract and compliance manager, and will be recruited this year to strengthen oversight and capacity.

Performance Measures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I now turn my attention to Performance Measures for 2024/25 located on page B-77.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the Office's performance measures for the fiscal year 2024/25 were achieved.

Business Unit 9000, Administration

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 9000, Administration unit

- produced and submitted all quarterly waiver reports to cabinet on time;
- completed 95 per cent of cabinet memoranda reviews within five business days;
- published the 2024 annual report;
- managed HR and budgets efficiently; and
- deployed affordable digital tools like RFX, Drafter and Bonfire to improve service deliveries.

Business Unit 9005, Procurement

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 9005, Procurement unit

- delivered eight training sessions (six virtual and two in-person) to 106 public officers;
- optimised cost by leveraging virtual platforms; and
- demonstrated strong value for money and increased training access across Government.

The Chairman: I'm pausing you there, Minister.

The Budget Book says five sessions, but that should be eight sessions, should it?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Umm—

The Chairman: One or the other.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: One or the other.

The Chairman: Okay, please continue.

Business Unit 90010, Project Management

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 90010, Project Management unit:

- Conducted six half-day sessions, in-person training sessions for 22 middle and senior level public officers.
- Training using hybrid methodologies based on PRINCE2 and PMI best practices.
- Customised sessions ensured relevance and high impact for project execution.

Business Unit 90015, Contract and Compliance

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Business unit 90015, Contract and Compliance—unable to deliver standalone training due to staffing constraints. However, integrated contract and compliance content into Code of Practice training with the Procurement unit.

And Mr. Chairman, the Code of Practice for Project Management and Procurement is currently under review and a revised third edition will be released shortly, accompanied by targeted training and communication.

Upcoming Fiscal Year

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, in the upcoming fiscal year, the Office will continue to produce quarterly waiver reports for the Minister and Cabinet and aims to complete Cabinet memoranda compliance reviews within five business days, targeting a 95 per cent on-time completion rate.

In partnership with the Department of Employee Organizational Development, the Office will deliver five training sessions on the introduction to the Code of Practice and four project management training sessions, alongside specialised learning initiatives such as planning projects for success and negotiation.

To further build procurement capacity, the Office will pilot a public procurement training programme in collaboration with the US-based National Institute of Government Procurement, with the goal of developing a syllabus that equips authorised public officers with foundational procurement skills and techniques. Additionally, the Office will publish its 2025 annual report in due course.

Mr. Chairman, the Office has aligned its future priorities with the Public Service Strategic Plan 2024-2027 and Bermuda's broader commitment to good governance. This year, the work will centre around five pillars.

1. Acting strategically. OPMP will continue to lead as a central authority for Government capital projects and procurement, ensuring alignment with national priorities and efficient resource use.

2. Human capital development. Design and deliver training to strengthen public officers' skills in project management, procurement, and purchasing.
3. Policy implementation. Roll out new updated policies, guidelines, and supporting notes to streamline operations and improve consistency.
4. Strategic sourcing and business opportunities. Guide ministries in sourcing strategies, explore cross-sector procurement opportunities, and implement framework agreements and vetted contractor lists.
5. Compliance and contract management. Build a robust monitoring framework to improve oversight of contract administration and enforce sound management and practises across departments.
6. Being customer-centric. OPMP is focused on delivering fair, transparent, and value-driven services tailored to the needs of government clients and the public.
7. Practical accessible training to develop flexible real-world training on project management and procurement available through multiple learning formats. Contract management learning modules will introduce a dedicated module to deepen officers' understanding of contract management and improve outcomes.
8. Specialised training/project training. Will launch new training tracks targeting the unique demands of IT and construction-related procurement and project delivery.
9. Putting people first. OPMP will embed transparency, fairness, and professional growth at the heart of its work by supporting all public officers involved in procurement and project oversight.
10. Code of Practice awareness. Ensuring each public officer is well-informed about the Code of Practice and their specific responsibilities under it.
11. Professional development. Deliver training guided by stakeholder feedback and promote careers in procurement, project management, and compliance through outreach and education initiatives.
12. Effecting digital transformation. The office is embracing technology to improve operational efficiency and transparency and accessibility to its core services. The digital platform transformation to migrate to a secure cloud-based procurement platform to better manage sensitive data and improve accessibility.
13. Digital case management. Exploring digital tools to track and manage internal office operations and client services.

14. E-learning integration. Embedding e-learning into procurement training offerings to expand access and flexibility for public officers.
15. Delivering excellence. OPMP is committed to high-quality results, better collaboration, and smarter procurement to deliver meaningful value to the Government and the public.
16. Optimise practices and performances to develop collaborative models and performance metrics to drive quality and efficiency in project and procurement processes.
17. Quality assurance and compliance so we can implement best practices aligned with international standards, ensuring the Code of Practice is consistently applied and simplified where appropriate for varying procurement values.

Mr. Chairman, the Office of Project Management and Procurement continues to evolve into a cornerstone of good governance, driving professionalism, transparency, efficiency, and how government plans and spends.

To the team led by Director Elaine Blair-Christopher, I extend sincere thanks for their focus, discipline, and integrity in service to Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my presentation of Head 80, Office of Project Management and Procurement, and my overall presentation for the Ministry for the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Members, we, and . . . Honourable Members and indeed members of the listening public, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2025/26.

We have been listening this morning to the budget debate, or the beginning of the budget debate on behalf of the Ministry for the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation. We have heard from the Honourable Premier initially on Head 9, the Cabinet Office, and then we have heard from the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation, Diallo Rabain, for the remaining five of six heads.

Is there any other Honourable Member who wishes to contribute to the debate?

I see the Honourable Member for constituency 10, MP Robert King.

You have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, Mr. Chairman,—

The Chairman: Good morning.

Mr. Robert King: —Members of this Honourable House and the listening public.

First off, I want to commend the hard work of the persons who work under the Cabinet, all the

supporting staff for the hard work that they do to meet the needs of this community.

So just, you know, to set the table here, Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation, pages B-38 through B-75, Corporate Headquarters for the Civil Service, *providing service and advice and guidance to other departments and to the public sector*. That's their role and responsibility. Department objectives on page B-39: *transparency and accountability, efficient and effective services to the Premier, Ministers, Cabinet, ensuring public value, ensure implementation of government reform priorities, inferred in a timely manner. Enhance government safety management systems*. So that's the framework on which they operate, and rightly so.

I'm going to move to headline [sic] B-40, Cabinet Office.

The Chairman: Yes, that's page B-40 of the Budget Book—B-40.

Mr. Robert King: Correct. I note that the London Office under [programme] 0902, Economic Policy and Foreign Affairs.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: [Business unit] 19035, London Office, \$1.68 million, actual; revised 2024/25, \$1.390 million; estimate 2025/26, \$1,456 million.

[Business unit 19045], Washington DC Office, \$393,000; revised 2024/25, \$415,000; estimate 2025/26, \$462,000.

[Business unit 19075] Brussels Office, \$342,000, actual 2023/24; revised 2024/25, \$410,000; and estimate 2025/26, \$343,000.

Under the—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no, just setting the table. Don't worry, I'll get to that.

Under the Cabinet Office, page B-41, current account estimates.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: [Page] B-41, Training \$17,000, 2023/24 actual; revised 2024/25, \$143,000; estimate 2025/26, \$50,000.

Professional Services, actual 2023/24, \$2.204 million; revised 2024/25, \$2.851 million; estimate 2025/26, \$3.775 million.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: So, regarding training, the question is, understanding that we're seeking innovation through digital technology, reliance on IT infrastructure and processes would suggest that training on the new systems

would be a priority to ensure efficiencies and improve performance with a new system. On the face of it, this budget does not appear to resource this need. The budget for training has been reduced by \$93,000. So, the question is, how does this reduction in training budget promote and support skill acquisition on the new format, especially for the more senior members of staff? How does it also, as the Minister stated earlier, seek to improve customer service?

Page B-41, professional services. These consultants are utilised for their specific skill sets to perform the tasks that require proficiency in . . . and other areas to support the Minister's objectives. Specifically what? Understanding that these needs were forecast prior, what cost benefit analysis was conducted?

Hon. E. David Burt: If I may, Mr. Chairman. Just a point of information.

The Chairman: Will you take a point of information, MP King?

Mr. Robert King: Sure.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: If I could—

The Chairman: Honourable Premier, you have the floor.

POINT OF INFORMATION

Hon. E. David Burt: Just to go back to . . . thank you Mr. Chairman.

Just to go back to the question on training. I just want to make sure I get it correct, because I heard the Shadow Minister say a reduction, but the budget shows an increase.

So, I just want to make sure I'm understanding precisely which one he's discussing.

The Chairman: So, I think he said page B-41.

Mr. Robert King: [B-]41.

The Chairman: And the revised of last year was \$143,000. The estimate, at least as stated in the Budget Book, is \$50,000.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, so he's comparing revised, not the original.

The Chairman: I believe so. I'll defer to the Honourable Member.

Honourable Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: I'm referring to the estimate for 2025/26.

The Chairman: Right.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Robert King: Correct. The revised of the original. Correct.

The Chairman: Thank you, I trust that that question is clear.

MP King, please, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-41, Revenue Source, 8316, PATI, Public Access to Information fees. What we see is an increase in salaries with no meaningful improvement in service delivery. What performance measures will be changed to ensure that customer feedback on service delivery performance will improve?

Head 9, page B-42, Cabinet Office, employee numbers.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: [Business unit] 19035, London Office.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: We had three employees, actual 2023/24; revised 2024/25, we had three; estimate 2025/26, five. According to what's been documented in employee numbers, I don't see 19045, Washington DC Office. I also don't see 19075, Brussels Office mentioned. I don't see any staff. What I do refer to is on Head 9, Cabinet Office, General Summary, page B-40, 0902, Economic Policy and Foreign Affairs. I see the budgets, but I don't see the staff that would be allocated.

The Chairman: Yes, I see. And that's page B-42.

Mr. Robert King: That is page B-42, correct.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: But in terms of looking for the salaries and the staff, refer to Head 9, Cabinet Office, General Summary, page B-40, 0902, Economic Policy and Foreign Affairs, so you can find the section.

The Chairman: [Programme] 0902 on page B-40 versus page B-42, yes. Okay. Thank you, MP.

Mr. Robert King: Question: on Head 9, Cabinet Office on page B-40, General Summary, 0902, Economic Policy and Foreign Affairs. The Washington and Brussels Offices have a combined total of \$825,000 recorded as expenditure. And as I've said, there are apparently no staff. If these two offices had been closed, the decision would have been made after careful consideration of

the pros and cons, and as such would have taken some time and planning. But according to what's here, it doesn't seem as though they exist. So, this must be a clerical error in terms of what's being recorded in the [Budget] Book.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Well, what I'm suggesting is it's in the [Budget] Book. It doesn't exist.

An Hon. Member: It's incorrect. It does exist.

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no, it does. But when you're listing the London Office, why aren't the Brussels and the Washington Offices documented there?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Okay, so they've got budgets, but they don't have a cost estimate. But we'll get to that. You'll be able to answer that a little bit later.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Yes, so the interesting thing is that we've got a budget that was two months postponed, so that—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Chairman: Yes, what is your point of order?

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry, Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to allow this Honourable Member to talk foolishness on the floor.

The Chairman: What's your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The [Honourable Member] is misleading the House. It is clear that the offices are not closed because they have budget allocations. So, the Member can ask his questions, but to make the pronouncement that these offices are closed on the floor of this House, where people are listening, is completely false and disrespectful to the Bermudians who are working in those offices.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you, Premier.
MP, you have your answer in relation to that statement.

Mr. Robert King: I would suggest that it's disrespectful to the listening public to have a Budget Book that doesn't accurately reflect what is happening. That would be disrespectful.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes, what is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Budget Book clearly and accurately reflects what is taking place. If the Honourable Member wants to ask the question, we can provide the answers. But to make assumptions and to state that these offices are closed is [factually] incorrect, and he should withdraw that comment because he said on the floor of the House that these offices are closed and that is not correct.

The Chairman: Honourable Member, MP King, please be guided—

Mr. Robert King: A point of clarification, sir.

The Chairman: —obviously you've asked a question, or you may ask a question.

Mr. Robert King: What I'm suggesting, Mr. Chairman, is that it gives the *appearance* that these offices don't exist or are closed because there's a budget, but they are not itemised the same way that the London Office has been itemised with the specific number. That is what I'm referring to. Whether or not they exist, that's another issue entirely. It's not recorded here next to the London Office.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Right, Honourable Member, I think we have the question, or I hope that those in the Chamber have the question.

Mr. Robert King: Well, it appears that the question is . . . it does exist, but it's not recorded as the London Office has been recorded in that specific section.

The Chairman: And this is in relation to page B-42 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Chairman: Right. Please proceed. I think the Premier has indicated he will answer that question in due course and you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Wonderful, thank you. Question: Has the public sector review completed? The business unit 19080 shows discontinued. If concluded, is this going to be tabled in the House?

The Chairman: This is page B-44, Honourable Member?

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Chairman: Right, so business unit 19080, Head of Public Service, page B-44, the Budget Book, references to discontinued.

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Chairman: Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-44, Head 9, Cabinet, Performance Measures, business unit 19045, Washington Office. Who is doing the job? How is this exceptional figure of three chosen as the target to achieve? With these targets being presented as aspirational goals, what is the target for the Casino Gaming Commission? I guess we should watch this space.

Question: What does this All Bermuda Party Parliamentary Group look like? It's the first that I've heard of it.

The Chairman: Just for clarification, we're on page B-43 and we're on business unit 19045 and you're referring to the establishment of the All Bermuda Parliamentary Group at the bottom of the page.

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Chairman: Thank you. Please proceed, MP.

Mr. Robert King: What does the All Bermuda Party Parliamentary Group look like? Is the Government suggesting that it form another political party?

[Laughter]

Mr. Robert King: I'm just . . . I mean . . . here, it's unclear what it actually is. So, I'd like some clarification on that.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Chairman. Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: What is your point of order?

Hon. E. David Burt: May I please ask, and I know it is not your role as you are sitting in the Chair, to please ask Members of your party in the Opposition, to learn this—

The Chairman: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is clearly misleading the House. As it has been stated in this House on many times, it has been stated in other places—all Overseas Territories have an All Party Parliamentary Group in the UK House of Commons, which is liaising with the London Office as other Overseas Territories do.

For this Honourable Member to get up here and say *we're starting a new political party* is nonsense. Can you please focus on the facts instead of making conjecture? We can answer the questions. If he doesn't know what it is, rather than trying to assume and saying, *Is the Government doing X, Y, and Z?* to say, *Can the Minister please provide clarity on that?* And we will happily provide the clarity for the Member, for the listening public, rather than engaging in this (in my opinion) shameless conjecture, which demeans this Honourable Committee.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier.

Honourable MP King, I think you got your answer there to the question on page B-43, but if not, please proceed.

Mr. Robert King: I want to thank the Premier and Finance Minister for giving me a clear answer on the question. So, I appreciate that, and especially the delivery of that answer. That was extremely helpful, sir. Thank you for that.

Page B-44, Head 9, Performance Measures, business unit 19080, Head of Public Service.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Develop and implement an updated Government reform plan. Actual outcome, 50 per cent, 2023/24. Revised forecast, 2024/25, 100 per cent. Target outcome, 2025/26, discontinued.

Hon. E. David Burt: Excuse me, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Sorry, are you inviting a point of clarification?

Hon. E. David Burt: I need to just try—

The Chairman: Honourable Premier, are you inviting—

Hon. E. David Burt: —to make sure that my team can answer the questions, if the Honourable Member will yield.

The Chairman: Is this a point of clarification?

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm just asking . . . Yes.

The Chairman: Okay. One moment, please.

MP King, are you happy to yield for a point of clarification?

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay.

The Chairman: Yes. Honourable Premier, you have the floor.
[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.
MP King, the floor is yours. We're on page B-44, I believe.

Mr. Robert King: Correct. Head 9, Cabinet Office, page B-40, General Summary 0903, Government Reform. We've got [business units] 19020, Safety and Health; 19040, Ministry Administration; 19055, Management Services.

The Chairman: And, MP, forgive me just for a second. We've gone back now to page B-40, correct?

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Please proceed.

Mr. Robert King: So, when we're looking at the budget, if we go back to 2017/18 for Health and Safety, and go all the way up to 2024/25, we've got over \$500,000. And we've got a similar sort of situation for [business unit] 19040, Ministry Administration, Management Services was \$591,000 in 2017/18. So, understanding that the purpose of government reform is to improve health and safety and the functioning, to ensure the welfare of the persons doing the job and persons affected by it, how do we then explain that the situation at the Department of Corrections continues to pose safety and health risks to officers, and this government has known about it, for more than two years?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman—

Mr. Robert King: Understanding that these audits have taken place, which have identified what the—

The Chairman: Yes. Sorry. We have a point of order?
One moment, please, MP King.
Yes. What's your point of order, Minister?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Member needs to be . . . The Member is misleading. The debate on national security that he participated in was last week. He's asking us questions about the National Security budget.

The Chairman: Right. MP King, you have the floor.

My understanding is your questions were about page B-40, [General Summary] 0903, safety and health administration, but if I've misunderstood . . .

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no. No problem, because the Minister also made a statement about uniformed services and the health and safety.

The Chairman: I see.

Mr. Robert King: Corrections would be considered uniformed services.

The Chairman: Okay. Well, obviously, be guided—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Absolutely not.

The Chairman: One moment, please, [Shadow] Minister. Just be guided not to reflect on the debate, but you're entitled to ask questions on those topics on those pages.

Mr. Robert King: So, basically, this is in reference to the Minister's statement, not specifically as relates to this Cabinet head.

The Chairman: The statement in the brief as given this morning.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, exactly.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

Mr. Robert King: So, the question is, health and safety audits were conducted, uniformed services, et cetera, and known hazards to staff and inmates have gone unaddressed despite the audit.

So, I would like to know what strategic plan is in place with deadlines, timelines, et cetera, and resource allocation to address those serious needs. Especially understanding that there was a recent incident, I believe it was yesterday, when officers, I think it was approximately five, were seriously injured.

Head 9, Cabinet, performance measures, page B-44, business—

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE CHAIRMAN

HOUSE VISITOR

The Chairman: Member, before you move on, let me just recognise the Cabinet secretary who is in the Gallery. Thank you.

Please proceed.

[Committee of Supply, continuing]

Mr. Robert King: Business unit 19085, PATI/PIPA Unit. Performance measure: *respond within five working days to request assistance with administrative and legal aspects of public access to information*. Actual outcome 2023/24, 100 per cent. Revised forecast 2024/25, 100 per cent. Target outcome 2025/26,

100 per cent. *Implementation of privacy initiatives for the Government of Bermuda*, 100 per cent, 100 per cent, 100 per cent. *Respond within five working days to requests for assistance with administrative and legal aspects of Personal Information Protection Act*, non-applicable, non-applicable, 100 per cent.

The Chairman: Yes, and that's in relation to page B-44, business unit 19085, PATI/PIPA Unit.

Mr. Robert King: That is correct.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP King. Please continue.

Mr. Robert King: Question. Page B-44, business unit 19085, PATI/PIPA Unit. Performance measures.

The [brief] from the Minister spoke to customer satisfaction surveys. Wouldn't it be more . . . the question is, wouldn't it be helpful to determine if the response was productive? Were the achieved goals and aims achieved by those measures?

Question: Page B-44, business unit 19085, PATI/PIPA Unit, performance measures. What specifically is being referred to? The inference I'm drawing is that the recently introduced fee structures and new processes are anticipated to have the impact of keeping public information private, but this cannot be the case. But it would appear to be—which is supported by a projected 90 per cent reduction in revenue. So, I'm wondering how that projection was arrived at, or that prediction was arrived at. Page B-44, business unit 19085, PATI/PIPA—

The Chairman: Yes, still there.

Mr. Robert King: —Unit, performance measures. Question: Understanding that there is a suspicion and or perception that charging fees and the matrix that has been formulated regarding PATI requests will dissuade members of the public from seeking the answers to questions that are in the public's interest, how will the Government measure performance in this area?

On one hand, PATI requests will now potentially become a source of revenue for the Government, and making money is a good thing. But if the request is not handled with the respect and transparency and the standard of accountability that is demanded of Government officials and obviously the civil service

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Just a moment, MP King. We have a point of order.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of clarification.

The Chairman: Point of clarification.

MP King, will you take a point of clarification? Will you yield?

Mr. Robert King: Not yet.

The Chairman: Not yet.

Sorry, Minister. He won't yield.
Please continue.

Mr. Robert King: On one hand, PATI requests will now potentially become a source of revenue for Government. Making money—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

Mr. Robert King: —is a good thing.

The Chairman: One moment, please, MP. We have a point of order.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If he doesn't want to accept the point of clarification. Point of order.

The Chairman: Yes, point of order. What's your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[*Standing Order 20: Anticipation*]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Member is anticipating debate. As he knows, we will be debating the budgets for the Privacy Information Commissioner and the other—I can't remember the name of the other head—on the non-ministries later this afternoon.

And these questions he's asking will be answered then.

The Chairman: So, Minister, as I see it, the business unit under discussion 19085 is at page B-44, and it's in this debate. And, therefore, as long as he is not misleading the House—and if he is, you can pull him up on it—he's entitled to ask these questions, I think.

MP King, you have the floor, but please be guided by the point about not anticipating a debate, which will happen later on today. But you're entitled to ask questions on page B-44 as you were.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you for your guidance and input from the Minister as well.

But if the requests are not handled with respect and transparency and the standard of accountability that is demanded of Government officials and officers of the civil service, the reduction of PATI requests may be interrupted wrongly.

So, I'm asking, what measures are going to be put in place to ensure that PATI requests are given the respect and the accountability and responsibility for treating each request properly. What measures will be put in place to do that? Because as it's been stated by constituents and others in the community, and also by the Information Commissioner, there were some concerns that the policies and procedures that have been

materially changed as relates to PATI may cause some unintended consequences to the detriment of the people of Bermuda.

So, the question is, What is the performance measurement matrix to ensure that PATI requests are handled ethically, legally, and professionally, understanding the competing interests of revenue and the seeking of the truth?

I know this must have been extremely difficult to figure out. And for clarification, this is not a rhetorical question.

We know that in the past—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again, point of information, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: Just a minute, Minister.
MP King, will you take a point of clarification?

Mr. Robert King: Sure.

The Chairman: Yes, the MP yields.
You have the floor, Minister.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: As I stated, anticipating debate. If the Member had looked on pages B-36, the Privacy Commissioner's Office, and B-37, the performance measures that we will be debating later, the questions he asks are answered.

The Chairman: Okay, Minister, that's a fair point.
MP King—I appreciate that this topic is [covered by] two different ministries or, more specifically, between this Ministry and the non-ministry debate for later this afternoon, so I will give you some leeway.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, yes, that's fine.

The Chairman: But do be guided by the answer, and I think the answer from the Minister was a fair point.

Mr. Robert King: Well, you know what?

The Chairman: Thank you. MP King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: In the spirit of collaboration, absolutely. I mean, I'll have another opportunity, and this Honourable House will, to revisit it if necessary. So, thank you for that.

The Chairman: Please continue when ready, MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-43, business units 19000 through 19080, performance measures.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: [Business unit] 19000, General Administration.

The Chairman: That's the top of page B-43, yes.

Mr. Robert King: Actual outcome, 2023/24, three-day turnaround of Cabinet conclusions, 90 per cent of the time; 100 per cent revised forecast, 2024/25; 100 per cent target outcome, 2025/26.

The question I have regarding [business unit] 19000, General Administration performance measures is, What are we actually measuring? If we're saying that 90 per cent of the time you've got a three-day turnaround, this doesn't appear to be something that we need to measure because we're achieving the targets, especially when you look at some of the other performance measures which have actually dipped. So, I'm just wondering why we are measuring this, a three-day turnaround, 100 per cent of the time with a 90 percent. It just seems like a waste of space on the page.

Page B-43, business unit 19020, Safety and Health performance measures. Questions: How many of the audit recommendations have been addressed? Sessions House—what's the plan to fix the health and safety problems there? When is it going to be fixed?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Please proceed.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-43, business unit 19020, Health and Safety . . . Safety and Health performance measures. How many of the recommendations remain outstanding? How many buildings are still offline waiting to be repaired?

Page B-43, business unit 19035, London Office performance measures. Purpose of the office, roles and responsibilities, will it be resourced according to performance and meaningful targets met?

Head 9, Cabinet Office, page B-41, Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, object code . . .

The Chairman: Yes, page B-41.

Mr. Robert King: Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, object code description. Since being elected in 2017 and excluding COVID-19 spending, Cabinet Office spending has more than doubled, driven by a 113 per cent increase in salaries, 11 per cent (much higher than inflation) and a 250 per cent increase in professional services, yet the employee numbers did not fluctuate significantly. So, the question I ask is, although salaries have been increased, there does not seem to be a correlation between a salary increase and a commensurate improvement in service delivery.

So, I'm wondering why that is and what specific measures are put in place to ensure that persons are being fairly and appropriately compensated, especially

when we consider that there have been many issues that have been as yet unresolved. So, I want to know what meaningful, specific, strategic plans are going to be put in place to ensure that persons are fairly compensated and are also held accountable to provide services, quality public service, to the people of this community. I mean, fundamentally, what benefits did Bermuda receive materially as a result of this spending?

Head 9, Cabinet Office, page B-41, Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates, object code description.

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Rentals. Actual Outcome, 2023/24 \$1,093,000. Revised Forecast, 2024/25, \$1.144 million. Estimate, 2025/26, \$1,135,000. Question: For a staff of 45 and expected to grow to 51, it appears disproportionate. Furthermore, wouldn't it make good economic sense to repair, renovate an existing government building or to purchase a building instead of paying high rents? But then, I guess it depends on who the landlord is.

How is this considered to be a good use of finances, especially when we add on the cost of electricity and other expenses? This short-term approach does not appear to be prudent and responsible use of government funds, and it is Cabinet, that is, the Ministry, whose responsibility it is to set the standard for government departments in the civil service. We in this Honourable House have come to accept that it's okay to watch our House of Assembly located a stone's throw away from this rented office space as being normal.

Meanwhile, you have wars raging in the Middle East, Africa, and Eastern Europe, where people are having their homes destroyed by war, who can do nothing about it because they are focused on staying alive. We have a choice. When we look at a historic budget surplus, two historic budget surpluses, money doesn't appear to be an issue.

When we have the recent cases of, for example, Savvy Entertainment, \$800,000; Sandys 360, \$800,000; Bermudiana Beach Resort, over \$100 million spent, and the breakage fee of almost \$500,000; the Casino Gaming Commission, \$16 million and counting. The question I have is this—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Well, you know what? We've already gone past that.

[Laughter]

Mr. Robert King: And then the breakage fee of almost \$500,000. The question I have is this: If we have an economy that is growing, a historic surplus for the second time in history, under a Progressive Labour Party Government, why hasn't the Honourable Premier and

Minister of Finance made getting this actual House in order and lead by example? We talk about repurposing and bringing on the properties, bringing on line properties that have been abandoned and not fit for habitation.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

Mr. Robert King: However, the words we—

The Chairman: Just a moment, please, MP.
Pause. Yes, we have a point of order.
What's your point of order, Minister?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm just trying to figure out . . . the MP, I believe, is misleading the House. He's going into surpluses and rental for this building, which would come under the Legislature, which would, again, be anticipating debate.

I'm just wondering what performance measures are we talking about or what page are we speaking of with this latest rant *[sic]*?

The Chairman: So, I had understood, leaving aside the word "rant," I had understood that we were on page B-41 under Rentals, under subjective analysis, but I will let the Honourable MP confirm where he was.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I was just . . . because he had mentioned rent, and he said—

The Chairman: Oh, rent, not rant—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —where we are now. He said rentals and where we are now, which would fall under the Legislature and not under the Cabinet Office.

So, I'm just wondering what are we actually talking about because he then talked about wars.

The Chairman: So, MP—

Mr. Robert King: It's all for context, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes. I mean, obviously, try to . . . you're entitled to make your comments.

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

The Chairman: They don't have to be questions as directed by the speaker, but you do need to link them to a line item, and my understanding is you were on the subject of rentals.

Mr. Robert King: Yes. The point I'm making—

The Chairman: So, let's try to keep it in that area.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you. Thank you.

The Chairman: Yes, you have the floor, MP.

Mr. Robert King: The point that I'm making with my continued rant is that we should not continue to pay rent for properties when we have properties that need to be renovated, repurposed. When we are supposed to set the example for the civil service, how can we when we don't keep our own house in order? It makes no sense. It's disingenuous.

The Chairman: MP, while you are checking your notes, for the benefit of Honourable Members and the listening Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for budget year 2025/26, and the debate this morning is on the Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation.

We have heard this morning from both the Premier and also from the Minister for the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation, Diallo Rabain. We are now hearing questions and comments and debate from the Honourable Member for constituency 10, Robert King.

We have about another 15 minutes or so before the lunch adjournment.

MP King, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. So, the question I have is, when are we going to fix our broken home if we want to make sure that money for rentals of over a million dollars per year is reduced? The only way we can do that is if we move into buildings that we own.

Those are my submissions. Thank you.

Are we going to continue on?

The Chairman: We have another 15 minutes. So, would you like to continue with questions for the next 15 minutes? No, we're not rising early, unless anyone says otherwise.

No. So please continue with further questions.

Mr. Robert King: So those are my questions.

The Chairman: For Head 9?

Mr. Robert King: Yes. So, I'll wait for the answers.

The Chairman: Well, let me just check.

Honourable Premier, do you want to close out Head 9 before lunch, or do you want the Honourable Member to put questions on all heads? I'm in your hands.

Hon. E. David Burt: I've been informed that there are additional questions from the Opposition on Head 9, so we'll take them all.

The Chairman: Fine. No problem.

Honourable Member King, if you're going to pause there on Head 9, let me just see if there are any other Members who wish to contribute to the debate.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you.

The Chairman: Or you can proceed with further questions.

Are there any other Honourable Members who wish to continue the debate?

I see . . . no. Yes? Okay.

The Honourable Member for constituency 25, MP DeCouto. You have the floor. And as I said, we have about 15 minutes or thereabouts.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Okay. Turning to page B-41.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Under Revenue, the PATI fees was for last year budgeted at \$50,000. Revised is at \$50,000 and estimated to come in at \$5,000.

Can we understand if that revised estimate of \$50,000 is simply a carryover of the budget or have there been substantial fees actually paid? And then what is the difference between the . . . if substantial fees were actually paid in 2024/25 to get to \$50,000, how do we arrive at the \$5,000 estimate for the coming financial year?

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you.

Regarding the PIPA/PATI unit on page B-40, [business unit] 19085, the budget does seem relatively flat. And I'm referring also to the Government initiatives, as mentioned in the Throne Speech, on making more information publicly available to the public. Will the PATI/PIPA unit be involved in advising on that? Will that be a sort of separate group of people?

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I turn now to page B-42, employee numbers, and I see the addition of two people in the London Office. And if that was already addressed in the brief, I do apologise.

The Chairman: It was addressed in the brief.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you. I will skip that question.

The Chairman: Yes, there was a new deputy consular officer to assist Ms. Durrant, and there was a second post identified.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Great. Turning to page B-43, and I'm looking at business unit 19045, the DC Office.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And the All Party Parliamentary Group. From the Premier's comments, I take it to . . . I'm understood to believe that actually probably applied to the London Office. Could we get some description of who's in that group? And if it's a long list of people, maybe a general description of the sorts of members who are in it. We maybe don't need the full list of individuals.

Remaining on this page—

The Chairman: Page B-43?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, page B-43. The up-to-date database of Bermudian—in the same business unit, the 19045 DC Office—the database of Bermudian college students residing in the US. Could we be informed as to how that database is compiled and how that 50 per cent revised estimate for 2024/25 is arrived at?

I believe you'd probably have to know the total number of students from Bermuda in the United States to arrive at that 50 per cent. So, we'd love to understand how the Government arrives at that number.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And what they think it is. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Right. The direct . . . remaining on the same page, B-43, turning now to business unit 19035.

The Chairman: Yes, London Office.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, deliver on UK policy through seven UK government departments. Could we get a highlight of what they believe the top two priorities would be? For that policy objectives.

And then turning now to page B-44, under the head of Public Service, performance measures 19080.

The Chairman: Yes, I see that.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Customer complaints logged and responded to within 48 hours. I do appreciate that in 2023/24 [and] 2024/25, there seemed to be some system issue. But the revised forecast is only at 30 per cent with a target for this year of only 50 per cent. Could we have some commentary on why such a low target going forward? Because I would imagine a response could be as simple as an acknowledgement that we've received your request.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: With a case number.

Those are my questions for this head, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Member for constituency 25, MP Douglas DeCouto.

Does anyone else . . . I see someone else wants to contribute to the debate, or we can move for lunch.

No? You're going to come? Yes. It's MP . . . the Honourable Member for constituency 12.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and to the listening Bermuda.

As we go through these heads, I wanted to turn over to page B-63.

The Chairman: Yes, thank you, MP Cannonier.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Under employee numbers. And the Minister mentioned Minister "*of*" as he mentioned.

The Chairman: Minister *for*.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes.

The Chairman: Minister *for*. Minister *for*.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh, *for*. Minister *for*.

[*Laughter*]

The Chairman: I did actually check, and he is the only Minister *for*, everyone else is Minister *of*.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I'm not sure how the duties change.

The Chairman: There we are.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Or differ.

The Chairman: He's going for it.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Under [business] unit 53050, Digital Services, the Minister mentioned about 10 positions that were funded for that we still need to fill. I was hoping that maybe . . . and I was trying to listen intently. He was reading so fast. But what exactly does a digital service person . . . what exactly do they do? And is this a hard-to-fill position?

I know that sometimes within Government, some of these positions are hard to fill, and that's quite a few people, 10-people positions.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That we want to fill. So, if you could give us a little more detail about what exactly is it that they do, and are they likely to come locally? Do we have to recruit overseas for this type of position? And what's the significance of this, meaning that we really need 10 people? Give us more of a significance of why we need to fill all 10 of these positions, which I'm sure we need, obviously.

And then, if we can turn over to page B-65, under Training, business unit 53080. And I brought this up in talking about training.

The Chairman: This is still under the Department of Information and Digital Technologies.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. My apologies.

The Chairman: No, no. I'm with you, page B-65.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Head 43.

Just curious as to how are we systematically working through the training of all departments in relation to some of our vulnerabilities, like a cyberattack. So, we know that we've been trying to upgrade everyone in these different departments. I mean, just opening up the wrong email or opening up an advert or something like that. What are some of the things that we are doing to work with all of the departments and getting everyone trained up and aware, even if it's not necessarily formal training, but aware of the vulnerabilities. How are we working through that with the training?

And then, here we go . . . when it comes to system integration, which has been a thing for some time now, and the Premier has himself taken on some of this to ensure that we get upgraded and systems are integrated within the Government itself. It is difficult sometimes for people when they have to go from one department to get this, and then they've got to go to another department to get this, all to just make sure that they get copies of something or get qualified or verified for something.

How are we coming along with system integration where we can ease some of the stress for the work that we're doing for the public to ensure that the systems are integrated? Can we get a progress report on that? Just a little bit about some of what we probably already have integrated. I mean, the Premier has spoken to some of that stuff before.

The Chairman: Yes. Yes, he has.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: But how are we progressing along? There was a time where even the—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, there was a time where the phone systems weren't even integrated. So, where

are we with that process and progressing there? So, system integration.

And the next question I have would be is, with getting advice, and we know we've had consultants come in and advise us and give us some direction going forward on some of the progress of integration and even security when it comes to cyberattacks. Are we still using any consultants to guide us through the process? I can recall I was on Front Street, and I had gone to a restaurant. What's the restaurant up top there? Not Port. Above Brew. What's the restaurant above Brew?

The Chairman: Pickled Onion.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Pickled Onion. Yes. My favourite pasta there.

The Chairman: It would be something better.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And there were some guys from Google, right? Guys—huh?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: No, not Port O Call. No, no, no, no, no, no. Upstairs is too expensive for me, Premier.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Absolutely. Absolutely, mate. You're welcome to come any time. You're welcome to come any time.

But the question I have—

An Hon. Member: You'd have to pay for it.

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes—

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The question I have is, are we using any consultancy services?

The Chairman: This is on professional services.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes—

The Chairman: [Page] B-63.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, correct. Are we using any professional services to help guide us through, not just with the integration of the process, but also with potential cyberattacks and the like?

And I brought up Google because I went there for lunch, and these Google guys were there, and they were just talking about how they were looking to help

Bermuda. And so, I'm not sure who we're using. Maybe we're using them. I don't know. But it's a two-pronged question in that, who exactly are helping us through the process? IT is a specialised area, you know, and it's not always where you can find the expertise just on the Island. You might be able to find some from, steal some from the international business, but . . . so—

The Chairman: MP Cannonier, we are probably going to pause there and go to lunch, but if you only have a few left, then I'm happy to let you.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, just one more question then.

The Chairman: Okay, I'll let you finish if that's all right. Go ahead.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, just one more question. And over on page C-9.

The Chairman: Yes—is that grants?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: No, capital—

The Chairman: No, capital acquisitions.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Acquisitions, yes. I must say I'm glad to see the investment of \$6.5 million.

The Chairman: This is on information digital technology still?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That's correct, on information digital technology.

The Chairman: Indeed, Cabinet as a whole.
Yes, I see.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And I'm glad to see that we have this commitment. I'm sure it probably is costing us way more than that to get us to where we need to be. And so, I was just curious, the Minister was talking about network upgrades, and he mentioned firewall enhancements and the like. If the Minister can tell us a little more about where we are with securing ourselves and how comfortable he feels that we are. I know this is a work in progress, so I get it. This is not an easy area, so it's always something to upgrade because hackers are always trying to upgrade their skill sets as well.

But are we in a position now, three years on, since the major cyberattack, are we a bit more comfortable with where we are infrastructure-wise, technology-wise, firewall-wise? And what are some of the things that we can foresee going in the future? What are some of the plans going into the future based on where we are just today?

What can the Minister tell us, how we can be a bit more confident? There's no 100 per cent proof, so it could happen—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: It could happen next week, whatever the case may be. So, I've asked the question. I have asked the question.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Cannonier.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I've asked the question.

The Chairman: If that's a convenient—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: If he can elaborate, yes.

The Chairman: —if that is a convenient place.

So, thank you, MP Cannonier. Thank you also to MPs King and DeCouto.

Premier, if you'd like to take us to lunch.

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

I move that the Honourable, I guess, Committee of Supply do adjourn until 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Honourable Committee of Supply do adjourn until 2:00 pm.

Any objection?

There being none, we move until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:32 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:01 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2025/26

CABINET OFFICE AND DIGITAL INNOVATION

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Members, we are resuming in Committee of Supply.

[Gavel]

The Chairman: Members, we shall resume with the Minister of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation. We are looking at Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 and 80.

We have approximately an hour and a half, I believe. I think it is one hour and 35 minutes. Correct?

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Approximately an hour and a half, so I believe we end this debate at 3:25 pm.

Are there any Members who wish to speak to Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 or 90?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Good afternoon, Madam Chairman, Members of the House and the listening public.

I will be addressing questions regarding Head 13, Post Office, page B-45 through B-51.

Head 13, Post Office General Summary, Operations 22410, Courier Services. Actual 2023/24 was \$239,000; revised 2024/25 is \$10,000; estimate 2025/26 is \$9,000.

Current account estimates Head 13, Post Office, page B-47, Description. Salary \$6.596 million—

The Chairman: Member, did you want to ask any questions?

Mr. Robert King: No, no, no. I am just setting the table. That's all.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: Just setting the table, that's all.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: All right. So we got salaries.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Robert King: Make sure everybody who needs to be at the table is. Right?

Salaries, the salary bump. That was explained and we understood that across the board. There was a salary bump that would increase the amount of expenditure in wages similarly. I do note on Head 13, page B-47, Training. Actual 2023/24 was \$13,000; revised 2024/25 was \$5,000; estimate 2025/26 is \$25,000. So page B-47, Training. Understanding that staff development requires necessary training and the gaining of experience especially as we move towards AI and technologies to improve speed and efficiencies, how do you account for the wild fluctuations in the training budget? In 2024/25 it was a mere \$5,000. How does this reduction in the Training budget promote and support skill acquisition on the new format especially for the more senior members of staff?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of clarification.

Mr. Robert King: Good.

The Chairman: Do you yield, Member? Yes. Minister.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I am at pains to try and explain to the Honourable Member, how to read a Budget Book. It was budgeted for \$20,000. The revised estimate means that despite being budgeted that's what was spent. Sometimes we spend less sometimes we spend more. That's why it is a revised estimate. This year we are budgeting more than we spent . . . than we budgeted for the previous year. That's how you read the Budget Book.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister. Member.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you. That wasn't helpful at all. We all know how to read a Budget Book. What I was asking for—

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: You do not.

Mr. Robert King: No, we do.

An Hon. Member: No, you don't!

Mr. Robert King: Actually, we do because that is why some things—

The Chairman: Excuse me. Speak to the Chair, please. Thank you. Your questions?

Mr. Robert King: Repair and maintenance, page B-47. How many buildings does the post office currently have? How many need significant repairs? Are there going to be any closures of post offices due to online shopping, e-billing and a declining population?

Page B-47, Rentals. Question: Why are we paying approximately over \$1.23 million in rentals? Wouldn't a strategic plan suggest that purchasing a building or renovating an existing building would be more cost-effective in the short- and long-term?

So, the question is, Why do we continue to rent buildings over the course of three years, six years? It's millions of dollars. We could actually have purchased a building which meant that we could properly establish ourselves in those locations—staff, training. Everything just runs a lot smoother if you are in control of the costs involved with operating your business.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: You'll have your turn.

Head 13, Post Office, page B-48, Revenue Summary, 8312.09, MyBermudaPost fees, actual 2023/24 is \$448,000; revised 2024/25 was \$509,000; estimate 2025/26 is \$523,000.

Head 13, Post Office, page B-49, Employee Numbers 125, 125, 125—across the board from 2023. Regarding page B-48, Revenue Summary, 8312.09, MyBermudaPost fees. Question: How is the difference of \$17,000 recorded as zero per cent, understanding that we need to be accountable for all spending of the people's money. We must be careful not to make too many slips of the pen and yet these errors appear to be common and expected. So I am just trying to understand how come there are so many errors in this budget given that extra time was given?

Page B-48, Revenue Summary, 8312.09, MyBermudaPost fees. Question: Understanding that the Government states that it supports local businesses, what measures does the Government take to ensure that it is not competing directly with local businesses? I'm thinking of Mailboxes and ZipX when I ask that question.

Page B-49 Employee Numbers. Question: Are there any plans to close down a post office or post offices due to the reduced demand due to population, eBills, online shopping, in an effort to improve efficiencies and save money?

Head 13, Post Office Performance Measures, [Programme] 325, Administration and Finance, found on page B-50. How does the post office plan to increase revenue with the reduced amount without raising fees? Employee numbers: Are there any plans to close down the post office or post offices due to the reduced demand?

Page B-50, Performance Measures. Question: Same question.

Those are my submissions for Head 13, Post Office.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads? Head 13, in particular, but other heads as well.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

Regarding Head 13, and associated with the revenue source, 8312.09, MyBermudaPost Fees, page B-48. Could the Honourable Minister please provide an estimate of the total cost required to run that service? Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you. Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43, or 80?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you.

I'll be speaking to Head 18, Libraries and Archives.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Pages B-52 through B-56. Having visited the National Archives I was most impressed with the professionalism of the staff. In particular, Ms. Karla Inlemann, who gave me a comprehensive tour of the operations and explained the vital role it has in preserving Bermuda's history and culture. What was apparent was the passion and commitment all employees demonstrated. And I was inspired.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Towards that end, I inquired about the needs of the Libraries and Archives.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: You enjoying the meal yet?

An Hon. Member: A full meal.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Mr. Robert King: Thank you for that. Encouragement always help—

The Chairman: Members, please speak to the Chair. Yes.

Mr. Robert King: I really appreciate the guidance of this Honourable House. Thank you for that.

Towards that end, I inquired about the needs of Libraries and Archives. It was learned that the Archives has outgrown its space and that in order to present and preserve the documents and books they need a purpose-built facility. I'm getting to the question now.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: I know that Minister Rabain also met with the incredible staff there. And I'm confident that he's in agreement with the comments I'm making with regard to this head.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Well, let's see how we end up.

It was suggested that creating another—

The Chairman: Member, before you . . . just make sure that when you do get to the question that you associate them with a line item.

Mr. Robert King: Okay.

The Chairman: Because this is not the general debate, so you have to be specific.

Mr. Robert King: Okay.

The Chairman: Okay. All right.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Robert King: So, I'm going to eat with my hands now. That's okay. It is a simple meal.

Pages B-52 through B-56, Strategic plan. What is the strategic plan to secure or repurpose a building or space to house the Archives in order to preserve our cultural artifacts?

Question: Regarding the Internet centre in relation to the statement that the Minister made, with regard to the Internet centre not being operational, can the Honourable Member provide an explanation as to how the Centre did not become operational? What were the barriers and what strategic plan is in place to provide youth and members of this community with a centre that will assist them in gaining the necessary knowledge and skills to compete successfully in the world of AI?

Question: Regarding the 25 arrest episodes at the National Library and one prosecution, what strategic plan is in place to protect members of the public, young and old and of different abilities, from harassment, threats, and antisocial behaviour? This has been an ongoing issue and is related to the culture of antisocial behaviour in our city parks.

Page B-55 Performance measures, [business unit] 28060, Adult Services. Question: What is the rationale for setting the standards so low? What are the barriers that are contributing to this disappointing service level?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Well, go to the section. You'll find it.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: No. Member, can you indicate which line item because if the Minister is to answer—

Mr. Robert King: Page B-55, Performance Measures—

The Chairman: —he needs to know what you are talking about.

Mr. Robert King: —[business unit] 28060, Adult Services.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, it's okay.
Page B-55, Performance Measures—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of information, if I may. If the Honourable Member wishes to yield.

The Chairman: Member? Yes—

Mr. Robert King: Well, actually, no.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay. Well, I will just say that we cannot answer the question because we do not know what he is referring to.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: So, if the Honourable Member wants an answer to the question, state what he is asking so we can answer it.

The Chairman: I will—

Mr. Robert King: I've already dealt with that.

The Chairman: —I will . . . Member, to make easier—

Mr. Robert King: Yes.

The Chairman: —because under Performance Measures you have different areas. If you state for each question which specific performance measure you are looking at, so for instance, if it is 28060, and you are talking about users satisfied with the main library programmes,—

Mr. Robert King: Yes, exactly.

The Chairman: —you can ask, you know, in what . . . how they propose to reach 100 per cent or something like that.

Mr. Robert King: Okay.

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: Fair enough. Thank you for the guidance.

The Chairman: You are welcome.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-55, Performance Measures, [business unit] 28060, Adult Services. Increased number of people attending programmes over previous year, 2023/24, actual outcome 250 per cent; revised forecast 2024/25 is -5 per cent; target outcome 2025/26 is 10 per cent. What is the rationale for setting the standard so low? What are the barriers that are contributing to this disappointing service level?

Page B-56, Performance Measures, 28110, Youth Services. Increased number of people attending programmes over previous year. Question: The standard is 16 per cent down to 10 per cent. So, you start with 16 per cent and then 2025/26, you have got the target down to 10 per cent. I am asking why the target is—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of clarification.

Mr. Robert King: —going in the opposite direction?

The Chairman: Do you yield to the point of clarification? Yes, the Member yields.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Well, we did have a conversation about how to read the Budget Book. These are not standards being set. This is an actual recording of the people who showed up. This is not . . . this is not a performance measure that is saying *This is the percentage we want*. This is recording the number of people who showed up.

Mr. Robert King: Well, that's helpful.

The Chairman: So does that help?

Mr. Robert King: That is extremely helpful—

The Chairman: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: —because . . . and the reason why it is helpful is if you see that the number of people who are showing up to your facility is low, if you are a restaurant or if you are a hotel you would take a look at that, look at the data, and then you would make some changes. What the Honourable Minister is saying is, *We will accept that people . . . fewer of them are coming here*.

The Chairman: Member, Member—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of order.

The Chairman: One second, Minister.

Member, you cannot speak for the Minister. And he did not say that. What you can do is ask a question that says, like, *What sort of measures will you put in place to try to increase the numbers?*

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you.

The Chairman: You can ask that kind of question, but you cannot speak for the Minister.

Mr. Robert King: I was getting there. I'm sorry.

The Chairman: All right.

Mr. Robert King: So that would be the question. What measures are being put in place so that you can inspire persons to show up and take advantage of the services?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Robert King: Okay. Those are my submissions under Library and Archives. Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay.

Are there any there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads falling under the Ministry of Cabinet Office.

No . . . yes, are there any other Members? Okay.

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Regarding the Head 18, Library and Archives, I did want to say thank you to the briefing, those who normally have a passion for the digitisation of key components of Bermuda's history. I know that the library has an extensive collection known as the "Bermuda Collection," if I have it correct. Could we have a comment on the fraction of that valuable resource that has been digitised by the library?

Thank you, Madam Chairman. That is my question on that head. But I can continue with other questions on other heads if that—

The Chairman: You may—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —would be—

The Chairman: —because we are looking at all the heads.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you.

Regarding the Department of Planning, I am turning to page B-60, performance measures and I see there is the business unit, Customer feedback satisfaction. And the revised forecast is 100 per cent. I presume that is for—

An Hon. Member: What page is that?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Page B-60, the second row under General Administration, business unit—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I see there is Conduct customer feedback satisfaction. I assume that means that that survey was done. But how would the Minister, how would the department quantify the customer satisfaction last year? And do they have a target goal for the actual customer satisfaction? I mean, for example, in some areas people use the term—

The Chairman: I think the Minister understood that question. Yes? Okay.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Those are my questions at this time.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: Yes.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Mr. Robert King: A moment of levity. We all appreciate that.

Head 32, Department of Planning, Employee Numbers, page B-59, 2023/24 actual outcome 32; revised forecast for 2024/25 is 33; estimate for 2025/26 is 36. Question: Staffing levels have not differed drastically, and we accept that digitisation improves service delivery through efficiencies. We cannot attribute poor service delivery to staffing. The question I pose is, What barriers to include management practices other are negatively impacting on service delivery?

Subjective analysis of current account estimates, page B-58, Salaries, \$3,447,000. Stable with an uplift. Employee numbers, stable. Might the training budget have something to do with performance results? [It appears that] \$1,000 for training contradicts the Minister's statements regarding staff development for training. What is the actual amount budgeted for training? What are the specific areas that have been

identified as being skill deficient? What specific time lines? What SMART objectives have been set?

The Chairman: Yes.

Mr. Robert King: Page B-61, Performance Measurement Permits. Question: What was the longest wait time for a commercial and/or residential permit? What specific strategy is being used to address the delays? Contract, staff, bonuses, overtime, fast-tracking applications. I remember some time ago that the Supreme Court actually cleared some of its cases by giving persons discounts. So, we can be innovative in our approach to solving problems.

Current Expenditure, page B-38, Cabinet Office training . . . No. That's it for that. Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Just a point of clarification on the process. If we have questions that come up later, will we have a chance to continue to ask questions?

[Crosstalk and laughter]

The Chairman: As long as appropriate time is given.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: If you don't speak for very long—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Understood.

An Hon. Member: Don't set the table. Ask your questions, it might be easier.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, when you want to have a feast, Madam Chairman, you must prepare it carefully.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

Turning to Head 43, Information and digital technologies.

The Chairman: Page number?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Starting on page B-62, I am just referring to my notes here, Madam [Chairman.]

I think we have heard . . . I guess I would look to . . . this is referring to the brief. We heard that there

was an acting chief information officer [CIO] in place. How long do . . . how long has that acting CIO been in place? And what are the plans, or when should we expect a full-time substantive chief information officer to be put in place, Madam President . . . sorry, excuse me. I'm having a little flashback there . . . Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Chairman.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is one question.

The Chairman: Is this falling under service support? Which line item—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I was referring to comments made in the brief by the Minister about the acting CIO.

The Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Also, the Office 365 deployment, was . . . was . . . was referred to. When is that plan to be . . . is that fully completed? And if not, when is the timeline for that to be fully completed? That would be my second question.

The Chairman: So, honestly, I just need to know what line item you are attaching that to.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, these were items that were referred to in the brief. And—

Hon. E. David Burt: It would be referring to a line item in the brief.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Sure.

The Chairman: When the Minister's read their brief, it does fall under a line item and/or head. All of that. So . . .

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, for the first question regarding the acting CIO, I think we could associate it with . . . on page B-63, under the employee numbers. I would imagine under the Admin and Management, the 53000, Madam Chairman.

For the Microsoft Office 365, for me that sounds like Digital Services and on page B-62, I would associate it under—

An Hon. Member: Capital acquisitions.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —Capital acquisitions. Thank you to the Minister for that assist.

The Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Let me just refer back to my notes. And under page B-63, under Security, 53090, for Security services such as monitoring and threat assessment and penetration testing. Do we have those as an ongoing subscription or it a sort of one-time cost? And if so, what is the annual cost of the subscription?

Hon. E. David Burt: A lot of subscriptions.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, well—

An Hon. Member: Finish your questions.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, this subscription is related to basically security monitoring, threat assessment, penetration testing. I think, especially with what was on the Order Paper these days we can appreciate the importance of that. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Those are my questions at this moment. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the heads?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: All right. Dinner time now.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Robert King: [Microphone not on.]

The Chairman: What page are you on, Member?

Mr. Robert King: [Microphone not on.]

The Chairman: B-64.

Mr. Robert King: [Microphone not on.]

The Chairman: Thank you. Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: In relation to protecting against cybersecurity threats. So, the question I have is: What percentage of the Government department are in full compliance with virus software and licensing agreements to make sure that antivirus software is up to date and functioning properly?

An Hon. Member: One hundred per cent.

Mr. Robert King: How many departments and areas?

An Hon. Member: One hundred per cent.

Mr. Robert King: Well, how many—

The Chairman: Excuse me. Speak to the Chair.

Mr. Robert King: Well, it could be one.

The Chairman: Speak to the Chair, please.

Mr. Robert King: One hundred per cent could be one.

The Chairman: Member, speak to the Chair. Is that your only question?

Mr. Robert King: That's my only question.

The Chairman: Okay.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 or 80?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Afternoon drinks now.

Mr. Robert King: [Microphone not on.]

The Chairman: I did not hear you, Member.

Mr. Robert King: Head 80, Project Management and Procurement, page B-75. Page B-76, eight employees. Page B-76, Current account training, 2023/24, \$1,000. Revised 2024/25 was \$3,000. And 2025/26 is \$3,000. Understanding that skill acquisition, maintenance and understanding also that the use of digital technologies, especially for the older folks and those who might not be tech-savvy, will require to be retrained and upskilled to ensure that they can meet the demands of their roles. So, my question is, Understanding the implications of digitisation of services, why is the training budget so low in comparison to what the apparent need is?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Any other questions, Member?

Mr. Robert King: Just a moment. Thanks.

The Chairman: I will remind the listening public that we are in the budget debate, the Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation. We are now looking at Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 and 80.

Mr. Robert King: I will ask another question. The statement made by the Minister in relation to training is that we put people first. I am not seeing how that is reflected in the budget, especially as it relates to training and resources for that department. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: It was a comment.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 and 80?

At this time I will call on the Minister if he has any responses that he wishes to share.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: I'll start it off.

The Chairman: Oh, you'll start? Okay. Thank you, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

[Pause]

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I will try to, as best as possible, to answer the questions which were posed for Head 9.

We will start, the Shadow Minister might not like the answers, but I am going to answer so hopefully he will learn the next time around the budget, or maybe even the next debate afterwards to ask proper questions so that he can actually get answers.

He asked a question insofar as the training budget has been reduced by \$93,000. The training budget has not been reduced by \$93,000. So, I cannot answer a question that is based on a false premise.

He asked a question for PATI, what performance measures will be implemented to ensure effective service delivery to the public? Now, of course, that is dealing with public authority. In other words, because there is the actual PATI office, per se, but the work in which we do in the office basically states that we continue to train. It is very difficult with persons having to do their regular jobs and also serve as information officers. But we will continue to support the work, and the brief did cover all the various training matters that we do surrounding there.

Of course, there was the question which came after the ridiculous assertion that the Brussels Office and the DC Office are closed, which as I indicated in the intervention which was highly disrespectful to the incredibly talented Bermudians who work and staff those offices in addition to—

Mr. Robert King: Point of order. The Honourable Member is misleading—

The Chairman: Member, just a minute. Your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Robert King: He is intentionally misleading the House.

The point is that where those two centres were supposed to be, next to the London Office, were not in the position in the [Budget] Book where they ought to have been. So, if they are not there, you could not refer to them. That's the point. They are in there because they have a budget, but in terms of the descriptive place where they are supposed to be, they were not. That was the point that was being made.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Hon. E. David Burt: It is very unfortunate that the Shadow Minister is taking the Shadow Minister of Finance's time who said he might want to respond with more questions. And I might just advise him that if he waits, he might actually get the answer. But if he wants to point-of-order me this entire time, it is perfectly fine. That's him, it is the Opposition's debate. But I am going to say what I am going to say in response to what he said.

So, it is unfortunate that the Shadow Minister made the assertion that these offices were closed. And if we want to remember what he said, he said, *I think there should be a whole bunch of planning in advance. So, I am surprised to learn and understand that these offices are closed because there are no staff who are listed for them.* And it has been stated, last year in the budget debate and in the budget debate before and also in this year's brief. The persons who are in those offices are not public officers, they are consultants. They are Bermudians and that is the reason why they are not listed underneath those matters because the people who are listed under manpower numbers are those who are actual public officers in established posts as per the laws of the country and underneath the Constitution.

But it is not correct to say those offices are closed. It is not correct to say that those offices are not staffed. It has been reported in this House who staffs Ms. Aliyyah Ahad, staffs the Brussels Office. She is an incredible worker. There is an intern in that office, a young Bermudian as well who is working over there. And in the DC Office it is Mr. Anthony Howell, who has been working in that office who is another talented Bermudian. Both of those young Bermudians have multiple degrees, work incredibly hard, support the office, support the country, et cetera

So those offices are not closed. That is the reason why there is no manpower numbers. And this is something that we covered last year and the year before. And I remember the Opposition used to be very good at reading what the responses were last year on these questions. And I hope that the Honourable Shadow Minister, maybe the Opposition Whip will remind the Honourable Member that in order to make

best use of your time you might not want to ask the same questions that have already been answered year after year after year and make false assumptions from them.

We will move on. There was a question regarding salary increases. And the salary increases are based on public sector negotiations that have taken place. So, I'm not entirely certain what more he wants . . . I am sure the Honourable Member was a former public officer. I think he would know how salary negotiations take place in regard to unions and collective bargaining agreements.

So let me state to the particular question because there is something that is an error on page B-43. On page B-43, it's listed under business unit, DC Office 19045. The last performance measure. It says, Establishing the Bermuda All-Party Parliamentary Group. That should be under the London Office. And the reason why this is a new performance measure is because as the Honourable House would be aware, as we did offer condolences, et cetera, for that, the Chair of the Bermuda All-Party Parliamentary group was unfortunately murdered in the United Kingdom due to terrorism which was widely covered.

And it was not a . . . and so the fact is that the London Office has established a particular performance measure to reestablish that group. That identifies finding a new Chair who will be a Member of the House of Commons to go ahead and to get that group [going] now that there is a new Parliament in place. I can advise the House that the work has not just started, it is well in train. The London Office has written me to ask my views and opinions. We have identified someone. I'm not going to disclose their name here. The London Office is going to write and hopefully that Member of Parliament will accept that chairman role. And we also have a number of persons who are familiar with Bermuda who we are inviting to sit on the Bermuda All-Party Parliamentary group so we can get it back up and running following the unfortunate, untimely demise of our Chair, Sir David Amess.

There was a question regarding the Government Reform Plan agenda and status. I gave a full Ministerial Statement on that in this Honourable House, and I advise the Honourable Member to read that. He asked when they will be shared and tabled. It was tabled that day and put it inside the public domain. So I cannot answer a question based on matters that are already inside of the public domain.

[The Honourable Member] had asked about health and safety challenges in the Department of Corrections which I think were covered in the brief on the very first day by the Junior Minister of Justice. I think they may have also been covered the Ministry of Public Works' brief. And I think they were covered in this where allocations have been made, and the updates were given there. So I'm not going to answer for other Ministers. What I can say is the Health and Safety Office is involved in the coordination of those particular

exercises. And the questions of which he's referring to are not under this specific budget line item.

There was a question on page B-44. Were the relative projections achieved for the units? And this I'm guessing is dealing with the performance measures for the PATI and PIPA units. Item number one, PATI/PIPA unit response to departments contacting for assistance. Item number two includes the developments of the privacy programme created leveraging international best practice. Guidance issued from the Privacy Commissioner's offices and in consultation with other jurisdictions who have privacy and data protection programmes in operations. And item number three is a new performance measure.

Moving forward. On page B-44 to PATI. I think it is important to note and remind that there is no fee to make a PATI request. We know the history of the upper limit. And appropriate limit amendments that were made last year in these Honourable Houses. And I'm happy to take any specific question, but I don't want to spend the time reading and rehashing what is inside of the law, as we are trying to make sure we actually dig into the details. So I'm going to try to be brief and only answer questions that are posed and are relevant.

I'm trying to move on through the questions that were asked. There was a question that was based around the London Office and judging performance. I will answer and say that the London Office maintains a constant database log for the assistance of Bermudians in the UK. The student database is currently 300. To ensure strategic oversight and constitute a policy, the London Office maintains a comprehensive cross-ministry policy tracker which monitors the progress of all relevant policy items to the Government of Bermuda that interact with international engagement, UK government coordination, and multilateral commitment. Over 60 policy items are currently being closely tracked in advance in coordination with ministries in Bermuda. The London Office staff are public officers and adhere to the same guidelines as the Government's governance transparency and accountability measures.

There's a question, Will PATI/PIPA advise the provision of more information to the public initiative. And the answer is yes. The PATI/PIPA unit works collaboratively with the groups enabling digital transformation to ensure more information management and privacy requirements are in place for the provision of proactive publication of information. The upcoming information upgrades to the government portal will provide greater capacity for information provided to the public. Also, the work of which we're doing in digital transformation, AI, I know I covered it inside of my particular budget brief on head . . . talking about exposure of financial information.

But even yesterday . . . and I'll talk about things that the Shadow Minister of Finance may not know. We are exploring the implementation of connecting the model context protocol into our JD Edwards EnterpriseOne System which will allow natural language

interactions so that members of the public can get information on financial information. Because it is not something that needs to be private, but it is just the difficulty of this. And this kind of gets to also the information with the Government Whip who was talking about, you know, these systems talking to each other. The advantages of which are taking place in the work and the resources of which you've seen significant additional resources insofar as information technology are going to enable that to be brought forward.

To make a small political comment in a response to the questions, Government is known for trying to keep its campaign promises. And we have promised to expose more information to the public and we will make sure to do that. And I'm happy for the Honourable Members opposite to hold us to account for that.

There was a question, DC Office, US-based college students, how is the list maintained and tracked across the compound? The database has not been completed. The 50 per cent completion mark is based off the total completion of the overall action. The DC Office is currently working for the Department of Education to complete the action. Currently the framework of which information will be compiled is how it will be implemented. And other matters pertinent to the establishment of the database have been worked out completing the first phase, hence the 50 per cent measure. And this is similar to what I had stated inside of the brief.

Page B-43, London Office, UK Government departments. What are the two top priorities for this office? The two top priorities are delivering on the outcomes of the Joint Ministerial Council of which there are 71 deliverable actions. Notable items: Bermuda is working with UK export finance on infrastructure, developing opportunities relating to credit guarantees and accessing further financing opportunities. Additionally, the London Office is working on exploring territorial extension for UK free trade agreements with their alignments with Bermuda's industries. And I am happy for the Honourable Member to refer to the JMC communiqué which was published, and I stated in this Honourable House in a Ministerial Statement in November.

I think the next question is for Head 43. I think I'm done with Head 9. I think it's over to . . . Oh, I have one more question for Head 9. Performance measures under [business unit] 19080, customer complaint's response number, performance measure, 100 per cent of the complaints receive an automated response. The department is in the process of onboarding required administrators to be trained to manage the back-up complaint system. This is something that is new. We committed in public sector reform, as you would well know, Madam Chairman, to make sure that we also measure. So, the fact that we've created an online feedback form, we are rolling out to various departments the forms that will go up, which are QR codes. Which most people know how to use. Where they can just scan or

automatically link. They can say whether they received good service or bad service. But all these things will get a response. And just for information since January 2025, so that's five months now, there have been 138 submissions to the feedback form . . .

I believe that is all for Head 9. I will defer to the Minister for the Cabinet Office for the rest.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier.

I call on the Minister. Minister [Rabain].

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I will begin . . . they were actually kind of going a bit not in order.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, I will start with, I believe it was the Honourable Member Cannonier who had asked questions about IDT. I do see a question . . .

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And so, I'm looking at . . . the first question is training, IDT. How are we working through the training of all departments with regard to protections against cyberattacks? IDT currently performs quarterly cybersecurity awareness training for Government users. It's aimed to arm users with best practices. Additionally, they do stimulated phishing of emails to make users more aware of threats. I also will add to that that if anyone who is a public officer knows, you get the e-mail that says you *must* conduct, you *must* do this self-training, and if you do not, your access to the network will be terminated. And you have to get it reset. But you have to show that you have gone through the cyber training for that.

Next question is [regarding] government system integration. How are we coming along with system integration? Can we have a progress report? On this fiscal year IDT will focus on establishing the foundation for future integration projects. The accelerator is a small phase integration and there are currently three accelerator 100-day accelerator projects that are going on. And I know two of them talk specifically about integrating government data together and to avoid . . . and I believe this is another one that MP Cannonier had asked about. And one of them is to address the *why do I have to submit the same information at multiple government offices? Why can't I do it once and it's spread and it's given to everybody?* So that's one of the projects that is currently being worked on. And I believe we're about 20 days into that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Twenty-five! See, my memory is getting better, Twenty-five days into that.

So, in 75 days we should have, I should be coming back here to say, *Hey, we have some solutions.*

Then we have cybersecurity consultants. Do we have them? Yes, we do. We do have and we do engage with consultants here and off Island as well to bolster our security posture. We currently have a security partner that provides 24/7 monitoring of our environment. With the Cybersecurity Act 2024, we work more aligned with National Security and are becoming less reliant on consultants.

Next question I have here. Capital acquisitions, IDT network upgrades. Where are we in regard to the level of data security? Are we in a more secure position and what are the projections? As rightly stated, the cyber landscape is always evolving. At the moment we have good visibility through endpoint protection; however, there will always be room for growth. With the capital investments projected for this fiscal year, we will continue to increase our security posture. This will always be continuous.

Next question, and we are still on . . . No, we've moved. This is Post Office now, Head 13. How do you account for the fluctuations in the training budget allocations? How many buildings are owned that can be renovated or used? I believe this came from Member King. The UPU [Universal Postal Union] mandates different compliance initiatives for member posts such as, disaster risk management, security, transportation [and] paper fee initiatives. Ongoing training is a requirement to keep pace with compliance with the UPU requirements. The \$5,000 budget increase in training is to develop more colleagues in different compliance requirements.

The BPO [Bermuda Post Office] does not own any facilities but occupies eight government buildings and one rental facility at Mills Creek. And to answer the gentleman . . . to answer the Member from constituency 10, when he asked about this very specifically, we did own the building that we now have to rent to use because it was at the airport that was sold off. And the Bermuda Post Office was asked to move from that and so the only one place they could find that could support the sorting equipment is the building they now rent. So, we were at a mail facility that was owned by Government and then it was not owned by Government anymore because . . . we all know what happened down there.

An Hon. Member: They gave it away.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Next question. Bermuda Post Fees, Revenue Summary. How is the difference for \$17,000 accounted for and what measurements are in place to account for errors in the budget? The BPO is continuously working to redefine the budget line item to be more accurate with expenses and revenues. The increase in \$17,000, MyBermudaPost, is an estimate for increased revenues as the service grows.

How does the Post Office propose to increase revenue without raising fees? The Bermuda Post Office is expanding service deliverables especially for entrepreneurs, small- and mid-sized businesses. The BPO also collects terminal fees from foreign posts to deliver mail and packages in Bermuda. The UPU legislates that rates can increase annually as the different products offered globally change.

Next question. Still on Post Office. Can the Minister provide the operational budget for the service? I think this was MP DeCouto. MyBermudaPost is part of BPO services which all colleagues may assist with, along with other postal duties throughout the day. For example, a courier may deliver a MyBermudaPost package, then a UPU package, and then perform a courier service for the Government. Once a package is received from abroad, it is considered a postal package of which revenues are collected. And the BPO will use all necessary employees to process and deliver it promptly.

And now moving on to head . . . so questions on Head 18, which is our Libraries. Customer satisfaction survey. How would the department measure these? This measure is simply about ensuring that it is carried out. And what we see in the [Budget] Book is the response rate of persons answering.

What is the training budget for? The training budget is targeted this year for scaffolding and accessibility training for building inspectors. Ah, I'm sorry. We've moved on to Planning. Okay? I'm still waiting for some answers for Archives.

We'll just skip to Planning and then come back to Archives. What was the longest wait time for a commercial building permit? The longest wait time for a commercial building permit was six months.

IDT question. Acting Chief Information Officer. How long in place and when would a substantive post be recruited? The Acting Chief Information Officer is in place since June 2024. And is on a secondment from BHB.

Microsoft Office 365. We have deployed 74 per cent of the 365 licences. This deployment is still ongoing. There is also work being done to train the workforce.

Security Services, threat assessment. Is what we have ongoing subscriptions? Yes. We have ongoing subscription costs for our security applications; however, as noted as the threat landscape changes, we must be agile as well. This includes evaluating software security options on a continual basis.

IDT cyberthreats. What percentage of the departments are in full compliance with licensing agreements to ensure that they are operating effectively? IDT has a continual patch management process to address the known security vulnerabilities. We will work with departments to help maintain their compliance with the application vendor. Licence agreements fall under the remit of each department.

Moving on to Head 80, OPMP. Training, skill acquisition maintenance, and regular training. Based on the importance of digitisation of services, why is the training budget so low in relation to the need? The \$3,000 referred to relates to the training budget for the OPMP team. Recognising budget constraints across Government, we are striving to deliver training needs in [the most] cost-effective way as possible. Where appropriate we are utilising free training programmes, including sessions offered through related professional associations and via the Department of Organizational and Employee Development, DOED.

Additionally, we are attending online training programmes rather than in-person and overseas offerings to reduce cost. In some cases, the public officers have done their own self-study programme to keep their professional designations, to keep current and abreast of industry practices. So, it sounds like they're doing really good with their budget and finding alternative ways versus flying overseas. Because I'm sure that would be reported if they flew overseas. We will talk about that.

Madam Chairman, I believe that's all the answers I have here. I think I've . . . I do recognise there was a lot of chatter but really, we couldn't decipher actual questions from some of the chatter. But these are the questions that we do have thus far. And I will take my seat. If anyone else wishes to ask [questions].

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Let me just say we are currently outside of approximately 40 minutes, 35 minutes before this debate ends. So I'm calling on any other Members who may wish to speak to Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43, and 80. I think I have called the numbers off correctly.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to those heads?

There being no other Members, I call on the Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, I move that the following heads, Head 9, Cabinet Office; Head 13, Post Office; Head 18, Libraries and Archives; Head 32, Department of Planning; Head 43, Department of Information [and] Digital Technologies; and Head 80, Project Management. Oh! I am reading the wrong thing. Sorry.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This is incorrect.

The Chairman: Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 and 80.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This is incorrect.

The Chairman: This is incorrect?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Because it is missing some heads.

[Crosstalk]

[Pause]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: All right. Madam Chairman, I move that Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 and 80 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43 and 80 be approved as printed.

Are there any objections to that?

There being none, approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation, Heads 9, 13, 18, 32, 43, and 80 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.]

The Chairman: So that moves us to the next debate which is on the non-ministries.

And I call on the Minister in charge.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, I move the following heads: Head 2, Legislature; Head 5, Office of the Auditor General; Head 56, Human Rights Commission; Head 63, Parliamentary Registrar; Head 82, Ombudsman's Office; Head 92, Internal Audit; Head 98, Information Commissioner's Office; Head 101, Privacy Commissioner's Office now be taken under consideration.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101 be taken under consideration.

Are there any objections to that motion?

There being none, Minister.

NON-MINISTRY HEADS

HEAD 2—LEGISLATURE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Madam Chairman, I am pleased to present the budget estimate for Head 2, the Office of the Legislature, as found on pages B-10 through B-13 in the Book of Estimates, Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.

The Legislature is of course critical to the Government in presenting and achieving its legislative agenda and policy objectives while also providing the forum for parliamentary oversight of the conduct and effectiveness of Government programmes and the management and accounting of the people's purse and Government spending. Part and parcel of this work is the appropriation of funding to the Government through the annual budget debates and approval of the

Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure by Members of the Legislature.

The Office of the Legislature's mission statement is, *To facilitate strong parliamentary oversight and administrative support services for a parliament that is responsive to the people of Bermuda.*

Madam Chairman, the total expenditure, as shown on page B-10 is estimated at \$5,811,000 for 2025/26, an increase of \$370,000, or 6.4 per cent, over the approved 2024/25 fiscal budget.

Madam Chairman, as seen on page B-11 there are seven full-time equivalents in business unit 12000, Administration; 47 Members of the Legislature in business unit 12010, Ministers and Members; and one full-time equivalent in business unit 12015, Opposition Leader's office.

Business unit 12002, Youth Parliament provides funding for the activities of Bermuda's Youth Parliament and some compensation for the Youth Parliament Coordinator and Youth [Advisory] who oversee Youth Parliament activities and debates.

Through business unit 12000, Administration, the Parliamentary staff led by the Clerk to the Legislature provide a reliable and impartial administrative and support services for both Houses of the Legislature, the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate, and the parliamentary committees. This includes providing quality service on proper parliamentary procedures and practice in accordance with Standing Orders of each House. Administrative and clerical support services, research and IT services, legal advice where needed and other professional support services in ensuring that the House, the Senate and their parliamentary committees have adequate funding and resources to support their operations and fulfil their responsibilities.

Members of the House of Assembly and the Senate, following the General Election of February 2025 and convening of the Legislature in March, the House of Assembly remains composed of eight women, (22 per cent) and 28 men (78 per cent), as was the case in the last Parliament.

The new Senate following the election is again composed of seven female Senators, including the President (64 per cent), and four male Senators (36 per cent).

Madam Chairman, the current Parliamentary staff is as follows:

- Clerk to the Legislature, Mr. Clark [W.] Somner, serves as Head of Department and Clerk to the House of Assembly. He is the Accounting Officer for the department and oversees the parliamentary staff and operations of the department, the House, the Senate and the parliamentary committees, including the management of all aspects of the Legislative process, procedural advice and guidance to the Presiding Officer and Members.

- Deputy to the Legislature, Mrs. Kara A. Beale, assists the Clerk and serves as Clerk to the Senate and several parliamentary committees, including the Public Accounts Committee. Supervises the Sergeant-at-Arms and the Assistant Clerk. Assists the Clerk in the management of the department operations and all aspects of the legislative process including procedural advice and guidance to the Speaker, the President of the Senate, Committee Chairs and Members.
- Assistant Clerk to the Legislature: Vacant. Assists the Clerk and Deputy Clerk in providing procedural advice to Members, clerical and other supporting services to the House, Senate and parliamentary committees. Assists the Clerks with logistical arrangements for committee meetings and the drafting of Minutes. Also works with the Clerks and other staff in the planning and coordination of ceremonial events. This post was formerly held by Ms. Beale and the recruitment of a new Assistant Clerk will be undertaken in 2025/26.
- Parliamentary Information Officer, Mr. Derek P. Lamb, is responsible for managing all aspects of Hansard production and editing, including digital recording of House and Senate proceedings and some cross-training with other staff, manages, populates and updates the Parliament website, SharePoint, and our social media pages; actively coordinates the provision of various IT services for the Office and for Members of the House and Senate committees including extensive liaison with local and overseas service providers, IDT and the House and Grounds Committee; online streaming of proceedings, and information research services for Clerks and Members.
- Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr. Arnold E. Allen, is responsible for active liaison with the House and Grounds Committee, the Speaker and Clerks in coordinating maintenance matters at Veritas Place and at Sessions House and Grounds, [active] liaison with the Speaker, House and Grounds Committee, and clerks on providing robust security and safety arrangements at Veritas and at the Sessions House in coordination with the Bermuda Police Service Special Branch and other security services providers, and aide to the Speaker and performs ceremonial duties in House proceedings and other formal events such as the convening of the Legislature.
- Administrative Officer, Mrs. Nadine C. Place, manages office operations, communications, liaison with other local and overseas officials and parliaments as well as administrative and logistical support services for the Clerk and the Speaker and the President. The procurement of office supplies, equipment furnishings, cleaning and other office services, as well as food and catering for members of the staff, responsible for the purchasing and payment of billings and maintaining financial accounting records per Financial Instructions. [She] is responsible for all aspects of salaries and administrations for staff and Members of the Legislature and for administering the personal data and information records of all Members and staff.
- Administrative Assistant to the Clerk, Ms. Andrina T. Smith, provides administrative and secretarial support [service] for the Office of the Legislature, the Clerk and Deputy Clerk, as well as the Speaker and Deputy Speaker of the House, assists the Clerk in the preparation and distribution of House Order Papers and other documents, official correspondence and communications, and assists with the annotation of House and Senate proceedings when required, and works with other staff in planning and coordinating official and ceremonial events, and performs other duties that may be assigned by the Clerk.
- Aide to the Opposition Leader, Mrs. Judy M. Benevides, provides administrative and clerical support services to the Opposition Leader, including communications, administration of the office operations, and arranging professional services.

[Mr. Christopher Famous, Chairman]

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, you will note on page C-4 of the Estimates Book some \$900,000 has been allocated for fiscal year 2025/26 for capital development programme 75230, Parliament Building Refurbishment. The House and Grounds Committee has been informed that the Supreme Court is expected to have fully vacated the Sessions House early in fiscal year 2025/26, after which time the Ministry of Public Works will undertake a comprehensive assessment of the interior state of the building. This will take some time. The committee is advised that the substantive Capital Works on the second phase of extensive internal renovations of the building are still some ways off.

Members and the staff remain very anxious to see this work progress.

The Parliament building refurbishment project, including the maintenance and renovation of the facilities at Sessions House and its precincts fall under the remit of the Parliamentary House and Grounds Committee, now chaired by the Deputy Speaker, Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, JP, MP.

Rental accommodations and arrangements for Members' use and the Legislature offices and the

temporary House/Senate Chambers at Veritas Place are also funded through this programme.

Mr. Chairman, I now turn my attention to the specific current account estimates and revenue expenditure in the four cost centres for the Legislative office.

The total current budget allocation for the Legislature for fiscal year 2025/26 is shown on page B-10 of the Estimates Book and is \$5,811,000 which represents an increase of \$370,000 or 7 per cent when compared to fiscal year 2024/25.

Administration—Cost Centre 12000

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the objectives for the Legislature's Administration office cost centre 12000, for fiscal year 2025/26 include the following:

- Provide reliable advice on a range of parliamentary procedures and standards in support of the work of the presiding officers and Members of the Legislature, ensuring that the House, the Senate and the parliamentary committees have adequate funding and resources to support their operations and fulfil their responsibilities.

The Chairman: Please hold, Minister.

For the benefit of the listening public we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are debating the non-ministries. Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain is giving the presentations on Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101.

Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

- Improving understanding of the importance and leading role of the Legislature in the governance of Bermuda, informing and educating public service officers about the legislative process and their roles in making it happen.
- Facilitating legal advice to the presiding officers and Members on Constitutional matters, procedure and the interpretation of relevant legislation and parliamentary rules, as well as other professional services.
- Advancing the digital transformation of the presentation of Legislature, papers and reports in the Legislature and recording of parliamentary proceedings and safe storage of parliamentary records and information and considering how AI may be applied.
- Administration cost centre 12000, found on page B-10, has a budget of \$1,361,000 which represents an increase of \$65,000, compared to 2024/25. This budget covers administrative staff salaries, office supplies, data lines for Members' tablets, software maintenance for both Internet and Hansard systems, along with

overseas Hansard transcribers. Additional provisions of funding is allocated for the Speaker of the House and Members of the Parliament for legal services. The increase in funding here is largely related to the increase in staff salaries resulting from the recent uplift negotiated by the Bermuda Public Service Union and Government.

Youth Parliament—Cost Centre 12002

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, this cost centre is found on page B-10. The total budget is \$6,000 for 2025/26, which remains the same as for fiscal year 2024/25. This funding covers office supplies and administrative expenses relating to the Youth Parliament and stipends for the Youth Parliament Coordinator and Youth Advisors conducting Youth Parliament meetings, debates and other activities and educating the Youth Parliamentarians on parliamentary procedure.

Ministers and Members—Cost Centre 12010

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the responsibility of the Legislature is to enact laws, fund Government spending and initiatives, and to hold the Government to account through its parliamentary oversight function. In turn, legislators should be fairly remunerated for carrying out their legislative and constitutional duties. The total budget for cost centre 12010 found on page B-10, is \$4,310,000 for 2025/26, representing an increase of \$303,000 over the last fiscal year. Just over \$4 million of this funding is allocated specifically for parliamentary salaries of all officers and Members of the Legislature and the increase in this funding is attributed to the parliamentary salary uplift approved by the resolution of the House of Assembly in March 2025.

Opposition Leader's Office—Cost Centre 12015

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the role of the Opposition Leader's Office is important, and non-partisan administrative aid staff as required are needed to oversee its operations.

Currently there is one part-time administrative assistant working in the Opposition Leader's Office under the supervision of the Opposition Leader. In the 2025/26 [fiscal year] funding for this cost centre totals \$134,000, an increase of \$2,000 which results from a salary uplift to the aid to the Opposition Leader. The Opposition Leader's Office grant for the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$86,000 and is found on page C-17 which remains the same for the fiscal year 2024/25. The additional funding of \$48,000 covers the salary of the administrative aid.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I would like to turn your attention to page B-11. Subjective analysis of the current account estimates. Salaries increased by \$324,000. The salaries estimate for 2025/26 is \$4,809,000 versus \$4,485,000 in 2024/25. This \$324,000 increase in salaries resulted in negotiated BSPU's [Bermuda Public Services Union] salary uplifts for parliamentary staff.

And the aforementioned parliamentary salary increase for Officers and Members of the Legislature is to come in fiscal year 2025/26.

Communications

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Communications estimate for 2025/26 is \$99,000, a decrease of \$4,000 compared to last year. This funding covers cost for telecom, cell phones for the presiding officers, and data lines for tablets of Members and staff.

Professional Services

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The estimate for Professional Services for 2025/26 is \$400,000, a slight increase of \$2,000 from last year. This funding covers various professional services for the Legislature Office including the digital recording, online streaming, radio broadcast and Hansard production for the proceedings of the House and Senate, local consultancy services, overseas services including the transcription of digital recordings for the Hansard, legal and other professional services provided for the office, the presiding officers of parliamentary committees and funding of the operations the parliamentary oversight committees.

Mr. Chairman, Members may recall that prior to the last election a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee was established to examine [matters] surrounding the September 2023 cyberattack on Government IT systems. It is now intended that a Joint Select Committee again be established by resolution of the House to take up examination of this matter.

The Legislature Office anticipates using some of its professional services funding to provide secretarial/clerical support services for the work and operations of that Joint Select Committee following its establishment by this Honourable House.

Repairs and Maintenance

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Repairs and Maintenance estimate for 2025/26 is \$124,000 versus \$123,000 for the last fiscal year. This funding covers costs largely for software maintenance, \$91,000, and for cleaning services, photocopier maintenance contracts, pest control and maintenance of security apparatus and equipment.

Grants and Contributions

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Grants and Contributions funding for the Legislature Office can be found on page C-17 of the Estimates Book. The 2025/26 estimate of \$171,000 remains the same as last year. Members will note that \$85,000 has again been allocated to the annual grant to the Bermuda branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [CPA]. This funding is intended to cover the annual membership fees for both the CPA and the CPA Caribbean Regional group for the Bermuda branch as well as costs for anticipated increase in personal attendance and participation in overseas CPA conferences and seminars by Members and staff.

The annual grant of \$86,000 has been allocated again for the Opposition Leader's Office, matching the 2024/25 grant. The grant was increased by \$11,000 to cover higher office rental costs and operating costs of the Opposition Leader's Office.

Performance Measures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, Performance Measures on the work and activities of the parliamentary staff and Members of the Legislature, the House of Assembly, the Senate and the Parliamentary Committees, and our Youth Parliament, as well as statistics on the number of Bills and other legislation passed by the Legislature, reports and papers tabled, the number of visitors to the Parliament website and our Facebook and Instagram pages, and the number of persons who access the streaming of our House and Senate proceedings on the website can be found on pages B-12 and B-13.

Mr. Chairman, the Legislature Office is pleased with the increased number of visits to the Parliamentary website, www.parliament.bm, and increased to the Hansard. As you may be aware, Mr. Chairman, Members can and do make regular use of the Hansard as a research tool to gather information for debates. Streaming of our parliamentary proceedings is also very popular and can be readily accessed on the website.

Mr. Chairman, Performance Measures focusing on professional development opportunities and certification in parliamentary practice and procedures are encouraged for both Members and parliamentary staff. In 2024/25, our clerks and staff actively participated in select CPA Academy training programmes. And also in online meetings and discussions of the UKOTP CPA [UK-led UK Overseas Territories Project] Clerk Leadership Group.

The Clerk to the Legislature, the Deputy Clerk conducted a DEOD [Department of Employee and Organizational Development] training course in July 2024 and September 2025 on "Understanding Standing Orders" and "The Legislative Process" for senior government directors, heads of departments, and technical officers.

His Honour the Speaker and Madam President of the Senate were pleased to represent Bermuda at the 67th CPA Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC) Conference in Australia in November 2024, with the Speaker having been nominated as one of the three Caribbean regional representatives on the CPA Executive for a three-year term ending in 2027.

The Speaker and the Clerk together with the London Office Director, Ms. Kimberley Durrant, represented Bermuda at the Commons and Overseas Territories Speakers Conference held in Turks and Caicos Islands in April 2024.

The Clerk made a presentation for Members of the Public Service Executive and heads of departments on Parliamentary and In-Chamber protocols, including protocols for the presentation and tabling of legislation, papers and reports in the House and Senate.

At a Public Service Leadership Meeting in September 2024, the Deputy Clerk and MP Renee Ming represented Bermuda at the Public Accounts Committee at the UKOPT Oversight of Public Finances and Good Governance forum held in September 2024 in the UK.

The clerks and parliamentary staff also arranged and presented workshops on parliamentary procedures, protocols and the legislative process for new and returning Members of both the House of Assembly and the Senate in March 2025, as requested by the Speaker and the President. Members may also note that former MP, the Honourable Cole Simons was nominated to represent Bermuda as one of the main session presenters in the [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's] Post Election Seminar held in Anguilla in March 2025.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I must take this opportunity to recognise the hard work, dedication and professionalism of the Legislature staff, which has remained a very small contingent over many years, especially when compared with other smaller parliaments in the Caribbean region and internationally. The Presiding Officers and Members of the Legislature are obliged to thank the staff for their commitment and service in helping us meet our responsibilities in performing our legislative and oversight duties to the best of our abilities throughout a very busy parliamentary calendar.

This concludes the presentation of the brief of Head 2. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience we are listening to the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

And the Honourable Premier and the Minister of Finance will be speaking on Head 5.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. If you can just bear with me for half a second.

I will be speaking on Head 5 and Head 92 at this time. Just to, I think . . . did I just get an email?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, dear. No, I'm good. Thank you.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: It's no problem. Okay. I will do Head 5. Thank you.

The Chairman: You may proceed, Premier.

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

[Crosstalk]

HEAD 5—OFFICE OF THE AUDITOR GENERAL

Hon. E. David Burt: All right. Thank you.

Mr. Chairman, I will be presenting the budget for Head 5 which is the Office of the Auditor General, found on pages B-14 through B-16 of the Budget Book.

Mandate and Mission

Hon. E. David Burt: The mandate and mission for the Office of the Auditor General is, *To provide positive change by fostering accountability, transparency and efficiency within the public sector.* The Bermuda Constitution Order and the Audit Act 1990 provide the legislative mandate for the Office of the Auditor General, and the Office's primary responsibility is to assist the House of the Assembly in carrying out its oversight responsibilities relating to government spending and accountability for the use of public money.

The mission of the Office of the Auditor General, which is derived from its legislative mandate, is *To add credibility to the Government's financial reporting and to promote improvement in the financial administration of all government ministries, departments, and all other entities for which the Government is accountable to Parliament.*

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving over to the expenditure overview, the Office of the Auditor General meets with her Parliamentary Standing Committee on her annual budget. The meeting on the 2025/26 budget recommendation was held on 3 December 2024. The committee is appointed for the duration of the life of Parliament according to Standing Order 34 for the House of Assembly and according to the section 45 of the Constitution. The committee has the responsibility for ensuring that the Office of Auditor General has the funding and tools to carry out its responsibilities and to ensure the independence of the office is not comprised. Once the committee is in agreement with the budget

requests, the recommendation by this bipartisan committee is translated to the Minister of Finance.

The Chairman: Premier, did you say bipartisan committee?

Hon. E. David Burt: I absolutely did. It is a bipartisan committee.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: But it is important that we dig into this a little bit. So I am going to dig into it a little bit more.

The reviewed and recommended budget by the committee to the Ministry of Finance was \$4,329,205. The Ministry of Finance set a budget ceiling of \$4,242,455, which as you would note, Mr. Chairman, is less than the amount that was requested by the committee. However, the budget ceilings were set but we then added salary uplifts afterwards. As you would note, if you look inside of the Budget Book, the total current account expenditure allocated to Head 5 is now \$4,397,000 for 2025/26 which represents an increase of \$217,000, or 5 per cent, over the prior year's budget.

It is also important to note that roughly \$137,000 of this increase is related to the BPSU salary uplift. Now all of that to say, Mr. Chairman, that, yes, it should be noted and accepted that this is not in alignment with the request that was made by the committee, but just as we discussed last year during this, it is important that we are not allocating resources that may not be used. And from this perspective, I don't want there to be false equivalents made on the broader items which were issued for other departments.

And this is no criticism of the Office of the Auditor General, nor is it a criticism of the work of which they do because inside this brief, which has been supplied to me, which I will share, is the fact that there are certainly difficulties in continuing to retain staff inside of the OAG [Office of the Attorney General] structure for accounting.

Madam Chairman [*sic*], if you will look certainly on . . . sorry, Mr. Chairman, if you will look certainly on page—

[*Inaudible interjections*]

Hon. E. David Burt: What happened?

Now you are being rude, Jarion. Be nice.

—if you would look on page B-14, you will note that the original estimate of last year was \$4.18 million. We know that it was criticised, as I see the Honourable Opposition Leader looking at the Hansard from last time. Make sure your Honourable Member in [constituency] 10 knows that.

[*Laughter*]

Hon. E. David Burt: Knows how to do that. It works.

[*Inaudible interjections*]

Hon. E. David Burt: I know.

But you will note that the Office of the Auditor General is not expected to spend all their funds this year. It is about \$400,000 under. What I did make the commitment to last year was that if there was additional monies that were needed for the Office of the Auditor General, the Ministry of Finance certainly would not hold the Office of the Auditor General back in that. And the same commitment is made this year. If they do actually need, I guess, the difference which is about \$80,000 additional for their full budget request for this year, we will absolutely make that available. We are in no way, shape or form trying to hamper the ability of the department in executing its particular role. And so I know that the Attorney General is listening. I know that Opposition Leader's here. I know that the Chair of that Parliamentary Standing Committee is there. And I have also made sure that the Chair of that Parliamentary Standing Committee is well aware of our position in the Ministry of Finance.

Mr. Chairman, may I proceed?

The Chairman: You may proceed.

For clarity, Honourable Premier, if you look behind me there are two flags.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

The Chairman: None of which are multi-coloured.

[*Laughter*]

Hon. E. David Burt: We will now move forward.

Revenue Estimates

Hon. E. David Burt: Revenue estimates for the Office of the Auditor General of \$457,000, a decrease of \$124,000 from last year, or 21 per cent, which represents audit fees charged to the accounts that do not form part of the accounts of the Consolidated Fund and paid in to the Accountant General as public funds in accordance with the Audit Act.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. E. David Burt: The subjective analysis, current account estimates for the Office of the Auditor General is found on page B-15. Salaries are \$3,464,000, an increase of \$138,000 from last year, or 4 per cent. The increase is mainly due to the negotiated BPSU's salary uplift. The office did not fill all posts for the entire year. For fiscal year 2024/25, which I just said, and the office is working to be at a full complement for fiscal year 2025/26.

Mr. Chairman, 70 per cent of the office audit are practitioners are contract workers on work permits

for three to five years. And the office continues to face challenges in attracting a full complement of qualified professionals. As stated last year, this is not unique to this Government or to this particular department. But it is part of a broader shortage of professional accountants, creating an extremely competitive market both locally as of course they get poached after a few years by the private sector and worldwide.

While the salary ranges of the office align with similar Government positions, they do remain less competitive than those offered in the private sector. And if you would recall, Mr. Chairman, from the debate which was held previously where I covered extensively the work of which we are doing to update the models and make sure that public sector pay is commensurate and online with private sector pay. That will also help the office of the Auditor General who is still on public sector pay scales as they are a non-ministry department.

The office tries to build resource organically and invest in future talent by providing supportive and collaborative workplace for our students to thrive and grow. Presently, the office employs four Bermudian students pursuing professional and academic designations, which I think is all something that we can applaud.

Professional Services

Hon. E. David Burt: Under Professional Services is \$368,000, an increase of \$38,000, or 38 per cent, from last year, or 12 per cent. This is our next . . . this is the next most significant expense for the office and includes services for contracted audits and expert advice as needed.

The department expects to continue to use contracted firms to aid in meeting the Legislative commitments and to aid during peak workloads and for unexpected separations.

The office outsources roughly six financial statement audits. An outsourced audit does not absolve the Auditor General of her responsibilities to audit the accounts presented to the Senate and the House of Assembly and all Government departments and offices and courts of Bermuda. The Auditor General signs each and every independent auditor's report. The decision to outsource any audit is not taken lightly. The Auditor General is able to sign-off on an agent audit independent auditor's report because her office reviews the completed agent auditor's working papers, files, reports and schedules and very often may require additional tests or other documents in respect of the audit in the public entity audited to satisfy that all requirements in the auditing standards generally accepted in Bermuda and Canada are met.

Repairs and Maintenance

Hon. E. David Burt: Repairs and Maintenance is \$140,000, an increase of \$11,000 from last year's budget. The increase primarily relates to software maintenance agreements and subscriptions.

Travel

Hon. E. David Burt: Travel is \$28,000, an increase of \$14,000 from last year. Staff auditors pursuing their professional designations may travel to attend training and development courses in pursuit of their [professional] designations.

Additionally, the Auditor General and team members may attend training for the long-term sustainability of the office. It is critical in keeping abreast of emerging auditing trends and participation in the round-table discussion to support and influence matters impacting our jurisdiction from the development of auditing methodology, practices, and professional development with standard [setters] such as the Public Sector Accounting Board.

The office also takes an active role in the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors and the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions, and the Auditor General is also on the Executive Committee of the CPA Atlantic Board.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. E. David Burt: I will move on to Capital Expenditure, and I sincerely hope that the Honourable Member from constituency 26 [sic] is listening. The Office of the Auditor General has been allocated a capital budget of \$21,000 for a server.

This amount is \$19,000 less than the amount originally requested to the Ministry of Finance for Capital Account Expenditure. This means laptops or desktops earmarked for replacement due to age or productivity loss will not be replaced this fiscal year. The brief that is submitted to me states the following, Mr. Chairman, that, *In the short-term the office will make adjustments internally to reduce risk associated with performance or productivity decline due to inefficient machines.* What I will say, Mr. Chairman, on this particularly, is that the Ministry of Finance is happy to revisit, review and revisit this.

Of course, the Minister does not go through each and every single particular line item on this, but the reality is (and I can speak from my own statements) that there is nothing more frustrating than slow computers when dealing with Excel spreadsheets and other things. And what I would hate for is for the Office of the Auditor General to be compromised in that manner. There is significant additional funding that has been given to office of IDT to secure more computers. And I just managed to intervene last week with Customs to make sure that computers got cleared so that the Minister's department can make sure to get additional desktops to users.

And what I will state is that for the Honourable Member from constituency 26, who is the Chair of that particular committee (and I am sure the Auditor General is listening), the Ministry of Finance will happily facilitate that to ensure that she does. And we will figure out where that money comes from. We are not going to increase the budget right now, but we will have to figure out where that comes from, from a different line item or vote or possibly give permission for funds that may not be used for other matters to be used for that. But I certainly want to make sure that the Office of the Auditor General can get her computers.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, I will not take it from the Road budget. Don't worry.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Now you are being funny, Mr. Chairman.

Manpower

Hon. E. David Burt: The employee number estimates for the Office of the Auditor General are 28 full-time posts. Of the 28 full-time employees, Bermudians fill 10 posts. Out of the 10 Bermudian staff, there are four students, three professionals, and three support staff. Of the four students, one recently passed one of her CPA certifying examinations and another is on her last examination.

Performance Measures by Business Units

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to performance measures by business units, Mr. Chairman, to continue the support of the House of Assembly to hold Government to account and to add to the credibility of Government's financial reporting, and to promote improvement in the financial administration of all Government ministries, departments and other entities for which the Government is accountable to Parliament, the office intends to fulfil its constitutional mandate by completing the following:

- 50 financial statement audits;
- 8 financial statement reviews;
- 3 non-financial audits; and
- 2024/25 compilation to be tabled in Quarter 3 of 2025. (That is very aggressive.)

Current Year Achievements

Hon. E. David Burt: The office expected to complete approximately 44 financial statement audits and reviews. As of 31 March 2025, the office actually completed 53 statement audit reviews and financial statement or attest audits or examinations of an auditee's financial statements. In these examinations the auditor expresses an opinion on whether or not the financial statements present information on the auditee's operation and whether the financial position is presented fairly and complies with auditing standards generally accepted in Bermuda and Canada.

Every year the Office of the Auditor General audits the financial statements of the accounts of the Senate, the House of Assembly, all government departments and offices including the Public Service Commission, and all courts of Bermuda as per the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 and the Audit Act 1990.

In addition to the completion of financial statement audits and reviews, the office also completed or participated in the following:

1. Practice inspections: The office successfully completed their practice inspection. The practice inspection is a vital component of Government's regulatory processes. A practice inspection is dual purpose. First, to protect the Government and the citizens of Bermuda and contribute to users' confidence in the integrity of financial information by assessing whether the Office of the Auditor General is adhering to the professional standards set out in the CPA Canada Handbook.
2. To provide an educational experience to help practitioners on staff improve their professional standards where necessary.

Mr. Chairman, if you would give me a minute.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now in Committee of Supply for the consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. We are debating non-ministries. The Premier who is also the Minister of Finance, the Honourable E. David Burt, is giving his presentation on Head 5.

You may resume.

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

Moving on to the next item which are the matters that the office participated [in] this year.

Peer Reviews

Hon. E. David Burt: Peer reviews are voluntary and are preformed by qualified Professional Accountants of Canada. And the outputs of these reviews provide insight for the continuous monitoring and improvement of the office quality management processes.

Team members participated in training with the Canadian Council of Legislature Auditors, the Caribbean Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions and the UK National Audit Office.

Next, to ensure that all staff are kept abreast of the new and evolving standards and to meet continuing professional development requirements all qualified staff in the Office of the Auditor General complete a minimum of 20 hours of continuous professional training. This ensures that all qualified staff are kept abreast of any new and evolving standards and meet the continuing professional development hours for CPA Bermuda and their regulatory bodies.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to plans for the upcoming year, the Government's risk landscape continues to change. And we are building in agility to respond to the emergent risk. Presently, the Office of the Auditor General will continue to work with various stakeholders across Government and the industry partners, such as CPA Bermuda, CAROSAI, and CCOLA (which is the Canadian Council of Legislative Auditors).

The following continued to have an impact on the Office of the Auditor General audit assessment and strategies:

- environmental hazards from coastal erosion due to hurricane frequency;
- malicious attacks from cyberattacks to our information and knowledge infrastructure;
- areas of significant judgment, such as impairment and obsolescence of tangible capital assets and other assets and additional disclosure requirements; and
- an increased number of fraud risk actors in terms of pressures and opportunities due to changing landscapes and conditions.

The office is built on the work it has thus far and provides the Public Accounts Committee, the House of Assembly and the Parliamentary Standing Committee with the same high-quality financial and nonfinancial audits to support accountability.

The staff of the Auditor General are independent of the Government. This independence enables the office to conduct its auditing and reporting responsibilities fairly and objectively.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to acknowledge the Auditor General, Ms. Heather Thomas, and her staff for their hard work, dedication and continued commitment to the Office of the Auditor General's mandates. The Office of the Auditor General will continue to support the House of Assembly and the Public Accounts Committee in holding this Government to account and to help improve Government's financial reporting and public services through high-quality audits for the benefit of Bermuda's citizens.

And what I will say is, as I said last year, though there may be a bit of squabbling (I will use that word,

my word) over the budget allocations that were given to the Office of the Auditor General, at no point in time has there been a request (in my memory, at least in the time I have served in this office) that we have not given the resources to the Office of the Auditor General which she needs. And if the Office of the Auditor General somehow is able to hire staff and get more people on and able to help to complete these audits, et cetera, to assist with the backlog, we maintain a cordial relationship and will be happy to make sure that we provide that funding and support.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation of Head 5, the Office of the Auditor General.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier.

For the benefit of the listening audience, this debate began at 2:57 pm and will end exactly at 6:57 pm.

We now have Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert who is going to give a presentation on Head 56.

NON-MINISTRY HEADS

HEAD 56—HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION

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

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the Human Rights Commission, it gives me great pleasure to present the Current Account Estimates for Head 56, Human Rights Commission, a non-ministry office, found on pages B-17, B-18 and B-19 of the Estimate of Revenues and Expenditures.

Mr. Chairman, the statutory body is charged with the promotion and protection of human rights in Bermuda. The Human Rights Act 1981 was enacted by the Bermuda Legislature in December of 1981 and shortly thereafter in early 1982 the Commission was established to administer the Act. The Human Rights Commission is Bermuda's national human rights institution, the United Nations "Paris Principles" require the NHRI [National Human Rights Institution]

- to have a broad human rights mandate and functions;
- to be independent, to have an international engagement;
- to have an inclusive and transparent selection and appointment process; and
- to have adequate powers and resources.

Mr. Chairman, the mission of the Human Rights Commission as found on page B-17 is, *To protect and promote human rights through education, collaboration, advocacy, and enforcement*, The Commission takes a leading role in the modern interpretation of its statutory mandate and the promotion of indivisibility and interdependence of all human rights. The Commission's mandate involves education, the promotion of principles of non-discrimination and equality, and to investigate and endeavour to resolve allegations of discrimination.

Mr. Chairman, the head of the public authority is the executive officer who serves as the accountant officer and is responsible for maintaining a sound system of internal controls which safeguard the public funds and assets of the Commission. The Human Rights Commission is administratively accountable to the Minister with responsible for Human Rights and in accordance with section 13(5) of the Act. The Commission receives a budget allocation annually from the Legislature.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission's vision is a Bermuda that honours human rights for all as it relates to the provision of services to the public as noted on page B-17.

The Commission's objectives are to

- inquire into and investigate human rights-related complaints of discrimination and harassment;
- resolve human rights complaints through mediation;
- facilitate effective administrative support for human rights tribunals;
- educate the community on the principles of human rights, inclusion and equality;
- work with stakeholders to promote the protections afforded under the Human Rights Act of 1981 and to uphold the principles of human rights for all;
- inform the government of human rights matters inclusive of those that require the development of policies designed to strengthen protections;
- influence and support the development of Bermuda's human rights laws and policies;
- maintain a team of highly competent professionals to manage the daily operations of the Commission; and
- act independently in accordance with the Commission's statutory duties and to continue to strengthen the Commission's ability to function with the requisite independence.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-12 you will note the Commission's original budget for its 2024/25 fiscal year was \$1,380,000. The allocation for the 2025/26 financial year is \$1,434,000. This represents a 4 per cent increase in overall spending.

Mr. Chairman, you will note on page B-18 there are seven full-time employee positions with the Human Rights Commission for fiscal year 2025/26. A decrease of one full-time equivalent employee due to a reduction of funds for a vacant post which is currently under review.

Mr. Chairman, Head 56 has the following business units:

- business unit 66020, Office of the Commission
- business unit 66030, Appointment Committee; and
- business unit 66040, Tribunals.

I will discuss the functions of each business unit and provide explanations of variance between the original 2024/25 budget versus the 2025/26 allocations.

Business Unit 66020, Office of the Commission

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Human Rights Commission provides

- strategic and operational management of the Commission;
- complaint management and dispute resolution services;
- education and outreach initiatives to the community on the principles of human rights; and the
- provision of policy recommendations to the government on local and international human rights matters.

The budget allocation for business unit 66020 is \$1,331,000. The 3 per cent increase from the previous year's budget of \$1,296,000 is due to cost of living increase salary uplift.

Business Unit 66030, Appointment Committee

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for business unit 66030 is \$22,000. The 8 per cent decrease of \$2,000 is attributed to the decreased administrative cost associated with the Selection and Appointment Committee's public recruitment campaign and appointment processes in accordance with section 13B(1) of the Act. [Human Rights Amendment Act 2021] The most recent appointment occurred in 2024 as appointments are staggered to promote continuity. Recruitments will occur in the financial year for the appointments that end in September of 2025.

Business Unit 66040, Tribunals

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for business unit 66040 is \$81,000. The 35 per cent increase of \$21,000 relates to the statutory functions of the Human Rights Tribunal. The independent quasi-judicial body responsible for adjudicating meritorious human rights complaints. The funding estimate is based on the number of active matters currently before the Human Rights Tribunal for adjudication. And an increased volume of matters filed with the Commission which are likely to be referred for adjudication unless resolved through mediation.

Mr. Chairman, adequate funding is necessary for the Commission, the Independent Selection Appointment Committee and the Human Rights Tribunal to fulfil their statutory obligations set out within the Act.

The current budget allocation does not adequately support statutory needs with respect to the Tribunal. Without adequate funding the Tribunal will be unable to fulfil the statutory mandates, human rights complaints, and potential contraventions will remain

unresolved and the Bermuda's National Human Rights Institution will be unable to achieve its legislative and international obligations to effectively promote and protect human rights in Bermuda.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the subjective analysis for Head 56 can be found on page B-18. Salaries, the original full-time employee headcount for the 2024/25 fiscal year was eight. And the budget allocation for Salaries was \$846,000. In contrast, the budget for the 2025/26 financial year is \$750,000, which reflects an 11 per cent decrease of \$96,000. This reduction is a result of funds being removed from a vacant post which is currently under review.

Operational Expenditure

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Chairman, turning to Operational Expenditure, I will now discuss expenditures within advertising and promotions, professional services, rentals and insurance.

Advertising and promotion, in contrast with the previous fiscal year, costs associated with brand design support and visual communication strategies increased to \$35,000. This increase reflects a greater investment in strategic branding initiatives aimed at enhancing public engagement and strengthening the organisation's visual identity.

Mr. Chairman, the 2025/26 budget reflects a 44 per cent increase in professional services, from \$293,000 to \$422,000. The increased costs are primarily attributed to local consultant fees, costs associated with the Commission's voluntary mediation programme, manage IT services, research services and funding to remunerate human rights tribunal panel members.

In comparison to 2024/25, rent increased by 6 per cent to \$137,000 because of a new lease agreement for the Commission's offices.

Mr. Chairman, during fiscal year the Commission obtained directors and officer's liability insurance to ensure adequate financial protection is in place in the event of legal actions commenced against the Commission or the Human Rights Tribunal. This investment of \$4,000 provides coverage as a key component of the Commission's Risk Management Strategy, safeguarding its leadership and adjudicative bodies while supporting the integrity of its operations.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission's performance measures can be found on page B-19. In accordance with the Public Access to Information Act 2010, the Commission's quarterly expenditures are available to the public on request. The Human Rights Commission has a statutory dual mandate, enforcement and education. Discrimination is addressed by way of meritorious complaints, referrals to the Human Rights Tribunal but also the Commission helps to prevent discrimination by

fostering awareness and empowering individuals and institutions to uphold human rights in their daily practices.

The complaint management and dispute resolution processes involve several stages which I will briefly outline below ahead of sharing the key performance indicators achieved during fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the executive officer performs a screening function of all complaints filed with the Commission and has a statutory power to investigate complaints, collect evidence, and refer meritorious complaints to the Human Rights Tribunal. Throughout the complaint-handling process efforts are made to facilitate the resolution of the complaint. Examples of grounds protected within the Act include race, sex, and disability while examples of protected areas include employment or goods, facilities and services.

In 2024, the most frequent protected grounds identified by the public when contacting the Commission [was] for disability, sex, ethnic or national origins, and place of origin. These included instances where individuals alleged that these grounds were a factor in discriminatory treatment experienced by them. With respect to conduct deemed unlawful within the Act, members of the public primarily alleged discrimination in the areas of employment when contacting the Commission which was followed by allegations of harassment in the workplace, and alleged discriminatory conduct when assessing goods, facilities or services.

Mr. Chairman, I just want to pause so I can get the podium . . . please.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply for the . . . [consideration] of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

Minister Tinee Furbert is giving a presentation on non-ministries, Head 56.

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

Mr. Chairman, during the 2024 calendar year there was 179 reports received by the office of the Human Rights Commission which represents a 19 per cent increase from the previous year. Mr. Chairman, 82 per cent of the intakes received were resolved within the calendar year, which represents an increase of approximately 35 more matters, achieving a resolution when compared to the previous year 18 per cent of intakes are ongoing.

The Commission provides an extensive triage and referral process to assist the public in finding a resolution to their queries or complaints in the event their matters do not appear to fall under the jurisdiction of the Human Rights Act. During the period, various intakes once screened were referred to the Labor Relations Office. Additional referral agencies included trade unions, the Department of Education, the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda, the Treatment of Offenders Board the, Police Complaints Authority, Age Concern,

advocacy groups and nonprofit organisations such as Bermuda is Love, the Women's Resource Centre, and Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda [CURB] and referrals for independent legal advice.

Mr. Chairman, when a matter is referred for an investigation in the first instance parties are offered the opportunity to engage in the Commission's voluntary mediation programme. Where parties agree to participate, efforts are aimed at assisting them to mutually resolve their complaints by bringing parties to a complaint together with an independent mediator who assists them to achieve a resolution. In 2024, parties in 10 matters participated in mediation; however, offers were also made in six other matters but the parties did not wish to participate in mediation. With respect to 10 matters active in mediation in 2024, five matters were resolved through mediation, two matters did not result in a resolution, and there were three matters still actively engaged in the mediation process when the year ended. Based on a review of the matters currently before the Commission, it is anticipated approximately nine matters will be engaged in mediation services provided by the Commission during the 2025/26 financial year.

Mr. Chairman, following an investigation where a complaint appears to have merit and it appears unlikely that the parties can resolve the complaint, the executive officer shall refer the complaint to the Human Rights Tribunal for adjudication in accordance with section 18(1) of the Act. After hearing a complaint, the Tribunal shall determine whether the Act has been contravened, may order any party to do any act or thing that constitutes full compliance with the Act and may order any party to rectify any injury caused to a complainant in the form of financial restitution. Any order made by the Tribunal under section 20 of the Act shall be made an order of the Supreme Court and is enforceable in the same manner as an order of that court.

Mr. Chairman, there are eight cases before the Human Rights Tribunal for adjudication. If historic trends continue throughout the financial year, the number of cases before the tribunal will likely reach 18. Despite the 35 per cent increase in funding for this business unit, it is anticipated a shortfall remains to fully cover panel members remuneration.

In 2024, the Tribunal rendered decisions in five matters with all being registered with the Supreme Court of Bermuda. For more information on these judgments, please see the Commission's website: humanrights.bm.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission exists to make human rights real in the lives of all people in Bermuda. A core function is its mandate to provide education and guidance on the protections and compliance requirements within the Act and to empower all residents with the principles of equity and inclusion for all. With respect to the consultations and policy reviews conducted by the Commission, the Commission provided guidance related to the compliance

with employment and recruitment practices. The guidance was framed around the duty to accommodate the use of application forms and mandatory drug testing policy and the human rights consideration required.

In October 2024, the Human Rights Commission acknowledged the extension of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities [CRPD] to Bermuda. This international treaty adopted in 2006 reaffirms the equal rights of persons with disabilities and outlines the steps required to create an inclusive and accessible society, the Commission welcomes this important milestone and recognises it as an opportunity to strengthen existing commitments to disability inclusion.

Mr. Chairman, the Commission affirms that in Bermuda there are already commitments and obligations already in place at the national level which should result in those with disabilities being able to fully participate in society free from discrimination. Despite existing obligations and statutory requirements, this is not the reality for those with disabilities. The Commission participated in consultations with the Government of Bermuda and the UK Foreign Commonwealth Office and the Commission looks forward to working with all stakeholders to bring these international obligations to life.

Mr. Chairman, the protected grounds of disability remains one of the most frequent identified grounds of discrimination. These matters have included people being denied work, discriminatory employment practices, people not being afforded equal access to information and education, people being denied access to services and transport systems, the built environment being developed without consideration to those with disabilities, and the existence of barriers to health, well-being and prosperity.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission initiated a public consultation focused on disability inclusion in Bermuda. The multifaceted research process gathered a broad range of perspectives from the community and was comprehensive in scope and methodology. The consultation included a survey, a series of facilitating focus groups, and a community conversation designed to foster open dialogue. This allowed the Commission to engage with individuals living with disabilities, their families, caregivers, advocates, and the public broadly.

The process was intentionally inclusive ensuring diverse voices were heard and participants had multiple channels through which to express their experiences, concerns and recommendations. The feedback collected has provided the Commission with valuable insights into the lived experience of persons with disabilities in Bermuda. The findings and recommendations emerging from this consultation have been compiled into a detailed report. This report will be shared with the Government through its Ministry as a resource to inform future policy development and programme planning.

Mr. Chairman, in keeping with the Commission's commitment to be transparent and to have transparency and community engagement, the findings will also be made available to the public during this fiscal year. The Commission remains committed to advancing the rights of persons with disabilities and will continue to work in partnership with key stakeholders to advocate for, educate and promote a more inclusive Bermuda.

The Commission values and is committed to providing professional development for staff. During the fiscal year quarterly trainings were provided to officers which is essential to enhance the knowledge, skills, and performance of staff while ensuring they are well-equipped to meet organisational goals and adapt to workplace and societal needs.

Mr. Chairman, regarding education and outreach, during the fiscal year the Commission facilitated 63 engagements which represents 33 more initiatives than forecasted—this included presentations, public speeches, and focus groups, all designed to inform and involve the public on key human rights issues.

Media and communications continue to serve as a strategic pillar in the Commission's efforts to engage the public and promote human rights. Throughout the year the Commission participated in a range of media engagements including radio interviews and podcast appearances to broaden its reach. In addition, several key press statements were issued addressing key topics such as artificial intelligence, disability rights, and tribunal decisions. These communication initiatives reflect the Commission's commitment to remaining both visible and responsive for matters of public interest.

By leveraging multiple platforms, the Commission is strengthening its ability to inform, educate and advocate for human rights in an accessible and timely matter. The emphasis on media engagement has also contributed to the Commission's ongoing global goal of demystifying its role and services by actively promoting public awareness of the rights and protections under the Human Rights Act. All of these efforts underscored the Commission's expanding capacity to reach a broader and more diverse audience, reinforcing its position as a proactive, transparent and community-oriented institution.

Mr. Chairman, on the horizon during the fiscal year the Commission will continue to promote awareness of the Commission's functions and the protections afforded under the Act to further expand the public's knowledge of human rights. The Commission will meet with stakeholders and promote findings of the Disability Inclusion Report, along with implementing its own recommendations to support its commitments. The Commission also plans to launch a public consultation on age and will host another community conversation to consider how to expand efforts towards a more inclusive Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, the human rights is increasingly recognised as a vital public resource and is available to us as the public by visiting their offices, or via phone at 295-5859, or via email [at] info@humanrights.bm.

Mr. Chairman, the Human Rights Commission has issued a call to action to the country. As Members of this Honourable House, [we] are entrusted with shaping the future of our country with responsibility to ensure that rights and dignity of every person in Bermuda are upheld, not only through legislation but through the everyday environments we create and sustain. The Human Rights Commission invites you to reflect on the spaces you might move through daily, your ministries, your workplaces, your places of worship, your favourite café, your child's or grandchild's school, the parks and beaches you visit. In each of these spaces ask yourself whose voices are missing. Whose rights are not being fully recognised or respected?

Promoting human rights means going beyond statements of intent. It requires deliberate, sustained action to eliminate discrimination, remove barriers and foster a culture where fairness, dignity and inclusion are lived values. It means being willing to examine systems and practices that may unintentionally cause harm or exclusion. Let this be a moment to recommit not only as legislators but as leaders in your communities to ensure that Bermuda becomes a place where human rights are actively protected, actively promoted, and made real for everyone.

Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Human Rights Commission for its dedication to the advancement of human rights in Bermuda and for stewarding the Commission's statutory mandate with integrity and excellence.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 56, Human Rights Commission.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

For the benefit of the listening audience, we are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for year 2025/26. Minister Tinee Furbert has concluded her presentation on Head 56, which deals with the Human Rights Commission.

And now the Honourable Premier and Finance Minister, E. David Burt, shall give his presentation on Head—

Hon. E. David Burt: [Head] 92.

The Chairman: Head 92.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I am going to try to be like you and say, *for the benefit of the listening audience*, I am going to do Head 92. And following after which time the Minister for the Cabinet Office will do Head 85, the Ombudsman's Office, Head 98, the

Information Commissioner's Office, and Head 101, the Privacy Commissioner's Office.

Unfortunately, I have to leave to attend an urgent meeting, unless I will be back to answer questions. I don't want the OBA putting out statements saying that I had to go tend to matters of state and tell the very important meeting that I had.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: See! He can't help himself.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: He can't help himself!

The Chairman: Excuse me, Premier. Earlier you mentioned a word. Could you give the explanation of the word "bipartisan" again, please?

Hon. E. David Burt: Bipartisan means that we try to work together. And it is very interesting that most legislation up here passes on a bipartisan basis. But, you know . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am going to move through. The brief for Head 92 is very short. And I certainly want to get to this meeting.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Please proceed, Premier.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Territorial, if you want to be specific.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, boy. They are having fun. It's like I woke them up.

HEAD 92—DEPARTMENT OF INTERNAL AUDIT

Hon. E. David Burt: All right, Mr. Chairman. If I may, I will now present the brief for Head 92, the Department of Internal Audit which is found on pages B-26 through B-28 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

The mandate and mission of the Department of Internal Audit is *To provide independent, objective assurance and advisory services to improve operations and internal control systems.*

I will move to Expenditure Overview including the subjective analysis which can be found on page B-27. Mr. Chairman, the total current expenditure is estimated to be \$1,115,000 for this current fiscal year and

it represents an increase of \$60,000, or 6 per cent more than the estimate for 2024/25. This change is primarily due to the 4.81 per cent salary uplift for 2025/26. Line item, Salary, \$61,000 an offset by a decrease in other expenses. Line item 11, Other Expense \$1,000 which is lower. \$61,000 minus \$1,000 gets us to \$60,000.

In regard to Manpower, the total estimated FTE (full-time equivalents) and funded positions for 2025/26 for the department is nine, representing eight professional staff and one administrative officer. The department's funded posts are comprised of one director, one administrative officer, one internal audit manager, one IT audit manager, one senior auditor, one IT audit senior, and three internal audit officers who are working towards obtaining a professional internal auditor qualification. The internal audit officer positions are Bermudian-only training positions to encourage and train for Bermudians in the internal auditing profession. One internal audit officer post has been filled as of April 2025. The administrative officer and IT audit manager vacant posts are currently being recruited and are expected to be filled by the second quarter of 2025/26.

Performance Measures

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving to Performance Measures on page B-28. I will share the information provided on the department's performance measures for fiscal year 2023/24. It is a little bit unusual as we typically do, you know, 2024/25 and 2025/26. But there is the initial column, and you'll see that some of the items there, [you heard] the Opposition Leader saying "N/A" because they report actual figures. So I'm just going to go back to report actual figures on the 2023/24 before I move to the 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The department achieved its engagement activity reporting—sorry, achieved its engagement and activity reporting, staff utilisation and continuing professional development outcomes during the year. The number of recommendations issued from audit projects totalled 35 relating to remediating identified weaknesses in internal control systems, governance and/or risk management activities. As a result of follow-up procedures performed, the department recorded 28 management actions which were implemented by the agreed upon date. The department issued three audit reports covering operations, financial and IT systems and three supplies comprising of audit reports for a total of six audit reports issued during the year 2023/24.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Moving on to 2024/25. I'll be able to cover the revised forecast for the performance measures. They can be seen on page B-28. The department issued four audit project reports and five compliance reports during the year 2024/25.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: The plans for the upcoming year, Mr. Chairman, are to execute the department's 2025/26 approved audit plan to conduct six audit projects and five compliance reviews. It is to continue to train and develop staff, especially the three Bermudian internal audit officers [as] they work towards attaining their CISA, which is Certified Information Systems Auditor or CIA, Certified Internal Auditor, professional qualifications while gaining work experience in the internal audit field.

Good work if you can get it. If there is anyone listening, you know, who has someone who may be studying accounting, who wants to make sure they can have a job as long as they are ready to work, they can always go to the Auditor General, Internal Audit Accountant General. Many trainee positions, bursaries—open, willing, ready, and able to accept young Bermudians. And as we can see, we have had some success in attracting young Bermudians. And there is no question that especially the field of certified information systems auditor, it is something that will continue to be well in demand. So it is an ideal career opportunity for anyone who may be listening who may have members of their families who may be looking to go in this route.

That much being said, Mr. Chairman, as I did say it was a short brief, I welcome any questions that the Opposition Leader has. And although I am stepping out, Opposition Leader, I will be back to answer the questions in case you have any more. And the team will ably record any questions. I would just ask that you make those questions more specific than the Honourable Member from constituency 10, so we can answer them. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Premier, for Head 92.

We will now hear from the Honourable Minister—

[Crosstalk]

The Chairman: We will now hear from the Honourable Minister *Deallo* [sic] Rabain. Sorry. *Diallo* Rabain.

An Hon. Member: Get it right. Get it right. Get it right.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Diallo Rabain. On Head 63, which will speak to . . .

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Parliamentary Registrar.

The Chairman: The Parliamentary Registrar. What is the Parliamentary Registrar? For the listening audience.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Parliamentary Registrar conducts elections in Bermuda.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you. Very interesting.

HEAD 63—PARLIAMENTARY REGISTRAR

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I would now like to present the brief for the Parliamentary Registrar, Head 63, found on pages B-20 through B-22 of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure.

Mr. Chairman, the mandate for the Parliamentary Registrar is, *To independently manage elections and promote voter awareness in Bermuda to facilitate free and fair elections.*

The Parliamentary Registrar is appointed by the Governor under the provisions of the Parliamentary [Election] Act 1978 and as such is required to discharge the duties conferred or imposed under the Act. The Parliamentary Registrar is subject to the general direction of the Governor and in the exercise of her statutory duties is assisted by such [members] of public officers as may from time to time be authorised to be employed.

The Parliamentary Election Act 1978 as amended, the Municipalities (Election) Order 2011, and the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968 are the instruments by which the activities of the Parliamentary Registrar are governed.

Mr. Chairman, the staff at the Parliamentary Registrar consist of six full-time positions under the direction of the Parliamentary Registrar, Ms. Tenia Woolridge.

Mr. Chairman, the Parliamentary Registrar is responsible for maintaining of the Parliamentary Register and overseeing a range of daily operational functions. During the last budget cycle, the [Registrar] successfully conducted bye-elections in Smith's North and Sandys North and led the development of the new election results management platform, which despite being completed on a tight timeline, was successfully deployed during the general election and received positive international feedback.

In 2024/25 fiscal period, the Parliament also supported . . . the department also supported the work of the Constitutional [sic] Boundaries Commission—

An Hon. Member: Constituency.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: —Constituency Boundaries Commission which was temporarily paused due to the election. We anticipate its resumption shortly as the regular assessment of constituency boundaries is a constitutional requirement essential to maintaining the integrity of the electoral process.

Mr. Chairman, following the successful completion of the 2025 General Election, the Parliamentary Registrar's Office is currently focused on the organisation, collection, and analysis of data derived from the electoral process. Concurrently, efforts are underway to secure and archive all election materials and according to the Parliamentary Election Act 1978.

The next phase will involve stakeholder engagement to review operational outcomes, identify areas up for improvement and advance legislative amendments aimed at introducing alternative voting methods, including provisions for absentee voting.

Mr. Chairman, I now turn to the detailed estimates of expenditure annual revenue across the five cost centres for the Parliamentary Registrar's Office. For the 2025/26 fiscal year, the total budget allocation for the Parliamentary Registrar's Office as outlined on page B-20 of the Budget Book is \$1,333,000. This reflects an increase of \$54,000 when compared to the original allocation in 2024/25.

Mr. Chairman, Administration, cost centre, 73000. The proposed budget for the administration of the Parliamentary Registrar for 2025/26 is \$1,064,000, representing a 29 per cent increase of \$241,000 over the original 2024/25 budget. The rise in expenditure is primarily due to the addition of an election support officer to assist with election preparation and delivery.

Updated job descriptions and union negotiated salary adjustments. This cost centre covers expenses related to daily operations, including administrative supplies, registration forms, and equipment maintenance. It also funds the maintenance of the cash receipting system and credit card processing fees, supporting the efficient issuance of apostille certificates which form a key part of the department's responsibilities.

Mr. Chairman, Boundaries Commission, cost centre 73005, the proposed budget for the Constituency Boundaries Commission for 2025/26 is \$88,000, reflecting a slight decrease as compared to the original 2024/25 budget. A new Commission is expected to be appointed during this fiscal period with ongoing work related to constituency boundaries.

Funds allocated to this cost centre will support the administration of the Commission, including travel and accommodations, expenses for overseas Members participating in its activities.

Mr. Chairman, General and Bye-Elections, cost centre 73010. The proposed budget for the general and bye-elections cost centre for 2025/26 is \$149,000, representing a decrease of \$101,000 from the original 2024/25 budget. Following the recent completion of the general election the allocated funds are intended to cover the cost above the two bye-elections should they be acquired during the fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, Municipality Elections, cost centre 73015, a proposed budget of \$32,000 has been allocated for municipality elections cost centre for 2025/26—unchanged from 2024/25. This allocation provides for the conduct of up to two extraordinary municipal elections if required during the fiscal year. The Registrar remains mindful of the pending court proceedings related to the proposed changes to the Municipalities Act [1923].

Mr. Chairman, [Election] Reform Research, cost centre 73017—one of the things in the [Budget]

Book that have caused a bit of excitement. Although no funds have been allocated to the Election Reform cost centre for 2024/25 fiscal period, work on key reform initiatives including the introduction of absentee voting will proceed. While immediate research—

The Chairman: Sorry. Sorry. Excuse me, Minister. There was a little technical glitch. Could you repeat that please?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Oh, absolutely.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Absolutely. Because this will be led by my office.

Including the introduction of absentee voting will proceed. While immediate research spending will be limited, target data collection efforts are scheduled to begin this year to support the drafting of legislation. The aim is to have the necessary legislative framework for absentee voting ready by September 2026. Despite the absence of dedicated funding at this stage, preparatory work will continue to ensure Bermuda's position to modernise its voting system ahead of the next general election.

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to turn your attention to page B-21, the subjective analysis for current account estimates. Professional services decreased by \$87,000. During the next fiscal period, most funds allocated under this object code will support the operations of the Constituency Boundaries Commission, including sitting fees for Commission members and costs associated with consultants engaged in this work. Consultants transitioning to full-time employees will be funded through the Salaries budget.

Advertising and Promotion decreased by \$42,000. The Advertising and Promotion budget for the 2025/26 fiscal year is \$79,000. These funds are primarily allocated to the Constituency Boundaries Commission by general bye-elections and municipalities cost centres, with the main focus on voting information and public awareness campaigns.

Rentals have increased by \$35,000. The budget allocation for this object code is \$152,000, representing a \$35,000 increase over last year's figures. It is anticipated that the Parliamentary Registrar will relocate during the 2025/26 fiscal period. These funds are intended to cover increased rental costs associated with securing new premises, as the lease for the current location has expired.

Mr. Chairman, revenue is generated through the issuance of apostilles. For the 2025/26 fiscal year, total revenue is estimated at \$250,000, unchanged from last year. The Parliamentary Registrar remains committed to the prompt and efficient issuance of apostille *[sic]* certificates for international and private sector clients.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Apostilles. Thank you. What did I say . . .

An Hon. Member: Apostle.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Apostle. Apostilles.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: In support of this commitment, processes and procedures have been enhanced to improve the accuracy of financial reporting ensuring greater efficiency and transparency in service delivery.

Mr. Chairman, in conclusion, I extend my sincere appreciation for the staff of the Parliamentary Registrar, under the leadership of Tenia Woolridge, for their unwavering commitment and dedication throughout the past fiscal year. Your contributions are deeply valued and I look forward to continued success in the year ahead.

And also, Mr. Chairman, if I can add, when it comes to absentee balloting, that is something that I will be making further statements on. I'm sure it would assist with the questionings that may come because the [Budget] Book looks like there will be nothing going on, but there definitely will be committees and such put together in the very near future.

The Chairman: Would it be questions or, I don't know, blanket accusations?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Questions.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

The Chairman: The statement is already written. Right?

Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, and I will move on now to the Office of the Ombudsman—

The Chairman: Which is head . . . what?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: It is Head 85.

The Chairman: So, you have completed which head, Head 60?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So far, we have completed Head 2, Head 5, Head 56, Head 92, and Head 63.

The Chairman: So, you are now on—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Head 85. We have Heads 85, 98 and 101 left.

The Chairman: So, in the interest of the public, this debate began in earnest at 2:57 pm and is due to end at 6:57 pm. And at the current pace (similar to Cup Match) the Opposition is going to have a lot of time to ask questions.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This is the reason why we do what we do.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Theatrics.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Please proceed, Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

HEAD 85—OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to present the budget for Head 85, the Office of the Ombudsman of Bermuda, found on pages B-23 through B-26 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman is an independent non-governmental official who investigates complaints from the public about the administrative actions of public authorities. The role of the Ombudsman is to strengthen governance through the promotion of fairness, accountability and transparency.

The office works for the good of the public and those who work for the public. The office provides an impartial form of alternative dispute resolution which is flexible, accessible and less costly than adjudication through the courts. Anyone who feels they have been unjustly treated by an administrative action of a public authority may bring their complaint to the Ombudsman. A family member or other suitable person may make the complaint if the person is unable to do so.

Services are free, confidential and available to everyone. Even if a complaint is outside the Ombudsman's jurisdiction, the office can assist by providing information or making a referral to another body that can investigate the issue raised. The Ombudsman aims to putting things right if they have gone wrong.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman's mission is, *To protect the interests of the public by providing independent resources and interventions for individuals who have complaints about public services while influencing improvement in standards of these services to ensure people are treated fairly.*

To achieve this mission, the aims of the Ombudsman's Office are to

- ensure that these services are accessible to all users and provide complainants with effective and timely avenues to seek redress and restore fairness;

- enhance the impact of its work, encourage authorities to improve the services through compliance with recommendations and lay reports in the House of Assembly;
- expand its community engagement by developing public awareness, confidence and satisfaction of its performance;
- utilise local and international relationships to identify best practices and prepare for future developments;
- train and develop staff to create a positive and healthy working environment; and
- identify successive plans and contribute to the retention of key staff.

Mr. Chairman, core values of the Office of the Ombudsman are independence, fairness, respect and professionalism.

Mr. Chairman, the mandate of the Office of the Ombudsman is to receive complaints and investigate any administrative action of an authority for the purpose of deciding whether there is evidence of maladministration on the part of the authority. Wherein an investigation is conducted, the Ombudsman makes recommendations to the authority concerning any administrative actions that formed the subject of the investigation and more generally about ways of improving its administrative practices and procedures.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman advocates alternative dispute resolutions and is addressing more complaints with informal resolution wherever it is suitable to do so. The office encourages the preservation of relationships between government authorities and persons with complaints. In addition, as an office of last resort, the Ombudsman also assists complainants by directing them for assistance to a more appropriate authority. The office also aims to assist whenever possible those who do not know where else to go for help.

Mr. Chairman, the Ombudsman's Office was established in Bermuda by the Bermuda Constitution (Amendment) Order 2001, and it is governed by the Ombudsman Act 2004. The office opened on 1 August 2005. Section 93B(2) of the Constitution protects the fundamental characteristic of an Ombudsman's Office, which is its independence, by stipulating that "in the exercise of his functions and jurisdiction, the Ombudsman shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority."

The Ombudsman submits an annual report of his operations to the Speaker of the House of Assembly with copies to the Governor and the President of the Senate. The accounts of the Ombudsman's Office are audited annually and reported on by the Auditor General.

Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Ombudsman for Bermuda continues to be highly regarded by regional and international ombudsman institutions and colleagues. Its memberships include the Ombudsman Associations of the Caribbean, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Canada, as well as the African

Ombudsman Research Centre, and the International Ombudsman Institute. Such relationships provide the Bermuda office with valuable assistance and access to the best available information on current practices and procedures.

Mr. Chairman, expenditure overview.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I now turn my attention to the specific estimates of expenditure which can be found on page B-124.

The estimated budget for 2025/26 is \$1,100,000, an overall net increase of \$50,000 when compared to last year's budget. Variances between last year's budget and the 2025/26 budget for amounts with a net change of \$10,000 and over are as follows:

- Estimate for Salaries increased by \$44,000 as a result of union negotiated salary increases.
- Professional services increased by \$11,000 as a result of additional assistance required from overseas technical consultants.

Mr. Chairman, the allocated budget for six full-time employees [FTEs], all of whom are Bermudians, is shown on page B-124. And that amount is \$786,000. These positions are Ombudsman, Deputy Ombudsman, two investigation officers, a manager of finance and administration, an intake and research officer. The Ombudsman also engages service providers and technical and professional services as required.

Mr. Chairman, for the 2025/26 fiscal year, there have been no approvals for capital purchases.

And this brings me to the end of Office of the Ombudsman's budget information. Mr. Chairman, in closing, I would like to thank the Ombudsman and staff for their commitment and dedication to their duties on behalf of the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

And the following head, the remaining heads are Heads 98 and 101.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Head 98, the Information Commissioner's Office. I do hope the Member from [constituency] 10 is here. Because he asked questions earlier on these heads, these next two heads. Hopefully we can answer them now.

HEAD 98—INFORMATION COMMISSIONER'S OFFICE

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 98, the Information Commissioner's Office found on pages B-29 through B-33 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner Office (ICO) is an independent non-ministry public office established in 2015 when the Public Access to

Information Act 2010, or PATI Act, was brought into operation. The ICO's mission is to, *Uphold the right of all Bermudians and residents of Bermuda to access public records to the greatest extent possible within the provisions of the Public Access to Information Act 2010.*

The ICO's objectives as listed on page B-29 in the Budget Book are:

- Encourage a cultural shift with the public and public authorities by embracing the principles of public access to information.
 - Foster the use of PATI rights through public awareness and education.
 - Assist public authorities to develop and follow best practices in meeting their obligations under the PATI Act through guidance and oversight.
 - Conduct independent and impartial investigations and reviews in a fair and timely manner.
 - Engage stakeholders to strengthen and enhance public access to information rights and their protections in law.
- The ICO's mission and objectives, taken together, bring life to the purposes of the PATI Act for the public's benefit, which is to
- give the public the right to obtain access to the information held by public authorities to the greatest extent possible, subject to exceptions that are in the public interest, or for the protection of the right of others;
 - increased transparency and eliminate unnecessary secrecy with regard to information held by public authorities;
 - increase the accountability of public authorities;
 - inform the public about the activities of public authorities including the manner in which they make decisions; and
 - have more information placed in the public domain as a matter of routine.

Mr. Chairman, a total of \$1,200,000 has been allocated to the Information Commissioner's Office as shown on page B-30, which represents an increase of \$83,000 from last year's budget allocation and constitutes approximately 7 per cent of ICO's total budget. This increases the primary fund and reasonable costs associated with an office relocation, which is precipitated by the expiry of the shared co-location agreement with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. This expenditure is discussed further in the subjective analysis.

Madam Chairman [*sic*], the ICO Office—

The Chairman: Minister, I'm going to correct you. Please look behind me. There are no rainbow flags. Not "Madam" Chairman.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Oh . . . who put Madam Chairman there?

[*Crosstalk*]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This increase is primarily to fund the reasonable cause associated with an office relocation. (I did that.)

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner's Office is subdivided into four fiscally identifiable business units as follows:

- 108000—Administration
- 108010—Applications
- 108020—Compliance
- 108030—Public awareness

I will now proceed to address each business unit individually, Mr. Chairman, as follows:

Administration, 108000

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The administration business unit provides with a full range of administrative operations and personnel costs to maintain the day-to-day operational activities of the Information Commissioner's Office for which a total of \$1,157,000 has been allocated.

The Administration business unit's estimated costs represent 96 per cent of ICO's total budget allocation for [2025/26]. The largest expenditure items under the Administration's business unit are for salaries, rent and IT infrastructure. These are fixed, unavoidable costs for which ICO has made all reasonable efforts to improve cost-effectiveness and value for money.

Applications, 108010

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Applications business unit covers the cost associated with conducting statutory reviews of the Information Commissioner on decisions made by public authorities regarding requests for access to public records under the Public Access to Information Act.

A total of \$8,000 has been allocated for this purpose. This allocation for the fiscal year 2025/26 is new as these expenses were not included in last year's budget package.

Mr. Chairman, legal issues arising during applications for review by the Information Commissioner are becoming increasingly complex and more likely to necessitate legal advice or judicial action. While most of the resource costs associated with conducting reviews are accounted for in the administrative business unit, the allocation here in the Applications business unit represents a nominal amount of \$8,000 to cover legal costs related to judicial filings and legal advice that may arise as part of a review by the Information Commissioner.

Compliance, 108020

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: For 2025/26 fiscal year \$8,000 has been allocated to support the Information Commissioners compliance-related oversight and assistance to public authorities. This allocation covers briefings, guidance, and support activities tied to PATI Act complaints. A \$2,000 cost-savings has been achieved are shifting from commercial venues to public facilities such as Bermuda College for hosting in-person briefings. This approach is more economical and helps retain spending within the public sector, reinforcing prudent fiscal management.

Public Awareness, 108030

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Public Awareness business unit encompasses costs related to the delivery of public awareness and education activities aimed at informing the public of their right to access public information. For fiscal year 2025/26, a total of \$27,000 has been allocated to this business unit.

Mr. Chairman, the ICO's Public Awareness business unit has faced underfunding in recent years, with typical costs being covered by savings sourced from other business units. In addition, \$7,000 for this fiscal year will cover the actual cost of producing the ICO's annual report and anticipated expenses for various right-to-know day events which will be enhanced this year as we commemorate 10 years of PATI rights being available in Bermuda.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Subjective Analysis of current account estimates for the Information Commissioner's Office are found on page B-30. I will highlight the material object code, increases and decreases.

The estimate for ICO salaries is \$815,000, an expected reduction of \$150,000 year over year. Specifics on the ICO's staffing complement are detailed later in the presentation but the 2025/26 decrease in salaries is due to an apportioned savings for two vacant full-time employee posts. The majority of the budget estimate increase for ICO is to fund the cost of an impending relocation of ICO's office. The estimated expenditure for relocation is spread across several object codes as listed in the subjective analysis.

Higher projected rental costs for ICO are expected to total \$147,000. This represents real costs to reflect current market rates for suitable office accommodations. Facing an anticipated office move in 2025, the ICO will no longer benefit from cost-savings associated with co-location with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner. The budgetary difference when comparing fiscal year 2024/25 shows an increase of \$139,000.

Mr. Chairman, the year-over-year increase for the ICO's rent allocation of 2025/26 reflects a budget correction rather than a sharp spike in actual cost. In

2024/25, [the] budget omitted a full office rent estimate as cost was shared 50/50 with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner on the co-location agreement. The more accurate comparison is a revised rental cost of \$95,000 for 2024/25. However, even that figure does not represent the true rental cost due to the shared space arrangement. As the ICO transitions to an independent office space, several related budget lines will see modest but necessary increases. Rent reflects a return to a full standalone office occupancy.

Repairs and Maintenance

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: An increase of \$15,000 to support office fit-out. Repairs, supplies and equipment each increased by \$11,000 to accommodate relocation lease. Professional services [with] an increase of \$44,000 to fund the secured transfer of IT and security infrastructure to the new location. These adjustments support the ICO's need for a secure, functional and independent work environment while maintaining operational continuity and compliance safeguards.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner's Office has an estimate of \$7,000 allocated for travel expenses this fiscal year. This is an increase of \$2,000 which will contribute to the attendance of the International Conference of Information Commissioners (ICIC) Annual Conference in June where Bermuda ICO serves as a Member of the Executive Committee. Bermuda's presence and participation helps to raise Bermuda's profile as a trusted jurisdiction with a robust access to information regime and lends support to the advancement and capacity-building for improvements in the information rights globally. Public officers here at home benefit greatly from the transference of skills, expertise and insights that are exchanged at ICIC Conferences.

Mr. Chairman, Capital Expenditure for ICO is found on page C-9. The estimated budget for 2025/26 fiscal year is \$10,000. This represents no change in capital estimates appropriated for the previous year. This capital expenditure will be allocated for essential software upgrades necessary to enhance the Information Commissioner's secure IT environment. The Information Commissioner's Office depends on a closed IT infrastructure to provide robust data security controls, assuring its data sovereignty while minimising the risk of potential data breaches. Maintaining effective IT governance is crucial to upholding the integrity of the Information Commissioner's reviews as public authorities must have confidence that any records submitted to ICO for a review are stored safely and securely.

The ICO will maximise the minimum investment of \$10,000 as it keeps current with routine and scheduled upgrades to its IT landscape.

Manpower

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, for 2025/26 the Information Commissioner's Office has salaries allocation of \$815,000. Salaries continue to comprise the majority of ICO's operating budget, accounting for 68 per cent of the total allocation. This adjustment reflects a planned approach to staffing with two full-time positions, an Investigation Officer and a permanent administrative assistant to be recruited later in the fiscal year. The ICO closed the previous fiscal year with 17 members, including key leadership and operational roles. By scheduling recruitment to Quarter 3, the Office can effectively manage its salary expenditure within the approved budget. The Information Commissioner remains committed to strengthening the capacity to support delivery of services and uphold the Office's statutory responsibilities.

Mr. Chairman, I'm pleased to report that the Information Commissioner's Office forecast performance measures for fiscal year 2024/25 are mostly achieved, in line with past year results, as outlined in pages B-32 and B-33 of the Budget Book. The Information Commissioner's Office continues to demonstrate operational excellence, resilience and commitment to fulfil its statutory mandate and responsibilities within a challenging fiscal environment. The ICO has refined its performance measures for simplicity and to tailor the measures of ICO's revised mission statement and objectives.

Business unit 108000, Administration. This administration is responsible for the day-to-day operations of the ICO, including facilities management, staff support, training and access to necessary resources. Its performance is measured on how effectively it upholds statutory, financial and governance obligations. The ICO has consistently met its statutory requirement to table its annual report on time with the 2024 report laid before the Legislature on 28 March. It demonstrates fiscal transparency and accountability by publishing quarterly expenditure reports and financial records online. The office maintains a strong audit record having consistently received unqualified audits from the Auditor General. In the year ahead, the Administration plans to review and update internal guides, policies and procedures to align with the evolving best practices and legal standards.

Business unit 108010, Application. This unit handles applications submitted for independent review of public authorities' PATI decisions. It represents the most complex and labour-intensive function within ICO. In 2024, ICO received 50 new applications for review. The unit consistently meets most performance goals except for the eight-month target to close reviews, a timeline often impacted by the complexity of investigations and staffing constraints. Delays are frequently due to public authority challenges in responding to reviews while managing their core functions, contributing to a growing case backlog.

As of now, there are 33 open applications in the investigation phase. To address this, ICO is

streamlining its internal review process for greater efficiency while maintaining fairness and decision quality. Investigators are also committed to assisting public authorities with review submissions and actively seeking resolution opportunities from team parties to reduce review times.

Business unit 108020, Compliance. The Compliance Unit is responsible for monitoring and guiding public authorities to fulfilling their legal obligations under the Public Access to Information. PATI Act, particularly as outlined in Part 2 of the Act.

Key responsibilities include

- collecting and analysing annual return data from over 190 public authorities;
- promoting proactive publication of public records;
- ensuring information statements are regularly updated; and
- gazetting of contracts over \$50,000.

Despite the volume of authorities and limited resources, the ICO delivers quarterly compliance briefings on emerging issues, provides direct assistance to public authorities as needed, and publishes guidance materials to support consistent best practices compliance.

Looking ahead, the ICO will leverage data analysis from annual returns to identify trends and opportunities for improvement. Authorities with persistent non-complying issues can expect a rise in targeted compliance interventions to address and correct deficiencies.

Public Awareness, 108030

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Public Awareness Unit plays a central role in advancing the ICO's mandate by educating the public on their right to access government records under the PATI Act. The ICO raises awareness through educational initiatives, social media and accessible online resources.

Public events, including international right-to-know day stakeholder engagements to strengthen understanding and use of information access rights. Mr. Chairman, 87 per cent of respondents to the ICO's 2025 public engagement survey indicate that access to public records is important to them. The unit's key objective going forward is to turn awareness into action by

- encouraging more individuals to submit PATI requests;
- demonstrating how public access can support personal and civic empowerment; and
- the ICO will continue to refine outreach strategies and gather feedback to strengthen public engagement and improve overall access to public records.

Mr. Chairman, the Information Commissioner's Office is preparing two significant policy changes under the PATI framework:

1. Implementation of new fees for PATI requests
 - While no start date has been set, the Government intends to introduce a fee structure for certain PATI requests. The ICO is concerned such fees may pose a barrier to some individuals seeking to access public records. In response, the ICO will maintain strong public outreach to ensure people understand the new fees when they apply.
 - Reinforce its commitment to upholding the right to access to the fullest extent possible.
2. Amendments to the PATI Act eight-month review deadline
 - Anticipated legislative changes will require the Information Commissioner to complete reviews within eight months.
 - The operational impact of this requirement has been previously discussed in the brief, particularly regarding complex cases. To mitigate the added burden, Government plans to increase the availability of Government information accessible online to help reduce PATI requests.

The Information Commissioner welcomes consultation with the Minister and public officials to establish official Codes of Practice on record-keeping as outlined in section 60 of the PATI Act ahead of the fee implementation.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Information Commissioner has set a vision for 2025/26 and beyond to balance the ICO's mandate by directing greater efforts and resources towards supporting the availability of proactively disclosing public information and enhancing opportunities to improve public authorities PATI compliance. This separate focus, apart from the ICO's review process, in issuance of legally binding orders for disclosure will bring efficiency to public authorities records-handling and ease bureaucratic lag associated with processing PATI requests. The ICO's vision aligns quite naturally with the Government's 2025 Throne Speech commitments for the digital transformation of Government services by increasing (and I quote) "the amount of government information that is open and accessible online to reduce the unenviable burden of PATI requests on public officers."

The Public Access to Information Act and the work of the Information Commissioner to protect and promote the right to access public records stands as a fundamental tool in our democracy, empowering

Bermudians and residents to realise social, economic and democratic rights.

Mr. Chairman this ends my presentation on Head 98, the Information Commissioner's Office. And I wish to commend the Information Commissioner, Mr. Jason Outerbridge, and his staff for their exemplary work in this past fiscal year.

The Chairman: Yes, and there was a previous . . . and his predecessor as well.

For the benefit of the listening audience and Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26.

Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain and his team, including the Premier and Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert, have completed Heads 2, 5, 56, 68, 86, 92, 98 and now remains 101. And they are assisted by Permanent Secretary, Ms. Jeane [Nikolai],—everyone loves Jeane—

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And Mr. Ian Cameron.

The Chairman: It's not your place to say this. And Mr. Ian Cameron.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I will say, *and you know*.

The Chairman: I knew who he was.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: All right. But he is a super popular guy. Can't make kites though.

The Chairman: Yes, so now we are on Head 101, which is . . .

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Privacy Commissioner.

The Chairman: The Privacy Commissioner.
Are you allowed to talk about that?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. It's public today.

The Chairman: Please proceed.

HEAD 101—PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to present the final head of this debate, of these 52 *[sic]* hours, of these 52 *[sic]* hours that we have spent up here, for Head 101, the Office of the—56 hours of debate—

The Chairman: Well, 54 so far.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Bermuda, found on pages B-34 through B-37 of the Budget Book.

Mission and Mandate

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The mandate of the Office of the Privacy Commissioner for Bermuda, Mr. Chairman, for your edification. The mission of the Privacy Commissioner is, *To protect the rights of individuals in relation to their personal information.*

The mandate of the Privacy Commissioner is, *To take responsibility for monitoring how the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 is administered to ensure its purposes are achieved.* The Commissioner is empowered to regulate the use of personal information by organisations so that such use is in a manner that recognises both the need to protect the rights of individuals in relation to their personal information and the need for organisations to use personal information for legitimate purposes.

Mr. Chairman, the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 (PIPA) establishes the legal foundation for the Office of the Privacy Commissioner and sets out its powers, duties and independence. The Act was assented on 27 July 2016 where provisions for establishing the Office and appointing the Commissioner were enacted in December 2016, the remaining sections of the Act came into full effect on 1 January 2025, marking a significant milestone in Bermuda's data protection framework.

PIPA applies to all organisations in Bermuda that use personal information as part of a structured filing system, whether manual or automated. The Office of the Privacy Commissioner operates as an independent non-ministry entity. It is not subject to direction or control by any person or authority in carrying out its functions, must submit an annual report to both Houses of the Legislature by 30 June each year, undergoes an independent annual audit by the Auditor General outside of the Consolidated Fund. These legislative requirements ensure operational independence and public accountability for the Office, reinforcing its role as a neutral protector of personal information rights.

Mr. Chairman, the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA) empowers individuals to control how their personal information is used, offering protection for themselves and their families while strengthening Bermuda's position as a trusted and modern digital jurisdiction.

PIPA supports Bermuda's reputation as a regulatory safe harbour aligned with international standards, encouraging innovation and investment in digital commerce. In preparation for the full implementation of the Act on 1 July 2025, the Privacy Commissioner led a year-long "Road to PIPA" campaign, featured a target Data Privacy Week in January [2024], provided practical tools and guidance for businesses (especially small organisations), published accessible resources such as

"Guide to PIPA" templates and checklist at www.privacy.bm. (Is it priv-acy or pri-vacy?)

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Is it tom-AY-to or to-MAH-to?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Internationally, the Commissioner has engaged with global data protection peers, ensured Bermuda's policies aligned with international best practices, positioned Bermuda as a regulatory leader within the global Caribbean region among finance centres and on the global stage. These efforts have advanced both public understanding of data rights and Bermuda's global influence, all while strengthening protections for people of Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, as shown on page B-35 for the 2025/26 fiscal year, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner has shown an allocated budget of \$2,420,000, representing a net increase of \$112,000 from last year. This increase reflects the completion of staff recruitment with remaining open positions expected to be filled this year. To accommodate this, funds have been reallocated from other line items to support salary needs.

Office Accommodations

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Following the expiry of the fixed lease in January 2025, the office has moved to a month-to-month arrangement while awaiting new lease arrangements by the Department of Public Works. The rental estimate of \$155,000 has been included in the 2025/26 [financial year] based on projected market rates.

ITC Infrastructure

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, \$119,000 has been allocated for Information and Communication Technology. This marks the decrease of \$95,000 from the previous year as major ITC upgrades were completed during 2024/25. This budget supports the continued development of the office's operational capacity while responsibly managing costs and preparing for full implementation of the Personal Information Protection Act.

Human Resources

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Office of the Privacy Commissioner has an approved staff complement of 14 FTE positions, as shown on page B-35 of the Budget Book, consistent with the previous fiscal year. The total salary allocation of \$1,803,000 shows a \$226,000 increase over the 2024/25 estimate. This increase supports the full-year funding for positions that were previously filled on a staggered basis as the office continues to build capacity. Key senior roles established in

2025/26 include privacy commissioner, deputy commissioner, legal counsel assistant commissioner for operations, policy innovation and investigations.

The Commissioner will continue to assess how best to allocate staff resources to meet the office's growing mandate and service responsibilities with the full implementation of the PIPA Act.

The office may also engage external legal and technical expertise as needed to support its work.

Subjective Analysis

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Of the Office's total \$2,242,000 budget allocation for 2025/26, as shown on page B-35, Mr. Chairman, \$165,000 have been designated for operational activities. These operational funds will be strategically focused on public engagement, skills development, and rights education. Including:

1. Supporting organisations and public authorities:
 - The Commissioner will continue to assist businesses and government entities especially small- and medium-sized enterprises by developing a practical resource such as policy guidance, codes of practice templates, and hosting educational forums.
2. Empowering Bermudians through skills training:
 - In partnership with schools and community groups, the Office will support individuals seeking to enter the privacy field by promoting career pathways as privacy officers, enhancing job readiness, and meeting private sector needs.
3. Educating individuals on privacy rights:
 - The Office will help individuals understand their privacy rights as a human right including responding to public inquiries, conducting investigations into complaints [and] issuing official guidance and directions where appropriate. While the operational budget has been adjusted to reflect broader fiscal planning, the Office remains fully committed to delivering meaningful community engagement and ensuring that the privacy protections are clearly understood, accessible and actively supported in Bermuda.

Mr. Chairman, I will take a point of privilege to let the listening public know, as well as Members within, that there is a forum on forum.gov.bm that if you go and fill out, and you want to know anything about PIPA, they will contact you and arrange to have a meeting with your group or give you a presentation. But you can go on to government forums and actually sign up and have that sorted out for you.

Mr. Chairman, the operational expenses total \$165,000. These include

- \$10,000 for staff training, professional fees development and certifications;
- \$25,000 for travel expenses to attend such training professional conferences and staff secondments with fellow privacy regulators;
- \$27,000 for telecommunication services;
- \$34,000 for repairs and maintenance;
- \$12,000 for education for energy needs;
- \$10,000 for materials and supplies; and
- \$34,000 for equipment.

The Privacy Commissioner is committed to responsible use of public funds throughout the fiscal year 2025/26. The Commissioner will assess the needs of the Office and make any additional funds request to the Minister of Finance to ensure that the mandate of the Office is met.

Capital Expenditures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the capital expenditure allocation for the Office is found on page C-9 of the Budget Book and is \$18,000 for the fiscal period 2025/26. These funds have been allocated to purchase office and technological equipment for staff.

Revenue Overview

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the Office of the Privacy Commissioner is reported [as] \$161,000 in Revenue for fiscal year 2023/24 as shown on page B-35 of the Budget Book. This revenue . . . I'm not sure if that's a typo. If that should say 2025/26. This revenue was generated through registration fees and sponsorship—Ah! No. That is right, [it is] 2023/24. I remember reading this now.

This revenue was generated through registration fees and sponsorship for the Global Privacy Assembly (GPA) which Bermuda hosted in October 2023. The GPA brought together regulatory leaders and technology executives, over 130 countries, showcasing Bermuda as a global hub for digital innovation and human rights protection. The Office successfully organised and supported the event without drawing on public funds, relying instead on local and international sponsorships. The only public resource used was staff time.

The remaining \$661,000 in surplus funds has been placed in a dedicated account to support future participation in the GPA and to cover membership dues and travel costs related to ongoing regulatory cooperation. This approach assures transparency and accountability as the funds are clearly earmarked for international engagement purposes. The Office does not anticipate revenue collection in 2025/26 but may do so in future years as permitted under the Personal Information Protection Act (PIPA).

Performance Measures

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Chairman, the performance measures for the Office of the Privacy

Commissioner are found in the Budget Book on pages B-36 through B-37. In 2025/26, the Privacy Commissioner will engage in monitoring how the Act is administered to ensure its purposes are achieved. The Office's operations business unit will undertake initiatives to develop the operational maturity of the Office, enhancing compliance, function and processes concerning various statutory requirements related to finances, annual reports, access to information, and other business operations. This unit will establish a mediation, an alternative dispute resolution process, for addressing both formal and informal issues linked to complaints and potential violations of the Act.

In 2024/25, the Office reorganised to incorporate communication functions within the operations business unit, which will also undertake initiatives related to community awareness and education, conduct workshops and events, and manage publications.

Mr. Chairman, the Office's Policy and Innovation Unit will undertake initiatives related to creating technical guidance on compliance with the Act. The public will be given specific guidance on how to implement various sections of the Act. The Office's Policy and Innovation Unit will continue to work on the privacy, innovation and knowledge-sharing (or Pink Sandbox) to support businesses engaging in innovative uses of data and personal information.

The Office's Investigations Unit will engage in initiatives related to constructive, proactive regulation. This unit will continue to respond to individual complaints, generate own-initiative actions, draft compliance orders, and undertake sectorial and industry surveys.

Mr. Chairman, the Government is proud to have brought the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 into operation on 1 January 2025. The Act is of vital importance to protecting Bermuda and her people from a variety of online, financial and even physical harm. In addition, for a country to promote technological innovation we need forward-thinking rules and regulators. I commend the work of the Privacy Commissioner in shepherding this Act into force and guiding the community to comply with it. The Commissioner will continue to advise Government on the Act and provide recommendations regarding the exercise of provisions now that it is operational.

Mr. Chairman, it has been a long road to PIPA since 2016. With the Act coming into effect, it would be easy to say that we have reached our destination; however, compliance is a journey, not a destination. Even while the Act is now in effect, it will be a continuous process to protect the digital rights of individuals. Organisations should continue to ask themselves, *What data are we storing? For what purpose is the data being used for? Do we even need the information we hold to accomplish our business purposes?* By understanding their data assets, they can determine what policies and procedures would best reduce the risk of harm to individuals.

Mr. Chairman, I encourage any organisation that needs a better understanding of the Act and compliance, to visit the website of the Privacy Commissioner, www.privacy.bm.

Mr. Chairman, this now concludes my presentation for the budget of Head 101, Office of the Privacy Commissioner. It also concludes the tenth head that I have read today.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I wish to commend the Privacy Commissioner, Mr. Alex White, and his team for the commitment to excellence this past year. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister, and your team for such succinct and brief briefs.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening public and the Honourable Members, we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. Today, this last brief we are debating is the Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation . . . that was done earlier.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Please let the Chair . . . have you seen Captain Philips?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Okay. All right.

Earlier the Ministry of Cabinet Office and Digital [Innovation] was done. And now . . . starting at 2:57 pm, the Non-ministries were done. And now the Opposition has approximately one hour and 40 minutes to ask their succinct and non-accusatory questions.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I can make no guarantees, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I thank the Honourable Minister and his colleagues for very thorough briefs. Even though there were quite a few of them, they were detailed enough that we could proceed to this stage of scrutinising the Budget Book.

With that being said, Mr. Chairman, I am going all the way back to Head 2, which we started two hours ago. Just to keep it in order.

I want to start my contribution, or evaluation, by . . . where the Minister finished, which was thanking the staff. We are currently doing Head 2, the Legislature, which includes some \$5.8 million in spending. Mr.

Chairman, when in church council you talk about the pastor's salary, you normally ask him to leave, him or her. I don't think we can ask these guys to leave though, so you guys will have to be here through the full presentation. I want to make it very, very clear that absolutely none of my questions mean that I do not appreciate and value the work of the staff here at the Legislature, at the House.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: They are an incredible group of people who work incredibly hard. And most especially I want to point out that even though this Legislature has a Head 2, it infers that this is one of many. It is not.

The Legislature is the beginning of all things in Bermuda as it relates to the formality of Government. It is the place where law is made. It is the place where truly hard things are done. It is the place where buildings are permitted to take place. It is the place where social programmes are created and . . . well, I will give it to the Minister for action. But this is so, so key because I don't think a lot of times the public are aware of just how vital it is. So, starting there.

I will start my address by speaking to [business unit] 1000 *[sic]* on page B-10. Sorry. That is [business] unit 12000 on page B-10. I noted that we see an increase of 5 per cent in the administration budget. And I wanted to get a little bit more information on that. I understand it being salary increase but were there any performance [measures] associated with those increases?

I have a very blunt question relating to Schedule 3, on page B-11, which is dealing . . . oh, sorry. It is on Schedule 3 as well as page B-11, which is dealing with the Sessions House. And the question that I have, and it is a straight-up question requiring only a straight-up answer is, When will the Legislature return to Sessions House? Even though we spoke about it, or we certainly spoke to it in the brief a little bit, what we did not speak to was a finite date for our return to Sessions House. We are currently in rented accommodations, and I believe that we are capable of doing our job better in purpose-built facilities.

A further question to that, Mr. Chairman, I note that we have had some discussions in passing about some changes that might be taking place to Veritas House while we are here. So, my question . . . I didn't see where that was coming out of our Head 2, Legislature budget. I am aware that the House and Grounds Committee is busy and meeting and dealing with a number of issues, and I would like to know what, if any, changes we are anticipating to the rented properties and which head, or which business unit that will be getting paid from. Thank you.

Also, what is the current explanation for the significant increase in energy as well as other expenses?

Mr. Chairman, these rising administrative costs are a point of interest to the general public. They certainly speak to if we are in fact going to increase the cost on this that we should definitely see an increase in performance.

Mr. Chairman, moving on to my second set of questions relating to Hansard streaming and the legislative accessibility. Mr. Chairman, I note that the Minister or the Premier . . . is it the Premier who brought this? I think it was the Premier. [He] did not speak to the voice transcription service that we had previously entertained on our other budgets. And this I will speak to page B-10 under, Department Objectives, which is "Advancing the digital transformation of the presentation and tabling of legislation papers and reports in the Legislature. The recording of Parliamentary proceedings and the safe storage of Parliamentary records and information."

We had previously stated that voice transcriptions would be of use. Now, why would that be of use? Mr. Chairman, right now it takes quite some time for the Hansard to be turned around. Hansard is the written record of our proceedings. As it stands, it is quite vital, not only in the reflection process but for us to evaluate what is taking place and interrogate that information, correlate it and then put proper questions to power. In the absence of the Hansard, we often have to rely only on our own recollections and notes. So, to that end, a voice transcription service would modernise the House and provide us in here the opportunity to actually undertake the work with a lot more professionalism and detail. To that end my question is, what happened to the voice transcription project?

Further to that point, Mr. Chairman, going on to objective number six, still speaking to advancing the digital transformation of the House of Assembly. I wanted to speak to . . . is there a timeline target for turn-arounds on Hansard transcriptions? Which I do not see under performance measures. Again, I have spoken to the value of the Hansard, but I wanted to make it clear that it is actually, they can be quite dated sometimes. For example, the most recent Hansard that is available is currently dated 26 March 2025. And we are on 29 . . . sorry, we are on 28 May. And so obviously that would be incredibly helpful in undertaking our jobs. So, my question to the Premier would be, Is there a timeline target for releasing Hansard transcriptions? And are we going to expand into voice recording transcription service?

Further to that point, Mr. Chairman, under objective number four, for Head 2, the objective is that the Legislature will be customer-centric and improving public knowledge and understanding of the importance and leading role of the Legislature in the governance of Bermuda. I think this is absolutely critical, Mr. Chairman. I don't think anyone of us can . . . doesn't have a story where we have been approached by a member of the public who wants us to do certain things but clearly does not understand the nature and structure of the

Houses of Parliament as well as the rules that govern our conduct. So it is very important that we let them know. One of the areas that we could let them know is by livestreaming access to committees. So my question would be, Has the Government or anyone else considered expanding livestreaming access to committees. Mindful—don't need a point of order—that that might need to go to the Rules and Privileges Committee. But it is a point of curiosity since it is outlined, and we are funding at \$5.8 million.

With that being said, Mr. Chairman, this goes back to the voice transcription services, or the voice recording service. I want to bring that up because we shifted back to manual transcriptions for Hansard, it is under professional services, but I did not see a commensurate reduction in professional services costs. Or an increase. In fact, I can't quite make sense of how . . . what impact, if any, it had to our budget. So if someone could explain what impact the failure of the ASR project has had. Are we saving money? Losing money? Obviously, my earlier question is, Are we still proceeding with it at all?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: ASR, it was called.

Mr. Chairman, that would be my questions under the theme of Hansard streaming and legislative accessibility.

My next set of questions relate to public and youth engagement, which comes under business unit 12002, under Youth Parliament. And especially, obviously, under the education part of our honourable assembly. Now I noticed that the Youth Parliament participation rate . . . now, by the way, I genuinely did not know as much about the Youth Parliament until the sad events that the Lister family had experienced. And having now spent some time looking into it, it is actually quite key. A number of our social commentators in Bermuda right now have come through the Youth Parliament process and so it is key that in order to engage the youth and make sure that we increase youth participation in our electoral process that those mechanisms are reinforced and published as much as possible.

Now, the reason I bring all that up is because this Budget Book, again, \$5.8 million, a portion of it which is allocated to the Youth Parliament under business unit 12002. And I noted that a number of Youth Parliamentarians participating in each legislative session, we anticipated 20 and it went down to 12—anticipating 18. The only sort of recollection I have of Youth Parliamentarians participating in our assemblies is really relating to us during the opening of Parliament when they typically have a role there. It would be good to get them more involved. So to that end, what is being done to recruit more students into the Youth Parliament? Will their debates and forums be broadcast or held more visibly this year? Right now there is only one a year that is held via CI . . . or held upon . . . sorry . . .

broadcast by a CITV. And it is clear that the more people we get involved again, the better we get for youth participation. So, are we going to see more of that? And is \$6,000 going to be enough to cover for the Youth Parliament's engagement objectives?

Moving on to Legislative Output and Committee Oversight. This one will be speaking to business unit 12010. I had already spoken to the House and Grounds Committee's meeting. And I would be interested to know what are, again, those plans that we are looking at in Veritas Place? There is an overlap there.

And that takes me on to the Sessions House restoration which we spoke to a little bit about before. To that end, would the Honourable Minister or Premier be able to state the judicial relocation that is required to start the renovation on Sessions House? During his brief he said it would take place in early 2025. But we are in May 2025. So, we are already almost half-way through the year. And I am not sure if they are actually going to move out.

When I was on the House and Grounds [Committee] it was quite clear that there was quite a lot to do insofar as moving the courts out of Sessions House and into their Dame Lois Browne-Evans Building. And so it is no easy thing. I would ask the Honourable Premier if he could specify instead of saying *early 2025* because again, we are past *early 2025*.

I note that the 2024 budget allocation was for \$250,000 for phase 1 of the restoring of Sessions House. In other words, putting us back in Sessions House. We seem to be running into more and more delays. This year's Budget Book has \$900,000 set aside. If you just bear with me . . . or you could just believe me. Here it is. On page C-4, \$900,000, has been allocated to the Parliament building refurbishment. That is under business unit 75230. So there are a couple of questions here. What does \$900,000 get us in terms of how far? Especially given that under that same heading, business unit, we are estimating a \$20 million refurbishment and so far, as I said, last year's fiscal budget we allocated \$250,000. This year \$900,000.

So, at this burn rate, at \$20 million we are not going to get into the Parliamentary building for a while. So, my question is, What are we going to get for that \$900,000 in this fiscal year? My question is . . . also, further on, 75230, there is an original estimate of that \$250,000 I had raised earlier, Mr. Chairman, but the revised estimate shows \$419,000 was spent.

Now, well knowing that full renovations, for that to take place requires the judiciary to move. The judiciary has not yet moved. What did we spend . . . how did we exceed a budget given that the conditions were not yet met for us to spend up to \$250,000. So some clarification would be an assistance. In other words, what did we spend that extra money on as it relates to getting us back into Sessions House?

I also want to make very, very clear, we are going to have to reiterate this. In the last three budgets, we have discussed when we are going to get back into

the Sessions House. I think it is time that someone comes up with a deadline to get back into Sessions House. And most especially my question will be, Given that we are now spending \$900,000 and the Honourable Premier did make a point in saying that there will be a full review of the work that it will entail for us to get back into Sessions House, my question is, Will he table the Master Plan or refurbishment timeline before the end of the fiscal year? Alternatively, will the House and Grounds Committee be able . . . be given that specific duty?

The question also, from the brief, again regarding the \$900,000. I noted that the Premier said why . . . that we are going to take time to review, once the judiciary is out of Sessions House. My question is, What does that review entail? We have been monitoring the development of this project for some time, especially in House and Grounds. I know that plans were sent at one point. The Honourable Minister Colonel Burch in fact had quite a plan. I remember us meeting and discussing it at one point. So, it is clear that a lot of work has already been done. My question is, Given that that much work has been done, given that we are now allocating \$900,000 and that we overspent last year on the renovation and again, we are not there, and we do not even know when we will get there, could someone please explain what is the plan to get back into Sessions House?

My next question, Mr. Chairman, relates to the committees of this Honourable House. Most of which are outlined under Head 2, under page B-13. Specifically, under performance measures, business unit 12010, Ministers and Members.

Now, Mr. Chairman, one of the areas that we have been examining here is these committees. I mentioned House and Grounds more than a few times. We have the Audit Office which the Honourable Premier had mentioned, or the Audit Office Committee which the Honourable Premier had mentioned is a mechanism by which to fund the Office of the Auditor General, Private Bills Committee, Standing Orders and Privileges [Committee] and obviously Joint Select Committees. The one we have not mentioned which is outlined here is the Public Accounts Committee.

Again, on page B-13, referring to business unit 12010. The Public Accounts Committee plays a key role, as you are well aware, but certainly all of us are very, very well aware in facilitating what we do in this House, most especially holding the Government to account. But it has not been with committed secretarial research facilities. In fact, I just want to point this out. We have some seven staff allocated to the administration of the entirety of the House of Legislature—the entire Parliament—which oversees (I want to say) a \$6 billion economy, which oversees \$1.2 billion in Government spending. I mean, we have huge responsibilities and seven people administer that. And that is why I thank them so much. Because it is an incredible, *incredible* task. One of the primary mechanisms though

is that they are all not going to be able to—actually, may I read for a second from something? The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association speaks to a Public Accounts Committee utility. I just want to mention this.

The Chairman: Please go ahead.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you.

The quotation is from *Recommended Benchmark for Democratic Legislatures*. It is dated 2018. Specifically benchmark 2.1.5 where it reads, “The Public Accounts Committee shall be adequately resourced and empowered to conduct effective oversight of public expenditure.” Now in similar jurisdictions, which I am pretty sure the Premier actually mentioned in his brief, we see dedicated researchers, report writers, and financial analysts. That is the kind of resourcing the Public Accounts Committee is going to need. And it is going to need that no matter who is in Government.

And so to that end, I think that until we have a committed secretariat who has that source of investigative and analytical resources, the Public Accounts Committee will be entirely reliant—again, speaking to business unit 12010 on the availability of its members to undertake analytical, investigative and report-writing work and researching work. So, I definitely, strongly, advocate that we increase the funding to the House of Assembly, especially under administration. That being business unit 12000 to provide for the staffing to the Public Accounts Committee to undertake its role.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: So, Honourable Opposition Leader, for clarity for the Minister, are you advocating for the Government to increase staff?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

The Chairman: And increase expenditure?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: For the Public Accounts Committee, absolutely.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Twice on Sunday.

The Chairman: All right. Just be careful.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Okay. Thank you so much.

Whilst we are there, let's go through Head 2. I noted that the Premier's brief had spoken to

Communications. So we are under Head 2, object and code description, this is subjective analysis at current account expenditures. Under Communications, we see some resources that are in use. For example, right now we are all issued tablets. Those tablets come with cell phone numbers or data lines. I could not tell you the last time I saw one of those kicking around here. So, I think it is quite key that where possible that we are able to redirect those resources. Again, there are better places to put it, such as the Public Accounts Committee.

So, one of the questions I do have is, and I asked it earlier, I spoke about the jump in energy costs. Again, under subjective analysis of current account expenditures, as well as other expenses.

As it relates to the vacancy, under employee numbers, full-time equivalents, page B-11, the assistant clerk position is vacant. My question to the Honourable Premier, Do we have any understanding of what may take place given that that position is vacant? Right now we have the incredible Ms. Beale as our Deputy. But she was previously Assistant Clerk. Is she wearing two hats? How much work is she doing? What changes, especially what adverse changes could we see to our support structure? And if none, or at the very least, when are we anticipating hiring an assistant clerk? Again, these guys work incredibly hard, and I would hate for them to be working even harder.

And I note that in the Premier's brief he had mentioned that we are going to consider how AI can be applied. That is, artificial intelligence. Mr. Chairman, as someone who is now working in that space where we are using more and more artificial intelligence in the public sector, it would go a long way to our objective number six. That is, Advancing the digital transformation of the presentation. If we were able to get access to artificial intelligence. I know the Honourable Minister for Cabinet Office mentioned that Government will be trialling and in a Ministerial Statement probably a month or two ago that we will be trialling artificial intelligence use in Government. I would advocate that that trial be extended to this Honourable House because that would go a long way to providing both report writing, researchers and investigators. And to that end, I would ask that question of the Premier. When would he consider expanding that trial of artificial intelligence to the House, to the Legislature? Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Moving on, Mr. Chairman, to Head 5.

The Chairman: For the benefit of the listening audience, we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. The Honourable Opposition Leader, Honourable Jarion Richardson, is asking very clinical questions on non-ministries.

You may proceed, Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

For the Office of Auditor General, Head 5, I would again start where the Honourable Premier finished by thanking the team at the Office of Auditor General, the OAG, for their incredible work. And the importance of their work should be stated as vital. Absolutely vital. Again, it always baffles me when we talk about non-ministries. It sounds like an afterthought when it is in fact the most central part of our entire governing system. So the Office of the Auditor General has my thanks.

Starting off we'll talk about the financial statement backlog and systemic audit gaps, that the Auditor General has been reporting on for some time. Most specifically, we are talking about, under general summary, on page B-14 under business unit 15000, which would be the same as the Auditor General's performance measurements. Similarly, under business unit 15000. Now the Auditor General has asked for an allocation, or rather the Government is likely to give an allocation of \$4.397 million. The Honourable Premier did specify that a different number was sent to the Audit Committee of the House, and he explained how he arrived at this number. As well as his flexibility on a going-forward basis. Which I'll bring up at another point in question.

My question is the Auditor General is generating a number of products as it stands right now and one of my questions under performance measures is she generated a number of reports saying that entities remain in arrears with their financial statements. And I don't see that as a performance measure. My concern, the reason I'm raising this, is because I'm not sure if we are encouraging . . . do we have a dog that can't bite? Or in this case, bark. If we have so many outstanding audits and we're not tracking them in our performance measures when we're allocating \$4.397 million, then I have a question about, *Well, what value are we getting here for that for \$4.4 . . . Let's just say \$4.4 million.* So my question is, How many entities remain in arrears? How many financial statements have been submitted for audit but are not yet completed? What is the current number? Oh, and do we have a remediation plan? Does the Ministry of Finance or the Auditor General have a remediation plan to clear up of these backlogs? Again, I don't see this in the performance measures, but I would argue that anyone who's about to receive \$4.4 million we would want to get to grips with that problem.

Mr. Chairman, following on from that . . . and in going under performance measures, I don't see any targets relating to closing open recommendations from audits or any departments or boards facing consequences for audits or any selected audits being implemented. In fact, what I do see and let me just read it out. Just to be clear because it's not as if there is nothing there. It just doesn't seem—

The Chairman: To be clear, where are you reading from?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sure. Sorry. My apologies, Mr. Chairman. I'm on page B-16, reading under Head 5, performance measures for business unit 15000.

The Chairman: Not that we don't trust you but, you know, people want reference points.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Sir, absolutely, I'm very mindful that people are listening right now and don't have . . . we don't have the TV staring with the presentations like the US Congress does.

To that end, the business unit has some measurables including a number of financial statement audits completed. A number of financial statement reviews completed. A number of non-financial audits completed. Annual report, percentage of team members who met minimum CPD requirements. Percentage of audit staff time allocated to the annual consolidated fund and percentage of audit staff time allocated to the other audits. And these are good. But I would argue that, again, when we give \$4.4 million, what we want to know is how effective \$4.4 million is. I don't see that. So, my question is as outlined, and I know persons are taking notes for the Honourable Premier.

Further, we have a question or rather relating to the resourcing recruitment and capacity constraints. Now the Honourable Premier made the point that there's been . . . and in fact over the years a number of people have made the point that it's quite difficult to staff the Auditor General's department because of the competition in the private sector. So to that end, would the Honourable Premier be able to answer if the Auditor General's Office is currently fully staffed to its authorised full-time equivalents? And that information is on page B-15. So, I'm asking if the information on page B-15, specifically, business unit 15000. I see that we have 28 in the 2024/25 full-time equivalents. I see that in the 2024/25 revised it says 25. And then in the estimate it says 28 again. So, the question is, Do we have those bodies yet? And if not, what is the plan to get those persons? Granted it might be incredibly difficult to recruit but nonetheless we still need a plan for such a vital department. Thank you.

Also, a question relating to the Honourable Premier and undoubtedly the support team listening in, Has the 2023/24 annual report from the Office of the Auditor General been published on time and tabled in the House? I'm afraid that I've not been able to find that information. The last one I found was from 2019 with some audited financial statements. And I'm just wondering, Are we looking in different places? I'm very mindful that the House does an incredible job on digitising the information that we received on our Share-Point site, but that doesn't always mean that it is the easiest thing to do. Which again, I sort of lean on my honourable colleague, the Minister for Cabinet Office to

give us access to artificial intelligence which would increase our ability to undertake research.

Okay. Moving on. I am in general very pleased to see a \$4.4 million allocation to the Auditor General. I am very mindful that the 2023/24 allocation was—sorry. That's on page B-14, under 15000. It was \$3.6 [million] and then in 2024/25 the original allocation was \$4.1 [million] and then only wound up being spent, it looks like \$3.7 million. So, to see \$4.3 million is great. And that's a fantastic thing. The Minister did explain how that budgeting process works. My question though is, he's explained that the additional funds, if needed, the Ministry commits to providing them. And yet in the same brief when the Honourable Premier was speaking to capital acquisitions, he mentioned that the Auditor General needed some new computers. But [they] didn't get everything they wanted. Now, I do see some allocations here. I want to say \$21,000. And this is on page C-9 under capital acquisitions, which is Schedule C dealing with business unit 76605.

So, the Auditor General is getting \$21,000 but the Honourable Premier said that that's not enough. So he said that the Ministry will look at that. So it seems like this number is a bit fluid. So, my question is, What is the criteria that the Premier is deciding when addressing the needs of the Auditor General's department given the fluidity that is currently in evidence by his ministerial brief?

Moving on, still on page B-15. I noticed that the professional services area, under page B-15, under subjective analysis of current account expenditures, we're seeing an allocation of some \$364,000. This was originally allocated last fiscal period at \$330,000 and revised to the actual spend of being or anticipated spend being \$201,000 so we're now allocating \$368,000. That is on page B-15 under subjective analysis of current account expenditures.

My question is that we have spoken quite a number of times about outstanding audits and how the Office of the Auditor General will hire additional staff, additional professional staff, under this line item within the budget to cover for that. So, if the Honourable Premier would be able to just specify, Why is it that we have this line item and this activity where we do hire additional people to go through them, to go through these accounts, but we still have outstanding accounts? And then further to that, Why are we also providing legislative options for persons to effectively opt-out or . . . sorry, select a different auditor if we have a mechanism to make sure that we catch up with their audits? And the last time this happened the Honourable Minister, the then Minister of Education, had brought legislation to the effect facilitating that process for another body. So, my question is, Why do we have that option if we're able to hire staff? I'm happy to take a point—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Point of clarification.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Absolutely.

The Chairman: Proceed Minister.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you for mentioning that. This may affect the question, but the reason that legislation was brought forth for the Bermuda College is [because] part of their accreditation required that they show they have complete control over their financial matters. And so it required for them to be able to select their own auditor to do their audits for them. Not that we didn't want the Auditor General to do it.

The Chairman: Please proceed.
You got your clarity?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Oh, absolutely.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: That was that was borderline effective. I like when we do effective up here.

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: So that's a great point.

But that also . . . I'll leave that question there for the Honourable Premier because the Honourable former Minister of Education made the point that that was due to an accreditation. But there are obviously others who would have similar interests, so my question would still apply to everybody else. Which was, How do you . . . given that where you have a mechanism by which to compensate for outdated reports, why do we have outdated reports, effectively?

And performance . . . That's . . . that's my questions. Commissions . . . Ah yes. I have some questions on page B-16 for the Office of Auditor General, Mr. Chairman.

Under performance measures, again going back to 15000, Number of financial statement audits completed. And I've looked through a number of reports from the Auditor General and it's been mentioned that sometimes this process has been hampered by no submissions, or problems getting submissions from other parties. And I believe the Honourable Premier did mention that in his brief. So I would ask the question, How many, if any, are these financial statement audits being hampered by either a lack of submissions, submissions which are not substantive enough? And are we tracking? Who's doing that? Why? So that we can remediate out of that circumstance.

That's my questions under Head 5, Office of Auditor General, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Do you wish to continue or do you want the answers?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I'll just keep on going.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I'm following the Minister who went for like two hours. I got to . . . if I take a break I might get in trouble.

The Chairman: I think he went longer but, you know . . .

[Laughter]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: So the next set of questions is under Head 56, the Human Rights Commission. And to that end . . . I'm on page B-17 and dealing with . . . well, I'll get into the questions to deal with. My question relates to the complaint caseload and investigation timelines, or timeliness, as it were, relating to business unit 66040 of the Tribunal as facilitated or administered by [business unit] 66020, the Office of the Commission. And my question relates to the performance, as it were. The performance standards of the Human Rights Commission are outlined on page B-19 under business unit 66020. And the Human Rights Commission, again, under the number 66040. And what I don't see here, but I do see in their annual reports, is reporting on their activities such as how many complaints remained open at the start of 2025/26 and timely resolutions.

So, my question relates more so to the Minister on the . . . overseeing this area, or responsible for administering this area, I should say. Why isn't that information included in the performance measures? That being the complaints that have been tabled. And times to resolutions and things like that. My question, it really does relate because performance tracking for resolving discrimination complaints, which are in line with section 14 of the Human Rights Act, are very important.

I actually skipped ahead and I apologise to the Human Rights Commission, its team, staff and Minister. I did mean to say first, thank you for their considerable service. The Human Rights Commission does a job which is absolutely key in modern law and modern life in Bermuda and is often quietly going about their jobs. But they are critical to making life sustainable, civil in Bermuda. So I wanted to mention that point.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: What is your point of order, Minister?

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member did maybe a five-minute ramble without asking a single question. I believe that the Member is supposed to ask questions which are in alignment with the Budget Book. And I have not heard a question in that last five-minute period.

The Chairman: Just for your clarity and the clarity of the listening public, the Chairman of Committees had a meeting and there's some levity allowed for creative discussion. That can always be counteracted with factual answers. Thank you, Minister.

Please proceed, Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I thank the Honourable Minister for bringing up the fact that, yes, there were some constraints before in this process. I'm glad those constraints have been lifted.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I'm at five minutes . . . my clock shows five minutes and 51 . . . five o'clock and 51 minutes. And I have a point there. The Honourable Minister said five minutes, I'm pretty sure within the five-minute period I asked a question about page B-19, 66040.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: So, my question to somebody is, really anybody, didn't that constitute a question? That question?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: But anyway, let's get back to the work of the people.

And especially . . . by the way and the reason why, Mr. Chairman, that I'm actually adding my thanks and specifying the importance of these roles is because the Minister's briefs all include that portion and what I would hate to happen is for someone to think that because I'm scrutinising their conduct, their allocations, their funds, or their output in any way means that I am not thankful for their contribution to the state of this country. And so, I just wanted to make that point.

Moving on back to Head 56, the Human Rights Commissions on page B-17. I had asked the question relating to the tracking mechanisms relating to discrimination complaints. A further question to the Honourable Minister would be on allocations on page B-17 relating to business unit 66020, Office of the Commission. My question would be, Of that allocation, which I'm looking at \$1.331 million in the 2025/26 estimate, how much of that supports investigations? My understanding is part of this process, part of the complaints process, is an investigation part. And I'm not quite sure I know how much, or I can see how much funding goes towards investigating these complaints. I am making this point because timely handling of discrimination complaints is crucial and there is a rising caseload, so we just want to make sure that we are getting an understanding here as we are allocating \$1,434,000 under Head 56, that it is being properly dealt with.

Relating to education and public engagement, which is coming under department objectives, most especially department objective 4, to educate the community on the principles of human rights inclusion and

equality. I do have some questions here. We have three business units: business unit 66020, business unit 66030, and business unit 66040. But we also have an objective to educate the community under objective 4. And my question is, What share of the operational budget is devoted to the public education media outreach and or training piece? I believe the Honourable Minister did speak to that, but I wasn't sure if I got a specification as to how much of that funding goes towards that process? I am mindful but—

The Chairman: Please hold there, Opposition Leader.

For the listening public, we are now in the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates or Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2025/26. This debate began on non-ministries at 2:57 pm and it ends at 6:57 pm which by my calculations, Berkeley maths, means we have one hour left. So, if the Opposition continues to ask non-succinct questions, they may not get any answers.

Please continue, Mr. Opposition Leader.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman for your evaluation of my sequence of questioning.

I would note . . . Oh, that's it. What performance measures exist to track education delivery or outcomes beyond media appearances and consultations? That's specifically relating to page B-19 either under business unit 66020, which is I think that's where it will be tracked. Because it is an advertising and promotion line item under subjective analysis of current account expenditures. But that looks like advertising and promotion and I'm not entirely sure that I'm capturing the full education delivery or outcome purposes.

Okay. Obviously, a great part of making sure that we don't increase our caseload which is what we're seeing right now, is the education piece. So my question relates to the education piece. A further question relating to the performance measures under 66020, relating to the strategic plan. I don't see it mentioned under performance measures, but the Human Rights Commission was applauded when they released their 2023-2025 Strategic Plan. And it would be interesting to know if any portion of the current projected allocation of \$1,434,000 would go towards a new strategic plan.

Moving on. Independence and oversight and now moving on to Head 56, number 9, To act independently in accordance within the Commission's statutory duties and to continue to strengthen the Commissions ability to function with such independence. Which portion . . . I have some questions relating to the role, to the process, of the allocation process right now because I see that we have \$1,434,000 and I know that the Commission is supposed to act independently of the Government and I wasn't sure, did the Cabinet amend the request? We saw a similar circumstance in the Office of the Auditor General where the Auditor General put forward a number to the committee, Audit

Committee of the House. That number was then sent to the Finance Minister and that number was amended. Is there a similar such arrangement relating to the Commission?

Further on, going back to page B-17, specifically, objective B, Mr. Chairman. To inform the Government of human rights matters inclusive of those that require the development of policies designed to strengthen protections. With 46 per cent of complaints this year . . . this year? Yes, last year . . . tied to employment, has the Human Rights Commission consulted with the Government in drafting workplace discrimination, immigration or wage enforcement policies?

Further on to objective 6. I note the Honourable Minister had mentioned adopting disability as needed across Government. In her brief, which was, a report will be commissioned. I'm not sure if I caught all of it either. It is being commissioned, has been commissioned but it's supposed to go to Cabinet. And at that point it's supposed to be used as part of the wider consultation on every Government policy. I was hoping the Honourable Minister could speak to how that process would work because for those of us who work in compliance, we're well aware that if you send the policy to too a high level, it just gets put on a shelf and then collects dust. So, I'm wondering how that's going to work out.

Certainly, the Human Rights Commission is an early warning system, and it tells us what's going wrong or what needs to be addressed within our community. And so, I'm pleased to hear about the Human Rights Commission's work, and I'm interested to know how it's informing Government policy.

Moving on to the Human Rights Tribunal effectiveness. I am now referring to Head 56, page B-19, business unit 66040 Human Rights Tribunal where the two performance measurements are decisions issued within 30 days of the conclusion of a hearing being 100 per cent for the targeted outcome of this year and tribunal decisions registered in Supreme Court being 12.

One of the questions I have is . . . I'm not sure and maybe I might have missed this, is the total number of complaints being received and I'd be pleased to be corrected if I just missed that in the Minister's brief. Again this goes towards the effectiveness of the tribunals because I'm not sure how much how much work is being sent to them. They are being allocated right now \$81,000. Speaking of that, there's a great question to the Honourable Minister. She had mentioned that under professional services, so 466040, under Professional Services which is the subjective analysis of current account estimates on page B-18 that tribunal—some members of the tribunal are being compensated under the Professional Services line item. And I had a question, Why is that if there is its own business unit under 66040 under tribunals?

The problem I see with that, Mr. Chairman, is that I'm not . . . it seems like one of many line items that

get stuffed into Professional Services and given that we're seeing a 44 per cent increase in expenditure for that one line item, there's some curiosity around what's going in there. And further if I could ask the Honourable Minister as it relates to the subjective analysis of current account expenditures, specifically on page B-18 and I think this was under Professional Services as well going to my earlier point. She had mentioned that director and officer insurance had been obtained for the members of the tribunal and so my question is . . . and I think she said that price point was \$4,000. So what about the statutory protections was not enough that required additional insurance coverage? I am just mindful of the precedent it sets relating to all the tribunals in government.

And I'll take us past Head 56 on the Human Rights Commission, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to move on to Head 63, the Parliamentary Registrar, with your permission.

The Chairman: Yes, please do, Honourable Opposition Leader. Get in all your questions. You have all of 50 minutes to go.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, I think I'll probably take a break so I can get some answers back because I do have some supplementals. I am sure that excited a lot of people.

The Chairman: What did you say earlier? You said your statement was already written.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Would you like—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Foregone conclusion.

The Chairman: When would you like to get your answers?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Well I can sit down right now and get some answers. I would love to.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, definitely. Thank you.

The Chairman: While the . . . Minister Jason Haywood wishes to speak to some of the questions—

Hon. Jason Hayward: No—I will speak to the heads. Head 56—

The Chairman: Speak to Head 56, please.

Hon. Jason Hayward: —outlined in the Budget Book. I also laud the efforts of the Human Rights Commission and the departmental objectives. I think it plays a

fundamentally important role in ensuring that we have an inclusive society, one that's based off of principles of social justice. One where we can embrace equity and equality.

Our department which is designed to understand by nature of us being human beings that we have biases—whether conscious biases or unconscious biases which lead to decision-making which may negatively impact individuals. And as a result of that we want to ensure that we respect persons at their most basic level and that is simply for being a human being. Persons should not be treated different based off of race, gender, nationality . . . we have ageism as well, which is a factor. And we count on and rely on persons to do the right thing within our society, but they simply don't. And there needs to be appropriate protections in place so we can continue to protect those individuals.

The department objectives of Head 56 to inquire into and investigate human rights related complaints of discrimination and harassment is needed. You would note that what I would have done in the Ministry of Economy and Labour would have been to place within the Employment Act the provision that every employer must have a policy in place against workplace bullying and harassment. What we found is that when we looked at the Human Rights Act, it was a very difficult hurdle for employees to climb to prove that they are being harassed or bullied based off of discriminatory grounds.

So, we put a policy statement in place to say simply it should not happen, whether it's based off of discriminatory grounds or not. But what we also found is that underneath what we consider to be discrimination and harassment is this layer of behaviour that we consider to be incivility. And that incivility in the workplace also impacts persons on many levels and I find that there is a gap in the human rights legislation as it pertains to incivility. We are going to discuss further with the Human Rights Commission as it pertains to employment equity in the workplace and how we can strengthen those provisions.

You would note that employment equity is found in the Human Rights Act and there are strong provisions in place to ensure that there is equality of opportunities in the workplace and that persons are not being discriminated and passed over. Something that exists within our community. Many complain about it and this Government will be on the forefront of addressing it. That was found in our [Retaining] the Local Workforce [Position] Paper, where we identified in order for Bermudians to feel comfortable in their places of employment, they needed to . . . we need to ensure that the environment is one that is conducive to them being productive and progressing.

We also support the efforts of the department to resolve human rights complaints through mediation. Mediation is an excellent tool to ensure that we have appropriate barometer checks of behaviour. Not all the time do complaints have to go through a tribunal and

there is punitive measure. Sometimes mediation can lead to correctional behaviour, but acknowledgement that the behaviour actually exists as well.

It is important that the Human Rights Tribunal have the effective support. It is important that we continue to look to revise the Human Rights Act. It is also important to inform Government policymaking—where the complaints lie, who was still . . . which demographic group within our society are being negatively impacted? In which areas does the discrimination actually exist? All of these things are fundamentally important to ensure that we have a society that works for all. The society that appreciates persons' basic human rights but also a society where we afford everyone the same level of opportunity and we extend the quality of rights of that . . . that person's desire. Where persons can work in or live in some sort of dignity.

We see worldwide where atrocities are taking place based off of nationality and race and tribal wars and things of that nature. And it is these sorts of bodies—the Human Rights Commission and the international institutions in which the Human Rights Commission aligns itself with that actually provides us with stabilising mechanisms that mitigate against some of the negative impacts of that behaviour within our society.

When we look at the budget allocation, we continue to ensure that we increase the budget allocation of the Human Rights Commission's office. We do appreciate the role that they actually play within our society and we want to ensure that they achieve the targeted outcomes which are set up on page B-119, under Head 56, Human Rights Commission.

In particular, when we look at ensuring that officers are trained on legislative amendments, ensuring that we keep a track of the number of complaints and the complaints are appropriately adjudicated, another important thing and we see an expansion of the targeted outcomes is where we have community education and public resources. I think that is a critical area. We have to continue to inform persons of the standards in which we expect and desire within our society—whether it be in the workplace.

There is now discrimination that is taking place as it pertains to housing. We are having challenges with housing and part of the challenges we are having with housing is because persons are being discriminated against. Certain individuals—whether it be their family size, whether it be their racial background—do not have access to housing opportunities that others have. We certainly see it in the workplace. We see it in our financial institutions as well, where persons who achieve a certain age . . . there are barriers to them accessing capital from our financial institutions and utilising our financial institutions for investments and levels of empowerment. And so, it is something that we have to keep a watchful eye on, and we will keep track of the reports as to understanding where the complaints actually lie and also get a sound understanding of the areas that need actual addressing.

As it pertains to Head 5, which is the Office of the Auditor General, a lot of work is done in that area but it is important that we understand that the department's objectives are to strengthen the accountability, transparency and integrity of the Government of Bermuda and the public sector and just the delivery of assurance services and sound guidance of the highest quality. I think that the work that has been done over the years in this particular space has allowed us to strengthen our good governance mechanisms. Year after year, reports are written. Year after year, recommendations are made. And year after year, the Government makes improvements—whether it be to the evolution of financial instructions but also leading to how we can ensure that we exude good governance more of the time.

We do not run from the reports of the Auditor General. We welcome the reports. The reports are independent, critical of Government at times, but it's for us to ensure that we are always operating at the highest standard. And this Government certainly . . . strives to ensure that we operate with a sense of excellence and of highest quality. You see, it ties right in with what we're trying to do as it pertains to economic development. You simply can't have an economy which is a blue-chip business jurisdiction and a government that does not live up to the same values as our reputation from a business community standpoint.

And so the same strong regulations and the legal framework that we appreciate in our business ecosystem is the hallmarks of what we carry over into the government as well. Those were my interventions, Mr. Chairman. I'll lean on the Minister responsible for the Human Rights Commission to answer some of the questions the Opposition may have asked . . . and I know that other Ministers are now prepared to answer questions which were asked. But those were my brief interventions.

The Chairman: Thank you for your very brief intervention, Minister Jason P. Haywood

We now have . . . the Chair now recognises Honourable Tinee Furbert.

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

I will take the opportunity to reiterate some of the brief that I spoke about earlier to answer the questions. Actually, I couldn't quite follow the questions, Mr. Chairman. It was very difficult to follow the questions but I'll try my best because there was a lot of ad-libbing in between the questions. But I will try my best to interpret what the questions were.

Mr. Chairman, as far as the tribunals are concerned and the budget monies allocated for those units, you would note on page B-17 . . . [where] it speaks of the general amount that is allocated for the tribunals being \$81,000. And then when you review page B-18 which gives the actual breakdown of those business units, which gives us the total of the \$1.434 million, the

tribunal costs in general come out of professional services. So, it is just enclosed . . . when we pay our tribunal members for their services, it is actually enclosed in the professional services area.

There was a question—and please forgive me because I'm going to probably answer these out of order. There was a question in regard to the education, number four of the department's objectives to educate the community on the principles of the human rights inclusion and equality. And I did speak about this, particularly on the area of advertisement and promotion, that the Human Rights Commission has worked very diligently this year. And actually, I had tasked them with making sure that they were communicating their role and what they do and what they offer our community.

You will see that they have done that—particularly with the increase in their spend for advertising and promotion, where they have done branding design support, visual communication strategies [which] has increased to \$35,000 this particular year. Where if you look in the Budget Book you will see that that amount has been in the region of \$12,000 to \$27,000 and so they have actually worked hard to increase their education and public engagement and their visual identity in the community.

Mr. Speaker there was . . . I'm sorry, Mr. Chairman, there was a question around the insurance for the tribunal members. We must understand that the Human Rights Commission is an independent body and so if there was someone in the community who wants to press charges against our tribunal members that our judiciary . . . I'm sorry our Chambers do not fully cover that and that they would have to have representation.

And they can choose to have representation from other outside bodies to be able to protect them throughout tribunal proceedings, if someone decides to take them or want to take them to court. And so, we found it very prudent, and the Ministry supported that, that recommendation for them to have liability insurance. And it provides an extra layer of protection for our tribunal members in making a decision to want to be a part of the actual tribunal and they felt a little bit more secure having this insurance in place.

I'm just wanting to skip quickly because I know you have other questions for the other Minister. In regard to the . . . in regard also I had spoke about educational outreach. The Commission facilitated 63 engagements which is 33 more than they had done in the previous year. So that education continues to go strong for the Human Rights Commission, which I'm very proud that they continue to go with . . . let's see . . . sorry—

The disability report, Mr. Chairman. It's been an initiative of the Human Rights Commission where they wanted to do research around the areas in which our country may be deficient in disability rights. I'm still waiting for that report. They will present it to the Ministry first and our country should know that we are doing research right now as it relates to Bermuda's own Disability Act and so this report will actually be very helpful,

as information gathered from an independent body to help us to formulate the . . . or to cement the direction that we're wanting to go particularly with disability legislation. So it doesn't go to Cabinet right away; it goes to the Ministry for the Ministry to use as information to proceed with . . . as information for us to have for disability legislation.

I will sit right there. I'm still . . . I'm still waiting for some answers to come in, but I'll let my colleague answer some of the questions that were ahead of me.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister Tinee Furbert.

The Chair now recognises Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Why, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I will handle answering questions from Head 2, which is the Legislature. The Honourable Member did have quite a few questions . . . the Honourable Member did have quite a few questions on Head 2 and so I will attempt to answer them.

Mr. Chairman, speaking on page B-10, business unit 12000, the Honourable Member asked about the increase in 5 per cent in the admin budget. There were not any performances related to those increases. Answer is (and which was in the brief) is those increases are salary uplifts and so I guess the answer is: no performance measures to those particular increases.

Page B-11—and there was quite a bit of conversation about Sessions House and when would our legislature return to Sessions House and talked about things going on in Veritas Place. And so the answer that we have here is there's . . . unfortunately there isn't a definitive answer that can be given. I know in the brief it did say that now once Courts have moved out, the Public Works would be required to go in there and do a comprehensive inspection and they are working with the House and Grounds Committee.

I do know that there are Members Opposite that sit on that House and Grounds Committee, as the Opposition Whip sits on that Committee. So I'm sure any information on what's being discussed between them and Public Works certainly could be ascertained by the Opposition Leader from the Whip. And speaking of such . . .

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: And so projections on costs and project timelines are still to be finished.

I believe he mentioned the sum of \$20 million and I want to say that did come from the Capital Acquisitions page where it talked about TAF. I'm assuming that's what you were referring to the TAF—so those out there that are listening the TAF, total allocated funding, doesn't mean it's been allocated but that's what you

estimate you're going to spend and that actually, from my experience in government, that's not tied to a time frame either.

It's always, *Hey we're going to fix it. This is what we think the total amount is going to be*, and so the project will progress. Being someone who's kind of familiar with renovations it could very quickly, you know, ramp up once you get in there and find out what needs to be done or. . . but it could be a kind of a slow little creep until you get to that point where construction can just ramp up and get going.

Again, on page B-11, what attributed to the significant increase in utilities? We have heard the increase was budgeted as energy costs for Session Hall, previously shared with the Courts, was expected to fall slowly to Legislature after the Courts left. I guess what we're trying to say there is because the Courts were in there, they were paying some of the bill and now that they're gone . . . now that they're gone, and even though buildings are not utilised there's still some on-going energy costs that go with that.

The Hansard—next question here talks about the Hansard. I didn't . . . you said the Premier, but it was I that gave the brief. I didn't speak to voice transcription services previously discussed. The idea was that the recordings would be subject to abuse. A voice transcript service would then benefit Members of the House. It says here that VRS was trialled and found to be wanting. The Parliament Information Officer advised ASR software had repeated difficulty differentiating Bermudian vernacular dialect. Also, not good at formatting and abiding by Hansard style guidelines. And I do understand the Hansard. I use them quite extensively as well and find them very, very useful to go online and find out what had happened previously.

Digital transformation. Is there a timeline for implementation of Hansard? The Parliament Information Officer is the only editor, and it takes five to seven days for Members' proofs to be completed. This is very contingent on the length of the House and Senate meetings. The editor has to go through the recording and transcript very carefully. Complete editing of Hansard requires at least another week when the House is meeting on usual bi-weekly basis. This process is naturally a lot longer following budget debate meetings. I hope that answers that question.

Parliament informing the public through live streaming committees. This would be only considered for public meetings of a committee. However, cost would be prohibitive. Public meetings would be open to the press and the general public. Again, you're talking about voice [transcription] services, and I already spoke about it being trialled and found to be wanting.

Interesting question you had here about Youth Parliament and said from 20 to 12 and what is being done to encourage active participation. I do know in the in the [Budget] Book it says the outcome sought for this upcoming fiscal year is 18—so it is going up. I do know . . . I was kind of shocked to hear when you said you

didn't really know anything about Youth Parliament until the unfortunate passing of the Speaker's wife.

I know I've been involved in Youth Parliament. I never was a Youth Parliamentarian, but I've been involved with Youth Parliament as I progressed in my venture into the political realm. And I've witnessed their debates. It was a lot easier when it was in the Parliament House, but they really have really robust debates and I've actually been a judge in a couple of their debates.

Interestingly they meet every Wednesday, and they were meeting today while you were speaking. They meet on the fifth floor of this building, and they actually just completed their meeting like around 5:30-ish and left. So, if you want to come down here on a Wednesday you can come down and actually see them because they meet every Wednesday. But you would reach out to young Lister, Mr. Russell Lister, and he'd be able to organise something for you on that.

What does the \$900,000 get us? Again, this is something Public Works will answer. They are the ones that's responsible for the refurbishment of the building. But the portion of those funds, as I did mention in the brief, covered a rental cost of Veritas Place and the energy cost of this building as well.

And so, this goes into when you were talking about the \$20 million, this was budgeted . . . the \$900,000 was budgeted by Public Works for the 2025/26 spend for the work that they need to do up there once the Courts have rolled out.

You have here Ministers and Members Public Accounts Committee—international comparison support and need for invested secretariat. It says that funding and resources for PAC committees generally come out of the Boards and Committees Fees budget of \$100,000 and from the Professional Services funding. We have no dedicated committee secretariat. Clerks and staff are assigned to serve the committees. If appropriate, temporary workers may be assigned to work with committees. And I can say . . . I know I've been on the Joint Select Committee and we've had external support to try to transcribe and all of that stuff, so I do know it's something that does happen.

The vacant post as you would have . . . you spoke about the vacant post that's the assistant clerk—not the assistant clerk. Is it assistant clerk? The assistant clerk . . . but I did say in the brief that they plan to recruit in this fiscal year to fill that post. I do remember saying that.

We have here performance measures reports indicate that a number of entities are not in compliance with audit requirements. How many entities are in arrears? Oh . . . that goes into auditor. Sorry, I don't want to answer that one.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Advancing digital transformation trial use in government . . . that trial is to be extended.

I did want to say when . . . because you referred to a Ministerial Statement that I gave and the Ministerial Statement spoke to the AI policy that government was to adapt. That when AI was being utilised throughout government services, these were the rules and regulations that went behind it. I think what . . . listening to you, what it sounds like you're speaking about is the use of a chat box that could be added to the website that you will be able to put in a question and go and search the website and find the information that you need. And that's something that I can encourage the Parliament's Clerk to reach out so we can have that conversation with the Digital Innovation team to see if that's something that we could actually all put together for that.

I believe that covers most of the questions. Oh we have here communications, antiquated electronic resources in use. Can these costs be reallocated for better use? I think that question you were talking about the tablets that virtually no one uses. Some people use them, though I do see a few of them here. And it says here procurement of more advanced technology can be considered for funding in future budgets.

And so, with that—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes. And I will say it is non-ministry, so a lot of the stuff falls on the under the Speaker . . . and I believe there was something else that you spoke to that I do want to say: there is some legislation that the Parliament is pushing through to revamp some of the ways they do things around here. And so where . . . that's in the hands of the Clerk and the Speaker and the rest of them so we're still waiting for that to move forward. You probably would have been aware of the report that was done on modernising Parliament. Cole Simons was the Chair of the Joint Select Committee. It was it was done forever ago. Okay? But thank you.

That's the questions that I have here, and I'll just leave it to the Premier to answer questions on audit.

The Chairman: Thank you, Honourable Minister Diallo Rabain. And now Honourable Premier and Finance Minister shall give his succinct answers to his Member Opposite.

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

I will try to answer as many questions as I can on Head 5. There was a question that said on page B-14, performance measurements, reports indicate that a number of entities are not in compliance with audit requirements. How many entities in arrears and do we have a remediation plan to cure the backlog?

Response from the Auditor General's office is entities in arrears amount to 176 financial statement accounts. The remediation plan varies. The office is currently working with the Ministry of Finance on roughly 67 fund financial accounts that are in arrears and expect to address many of the dated accounts within the current financial year—which is something I spoke to inside of my Finance brief which is work that is taking place on that side.

A question said, What are the recommendations related to financial statement audits, \$4.4 million? What are the outcomes and measures warranting this expenditure? The Office of the Auditor General performs follow-on on the recommendations annually and the last follow-up report dated November 2024 is available on the Office of the Auditor General's website.

The question asked, Is the Auditor General's office fully staffed? If not, what is the plan to staff its entity? I did think I answered that question inside of the budget statement, but I will provide the response the Opposition Leader from the Auditor General. The Office of the Auditor General is not currently fully staffed (which I said in my brief). They are currently recruiting for open posts as noted in the brief; 70 per cent of the staff and 90 per cent of the qualified staff are work permit holders or contract workers. As such the office is constantly recruiting. And I did say in the brief—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry? I'm not following . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay. Has the 2023/24 Auditor General's report been drafted? If so, where is it located? And the response from the Office of the Auditor General is the 2023/24 report on the office operations are to be laid in Quarter 3 along with the 2024/25 compilation.

This question is a strange one, but it says the Premier stated that additional funds would be provided to the office as needed and that it is noted that there is a need for computers. What is the Premier's position with regard to the additional funding for the Auditor General's office and I stated to—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of information.

The Chairman: Please give the point of information. What is your point of information?

POINT OF INFORMATION

Hon. Jarion Richardson: The question was relating to how does the Honourable Premier decide when to authorise additional spends, given that he said he'd support a \$60,000 or \$80,000 increase or . . . but I see there are computers needed so I may . . . so my

question was, How do you decide what to permit? How do you allow that to happen? How do you decide when to expand that budget? Blah, blah, blah.

The Chairman: Thank you for that point of information. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. Budgets cannot be expanded because budgets are approved by this Honourable House. And so, the budgets cannot be expanded. The Minister of Finance does not have that power or discretion.

In speaking of the particular point to which he was raising, what I had stated on a—

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Point of clarification

Hon. E. David Burt: I will yield.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, he had said he would find the money somehow, I believe that was the statement. So, it was clear that there's some flexibility I'm just trying to figure out how the flexibility gets decided.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Do you want me to answer the question? It's the same clarification. I got your question, mate. If I need the clarification, I would have said—

The Chairman: Honourable Member.

Hon. E. David Burt: Honourable Member—

The Chairman: Honourable Mate. Honourable Member.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: I will start again. We cannot create additional funding because funding is approved by this Honourable Chamber.

The way that process works is, number one, if there is a surplus and additional computers that are purchased (as I explained during my brief in that time when I was discussing that), there are significant numbers of funds that we have used to purchase computers for the government. Computers are relatively standardised. If there are additional ones, those could be supplied to them.

The other options are . . . because the Office of Auditor General never spends all of their funds, as we've seen, because their office is not fully staffed and so there could be provision for those monies to be vired. Or the third thing is if there are additional capital funds which are not spent (as we do know that capital funds which are appropriated and allocated by this

House are rarely if ever completely spent), then we do an authorisation for virement and that comes in the form of a supplement to the estimate. So that is the way under the Public Treasury Administration Payments Act and the rules of the House—which I would of course assume that the Honourable Member does know.

He said we have spoken about hiring additional staff under line item for professional services. What about overdue audits and addressing those? And I'll read the answer from the Auditor General. There has to be a shift in mind-set. If there is an agreed upon plan with the Auditor General, her office can work with the auditee to address. The Auditor General does not have the power to compel entities to produce and remit their accounts to audit.

Another question was asked, page B-15. It says mechanisms for entities to opt out of audit requirements, not using Auditor General, but using their own. Why do we have that option if we are . . . why do we have that option if we are able to hire staff. There is—and from the Auditor General—as the Audit Act would state there are no government entity or quango that can opt out of a financial statement audit. The only independent audit report that is laid in the House of Assembly is that signed [by] the Auditor General. With the entity that appoints the auditor, they must work with her office, and it is her office that reviews their working papers, and it is her office's independent report that is laid in the House of Assembly. And so, you cannot opt out of that particular requirement.

The question that says, Why do we have outdated reports? And the response is there are several reasons why there are accounts in arrears. The two main reasons include a lack of resources of the auditees to prepare the financial accounts and competing priorities of the entity's information in some cases not available due to hurricanes, water damage, et cetera.

And the final question under the Auditor General which says 15,000 number of financial statements completed—Oh, 15000 is the [business unit]—number of financial statements completed. It was reported that there was an issue receiving submissions from entities. How many statements are being hampered by missing data? And the response from the Office of the Auditor General is missing data cannot be evaluated until the accounts are obtained.

And I do not believe there are any questions for the Office of Internal Audit, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you for your succinct answers.

Opposition Leader, you wish anymore questions? You have had enough?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Never, Mr. Chairman. Never. They did not send me here to sit back when I had the opportunity. Let me . . . Mr. Chairman, thank you so much for this further opportunity to further scrutinise the Estimates for Revenue and Expenditure.

To that end, may I continue on Head 63?

The Chairman: You may continue. You have 15 minutes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Thank you. Thank you very much, sir.

Mr. Chairman, thank you. The Registrar . . . again, I will start where the Honourable Minister finished by thanking the Parliamentary Registrar for her considerable work and the work of the staff in executing the general election most especially recently. I don't have a lot of time but I would want to say her work is incredibly important and at no point would anything I say now [impute] a motive or anything like that. I know there was some media pieces that . . . that because I had raised questions about processes that in some way, shape or fashion I was being untoward and that would be 110 per cent wrong.

The Chairman: So, do you want to clarify that you were not attacking the Parliamentary Registrar?

Hon. Jarion Richardson: I would never do that. I think highly of her; and she has a very, very important and key role in our country.

The Chairman: All right. Thank you.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: To that end under Head 63, I do have some questions relating to voter register maintenance and accuracy.

Under Head 63, most especially under object . . . sorry, on page B-20 under objective two . . . the Parliamentary Registrar has an objective *to maintain a complete, accurate and up-to-date register for voters*. And so, I have some questions relating to [business] unit 73000 which I believe houses all of the staff under employment numbers, full-time equivalence under page B-21. And my questions relate to updates to the register, as it says *maintain a complete accurate and up-to-date register of voters*.

My question is, How frequently are updates received from other government departments that would have information relating to voter eligibility such as the Department of Immigration, Courts and the Register General? That information includes register addresses and deceased voters. My further question is, as it relates to . . . and this can also be added to the performance measures under 73000 Administration. I see that the performance measures are voter registrations updated per population, number of online registrations increased over the previous year and stakeholder engagements conducted to increase the awareness of voter registration. My question does relate to that process which is, How many voters were removed from or added to the register in the past year? This especially relates to objective two, obviously.

And a further question to the Honourable Minister would be, What performance measures (that would be on page B-22) exist to track the timeliness

and accuracy of updates to the Parliamentary Registrar? It's obviously key that our elections . . . the accuracy of the Registrar lends credibility to our elections and so it's quite key, that objective. And again, I commend the Registrar for working towards that.

My next set of questions relate to the advanced and special procedures under which absentee voting falls, which the Honourable Minister did speak to the policy work. Now this relates to page B-22 under [business] unit 73017, Election Reform Research, which has an allocation which isn't funded this year—which the Honourable Minister spoke to and said that that project (that being absentee voting) as well as other electoral reforms will be undertaken under his Ministry, which would be the Ministry for Cabinet [Office].

So, to that end, would the Honourable Minister be able to . . . outline if any funding has been shifted from this head to pay for that research into absentee voting? As well as give an update as to how far that progress has gone before it was handed over to the Ministry for Cabinet Office. This most especially relates to the earlier work done on absentee voting under the second Progressive Labour Party Premier, the Honourable Alex Scott. So clearly this ball has been under consideration for some time and so I would like to see where we're at . . . at the point at which that it left this Head 63 for the Parliamentary Registrar.

Further and then I'll . . . last question so that I can get . . . see if we can get the answer on the absentee voting. The next question will be as it relates to public awareness and education or electoral or voter education, I'm sorry, which comes under objective . . . I don't see . . . I actually don't see it. And perhaps this question is . . . this is the question . . . I had an understanding from the ministerial brief that there were a number of public awareness campaigns or media appearances and education as it relates to voting rights.

There was a group, I want to say Bermuda Connect or Youth Connect, who [had] recently done some fantastic work on voter education and registration just before the last election. So, my question would be, Does this Head 63 Parliamentary Registrar have a role to play in the education process, educating voters on voter rights? And further, my question relates to electoral systems modernisation which I believe falls under 73000—this is on page B-22, sorry, Mr. Chairman. [Business unit] 73000 . . . it might have been under business unit 73017 under Election Reform Research—but it certainly goes towards digitising the entire process. There's been some considerable progress made by the Parliamentary Registrar which obviously made life a lot easier and that's depicted on business unit 73000 relating to *number of online registrations*. Would the Honourable Minister be able to advise on future projects relating to modernising our electoral systems?

With that said, Mr. Chairman, I do have plenty more questions, but I'll take a seat to get the answers to those questions.

The Chairman: The Chair recognises Minister Honourable Tinee Furbert.

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

I do want to take the opportunity to answer some of the questions that came in earlier, if you oblige me, as the team has just returned them back to me and I'm sure they would want their work to be recognised.

There was a question about tracking mechanisms for intakes. The Commission uses a complaints management system to track all intakes which are comprised of complaints and queries from the public. I also want to take this opportunity to remind Members of this House as well as our listening audience that the Human Rights Commission publishes an annual report that they put out every year. And it is a very thorough and succinct report that spells out all of the statistical analysis as it relates to the complaints management statistics. I encourage our colleagues to take a look at that that which is located on their website humanrights.bm and particularly pages 9 and onwards which speaks to all of the numbers and statistics as it relates to the tracking of reports to the Human Rights Commission. But it also comprises of many other details as it relates to types of complaints as well. And that information is out there in the public domain for anyone to take a look at, at any time.

There was a question around costs allocated to investigations. There is under salaries for investigators there were two full-time investigation officers which total \$201,000, to answer that question. And then there was a question around the strategic planning update. The Strategic Plan was implemented during the previous fiscal year with noticeable commitments met, including the drafting of the operational policies and procedures and the increase in education activities including a human rights conference, a public consultation on disability inclusion, and 19 radio and podcast interviews.

There was a question around whether the members of the tribunal are being compensated through professional services. I did speak to this a little bit prior but also, it's important to note that the board and committee fees also fall under professional services for the Government of Bermuda's chart of accounts, which is the reason why the compensation of tribunal members is under professional services. Looking under page B-21, professional services would best describe the nature of services offered by tribunal members.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Honourable Opposition Leader . . . [do] you have any more questions? You have four minutes.

Hon. Jarion Richardson: Yes, just waiting on the answers for Head 63 relating to the Parliamentary Registrar, Mr. Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay. Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Hello, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, let's see now. There's a question here about voter maintenance and accuracy. How often are registers updated from government departments for voter information? Immigration is backed up every other day and share deaths, and registry general sent once a month and land valuation backed up every night and shared.

Still waiting for the answer to how many voters were removed from the registry in the previous year.

You have a question here about public awareness and voter education. Does this head have a role to play in voter education processes? I go back to the brief where we spoke about advertising and promotion and . . . in this fiscal year \$79,000 has been allocated. These funds are primarily allocated across the Constituency Boundaries Commission by general bye-elections and municipalities cost centres with the main focus on voter information and public awareness campaigns. It's also . . . they are also telling me here, yes, in the past they do engage high-school-age students and children turning 18. And so I do know that they do come out and do the voter education stuff as well.

Absentee voting, election reform research: Can the Minister advise of the reallocation of funding to support electoral reforms specifically related to absentee voting? This budget was completed just before the general election which is when the issue became pertinent, and it was discussed again. At the time of completion we were focused on the election preparation and therefore that's why no funds were allocated to alternative voting research. However, I can say that I have met with the part . . . one of the first things that I did on becoming Minister is meet with Ms. [Tenia] Woolridge and we discussed absentee balloting. She has a wealth of information that has previously been researched. That's why we said we are just now. . . [we have] to collate this information.

You did mention people like Youth Connect and then there's Bermuda [is] Love as well who did come out with this vote campaign. They have already been contacted by my office to say, you know, we want to have these discussions about how we move forward. So, it is something that is on our radar. It just needs to be executed. And as I said earlier on, when I spoke to the brief, we fully expect by September 2026 that that legislation will be passed, and we will have absentee balloting active in Bermuda.

The Chairman: Okay. The time now is 6:57 pm which means that the time for questions has expired.

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

Mr. Chairman, I move that Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98, and 101 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection.

Agreed to.

[Motion carried: Non-Ministries Heads 2, 5, 56, 63, 85, 92, 98 and 101 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.]

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

Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads be approved as printed: Non-Ministry departments, Head 1, Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation Heads 51 and 61, Ministry of Finance Head 49 and Ministry of National Security Head 45.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads . . . Non-Min— Heads 1, 51 and 61, 49 and 45 be approved.

Any objections?

No objections.

They have been approved.

[Motion carried: Non-Ministry Head 1, Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation Heads 51 and 61; Ministry of Finance Head 49; and Ministry of National Security Head 45 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.]

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

Mr. Chairman, I move that the current account estimates, the capital development estimates and the capital acquisition estimates be approved

The Chairman: Any objections?

It has been moved that the current account estimates, capital development estimates and the capital acquisitions estimates have been approved.

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

I move that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for fiscal year 2025/26 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Estimates of Revenue be approved . . . sorry, it has been moved that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2025/26 be approved.

Any objections?

Anything from the Opposition?

Nothing?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of clarification.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Scott Pearman: Sorry, I believe the Premier moved some heads in relation to the Ministry of

Finance in his first part of the speech and that those weren't repeated and approved.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: After you moved the Non-Ministries, you moved some of the Ministry of Finance and those were not repeated and approved by the House. Just for good order—

Hon. E. David Burt: What do you mean? Repeat it here, now?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Right.

When you started reading, you read the Non-Ministries that had not been debated, and then you hit the ones that were Ministry of Finance. Those were not approved by the House because they weren't repeated by the Chair.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: You think he didn't repeat them. I thought he read them all, but let me . . . I will try one more time just for good order if [you] don't mind. Because the Clerk was there. She would correct you, but I don't know—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: So, let me not get out of good order.

The Chairman: Maybe he needs AI or something, because . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: I remember you reading Non-Ministry 1, 51, 61, 49, 45. I heard you say those.

The Chairman: Okay, so—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, no. It was just 49. That is Ministry of Finance.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, but I did it here. That is what I just said.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: It has been moved that Non-Ministry Head 1, Head 51, Head 61, Head 49 and Head 45 be approved—again. Twice on Hansard.

An Hon. Member: Any objections?

The Chairman: Any objections?
Mr. Premier.

[Motion carried: Non-Ministry Head 1, Cabinet Office Heads 51 and 61; Ministry of Finance Head 49; and Ministry of National Security Head 45 were approved and stand part of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26.]

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

Mr. Chairman, having been moved and approved, the current account estimates, the capital development estimates and the capital acquisition estimates having been approved that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for financial year 2025/26 be approved. I now move that the approval of the Estimates [of Revenue and Expenditure] be reported to the House.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year [2025/26] be reported to the House.

Any objections?

None. It will be reported.

[Motion carried: The Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the financial year 2025/26 were considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed.]

The Chairman: Mr. Speaker.

House resumed at 07:02 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR 2025/26

The Speaker: Good evening, Members.

Are there any objections to the Estimate of Revenue [and Expenditures] for the year 2025/26 being reported to the House as approved in the Committee?

Any objections?

There are none.

It has been reported to the House.

Premier.

BILL

FIRST READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2025

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

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing a Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2025 for its first reading with the Governor's recommendation signified.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none. Continue, Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move in accordance with Standing Order 28(5)(1) that under the provisions of Standing Orders 41, 12 and 42 the remaining stages of the Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2025 be taken forthwith.

The Speaker: Thank you. The matter has been brought and will be taken forthwith.

No objections to that? No.

BILL

SECOND READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2025

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the [Appropriation Act 2025](#) be now read for the second time in the House.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none.

Continue, Premier.

[Motion carried: the Appropriation Act 2025 was read a second time.]

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

Mr. Speaker, I move clauses 1 through 6, inclusive, together with Schedules A, B and C as printed.

The Speaker: Any objections?

There are none.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 6 together with Schedules A, B and C passed.]

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to the preamble being approved?

There are none.

Continue, Premier.

BILL

THIRD READING

APPROPRIATION ACT 2025

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled the Appropriation Act 2025 be now read the third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to the matter being read a third time by title only?

There are none.

Continue, Premier.

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

It is a great honour for me to move that the Bill that will produce the second-in-a-row budget surplus for the country be moved and do now pass.

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker!

The Speaker: Thank you.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

The Speaker: I don't think you are serious on your point of order, are you?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order. The Premier is perhaps mistakenly misleading the House, Mr. Speaker. There was not a budget surplus in the prior financial year, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping and laughter]

The Speaker: Mr. Premier . . . it has been read. Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry?

The Speaker: Continue.

[Crosstalk]

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

I move that the budget . . . that the Appropriation Act which will contain the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for this year passed out of the Committee with a record investment in capital investment—

An Hon. Member: Aah!

Hon. E. David Burt: —with more money, a record expansion of health care—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: —inside of this country and the work that is being done with a \$43 million projected surplus . . . I move that that budget and Bill do now pass.

An Hon. Member: Yes!

The Speaker: Premier. The Bill has been read and considered passed.

[Motion carried: The Appropriation Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the following message be sent to the Senate:

MESSAGE TO THE SENATE

APPROPRIATION ACT 2025

Hon. E. David Burt: To the Honourable President and Members of the Senate: The House of Assembly has the honour to forward herewith the undernoted Bill for the concurrence of your House: The Appropriation Act 2025. Copies of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2025/26 are also forwarded for the information of your House.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

Members, that brings the matter of the annual budget debate for this period to a conclusion.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: We will now move on, Mr. Premier. Are there any other matters of the day or would you like to bring the House to a close?

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, sir. Mr. Speaker, I do believe that we are taking up two particular matters and the first item is just another one of the many tax cuts that was in the budget of which we just passed. As this Government cuts taxes instead of increases them. And so, I will defer, if you will, Mr. Speaker, to the Junior Minister of Finance.

The Speaker: Junior Minister of Finance.

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

I move that consideration be given to the draft Regulations entitled the [Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2025](#), proposed to be made by the Minister of Finance, in exercise of the power conferred by section 2 of the Government Fees Act 1965.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

None.

Continue, Junior Minister.

DRAFT REGULATIONS

GOVERNMENT FEES AMENDMENT REGULATIONS 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, in the Pre-Budget Report tabled in this Honourable House in December, the Minister of Finance outlined a number of tax reductions that were under consideration to ease the tax burdens faced by residents and businesses. This Government has a history of ensuring that better fiscal performance results in a meaningful relief for taxpayers.

Mr. Speaker, I now bring to this Honourable House one of the fees reductions promised within the Pre-Budget Report and the 2025/26 Budget Statement.

Mr. Speaker, as stated in the 2025/26 Budget Statement, access to communication is essential for work, for education, for staying connected with loved ones. To ease the financial burden of mobile services, the Government will reduce the monthly fee on mobile phones by a whopping 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker, from \$12 to \$6. This measure will result in immediate savings for every mobile customer as a part of our commitment to lowering the cost of essential services. This tax reduction will take effect from 1 July 2025 and is expected to reduce the tax revenue by \$2 million.

Mr. Speaker, the following fee within these regulations will be amended within the existing head in the revised 2025 fee schedule as follows:

- Head 76 (Telecommunications Act 1986), provisions section 1(e)(iv).

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

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

Shadow Minister of Finance, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. Pleasure to speak with you again.

Tax cuts, whopping tax cuts. I'm sure somebody out there, Mr. Speaker, must have spat out their supper.

I did a little research to see what I could do with \$6. It's unfortunate the Minister of Home Affairs is not here because I perhaps could have helped her with her

survey, but \$6.99 for a dozen of Dunkley's eggs at Marketplace. Those are imported.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, \$7.69, that's local eggs at Windybank [Farm] if you can get them. White or wheat loaf of bread from Crow Lane Bakery, Mr. Speaker, \$6.95.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: MarketPlace house brand, \$6.20. And if you want a basic sandwich, \$7.99 and up. I recommend you don't ask for the avocado on top, Mr. Speaker.

Look, I'll take a \$6.00 cut. I'll take it. We're not going to say no. No, you know, we support this.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Spread the wealth.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But let's be honest, Mr. Speaker. Let's be honest. And we can acknowledge that communications is a lifeline, that it would perhaps be one of the basic needs of people in this modern age. So, we could support making sure that everybody in Bermuda has access to this fundamental communication.

Okay—\$6 a month. I looked up a couple plans on Digicel, like the most basic prepaid, not prepaid plan, postpaid plan where they send you a bill, \$120. Roughly the equivalent one for prepaid for the same amount of usage in days, about \$100. And I note that often people are going around with \$1,000, \$750 phones in their pockets. So, I'm just trying to put this \$6 in context, Mr. Speaker.

I also note that this is one of the headline initiatives from the Government in its budget, this whopping \$6 cut.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, let me turn . . . so we support this. But I would suggest—

An Hon. Member: Are you sure?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I would suggest, well, I would hope, Mr. Speaker, that the Government could have some better ideas on how to support the people in this country with real need to get the basic telecommunication services that is becoming a human right for somebody.

So, what I would have suggested is, for example, perhaps the Government could have worked with the providers to provide a very low-cost basic plan for people who need basic telecommunication services. It would have been a little more work, but it probably could have saved people more money—and the people

who need it. Because, for example, is this \$6 cut going to apply to all the corporate workers who have their corporate cell phone? Is it going to apply to people who are in the upper tax bands who aren't even going to notice it? They pay more for their coffee every day, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

An Hon. Member: Yourself.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: In fact, in fact, Mr. Speaker, it is indeed myself. I do not need a \$6 cut. I'm not lying.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: In fact, Mr. Speaker, I would put to you, with the recent pay rises, nobody in this Chamber needs a \$6 cut.

[Inaudible interjections and general uproar]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Nobody in this Chamber needs a \$6 cut!

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, while we support this . . . while we support this, frankly,—

[General uproar]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto:—frankly, Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed!

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Point of order, point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: We have a point of order—MP—

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motives and misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is imputing improper motive and misleading the House. He says that nobody in this Chamber needs a \$6 cut. We are not speaking for ourselves. We're speaking for the people that we represent. And the people that we represent—and I'm speaking for the people in constituency 24—may not have the same disposable income as those who they represent on that side.

The Speaker: Thank you. Continue, Minister.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, the salaries of the Members of this House are above the median salary of the people in Bermuda—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —above the median salary.

In fact, the Honourable Member has made my point for me, because I outlined some of the costs, Mr. Speaker, that it takes to get basic telecommunication services in this country. And that \$6 is a very small dent in that cost.

What I would have liked to see, because as you know, Mr. Speaker, one of our themes over here from the Opposition is we support these types of cuts in general. But we are hoping to see targeted initiatives from the Government that help the people who need it the most—not just the quick gimmicks to put out in the budget. Not just the gimmicks.

So, for example, and I'll repeat it because I wasn't sure that they heard it appropriately in the Government—heard it fully. For example, they could have worked with the telecommunication providers to provide a kind of basic, low-cost package that could have cost people who need that and have trouble affording it a lot less—a lot less—than it would cost them today. A lot less.

So let me wrap up with a few closing comments, Mr. Speaker. Actually, and I will commend the Government. I do have one example where they have provided a very good example of a targeted relief, and that is the child day care, where the amount that you get is connected to your payroll tax band. That's the kind of thinking we would like to see more of over here.

So, of course, Mr. Speaker, no one's going to say no to an extra \$6 a month in their pocket. I've got to look under the couch so I can go get my sandwich, right?

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But, frankly, if this is the best that they can come up with from the Government side, it's going to be a tough year for the people of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: Deputy Premier.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find it very, very rich for that Honourable Member to stand up in this House and diss the people of this country that could use a \$6 break per month in their bill. I find that rather rich.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He is misleading the House. I did not diss the people that could use the \$6. In fact, I exhorted the Government to do something better!

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: There we are!

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: Member.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, I repeat. I repeat. And we'll let the people of the country judge what the Honourable Member said when he said it.

And one thing is it's on Hansard. And if anybody wants to get a little creative, take that and put it out in the social media and see what kind of response you get.

Now, the interesting thing is that Members opposite will chastise this increase. Some of them might have been around when I was Health Minister and I increased FutureCare by \$5.

An Hon. Member: Increase? It's a decrease; not an increase.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, *increased* it. See, that's it. See, some of these Members weren't even around. So, they don't know what I'm talking about.

But I increased FutureCare by \$5. And guess what? They banged the tables and said, the people of this country, \$5, that's way too much money. You shouldn't be doing that to the people of this country. But yet here today—

An Hon. Member: No one said that.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Here today, here today . . . and you know what? We've heard it. We've heard it several times in my 20 years. Where minimum things that we do are cheap.

But you can tell seniors that money don't grow on trees.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Let's talk about that.

An Hon. Member: Let's talk about that!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Ask the seniors, who you told *money don't grow on trees*, what they think about \$72 per year. Because they'll get up in the future and they'll tell you, *Look, you guys got to do something. Because our seniors are trying to make a decision*

between buying drugs and buying groceries. Well, what do you think \$72 would do?

An Hon. Member: What?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right. That's what they do.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me say this. I've done a quick look up. And a roll of masking tape can cost \$6, too. I suggest the Honourable Members opposite buy some for MP DeCouto.

The Speaker: Now, now, now Members. Now, Members. Let's keep it above board, Members.

Minister, were you going to speak or not? You're on your feet now . . . well, . . . let's go.

When they decide who's going to speak—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Yes—speak to the Chair.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: What we were subjected to by the Member opposite actually makes me feel dirty. It actually makes me feel so insulted that I sit opposite that Member. I feel completely embarrassed to have to listen to that tirade just now, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I have not felt that way since I graduated from Saltus Grammar School in 1988. When I left and I attended a HBCU for university, and you know what, Mr. Speaker? One thing that I was educated on was the institutionalised racism that is so politely exercised by Members like that.

[General uproar]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, point of order!

[General uproar]

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait. Hold on, hold on!

Hold up, hold up, hold up, hold up. I was listening very carefully to see where he was leading on that.

Hold on, just take a seat a minute. Take your seat. No, no, take a seat. I was listening very careful.

And you were swaying, but you hadn't crossed the line until you got to your last word, the last point. And I'm going to ask you to be clever enough not to cross the line. If you're going to be clever enough, don't cross the line.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I will endeavour and be guided, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, when persons don't understand that what they say is hurtful, it is unfortunate that they just cannot see it. But, Mr. Speaker . . . Mr. Speaker, when you grow up with the UBP handbook next to your cradle, that is the attitude you carry for the rest of your life. No matter what—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House. He's going down the wrong path. Once again, insinuating DNA.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: If we want to go down the DNA road, we can certainly go down the DNA road here.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Lost my book? And that's a particular Honourable Member that shouldn't go down the DNA road.

The Speaker: I heard your point. Members.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The greatest slave owners in this country who moved slaves back and forth were the Portuguese.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Take your seat back. You're your seat back.

Members, from what I understand, today has been a decent day. You ended your debates earlier.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: And I would like to think we could conclude this debate, this day, in the manner and tone that we had in the early debates.

So, I'm going to ask all Members to be more guided in your comments, more structured in your comments as we go forward from here. We ended the debates on a good foot. Let's end this part of the debate today on a decent foot.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I will be guided. That wasn't a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I'm speaking . . . one thing that I cannot be challenged on is the facts that I speak of right now. And when you have a certain type of personality ingrained in you since birth, you will always display that.

The Speaker: Be careful now, be careful now.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: You always display it, no matter who you affiliate with.

Mr. Speaker, this Government is fighting tooth and nail to create savings where we can. Now, I understand what that speaker is trying to say. But I don't believe he understands how insulting he sounds when he says it.

Mr. Speaker, \$6 here, \$2 here, 50 cents here, \$10 here, it all adds up in the end. This is *one* of the initiatives that we are putting forth to save our people money. The taxes that are inflicted on our people today have been the lowest in the history of this country, the lowest they have ever been.

We will be reducing . . . we talk about things that people have a right to have. People love to drive their cars. They will have a reduction in licensing their cars, more savings, Mr. Speaker. They'll have a reduction in getting their cell phones, more savings, Mr. Speaker. That Member had the audacity to speak to the child care allowance that was reduced to unsustainable levels under that Government.

An Hon. Member: Say it again!

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Reduced. Less people qualified for child care allowance under that Government than ever in the history of this country. But he has the audacity to sit here and say that maybe you should do something like that. More people now qualify for child care subsidy under this Government than ever before.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, it all adds up. But if you cannot, because of just your makeup, see that—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
(*Standing Order 19(11)(f)*)

Mr. Scott Pearman: This is the third occasion on which the Honourable Member has trespassed against Standing Order 19(11)(f), which is that this House is not to impute improper motives or indulge in personalities.

He's been directed already, and I would invite him to withdraw the remark.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Member, I've asked that we try and keep the tone and the level at a higher level. And we get on sticky ground when we try and impede or imply it to a level that it directs to an individual.

Member, if you can take a road that doesn't direct it to an individual, Member, you're on safer ground.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Again, I'm guided . . . and thank you for your wisdom. I think the point has been made.

The public will judge the comments that have been made up here tonight. And history will reflect that despite the efforts of this Government to reduce the tax burdens on our people, there are Members within here that do not have the wherewithal to see that these are good things, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Does any other Member . . . MP Darrell, are you speaking now, or are you jumping up again? You've been up three times, and then—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, I'm still new, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Let's go.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Wow, you liked those Gombey's, didn't you? Let me tell you a little bit about Gombey's and what they can do with a \$6 savings. Whoo! Here we go. All right.

Mr. Speaker, good evening, and good evening to the Members of this House, Honourable Members of the House. And I just want to rise today in support of this Government legislation to reduce mobile phone fees.

And, Mr. Speaker, this measure of which we talk about today speaks both to the character of this administration, Mr. Speaker, and the values that we, the Progressive Labour Party, will bring to how we govern in this Island, which we call Bermuda.

See, Mr. Speaker, I know that the Honourable Member from the other side, who comes from constituency 25—

The Speaker: Remember the caution I gave—

Hon. Owen Darrell: —and he represents an area up the road, may not see savings the way that people in Pembroke East see savings, Mr. Speaker.

See, the people which he represents, Mr. Speaker, while they are important Bermudians, they may not appreciate a \$6 savings that goes across 12 months and on multiple years and what they can do. And I just find it rich at best that—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of information, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of information.
[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, if I may get into the meat of my comments. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mm-hmm.

See, Mr. Speaker, again, this is not just a technical adjustment, Mr. Speaker. This is strategic intervention. And this comes from the slogan of which you saw, and everyone saw, and everyone voted for on February of 2024 *[sic]*, that fairness is not just a slogan, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

An Hon. Member: You have an objection to the election?

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Honourable Member is misleading the House, because not everybody voted for the slogans to which he is referring. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Everyone had an opportunity to vote.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Twenty-five, thank you.

The Speaker: And if you're referring to the recent election, I believe it was in 2025.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I'm sorry, February of 2025.

And while the Honourable Member will, from the other side, who is the Shadow Minister, I remind him, of Finance, I want to remind him that that fairness word is not just a slogan, Mr. Speaker. See, fairness is a duty to the people of this country. The affordability to live in this country is not just a charity, Mr. Speaker.

As the Honourable Tinee Furbert will tell you, that affordability is a justice. And that's the leadership. That's the leadership that this budget that we've just gone through shows. This budget, our first since receiving this fresh mandate of February 2025, sends a clear message that progress must be felt, Mr. Speaker. It must be. Not just promised.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Scott Pearman: I respectfully remind the Honourable Member who's new to this House and from another place that we do not read speeches in this House.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Aha. Well done.

The Speaker: Member that is a ruling in this House.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, if the Honourable Member would like to come sit next to me, he can see that nothing here is verbatim of what I am saying.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Well, well, well, well—

Hon. Owen Darrell: And while, Mr. Speaker, while—

The Speaker: Minister, Minister, if that's the case, look at me more.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Because you have not been looking at me the entire time. You've been looking down.

[Desk thumping]

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: You've been looking down the entire time. Look at me.

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

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: It is . . . it is important for the Members from the other side to understand that the actions of which we take on this side of the aisle are deliberate actions to bring fairness to the people of this country.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And see, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to remind the Honourable Members from the other side of all of the things that we have done previous to this point to bring affordability back to Bermudians.

And I can tell you because I don't know how much canvassing the Honourable Member from

constituency 22 needed to do come February and if he would have spent some time canvassing with more of his colleagues, they may have more than the 10 that they have. However—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Scott Pearman: Again, we are indulging in personalities. And for the benefit of the Honourable Member speaking, I believe I did increase my vote to 74 per cent. Thank you.

The Speaker: Continue, Member.

Hon. Owen Darrell: See, as I was saying, Mr. Speaker, that if the Honourable Member from the other side, constituency 22, would have actually hit the doorstep and taken some time to talk to the people that vote in this country,—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, he would—

POINT OF ORDER [Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

And now I'm afraid the Honourable Member is imputing improper motive, suggesting that I didn't canvass to achieve that 74 per cent, which I did.

And I was, in fact, commended by one of his honourable colleagues because I managed to raise the vote count from a mere 54 before. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Member, don't get sidetracked.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, no. Mr. Speaker, thank you for the advice. And I just remember that . . . I will remind the Honourable Member that I am a history teacher by trade. And history will show that he never has gotten the number of votes that the Honourable Grant Gibbons got when he ran in that seat.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So maybe he can sit down and—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Never!
POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order. I'm afraid the Honourable Member is, again, misleading the House. I greatly respect the Honourable Member, Grant Gibbons, who held the seat before I did. But in fact, I did top his percentage on this occasion.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Minister, Minister, I am suggesting you don't get caught in that sidetrack.

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, no, no. Mr. Speaker, thank you. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: Don't get caught up in it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And see . . . see, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Don't get caught up.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yeah, yeah. Mr. Speaker, see, while we fail to realise that too often when we talk about the benefits of recovery, they get stuck at the top. We get stuck at the top and, you know, the Honourable Member and his friends on the other side may be complaining about the millions that they would like to save and earn more of.

But what we fail to realise is the compression that happens, Mr. Speaker, at the bottom. And I'm sorry, Mr. Speaker, but when I walk the hills of Glebe Road and when I walk the hills of Long Ridge Pass, I can tell you that those individuals are happy. Those individuals are proud to support a Government that looks out for their interests at the bottom and not just the people walking and flying at the top.

So, when the Honourable Shadow Minister got up this morning, Mr. Speaker—and I hope I'm looking at you enough—

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —but I hope when the Honourable Member got up this morning earlier today and he decided to flaunt and talk about Dunkley's eggs and talk about what is \$6 going to be, Mr. Speaker, I hope he can go out into his constituency this Saturday and look those voters in the eye and say, *I am sorry for*

disrespecting the savings that this Government is trying to bring on the table.

[Inaudible interjections and desk thumping]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, Mr. Honourable Speaker, I would say this, that this Government cannot solve the cost-of-living crisis alone. And this Government will continue to do all that it can to help the people of this country. While if they want to sit over, the Honourable Members on the other side and poke shots about what we're not doing enough and what we're doing, I can tell you when they sat in this place as the Government, they were increasing taxes.

Several Hon. Members: Yes!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: They were telling people what they could not do and what I'm going to tell you is \$6, as I said the other day, is a lot more than zero.

So, as the Honourable Member from the other side, constituency 8, will remind him that dark clouds, Mr. Speaker, cannot rain on my parade and while they want to sit over there and continue to talk about the doom and gloom and what the PLP should be doing more, I would ask them that they should have done something, *anything* to help the people of this country.

So, while I got that out of the way, Mr. Speaker, and I hope that I addressed you directly and appropriately for the Honourable Member from constituency 22, I will remind this House that this Government stands today undaunted by the global headwinds, unshaken by—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —unshaken by the criticism and unafraid to make the bold decisions—I hope they're listening—the bold decisions in the interest of the people of this country.

So, Mr. Speaker, I think what I did hear quietly amongst all the chirping here and there was that the One Bermuda Alliance led by the Shadow Minister of Finance—yes, you heard me, led by the Shadow Minister of Finance—came to this House and I think he whispered that he is in support of this Bill. So, I say thank you, sir.

Thank you for understanding that this Progressive Labour Government has continued to help the people of this country—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —and we will continue to do so.

So, as I started, as I started, Mr. Speaker, \$6 is not just \$6. Six dollars goes into multiple dollars when you count up families, multiple families, and you've got

the parents who have multiple children who are worried about the whereabouts of their children and if they're going to get home in time or if they're waiting somewhere, waiting to get picked up.

So, that \$6, Mr. Speaker, for families who are struggling, families that the Honourable Shadow Minister may not know anything about because he's never met them, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: —but I will tell you this, that that \$6 goes a long way.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I'm sure if the Honourable Member from the other side would poll his friends in international business and the amount of money that they have floating around with cell phone costs and they add up all those \$6—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, that he will see that this savings is significant.

An Hon. Member: It is \$6.

Hon. Owen Darrell: It is \$6. Absolutely.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: See, this is where, Mr. Speaker, I hate to say it, but some Members of the other side are disconnected.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: And let me just finish here, Mr. Speaker, and this will be very serious and very heart-felt.

You will note that every time I get on my feet in this House, it is for one reason and one reason only, and it is because I remember the people of whom I serve. Okay? And although the Honourable Member from constituency 10 over there has a very nonchalant attitude towards what service may look like.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Service may—

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I'm afraid that that is, again, diving into personalities. It is diving into personalities.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Contrary to the Standing Order I cited last time, we heard comments from the bench.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Just remember, we all come here to serve. Some of us have different approaches on how we serve.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Let me make this a little clearer.

The Speaker: All have the best interests of their service.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope I'm on the right side of the line on this comment. And I do apologise that I singled out the Honourable Member from constituency 10. I do apologise.

So, I'll make it a blanket statement. The Honourable Members, the collective Members of the Opposition, in my opinion, Mr. Speaker, do not value as much as the Progressive Labour Party—

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motives]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. We are now imputing improper motives.

The Speaker: I was trying to let him finish. He hadn't finished.

That didn't value what?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Yes, you didn't value what? I want to hear you finish [your] words. What's your finish?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: In my opinion, Mr. Speaker, and the opinion of the voters that went to the polls in February of 2025—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: You are on a good line. You are on a good line. Finish up.

Hon. Owen Darrell: By the way . . . through the mandate that they have given this party, the Progressive Labour Party—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Don't get distracted. Stay on the line.

Hon. Owen Darrell: I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that the voters of this country—

An Hon. Member: The ones that are left.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —are supportive and will continue to be supportive of this Government, of the Minister of Finance, supported by the Junior Minister of Finance, and all of the Government, the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs, that we will stop at nothing when it comes to making this country more affordable for those who live in it.

And I would go as far as to say that this \$6 reduction—yes, I said it, \$6 reduction—will help those whom I serve more than it hurts.

And I would remind the Opposition that the reason we come to this place, and the reason why we walk those hills, and the reason why we touch the community, is so that we can hear directly from the voters who put their trust in us. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member want to . . . MP Swan?

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

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank our Government for bringing forward something that would separate us from them. And I say that in that in this budget, which today we come with some legislation that is reducing the burden on persons, and we have heard my colleagues on this side articulate the difference in representing working-class persons and being a representative that might not knock on that many doors just by design of the country. And that's a fact.

This country's origin still has, and I'm on the Boundaries Commission with others, been geographically divided up, where if you're representing someone in Pembroke, in the densely populated areas of Pembroke, you're more likely to find someone when you knock on a door that appreciates a \$6 savings far greater than if you went on the other side of the railroad track. And I say that respectfully.

And that's the reality of this country. But I just want to point out, ever so briefly if I can, Mr. Speaker, the difference in the ethos of \$6, the difference in the mind-set of \$6. We have an Opposition with a track record that came in decrying the debt in 2012—decrying the debt. But raised the debt by over a billion dollars in their tenure.

We had an Opposition that when they were Government cut scholarships for persons who were dependent on those scholarships from the Education Ministry's prior to be able to further educate themselves. That speaks to a difference in ethos. And I heard an interpolation from someone that there was no money. That was said to many people: *Money doesn't grow on*

trees. But we *found* money to build Cross Island. Right? They found money to have America's Cup.

On the eve of not being Government anymore for a long, long time, they left us with a quarter of a billion-dollar responsibility at Morgan's Point.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And when we talk about the difference of an ethos, this ethos, yes, thank you for that, I appreciate that. We have a significant difference because when they had the opportunity to represent the people of this country, they did not think it necessary to increase seniors' pensions incrementally each year.

They told persons that money . . . and what happened, and I declare my interest, Mr. Speaker. I'm a senior today and I understand what an incremental increase means. I understand what \$6 means and I understand why . . . while their mind-set will keep them in Opposition for a long, long, long time.

An Hon. Member: Long time!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Because the cost-of-living increases that get afforded to seniors, they have said the same thing about that, what we have done since we've been the Government since 2017, and did it incrementally every year, thanks to the Finance Ministers past and present, that they didn't do.

And when they didn't do it, the pensions regressed, and it's significant. Six dollars means a lot, not so much of the total sum. It means a lot in the difference in the way they see life and the way we see life. The way they see life would see nothing wrong with sacrificing—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER *[Misleading]*

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Member is misleading the House because he's implying that there is this group of people, "they" . . . perhaps he could explain, but I'm going to read into what I think he's saying, *who all think the same*.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Oh, that's not a point of order.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And in fact, that is not correct. So, he is wrong.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We have a diversity of views over here, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We have a diversity of views, and I agree on that 100 per cent. But we have a debt and poverty line of people who make it very difficult for many persons to afford Bermuda. We understand that.

And that's the difference between point of ordering when a person really is on a good wicket, just to maybe take up some of that time.

And I'm here to say, Mr. Speaker, that Morgan's Point, cutting scholarships, not raising pensions, having Cross Island as a burden to a future government, and many other things that they did separate them, which makes them, you want to use anything to belittle us. But you know, we're a caring Government, and the good Lord doesn't sleep. Because if the good Lord knew that a pandemic was coming on this Island . . . and thank God, he put the PLP in power. Because the Government prior that said *money doesn't go on trees* would have let people suffer. But our Finance Minister—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

POINT OF ORDER *[Imputing improper motive]*

Mr. Scott Pearman: That's imputing improper motive if I have ever heard.

The Speaker: You heard me responding to him beforehand.

Member, I've guided other Members this evening to try and keep on the line where we stay above certain levels. I'm going to suggest you do the same.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Okay, Mr. Speaker, I'll say this much. And I appreciate the sensitivities that would force the Member to come there. And I accept the point of order. And I appreciate your guidance.

But I'll just say, let the record speak for itself. I got that from David Gibbons. You don't have to point to . . . said let the record speak for themselves. The PLP have done a lot to help working-class people.

The Government prior to 2017 did a lot that caused working-class people to live with great angst. And as a consequence, we have a mind-set that will come here and make a big hay about \$6 against \$6 but not represent the fact that this Government incrementally is going out of its way to try to reduce the burden on working families. And that's significant. And that's why they are there, and we are here. Because we care. Not to say they don't care. But their actions in Government have caused them to be where they are today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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

MP Robinson.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. And good evening to the listening audience. And I just wanted to jump up and give a bit of a juxtaposition to the amount of rhetoric that we're currently being buried under.

I'd like to cut to the chase here and say this: to translate, first of all, the One Bermuda Alliance, as stated by my colleague previously, is in support of this cut. And I would like to repeat that. In *support* of this cut.

And after listening to the speeches from Members opposite, you would think that the One Bermuda Alliance advocated for a cut only to go to insurance or the most wealthy. In fact, that Member, my colleague, stood up and advocated for more targeted cuts to those who need it.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And the thing that I wanted to push back on, because I don't want to—

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you.

I don't want to let the night go away with some things that I've heard as far as challenging the validity of voters on this side and voters who have voted for Members on this side. And I find that that assertion, that members of the public and the electorate who are equal when they cast their one vote, that's something we all agree on, for some reason would not understand or appreciate a \$6 cut because they voted for the One Bermuda Alliance.

And I reject that. I reject it completely. And I think that a lot of Members opposite forget that my colleague represents Warwick. I think that folks forget that. They are speaking like he represents a constituency that is very affluent. And I think that at the end of the day, you know, at the end of the day, Mr. Speaker, I am sitting here as a newly elected Member. And I know that there are members in our community who are listening in, who would like to hear debate about this particular thing. And the fact that their elected Members are here to represent their best interests and not to chastise and do personal attacks, especially when it comes to somebody who's only offering up a difference of opinion. When it comes to how the taxes should be applied, not necessarily what the tax is. Right?

And I just wanted to really get specific on that because I feel like a lot of these speeches that we probably will hear continuing on will go down a vein that portrayed it as though One Bermuda Alliance has not

supported this tax cut and that we made a mockery of it, because that's not the truth.

I will say that my colleague, the Shadow Minister of Finance, likes to be a bit jovial with his approach. And I think that a lot of people would have heard that.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: But I think that at the end of the day—

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: No, no. But at the end of the day there's—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: A lot of folks understand, right? The message that was being said was that a lot of *our* constituents and the constituents of those opposite are in need of a lot more relief than \$6.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Now, this is not to diminish it.

As I said, another Member said, you know, \$6 is better than zero. I agree. I absolutely agree. But what I don't want it to be is a political tool used in a way in which tries to divide the electorate, divide those who vote.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And it's . . . and the thing is, what we have to remember is that when we come into this Chamber we are not the OBA representative of constituency 25. We are just representatives of each constituency.

An Hon. Member: True.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And at the end of the day, that is what the electorate said to us loud and clear during the election. And usually after the PLP—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: —usually after the PLP wins an election, they tend to forget the messages that the electorate have said to them. But one of the main messages that I will remind the Progressive Labour Party is collaboration. Collaboration and the respect and decorum within this House. And as soon as a Member opposite got up, it was about his background.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: It was about where that particular Honourable Member came from and nothing to do with his comments that were made.

And I find that level of debate to be disingenuous because there are Members on the Progressive Labour Party side that make a lot more than me, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: There are Members in this House that have varying levels of earning and that shouldn't be . . . I don't . . . I don't need that. I don't even want to—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Because if I . . . if I turn around, Mr. Speaker, if I turn around, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Talk to the Chair. Talk to the Chair.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Mr. Speaker, if I turn around, I have to remind a Member that they are senior and should show some sort of decorum in this House.

Personally, Mr. Speaker, and I would love to see that because I know a lot of the electorate would like to see that.

But as we go along, I'd like to reiterate. We support the cut. Okay? And, Mr. Speaker, I want to also reiterate that I respect the opinion of every Member of this House, regardless of their background, their earning or where they represent, because somebody elected them to be here. Right?

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, if we're going to have a debate, let's just debate ideology, right? Both parties support the cut.

Hon. E. David Burt: No, they don't.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, well, the Honourable Premier says they don't.

I heard and maybe . . . we were talking about the Hansard and digital innovation earlier. I think the Premier needs to check the Hansard because our Shadow Finance [Minister] said succinctly, *We agree with the cut.*

An Hon. Member: Here we go.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: So, with that, I would like to just caution Honourable Members, as I am new in this House and I respect the seniority of many, that if we're going to have a debate on this, let's keep on the wicket

of comments made in the House and not personal attacks. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other member wish to speak? Minister Furbert.

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

Mr. Speaker, I stand to my feet today because . . . first, I want to say that I do support this tax cut because that's what it is. And that's what we do as Government officials. There are things that we can control and there are some things that we cannot control. And one of those things, Mr. Speaker, is cuts, tax cuts. Right? Or tax increases. And so, this is an example of a reduction in tax.

Whether it's described as small or not so big, Mr. Speaker, it does make a difference for many people. And I have the opportunity to speak to seniors every month. And I spoke to them recently about the changes with the budget and how it will impact them. And one of the impacts was this cut, Mr. Speaker. And they were happy about this cut, Mr. Speaker, whether somebody wants to describe it as small or not. They were definitely happy to receive this tax cut from their cell phones or their Internet service providers . . . their cell phones, sorry.

And so, it is important that we recognise that no cut is too small, Mr. Speaker. I want to also take the opportunity because if we evaluated all of the cost-savings, because what we will see over the next couple of months is Government bringing forth legislation to encourage some more areas of cuts in . . . or putting money back into the pockets of our people.

So, we want to say watch this space. Right? Because we will be bringing more legislation for more opportunities to put money back into the pockets of our people. If anyone is in the finance area, they would know about a snowball effect. And a snowball effect means that your small savings, right, if you put it all together, can be huge savings, Mr. Speaker. Little becomes much.

I want to talk about what this Government has done over the past three years, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The Government has reduced payroll taxes for 86 per cent of the workforce, Mr. Speaker. The Government has increased pensions at the rate of inflation every year for our seniors, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has eliminated customs duty on the essential goods.

An Hon. Member: Talk about it.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Speaker, this Government has 60 per cent reduction on our energy taxes, as well as 40 per cent reduction in our payroll taxes for taxi operators. We've reduced private car licensing fees by 10 per cent.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We eliminated land tax for registered charities and nursing homes.

An Hon. Member: Talk about it.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We eliminated customs duties on materials for capital projects for community clubs, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We froze local fuel prices at the pumps.

An Hon. Member: Yes!

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Mr. Premier, I think what we have not done, Mr. Premier, is probably shared what these snowball cost effects look like.

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm coming.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Okay, you're coming. Because we cannot talk about—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We cannot not acknowledge, Mr. Speaker, the cost-savings that we have provided for our people. And I think we have to be deliberate in sharing this information to our people. Because if we continue to allow narratives like what is being said from the other side, Mr. Speaker, then our people will not know.

And so, it is our duty, Mr. Speaker, to inform our people of the cuts and the cost-savings that we are providing for them. Now, it is up to them to decide how they're going to use those cost-savings. And I encourage them to use it wisely. But no amount, Mr. Speaker, is small. There is something that this Government does every year, Mr. Speaker, and that is the Pre-Budget Report. There are no secrets really in regard to what we are looking to progress. This tax was put as a suggestion in our Pre-Budget Report.

And I want to go even so much further as to say that many of the suggestions that we put in our Pre-Budget Report, Mr. Speaker, come from our people. They come from our people as suggestions. And so, if the other side is going to say that there is dis-appreciation for a \$6 cut, people, we want you to know that there is an example of some people who are not appreciating their thoughts, their ideas, that are being put forward.

Mr. Speaker, I . . . You know this is just one measure I spoke about. The fact [is] that we will be bringing more. I want to also remind . . .

I am going to end here, Mr. Speaker, because the \$6 will have a whopping effect in my household every month—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: —and many women's households, particularly women of childbearing age who have to buy pads every month.

[Inaudible interjections and desk thumping]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: No, that may. That is not a small gesture, Mr. Speaker. There are people out there who cannot afford to have sanitary napkins—cannot afford. I have seen people do fundraising to assist charities for that particular aspect. So, we cannot minimise. We cannot minimise the reduction of our taxes particularly on our cell phone bills, Mr. Speaker.

I am glad it was minimised because it was talked about. [It was] said, *Oh, a whopping amount!* Mr. Speaker. Yes. It will have an impact in many households if people use that savings correctly, Mr. Speaker. Right?

And so, I just want to acknowledge again that I support this Bill. All right? I support this Bill. The whole country should support this Bill (I am sure) because it came from the people. And it is a huge benefit, Mr. Speaker. And we are a government—

An Hon. Member: Correct!

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We are a government that is encouraged in wanting to support our people no matter how big or how small, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

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

None?

Minister, . . . Junior—Oh.

Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: I see, Mr. Speaker, they are getting ready to point-of-order, but they had better get ready because there will be a whole lot.

The Speaker: Premier, I am going to take the assumption that you are just using that for statistics that you want to relate to and not a speech.

An Hon. Member: Yes. Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, let me start by saying that I am actually surprised that we are still here.

The Speaker: Well, I agree. I agree with you.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am surprised that we are still here because of the thought . . . the *thought, the thought* that the Government would bring the first Bill today of a significant amount of tax cuts in this budget that will benefit people across this country—first Bill, first out of many. There will be more on Friday—doing more in the future. But the first Bill, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: And then to hear the Shadow Minister of Finance get up and say, *Oh, we support it, but.*

An Hon. Member: But!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: So, here we go. Now, Mr. Speaker, the last Member from that side to speak, you know, tried to play kumbaya—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: —and everything else, saying he is a new Member and he cannot believe—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.
The Honourable Member is misleading the House, and he should be sitting down right now.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: He is the Premier. He knows the rules. He is misleading the House. And the intent . . . it was a very sincere message that the Honourable Member gave. And for him to shed light on that Honourable Member in that aspect is certainly not premier-ship, not at all, not leadership at all.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: He was very . . . He was very . . . He was very earnest about what he had to say.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And here we go again. We just talked about the DNA of certain people. Right—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: —in this Honourable House. He needs to apply the take that he talks about. So, you know, everyone is keeping quiet here, letting the Premier say what he has to say, but to go down that vein of road is misguided.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Premier, I know things have got a little heated today, so you need not . . . This *evening*. I should not even say *today*. Just this evening. So, we do not need to turn the flame up a little up.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, Mr. Speaker, I did not turn the flame up. That Honourable Member took it the wrong way because the reality is, Mr. Speaker, you and I—

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: What is the point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: He is misleading the House again. I was earnest about what I said. How could I be misleading the House?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: All right. We can move forward.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Move forward.

Hon. E. David Burt: And Mr. Speaker, as we speak about the rights and privileges of Parliament—

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: —I do believe that the last Honourable Member from that side said that everyone in this House was elected to represent and serve, and I am going to speak on behalf of my Members in this House. And he can point-of-order me for the next 30 minutes if he wants, but I promise you, Mr. Speaker, I will make my point. I will make my point.

Now, Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member for constituency 30 got up and tried to play kumbaya and said, *Oh my goodness—*

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

We just went through that. I am sure that AI is not helping him out well at all right now. We already made the point. For him to get up again is disrespectful

to this House after we established the fact that the Honourable Member was not trying . . . He was earnest in what he had to say.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: The wording or the attempt at wording what the Member is trying to do is to bring some peace back to the conversation. My words. My words.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am fine—

The Speaker: What the Member was saying was trying to bring some peace back to the conversation.

Hon. E. David Burt: And that is perfectly fine. And guess what my definition of peace is, Mr. Speaker—*kumbaya*. All right?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: There you go. There you go.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: So, now Mr. Speaker . . . So, the Honourable—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —So, the Honourable Member, the last Member who spoke on that side, Mr. Speaker, tried to get up and, you know, play *kumbaya* and say, *I cannot believe. I cannot believe that we are having all this excitement from the other side.* And it is incredible that he does not even understand the base of this because as I started my comments, Mr. Speaker—

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.
The Premier is misleading the House again. For him to suggest that the Honourable Member did not understand is way out in left field.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You don't understand the rules of the House. Sit down!

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Sit down. I'm talking to you.

The Speaker: Members, Members, wait a minute.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Wait a minute. Members, Members. Members!

[Gavel]

The Speaker: Deputy! Deputy!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Did you hear what I said?

The Speaker: Deputy. Deputy. I am trying to get quiet so your Member can finish talking. Thank you.

Members, this matter when it started, I think we all expected that it would not be going this long. I mean, no one here expected we would be here all this time because I believe there is still another matter to be done.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, there is.

The Speaker: And we would all like to get on with the night so we can get all matters done. So let us tone down the tone that is unfortunately raised and let us get this matter done so we can move on to the next matter. Because I think everyone—both sides of this House—and everyone is agreed that [they are] in favour of the matter, in favour of the cut being . . . that is on the table. They are supportive of it. So we are fighting . . . no, wrong word. We are *encouraging* an argument to go on and on over a matter that everybody agrees on. Can we wrap this up? Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate your exhortations to wrap this up, but Mr. Speaker, I must apologise because I am going to take my time today.

The Speaker: I meant let us wrap it up in a way that would bring it back to—

Hon. E. David Burt: —Oh, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: —and do not turn the heat up any higher. I didn't intend for you to cut yourself short—

Hon. E. David Burt: —Mr. Speaker, Mr. Speaker, just so we are clear—

The Speaker: Let's keep it so that tone stays level.

Hon. E. David Burt: That is clear. The only voices that have been raised in my time speaking are the Honourable Members over there who before I even stood up said, *Point-of-order him the entire way through—*

The Speaker: Let's move on—

Hon. E. David Burt: That is fine. Let's trust and believe I will make it through my remarks—

The Speaker: Just continue through.

Hon. E. David Burt: And so here we go, Mr. Speaker. Back to it again.

The Honourable Member who, you know, took his seat from the other side, the last one to speak on

that side, you know, tried to come with the peace-making and surprise at the reaction of which was coming from the Honourable Member who said he supported this Bill *but*.

Now here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. Let's be clear and remember what the Honourable Member Shadow Minister said. [He] talked about demeaning the impact of this cut and what it would mean. I want that to sink in for the persons listening because it is important—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motives and misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He is imputing improper motive and misleading the House because I did not demean anything, Mr. Speaker. I provided facts. I provided alternate ideas. I provided a policy that the Government could have spoken to, but no one on that side has spoken to any of the factual points that I raised. They have gone off on a history lesson, which is not even 100 per cent correct. And I would love to hear if the Premier could address some of the actual ideas that we have given them in a spirit of collaboration.

Thank you.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Just . . . Just . . . Just try to keep this balanced here. The points that were raised were that, one, you agreed with the cut; and two, that you just could have gone further.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: And so, I think that is what is being addressed, responded to. Did I miss any point?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, if I may. Number one, we all know that was not a point of order. That is the first thing because you have not asked me to withdraw any words. So that is the first thing. And that is their tactic: point of order, point of order, point of order. I am there.

But number two, I will help the Honourable Member from constituency 25 if he will remain in his seat and listen like we did when he spoke. Then you might actually hear a few things.

[General uproar]

An Hon. Member: Now you are really mistaken.

Hon. E. David Burt: Now you might hear a few things.

But, Mr. Speaker, I will go back to my remarks because I want the people who are listening to hear and understand. The Honourable Member from that side got up and said, *We agree, but*, and made the implication that this cut will not mean much to people, started rattling off prices of this and prices of that, and saying that it is \$6.00, and saying that does not mean this, and all the rest, Mr. Speaker. That is what he said.

Now here is the reality. That of course would—as he well knew—get a reaction from those persons who have continuously been fighting to make sure that we can make this country more affordable. And here is the reality. Every single bit counts.

One of my colleagues said *gaslighting*. That is it. But here is the thing, when we are talking about gaslighting—because I am going back to the Honourable Member from constituency 30. It is as though, Mr. Speaker, he did not see his colleague come into the room, just throw the fire in the middle, the flame erupted. And then being surprised and trying to take out their budget replies and fan the flame and say, *Oh, we did not mean that. We did not mean that. We did not mean that*. A nonsense, Mr. Speaker. A nonsense.

An Hon. Member: That is right!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: So now, let me go because here is the thing. There are . . . We talk about the personal attacks, that is what was said, and all the rest. This goes back to philosophy. And here is the reality, Mr. Speaker. The reality is that they have not changed.

And we heard the message from the Member from constituency 30. It was incredible. He said, *The Government has not learned the lessons from the election*. And he went on to say that *if there was anything, the people wanted collaboration*. I would ask that Honourable Member who took his seat what part of collaboration did he find from the method and delivery and the message that came from his Honourable Shadow Minister who led from that side, Mr. Speaker? Because I will tell you what I heard. *I will tell you what I heard*. I will tell you that I heard—coded things and dog whistles that were basically saying that this ain't going to help you much.

And we heard Members from this side speak and discuss, discuss, speak and discuss around, *around* (key point now) the impact of which that will have. But remember, I said, I said (important, important, important) they said that this would not mean anything.

Remember when I said that they have not changed, Mr. Speaker. Let me, if you will allow me, Mr. Speaker, go back to the 2021 Budget Reply. Because you know what that side said? Same as today. [They] criticised the Progressive Labour Party tax cuts as being minimal. And they stated, as I quote: "Bermudians will note that the Premier's tax breaks are miniscule.

These cuts are not even drops in the bucket for most Bermudians.” That is what they said in 2021.

Let’s go on to 2022. “These tax cuts will do little to ease the hardship faced by Bermudians.” And here is the important point, Mr. Speaker. In 2022, they voted against those tax cuts. But here is what is important to note, Mr. Speaker, because we heard Members from this side say that every little thing adds up. Let me give the combined results of the tax cuts that they called minimal, Mr. Speaker. Important, important, important.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: For persons who are on the average (important point) [making] the median income in the country, the miniscule tax cuts of which they spoke have saved persons \$5,280 a year. I want to say that again.

So, let’s remember this, Mr. Speaker. These add up. This package of tax cuts announced in this budget will save the average family \$1,000 a year. This is the first Bill of many Bills that are going to come.

But here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. It is important for us to remember. And it is important for the public to hear and understand that the One Bermuda Alliance has not changed because when the Progressive Labour Party brings forward relief, the only response that they have is that it is not enough. However, Mr. Speaker, the people of this country remember that it was them who raised taxes on workers to the highest level in history. It was that party. It was that party, Mr. Speaker, that cut benefits, cut scholarships, cut investments in education. It was that party, Mr. Speaker. So, when they get up and say we need to do more where they do more for persons who need help and assistance, there is only one Government, one party—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Premier—

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He is misleading. It was the One Bermuda Alliance that put in place for the first time ever the progressive payroll tax system.

[In] years and years of the Progressive Labour Party government, they did not see fit to create the system whereby the higher earners paid a higher percentage. That was put in place by the One Bermuda Alliance Government. And the Progressive Labour Party has had very few new ideas since then. All they have continued is to tweak that structure put in place by the One Bermuda Alliance Government.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: All right. Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, that is not a point of order. He had his opportunity to debate, but he does not like the response that is coming because he understands the fire of which he has lit, and now he is there trying to clean it up.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: But let me go back to the history. It was that One Bermuda Alliance that raised taxes on workers to the highest level in history. I remember when I was a Shadow Minister, I even pointed it out. And I remember the Minister of that time looking at that [other] Minister and all the rest and saying: *Is that true? Is that true?* And they had to look back. Those are the facts.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Those are the facts.

Now here we go, Mr. Speaker, see? Because they do not like the fact that we point out the record. They do not like the fact that when we put relief upon relief upon relief upon relief—it adds up. Every single budget session we have come here, we have reduced taxes for workers in this country. And the one time that we said, *Those who earn more should pay more*, they oppose it.

So, it is interesting to see the Honourable Member get up and say that the One Bermuda Alliance put the progressive tax system in place, and when we went ahead and increased taxes on the highest earners in this country, they said *No*. They opposed the tax cut for 86 per cent of workers in this country that are saving money. They opposed the changes of which we have made. And guess what, Mr. Speaker. The voters rendered their verdict at the polls.

Here is the reality, Mr. Speaker. This is the first Bill of many, and we will continue to cut taxes. I sincerely hope that the Shadow Minister will find a different way to support. Because it is interesting, Mr. Speaker—interesting, interesting, interesting—that they go back to the same playbook every time. The same playbook every single time.

We have seen what they said in 2021. We saw what they said in 2022. We passed those tax cuts anyways over their objections, over their comments of, *It’s not big enough*, because we take the responsibility of the finances of this country seriously.

It is this Government, Mr. Speaker, that has delivered a balanced budget. It is this Government, Mr. Speaker, that is cutting taxes for workers. It is this Government, Mr. Speaker, that is going to bring the largest package of tax cuts that we have seen in this Honourable House since any of us can remember. The only person in Parliament who might remember is you, Mr. Speaker. And that is just the reality.

And so, Mr. Speaker, this is the first of many. But I will go back to what was said in the Budget Statement, a total of \$46 million of tax reductions. Can more be done? Absolutely. But here is the thing. Will more be done? Absolutely! And who will be doing the more? This Progressive Labour Party Government. Thank you.

[Inaudible interjections and desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.
Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I believe enough has been said. The Government has clearly—

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Yes, go on and leave it on that.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —defended its position. And we all know that at the end of the day, the public will support what we are doing.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move that the said draft Regulation be approved, that a suitable message be sent to His Excellency the Governor.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to it being approved?

There are none. The matter has been approved, and the appropriate letter will be sent.

[Motion carried: The Government Fees Amendment Regulations 2025 were approved.]

The Speaker: Thank you, Members, for your participation.

Now I understand that there is another matter for us to move on to. And I would like to move on to the next item on the Order Paper

And MP Lawrence Scott, you have the motion that you would like to do this evening. Is that correct?

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: yes. So put your motion.

MOTION

CYBERATTACK ON GOVERNMENT IT SYSTEMS IN SEPTEMBER 2023, ESTABLISHMENT OF A PARLIAMENTARY JOINT SELECT COMMITTEE

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House do now take under consideration the following motion, notice of which was given on the 28 March 2025:

WHEREAS the Government had previously established “a Joint Select Committee of both Houses to inquire into and make recommendations arising from September’s cyberattack”, prior to the dissolution of the Legislature in January;

AND WHEREAS the Government now desires to establish a new Joint Select Committee to resume the inquiry into this September 2023 cyberattack:

BE IT RESOLVED, pursuant to [the provisions of] Part IV of the Parliamentary Act 1957, that this Honourable House approves the establishment of a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee to examine and review matters surrounding the cyberattack on Government IT systems in September 2023, and to report to this House its findings and recommendations in due course.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to the matter proceeding at this time?

There are none.

MP?

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Yes, Mr. Speaker

Basically this . . . I am not going to talk long. Basically that this is just what I am suggesting is that we reintroduce the Joint Select Committee. We know that in September 2023 Bermuda was one of many nations that was the receiver of a cyberattack. The other nations would be the United States, the UK, Australia, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, [and] Barbados that also were attacked in similar fashion in the similar time frame.

In response to those attacks, those jurisdictions have taken steps such as strengthening their defence, establishing cybersecurity agencies and enhancing legislation. This Motion is our response, meaning that the creation of a Joint Select Committee, is one of our responses to that attack to be able to mitigate the liability of future attacks and to learn what happened with the original one. And this was only dissolved because of the election that was called.

The Speaker: Yes. Correct. The House was in agreement with it beforehand, and you just want to reintroduce it.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Correct. Correct, Mr. Speaker, that since the House was in favour of it beforehand, I just wanted to bring that back so we can start back up and get swinging on that again.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: That is it, Mr. Speaker, for me.

The Speaker: Are there any other Members who would like to make a contribution at this time?

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: MP Robinson, you have the floor.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Yes. Thank you. Yes.

Mr. Speaker, I want to say to the Member who just took his seat that I want to assure [the Honourable Member], Mr. Speaker, that my comments are not in any disrespect towards that Member as I believe that he led the Joint Select Committee with bipartisanship and transparency. And this not to speak out against any Members who sat on that Committee—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I associate my colleague from constituency 10. And I just wanted to rise today to offer maybe an alternative because I feel as though when we . . . I did not want to oppose because I want something to happen, but when we first constituted this, it was a while after the actual cyberattack, and now that we have had an election and we are reconstituting, I wonder if this method may be too slow to get the answers to the Bermudian public when they need it. Right?

And so far, a lot of our constituents have come up and said that they are concerned whether their data was compromised. I feel as though the Joint Select Committee before December of 2024 was a suitable method, but I do wonder now if it may be well to take advantage of the Government's touted stronger fiscal position and potentially pay to have an expedited and independent overlook of this particular attack and get it to the people as quickly as possible. Because the issue is that when we get together, we have had it carried over a few times. I think that now, at the end of the day, the people want to know whether or not a ransom was paid, whether or not their data has been compromised, and I think we need to go to a method that is a lot quicker and expert-led.

And so, I put that to the Chairman to consider—not to stall any movement on it. I would rather have movement than none. But I do want to raise the fact that we are going into almost two years now. And the people are questioning the [desire] to be transparent, to bring forth the answers necessary. So, [I] just want to say if we want the people who put us here to be, you know, safe, secure, and feel as though we are putting forth something that is transparent, I think it is time now that we pick a method that picks up the pace a bit. So, with that, I just wanted to put that suggestion forward, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

None?

MP DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: You know, my colleague put it quite well. I think he was talking about the time frame and what I would classify as a sense of urgency. And, Mr. Speaker, to be honest, the ship has sailed in my personal view.

[Inaudible interjection]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am going to give an example—the British Library. Some of you may have been there. I do not know. They had a hack at around the same time, the same time period. Probably I think it was within a few weeks. And you know, here we are (what are we?) 18 months, 20 months since the original hack happened, Mr. Speaker—so quite a long period of time. And to basic . . . I am supporting my colleague to say, *Look just publish the reports that we have got. Get it out there.* And I referred to the British Library hack happening at the same time frame. Its report was published in March 2024. It is easy to find online. Just google it. It is 18 pages. It is very comprehensive and provides a lot of recommendations. I would hope that we . . . I mean, we understand we are in possession of a report, and I hope that our report also would have a lot of recommendations that we should just put to the public.

I did a little extra research, Mr. Speaker, with respect to responding to cyberattacks. It is a tricky thing, but it is relatively well understood. And there are a lot of good resources that you can go to, for example, the UK National Cyber Security Centre. And if you do not mind, I might just provide a few points that I learned from there that I think would be instrumental for the Government to consider with respect to this area.

The first point is they say it is important that you communicate clearly, Mr. Speaker, and that you are transparent because transparency builds trust and credibility. And I think that my colleague was alluding to that perhaps in different words.

It is also important, Mr. Speaker, that you provide accurate information, that you avoid saying anything that might have to be retracted, and that you provide regular updates especially on the impact assessment.

It is important to maintain open communication with the media to counter negative publicity and misinformation. And again, I think my colleague was referring to the fact that, within the public's mind, there are more questions than answers. And they would probably benefit from getting the report that exists out there today.

And importantly, to share insights and lessons learned because transparency will improve collective resilience. So, we can think to the resilience of the Government but also of many other organisations on the

Island. So, I would refer the Government to that report and just give you a quick outline of headings in that report:

- How It Happened;
- What Was the Impact of the Attack?
- What Were the Response and Recover Efforts?
- An Overview of the Technology Infrastructure, (for example of our Government and the impacts on the hack);
- A Future Risk Assessment;
- Lessons Learned

And I would imagine, Mr. Speaker, that the report that the Government has in its hands today, which we know they do, which I understand was prepared by professionals, would in fact have some kind of similar coverage.

And that is why I think really this Joint Select Committee . . . With the greatest respect of this institution and the power and importance of these committees, we could get to where we need to get simply by the Government releasing the report that it already has.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

MP Cannonier.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, I would like to sing kumbaya—

[Laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —especially to my half-blooded colleague sitting next to you.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Mr. Speaker, at first let me just say that when I read the Motion, I was not in support of it. And the reason I was not in support of it at the time when I read it was because I was trying to understand really what we are attempting to do. If I read out, if you will, this Motion, it says at the end of it “the parliamentary Joint Select Committee to examine, review matters surrounding the cyberattack on government IT systems in September of 2023 and to report to the House its findings and recommendations in due course.”

I could understand if Government at the time, even a year after, was unwilling to do that, but I do understand that the Government also brought in expertise to help them also understand the complexity of what

took place. (Maybe even how. I am not sure.) But really fulfilling what it said here, *to review matters surrounding the attack* so that we could be better prepared. So, I am trying to . . . And as colleagues were asking me about it, I was saying, *Well, listen, we are two years down the road now. Just put the report out*, as my honourable colleague just before me spoke.

So let me say this. I gave it some thought, and as of yesterday, speaking to my colleagues, I am in support of it. What I would like to see for this [Joint] Select Committee is to have a time frame. Two years have gone by now. We have had experts come in to speak to us about the matter—and probably several different types of experts coming in to give us things that we should be doing.

We have already seen from the Budget Book that a lot more money has been put into establishing new protocols and the like. And we heard answers even earlier today about how that is going to be affected. My concern . . . And I am hoping that . . . so that it does not sound negative here. I am hoping that the Committee has a time frame through which it can come back. Certainly, a year is too long. The report has already been done, Lord knows how long ago. Maybe the honourable colleague could tell us how long ago the report has been done, but it has been done for a while now.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: And so, I am in support if it means that we . . . It does not seem like we are going to get the report if we do not have the [Joint] Select Committee based on the Government's direction and pathway that it has taken. So, if that is not possible, we need to hear about a time frame that is realistic that the committee can sit down . . . these are smart people.

I was not sure if this committee is going to be reappointed by different individuals or not, as well, based on the Motion here. So, I am hoping we get some clarity on that. Are we going to be looking for a new establishment of people, or is it going to be the same that were there before prior to Christmas . . . December time?

But we do need to get to [it] and put this to rest. So, if it is going to help put it to rest, let's give it a time frame. I think that three months is certainly enough time for a group to sit down [and] go through the report if it is not 1,000 pages. I understand that it is not. It is a fairly short report that we can go through. So hopefully we can come to some conclusion very quickly.

I do not feel like it is fair to the public for us to continue to go on and speculate as to was did [or] did not happen and the like. We feel for the Government in this particular instance of a cyberattack. I think there has been back and forth about it as to whether or not enough information was forthcoming.

I know that some of those were security protocols that we were putting in place, but as my honourable colleague said, we can take a look at other similar

situations where the cyberattacks took place and far more transparency was added to it. We know exactly. The public from another jurisdiction outside of Bermuda, we know all about what took place.

And so, I am hoping that the committee can get going on with its business and we can come to some conclusion. And I am hoping to hear a time frame. In my opinion, a year is well too late. Three months, maybe even stretch around a month from there, but we should be going into our break for Cup Match, potentially, having had this committee meet and get it out there, certainly not going into a new parliamentary session for this.

So, I want to thank the Honourable Member for bringing this forward. It has caused some thought, a lot of thought, as to whether or not this is good. So, I am happy to say that yes, Premier, I am supporting this here. And it is important that if we do not see any progress soon, if this committee takes too long to get going, we will be saying something about it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution.

None other?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Oh. Yes.

Mr. Robert King: No, no. It is okay. I will be brief.
Good evening, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Good evening.

Mr. Robert King: —and Members of this Honourable House.

Regarding the Joint Select Committee, I do not believe that there is going to be any merit in having it reconvened. We already have the subject matter experts' information digital technology, an audit. The persons who are currently working within that area know what happened. They have all the information, and basically what they are going to be doing is informing the persons who would be sitting on that committee who are not subject-matter experts of what happened and what measures are being put in place. So—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Yes, I was, but I am not going to do it again. But the point is, the mechanisms are already in place to have a report written by the person who are already doing the work and protecting this Island. So, we do not need to waste time; we can just have the report published.

Thank you.

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

Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, sir, Speaker.

It clearly goes without saying that the Government supports the establishment of this committee and the re-establishment. The only reason why this committee was not able to complete its work is because we had a general election and the Legislature was dissolved. And therefore, when the Legislature is dissolved, committees are dissolved. And then once you go back into Parliament—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: —if there were things that were not done before, you have to go ahead and do it and continue it, which I think you explained.

But, Mr. Speaker, it is a challenge. And I am going to explain why it is a challenge. Because hearing Members opposite (my opinion) . . . I know they will give a point of order, but I am going to say it. And they will point of order, and I will get them up—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —and keep saying it again.

Hearing Members opposite, you would think that the only time that Members of the House of Assembly are supposed to work is when we show up on Fridays. The reality is that as I have stated on many and numerous occasions (and we have had those conversations before), we need to make sure that we have more committees of Parliament, that they are active committees in Parliament, and that they can go through the work that is being done. But here is what is also important, Mr. Speaker, and especially for the Honourable Member who just took his seat—

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

The Speaker: Point of order.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: He was sitting in the House. He was sitting right there.

An Hon. Member: He was in the House.

The Speaker: He was in the House.

An Hon. Member: Okay. I apologise.

[Crosstalk]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, earlier we were debating the relevant heads and the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure where we made it quite clear that we believe in the work of the . . . The Honourable Premier is misleading the House. We made it quite clear that we believe that this work should take place not just during a sitting of the House but in fact during numerous committee events including espousing increasing in funding and resources for those committees.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, Mr. Speaker. So, we go back to it again—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Opposition Leader says one thing, and his Members say something else. So, the Opposition Leader believes we should have more committees and active committees, and their Members believe that we should not have a committee to look into this.

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order. What is the point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: The Premier is misleading the House. Nothing of the sort was said as to the Premier's last comment. Nothing. Everyone who spoke has said they—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: —support it. Every single Member that spoke to this Bill from the OBA supported it.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: That is false!

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: That is not false.

The Speaker: Let me help you out.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Let me help you out. There was a Member who indicated he thought the committee should not continue—

Mr. L. Craig Cannonier: That does not mean that he did not support it.

The Speaker: There was one of your Members. One of your Members thought that the report—

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Robert King: I might be able to assist, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: —constituted.

An Hon. Member: Oh, no, no, no.

The Speaker: Okay?

Hon. E. David Burt: I shall continue, Mr. Speaker.

So, the Opposition Leader says that we should have more active committees and more should be done by committees. The Honourable Opposition Whip says he supports this. The Honourable Members who spoke before—unequivocal. The first one said the support is there. Another one said no we do not support. The other one said, *I am not trying to have anything negative—*

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Mr. Jarion Richardson: I believe the Honourable Member was referring to this specific committee. I did not say I support every possible committee under the sun that could ever exist.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Premier is misleading the House. The statement he made to this House was that we over on this side do not support working in this Parliament other than on Fridays. That statement was not only rude, it is wrong, and it is misleading.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the last—

The Speaker: Keep it to where we are—

Hon. E. David Burt: That is fine, Mr. Speaker. But I will continue to say it because I find it laughable that this side wants to throw but the minute that they get a little bit of, you know, return they are like, *Oh my gosh! Don't! Don't! Don't! Don't!* But here is the thing. Here is the thing.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: That is all right. You can point-of-order again. But here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. Here is the thing. The reason why it is important is because . . . and the Honourable Member who just took his seat may be upset about what I said, but that is what I took from their statements. If you do not like what I took, then that is fine, but that is what I took from their statements.

Here is why committees are important, Mr. Speaker. Yes, absolutely, Mr. Speaker, someone can do a report. Sure! Absolutely. Here is the reality. We in this House scrutinise the work of the executive. We in this House need to find ways to learn, to improve, to understand more deeply. We in this House, I believe Honourable Members, especially when going into a space where cyber issues are going to be more prevalent, need to have an understanding, need to have the opportunity to sit, to question, to ask, to understand so they can deepen their responsibilities. Because a Member on this side who is on the committee or a Member on that side who is on the committee may be in a position at one point in time—whether the Minister is responsible, the policy officer is responsible—and the lessons that have been learned from the interactions will benefit the country and our democracy.

That, Mr. Speaker, is the reason why we have a committee. It is not just to publish the report because the Motion says to learn lessons and make recommendations going forward. And the persons who are part of that will have a deeper and better understanding of the work that takes place around it. That, Mr. Speaker, is why this Government put forward. That is the same rational when this Motion was originally passed, and it is the same rational today.

So yes, I understand that certain Members may not want to be on a committee and have told you, Mr. Speaker, and I understand the Opposition Whip is saying, *We are looking for a timeline*, and *Who is going to be appointed?* [and] all the rest. Those are things which are underneath your gift, Mr. Speaker.

But what I will say is that it is important to remember and recognise that work in committees that takes place benefits the Members of the committees to enhance their knowledge, their understanding, and to be able to serve the country better especially in something that is going to be more and more important as we go forward.

So that, Mr. Speaker, is my contribution. And I sincerely hope that Members on that side will follow their Whip and support this Motion.

[Inaudible interjections]

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

Does any other Member?

None. Member.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I find it interesting some of the comments from the other side, and I feel as though I should share some data on this topic.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: In 2023, multiple nations were the victim of cyberattacks. And the cyberattacks I am talking about now are the government-focused cyberattacks. The Honourable Members on the other side have spoken to one report that has come out. And, Mr. Speaker, as you notice, I am not using my tablet or my phone for this presentation.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: But what I want to say is from the notes that I have done and the time that I have spent—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: In 2023, around the same time that Bermuda suffered a cyberattack, how many other countries and how many other attacks (let's put it that way) do you think happened? It is estimated hundreds of thousands of cyberattacks were either attempted or successful on government systems in 2023.

How many of them have transitioned into concrete resolutions? Dozens to hundreds. So, that suggests that the majority of the cyberattacks that have happened to the United States, to the United Kingdom, to Australia, to Jamaica, to Barbados, to Trinidad and Tobago have gone unresolved. And Mr. Speaker, if you look at how long it takes for full implementation of a report to be done, an investigation to be done, and the mitigating factors, it takes one to three years. And this is from nations that arguably have more resources and more capabilities than we do here in Bermuda.

An Hon. Member: We could be on schedule.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, Mr. Speaker, I would love to caution this House that we can either do this quickly or we could do this correctly.

An Hon. Member: Yes!

Another Hon. Member: That is right!

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And Mr. Speaker—

An Hon. Member: That is right.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Mr. Speaker, I was raised in a household that said, *Haste makes waste*.

An Hon. Member: There you go.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: I understand because I came into politics when we were the Opposition. It is easy on the other side to say what sounds good—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: —and not have to back it up. On this side, when we say we are going to do something, we have to do it—and not just do it to do it but do it to do it correctly.

And so, Mr. Speaker, we already have or at least the Secretary for the committee has multiple reports from multiple jurisdictions that we can look into. This is not about pointing the finger. This is not about a singular event. This is about looking into . . . And it is not just about the Government. This about looking into our infrastructure for electricity, our health care, our international business, other jurisdictions internationally, how they have done it because what the world has learned is that cybersecurity is not an individual's responsibility; it is a global one.

An Hon. Member: True. True.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Therefore, we must be working together with others. And the best place that I believe and the Government believes to start is with the House of Representatives leading the way and having those conversations on your behalf, Mr. Speaker.

Because this is a Joint Select Committee, you are the one that would determine who sits on the committee. And Mr. Speaker, from what I am hearing, it seems as though we have to have a very stringent vetting process so that those who already have an opinion on the matter do not bring an opinion already created to the committee. And allow the committee to go through the data and let the data lead them to a conclusion.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I understand that there are those in this community, as there are those in this Chamber, that feel as though we have taken too long. I understand that there are those in society, as are those in this House who feel as though we should do more. But Mr. Speaker, I do not agree that we should put this

into the private sector's hands because, Mr. Speaker, the one thing that we all share in this Chamber is the trust of the people who elected us. Therefore, when a Joint Select Committee of this House comes out with a report and recommendations, it is one that the people and the country can trust and stand behind.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And, Mr. Speaker, even Members on the other side said that as we were making progress the Joint Select Committee was moving forward with transparency and that everybody was treated equally. And I will now go and embellish a bit that this was more parliamentary than it was party. We represent you, Mr. Speaker, when we reach out for evidence. We represent you, Mr. Speaker, when we call witnesses to help explain to us what the data means and what the terminology is in the reports that we are reading—

An Hon. Member: And it is good governance.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And, Mr. Speaker, as my colleague to my left that is lucky enough to share one of my names—

[Laughter]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: —has said, it is good governance.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

An Hon. Member: No one is spared.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, Mr. Speaker, on that note, I move that we do move forward with the Motion, and be it resolved.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to the Motion?

An Hon. Member: No objections.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: All right. I was just asking is there were any objections at this time. If there are no objections, are we going to need to take a vote on it.

No? Okay, that is where the ayes and the nays would have come in—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: —but it seems there were no objections and they were in favour. So, I would accept that it has been done.

Just for . . . And I am doing this piece for the edification of those in the listening audience. The

committees that are formed by this House are formed as a nonpartisan committee to look at issues that are important to not just this House but to the country.

I recently just came back, as you know, from being overseas and [in] meetings, and the cyber issue was in both the sets of meetings that I sat in. We had experts come in and talk to us about the cyberattacks on our countries and how our Parliaments need to be concerned about those things. So, it is fitting that we have this discussion.

Yes, time has passed us because of an election. But because an election came does not mean we do not come to a conclusion. And the committee is being reinstituted so we can come to a conclusion. My desire would have been seeing the Members who served on it prior serve again because they already have some information—

An Hon. Member: Continuity.

The Speaker: —and [for] the continuity of it. Thank you.

We had expected the continuity to have carried forward so that we can bring it to a conclusion without having to back and start over at the beginning with fresh Members.

So, with that said, the matter has been approved this evening, and it now brings us to . . . There are no third readings tonight, so it now brings us to a conclusion, Mr. Premier, for the evening.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House now adjourn until Friday, 30 May.

I am informed that one of my Members wishes to speak to the motion.

The Speaker: Does any Member wish to speak to that?

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. The clock is on. You have your 20 minutes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, welcome back. I must say that your Deputy handled the—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: I was just about to give a compliment.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: He reeled you in real quick, eh?

Mr. Christopher Famous: I must say, Mr. Speaker, but I shall not be deterred.

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Your Deputy handled the Budget Debates, the briefs, just the way you would, Mr. Speaker. And you know it is unfortunate that today was, you know, kind of your welcome back, [and it] kind of got, you know—

The Speaker: [It's] Part of the process.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Anyway, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: I will be very brief, Mr. Speaker, because the Deputy Speaker is giving me a look that—

[Crosstalk]

TRUE LEADERSHIP MEANS YOU HAVE TO TELL PEOPLE WHAT THEY NEED TO HEAR VERSUS WHAT THEY WANT TO HEAR

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, I think she would appreciate what I am going to say.

Mr. Speaker, some seven years ago you sent me on a CPA course, and that course spoke about the need for more women in political leadership. Earlier today we heard statistics that there were eight women in the Lower House and seven women in the Upper House—still not where we should be, 72 per cent male. And we see when alpha males get at it, it just goes crazy, right?

So, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that in the last few months, there have been some movements in our sister islands. At a recent conference, the Honourable Mia Mottley . . . [Is there] anybody that does not know who she is? The Honourable Mia Motley said she felt very lonely as the only female leader in the Caribbean at the time. And subsequent to that, there have been some elections in some of our sister islands, as you would know, Mr. Speaker, and I would just like to read off some names if you would allow, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Cora Richardson Hodge has been elected as the Premier of Anguilla—first female leader in Anguilla.

The Honourable Kamla Persad-Bissessar has been re-elected as the Leader of Trinidad and Tobago—first time they had a woman re-elected. Additionally, the Honourable Penelope Beckles[-Robinson] has been selected as the Opposition Leader in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago—the first female Opposition Leader. So, [in] Trinidad and Tobago, because it is a Republic, the President is Kangaloo (not

kangaroo. Kangaroo.) is a female. The Prime Minister is female, and the Opposition Leader is female.

And yesterday, Mr. Speaker, this week in the Republic of Suriname there was an election and the Honourable [Dr.] Jennifer Geerlings-Simons (might be part Bermudian) has been elected as the President of the Republic of Suriname.

So, I say that in the sense that we as men have to accept that we need more women in politics in general. Right? And even if we do not make way, they are going to make their own way. So, gentlemen, I suggest you be on your P's and Q's.

Mr. Speaker, moving on—

Mr. Scott Pearman: Honourable Member, take a point of information.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Anything for Mr. Scott.

POINT OF INFORMATION

Mr. Scott Pearman: I have been listening to the Honourable Member speak positively about strides women politicians have been making south of us, and I would merely remind the Honourable Member that the first jurisdiction in the world to have both a leader who was a woman and the leader of the Opposition who was a woman was, in fact, Bermuda.

The Speaker: Yes!

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Well, the first party that had an elected female leader was the PLP.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, to the west of us is a country that is called United States of America, and the present leader is, well, you know the name.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Christopher Famous: That leader is Donald Trump. Trump 1.0 made a statement, and I will not say some words because I know the Sergeant-at-Arms will take me out.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Well, escort me out, I mean. He said he did not want people from certain blank-blank-blank countries. He did not want people from Central and South America. And he did not want people from Africa. He wanted people from Norway. So, you can read into that what he wanted. Trump 2.0 has (I do not know) gone all out in trying to deport, escort, people of colour out of his country. But funnily

enough, he gave refugee status to some folks from another country and that happens to be in Africa. So, he said, *Well, didn't you say you did not want Africans in this country?* Then you look and you say, *Oh, you only want certain types of Africans here.*

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Right. What is the relevance, Mr. Speaker? We have someone . . . I am not going to call any names, but you all can figure it out. We have someone who has for years been advocating in this country that we have population increase. Now some of their argument has merit. We have a growing greying population. We have a declining birthrate. So yeah, okay it makes sense somewhere. And every time they get a chance, they keep saying: *We need more population. We need more population.*

They have gone so far as to say population increase would decrease the cost of living. Actually, it will not because you are going to increase the cost of housing, and so even if you decrease the cost of groceries, your housing price is going up. But anyway, Mr. Speaker . . .

Anyway, Mr. Speaker, that same individual in a Trump-like manner has gone on record numerous times inferring negatively that this Government is attempting to open the floodgates for people from a certain region. So, on one hand he is advocating for population increase, but on the other hand, he is saying, *Oh my God. Look at what they are doing. They are trying to sneak in people from this region.* kind of Trump-like. It sounds as if he—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: He is both a . . . the Member—

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am pretty . . . The Member I believe is alluding to another Member, and he is both mischaracterising and misrepresenting the Member's remarks. So, he is misleading the House of Assembly, and he is also imputing improper motive. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I—

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, I would—

The Speaker: I am not sure who he is leading to. That one has going past me. And I have been making sure

that he did not go personal in any direct way because I did not know who he was leading to.

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for your ruling. And I will say again, if the fish did not open their mouth, they would not get caught.

[Laughter]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: All right. Okay, Member.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher Famous: Mr. Speaker, my point being, one cannot advocate for population increase, rightfully or wrongfully, and then always take an opportunity to slyly disparage people from a certain region. It is Trump-like. Trump wants people out of his country, but he wants to bring in certain people. It is Trump-like, Mr. Speaker. But let me move on before another attempt at a point of order.

Mr. Speaker, housing. I will not go into a debate that was had earlier this week. All I would say, Mr. Speaker, [is] the facts are there is no simple way to get more housing in this country. The price of land is constantly going up. The cost of materials is going up (due to Trump). And the cost of labour is going up. So, it is somewhat like a moving goalpost for many Bermudians who did not get a start.

The reality is, Mr. Speaker, true leadership means you have to tell people what they need to hear versus what they want to hear. True leadership tells people that the odds of the percentage of your downpayment going down or you qualifying for a certain bank, hmm, maybe not. It's a possibility but maybe not. The reality is, Mr. Speaker, that the percentage we pay on our mortgage maybe one thing today [and] could be something else tomorrow. [It] all depends on what goes on in someplace else. We do not control our mortgage rates. All right?

Mr. Speaker, again, not speaking to a specific debate, but it is easy for any government anywhere in the world to say, *Hey, we are cutting the taxes*. But if other things are going up, the tax cuts are kind of negated. That is the word I want to use. But as leaders, what we have to tell our people, Mr. Speaker, is, *Save your money. You want to own a house? Save your money for a downpayment. You want to have a good retirement? Save your money. Put it in a decent pension fund*.

Mr. Speaker, we have a holiday just gone by. We have a holiday that is coming up. National Heroes Day, Heroes Weekend, whatever they call it. There are going to be a lot of parties going on, and we are going to find a lot of our fellow Bermudians wearing wristbands showing that they went to this party or that party. And we are going to find of those same people getting

on social media complaining about the price of bread. Well, how did you afford to go to all these parties, and you complain about the price of bread or the price of watermelon?

[Crosstalk]

Mr. Christopher Famous: So, I say this, Mr. Speaker: leadership. Yes, it is nice in here to come in and crack jokes between each other, you know, trade little barbs here and there—barb, b-a-r-b-s. But true leadership, Mr. Speaker, is telling people what they need to hear. And we are at a point in this country where no matter which government it is, the cost of living is not going down significantly. I am not saying it is not going down, but not significant enough. If people want housing, they have to save. Stop spending frivolously. [If] people want to have a retirement, a decent retirement, save their money.

So, I will end on that note, Mr. Speaker. And welcome back. And I see that King Charles finally met royalty. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter and desk thumping]

The Speaker: On that note, I take it that we are closing out for the evening. There are no further speakers?

No further speakers.

Thank you, Members, for your contribution today and throughout this Budget Debate. I am sure all Members are pleased that we finally finished the Budget Debate.

With that said, Premier, we are out until Friday at 10:00 am. Members, enjoy your, well, one day between. I almost said weekend. Enjoy your day in between and we will see you again on Friday morning at 10:00 am.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House stands adjourned.

[At 9:08 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Friday, 30 May 2025.]

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**BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
30 MAY 2025
10:01 AM**

Sitting Number 13 of the 2025/2026 Session

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

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.
The Clerk will lead us in prayer.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mr. Clark Somner, Clerk]

The Speaker: Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 28 May 2025]

The Speaker: Members, the confirmation of the Minutes from the 28th of May have been circulated.
Are there any amendments?
No amendments. The Minutes will be printed as confirmed.

[Minutes of 28 May 2025 confirmed]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

**ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER
OR MEMBER PRESIDING**

APOLOGIES

The Speaker: We have two Members who have indicated their absence today and that would be Minister Adams and MP Lister.

**PAPERS AND OTHER
COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE**

The Speaker: Premier, there is one paper this morning.

Hon. E. David Burt: Good morning to you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

**BERMUDA MONETARY AUTHORITY
ANNUAL REPORT 2024**

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the Bermuda Monetary Authority Annual Report 2024.

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

**STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND
JUNIOR MINISTERS**

The Speaker: We have six Statements this morning.
The first is in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance. Would you like to present your Statement?

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

**BERMUDA MONETARY AUTHORITY
ANNUAL REPORT 2024**

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 28 of the Bermuda Monetary Authority Act 1969, earlier today in this Honourable House I tabled the [2024 Annual Report of the Bermuda Monetary Authority](#).

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda's financial services sector is subject to the regulation and supervision of the Bermuda Monetary Authority. The Authority operates pursuant to the Bermuda Monetary Authority Act 1969 (the "Act"), which provides it with a number of principal objects, including the supervision, regulation and inspection of financial institutions operating in or from within Bermuda, together with the promotion of financial stability and soundness of financial institutions.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members would be aware that the Authority has specific licensing and supervisory responsibilities under the following regulatory statutes: the Banks and Deposit Companies Act; Corporate Service Provider Business Act; the Digital Asset Business Act; the Insurance Act; the Investment Business Act; the Investment Funds Act; Money Service Business Act; the Fund Administration Provider Business Act; the Trusts (Regulation of Trust Business) Act,

together with other statutes. The Authority also regulates the Bermuda Stock Exchange.

The Authority's mission is to contribute to Bermuda's financial stability, protect customers of financial services and protect Bermuda's currency through maintaining effective and proactive regulatory frameworks through its highly skilled and engaged workforce; delivering efficient operations and sustainable business practices; and supporting responsible innovation locally and in global markets.

International Recognition

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Authority has received international recognition for its regulatory excellence, being one of only seven jurisdictions with US National Association of Insurance Commissioners (NAIC) "qualified jurisdiction" status, one of three with NAIC "reciprocal jurisdiction" status, and one of just two jurisdictions in the world to be granted full Solvency II equivalence by the European Union.

Mr. Speaker, the Authority is an active and respected participant in key international regulatory bodies, fostering strong global relationships. The Authority's Managing Director of Supervision serves on the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS) Executive Committee, with BMA staff leading or contributing to numerous IAIS committees, including those on macroprudential policy, development, and financial crime. The Authority also engages with the Financial Stability Board, the Bank for International Settlements, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Insurance and Private Pensions Committee. The Authority is also a coordination group member of the Global Financial Innovation Network, a group of regulators committed to supporting financial innovation in the best interests of consumers.

Legislation

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Authority is authorised to advise the Minister of Finance on policy matters relating to financial institutions and may propose legislation consistent with its responsibilities under the Bermuda Monetary Authority Act 1969. Amongst the legislative proposals advanced in 2024 were those which bolstered the regime under which recognised investment exchanges and clearing houses are supervised and regulated; a Ministerial Order for the minimum initial net assets required of Restricted Banks at the time of licensing and expanded the classes of persons to whom such banks may provide services; and measures to amend the fees payable by entities operating within the Authority's innovation hub.

Additionally, rules were passed regarding the requirements for insurers to create a recovery plan, the contents of such plans, and the matters which the Authority shall consider when determining which insurers need to prepare a recovery plan. Regulations were also

issued to enable the Authority to refresh the form and design of coins to feature the image of His Majesty King Charles III.

Financial Sector Highlights

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, Members' attention is drawn to the following key highlights for the various sectors supervised by the Authority:

Banking Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: With regard to the banking sector, consolidated assets remained unchanged at \$23.7 billion in 2024. Investments retained the largest share of total assets at 53 per cent, followed by loans at 33 per cent, and cash and deposits at 11 per cent. Net interest income continued to be the largest component of the banking sector's income at \$755 million down from \$790 million in 2023.

Insurance Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, moving to the insurance sector, 1,239 insurers were registered as of 31 December 2024 compared to 1,213 in 2023. According to 2023 year-end information, total capital and surplus was \$404 billion in 2023 an increase of \$57 billion from the \$347 billion recorded in 2022. Gross written premiums were \$316 billion in 2023 an increase of \$39 billion from the \$277 billion recorded in 2022. This increase is attributed to the growth in business written by large, commercial, general business and long-term insurers. Total assets were \$1.87 trillion in 2023 an increase of \$217 billion from the \$1.65 trillion recorded in 2022. This increase was largely due to increased business written by a specific group of insurers.

Investment Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, moving to the investment sector, there were 52 licensed investment business providers, an increase of 5 from 47 in 2023; and 56 registered investment business providers operating in Bermuda during 2024. The aggregate total assets under management (AUM) reported by licensed investment providers were \$231 billion compared to \$225 billion AUM in 2023. Total assets under administration (AUA) for [2024] were \$25.4 billion, compared to \$28.1 billion reported for 2023.

Mr. Speaker, in 2024, there were 784 investment funds on the Investment Funds Act register, a decrease of 20 compared to 804 in 2023. Of these funds, 129 overseas funds being promoted in Bermuda and 655 Bermuda funds. This is contrasted against 2023, whereby 146 overseas funds were promoted in Bermuda and Bermuda funds totalled 658, with a net asset value reported in relation to Bermuda funds of \$295 billion an increase from \$281 billion in 2023. At the end of

2024, Mr. Speaker, 24 fund administrator licences were in issue, unchanged from the prior year, with \$195.6 billion in assets under administration.

Digital Asset Business Sector

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, 2024 was a significant year of growth for the digital asset business sector which ended the year with 36 digital asset business providers operating in Bermuda, a 50 per cent increase from the 24 recorded in 2023. This sector is continuing to demonstrate strong growth and is expected to become the third largest revenue earner for the Authority in the upcoming year. This growth is a testament to this Government's foresight in ensuring that Bermuda established a credible regime for this emerging sector, which has been in place since 2018.

Mr. Speaker, the total equity market capitalisation for the Bermuda Stock Exchange stood at \$217.6 billion at the end of 2024 as compared with \$191.7 billion at the end of 2023. A total of 156 new insurance-linked securities were added to the BSX in 2024 a reduction from 195 new issues recorded in 2023. Domestic trading volume totalled 11.3 million shares in 2024 up significantly from 2.3 million in 2023; with the value of shares traded increasing 5-fold from the prior year, totalling \$105.8 million compared to \$20.4 million in 2023.

BMA 2024 Financial Highlights

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members' attention is drawn to the following highlights set out in the Statement of Accounts Report:

- Net income for the Authority was \$17.93 million up from a net loss of \$3.53 million in the previous year.
- Total revenue increased by 50 per cent up to \$129.8 million, up from \$86.7 million in the year prior. The increase is mainly due to a \$40 million increase in revenue from supervisory and licensing fees.
- Expenses increased by 24 per cent to \$111.9 million. The increase was mainly due to the \$15.5 million in increased salaries and benefits.
- Licensing fees were \$114.5 million, compared to \$74.4 million from the prior year, of which \$103 million was paid by the insurance sector.
- The receipt of funds from fines and penalties increased by \$2.554 million from the previous year.
- The Authority had 302 full-time permanent employees, an increase from 273 in 2023.
- Board Members are paid an annual fee of \$50,000 an increase from \$26,000 in 2023; Board Sub Committee Chairs are paid an annual fee of \$58,000 to \$63,000, up from \$33,000 in the year prior. The Chairman of the

Board receives an annual fee of \$125,000, an increase from \$96,000 in 2023.

- The CEO's salary is set at \$550,000 up from \$500,000 in 2023, and he is eligible for a performance-based bonus of up to 50 per cent of base salary. The salaries of the other 20 members of the executive team range from \$275,000 to \$500,000, with a performance-based bonus of up to 37 per cent of salary.

Mr. Speaker, upon reviewing the Authority's 2024 financial statements, the Auditor General has issued a clean audit opinion.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Government, I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Authority's Board, chaired by former Cabinet Secretary Mr. Donald Scott. I also wish to extend special thanks to the executive team and dedicated staff of the Bermuda Monetary Authority, under the leadership of Chief Executive Officer Mr. Craig Swan. The Board and executive team deserve Honourable Members' congratulations for their sound stewardship and the excellent financial results achieved in 2024. As Minister of Finance, I am especially grateful for the continued partnership and collaboration with the Authority's leadership, as this Government remains focused on expanding and strengthening Bermuda's financial services sector in a globally competitive environment.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Mr. Premier.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of National Security.

Minister.

HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

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

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to inform this Honourable House and the people of Bermuda about our preparedness for the [2025 Atlantic hurricane season](#), which officially commences this Sunday, 1 June and concludes on 30 November.

Mr. Speaker, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) has forecasted an above-normal hurricane season for 2025, predicting 13 to 19 named storms, with 6 to 10 becoming hurricanes, and 3 to 5 reaching major hurricane status (Category 3 or higher). This outlook is driven by record warm sea surface temperatures in the Atlantic and the continued transition to neutral El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) conditions, both of which create favourable conditions for storm development.

Mr. Speaker, AccuWeather's forecast aligns closely with NOAA's, anticipating 13 to 18 named storms, including 7 to 10 hurricanes and 3 to 5 major hurricanes. These forecasts underscore the importance of early preparedness, particularly as warmer

waters can contribute to rapid storm intensification, leaving less time to react once a system is formed.

Mr. Speaker, as Honourable Members will be aware, June is recognised as Hurricane Preparedness Month. On Tuesday, 11 June, I will convene the executive of the Emergency Measures Organisation (EMO) for its annual hurricane readiness meeting. This session will serve to assess Government's state of preparedness and ensure that all relevant agencies are coordinated and ready to act if and when a storm approaches. Additionally, a tabletop exercise for relevant agencies is scheduled for 18 June. This exercise will bring together stakeholders from across the public sector, utilities, and critical services to simulate emergency scenarios and test our national response protocols.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the month of June, the Disaster Risk Reduction and Mitigation (DRRM) Team within the Ministry of National Security will lead various preparedness activities. These include training sessions, equipment and connectivity testing for the Emergency Broadcast Facility, and refresher briefings for EMO Operations Centre staff.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to use this opportunity to once again encourage all residents to take personal responsibility for hurricane readiness. Now is the time to review and update your household hurricane plans, incorporating any lessons learned from previous seasons. Please ensure that your property insurance is up to date and provides adequate coverage.

Mr. Speaker, each household should assemble a comprehensive hurricane supplies kit. This should include a two-week supply of any necessary medications, along with at least three days' worth of nonperishable food and water. Flashlights, spare batteries, and a portable radio are essential items to remain informed and safe during a storm. It is also helpful to include books, games, or other small activities that can help keep children occupied and reduce stress in the event of power outages or prolonged periods indoors. In true Bermudian spirit, I encourage all residents to check in on our elderly or disabled neighbours who may need assistance with their preparations, ensuring that no one is left behind.

Mr. Speaker, in times of emergency, accurate and timely information can save lives. I urge all residents to ensure they are receiving updates from credible and official sources. The Emergency Broadcast Station at 100.1 FM is live and remains a reliable source for Government messaging, especially if the power goes out. I encourage residents to tune in now and become familiar with the station's format and content. Other trusted sources include the Government of Bermuda and the Bermuda Weather Service's Facebook pages, in addition to reputable local radio and television stations.

Mr. Speaker, I must stress the importance of verifying any information received through social media. Not all platforms share accurate or timely information, and misinformation during a storm can cause

unnecessary panic or dangerous delays. When official advisories are issued, whether to prepare, shelter in place, or evacuate, it is vital that the public acts on this advice immediately. Timely action preserves life, supports emergency services, and strengthens our collective response.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has weathered many active hurricane seasons with resilience and unity. However, this success should not engender complacency. It only takes one storm to cause significant disruption or damage to our normal lives. With early preparation, community cooperation, and a commitment to following official guidance, I am confident that Bermuda and her people will safely navigate the 2025 hurricane season.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the next Statement this morning is in the name of the Minister of Tourism, Transport, and Culture.

Minister.

BERMUDA DAY 2025: THE FUTURE IS NOW

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

Mr. Speaker, it is with immense pride and gratitude that I rise today—the day before the end of Heritage Month—to reflect on the unforgettable celebration that was the [2025 Bermuda Day](#) Parade. Though set against unpredictable weather, this year's parade captured the power of community, the richness of our culture, and the bold promise of our future. With "The Future is Now" as our theme, Bermudians rose to the occasion and turned imagination into reality.

Mr. Speaker, the streets of Hamilton came alive with the sounds, colours, and creativity of our people. This year's parade saw remarkable participation, and the route was lined with families, friends, and visitors all soaking up the experience. From the very first beat to the last Gombey step, the 2025 Bermuda Day Parade delivered something special—an honest and joyful collision of heritage as well as innovation.

Mr. Speaker, this year we witnessed the resurgence of one of Bermuda's most beloved parade traditions: the majorette. Leading the charge were the PHC Majorettes and Drum Corps, long-standing bearers of the tradition, joined by a strong showing of new and returning troupes: Warwick United Majorettes and Drum Corps (celebrating their 50th anniversary, Mr. Speaker), the Ex-Artillery Elite Majorettes, the Devonshire Ultimate "STAR" Twirlers and Drum Corp Band, Hamilton Parish Community Hot Peppers, and the St. George's Original Dancerettes—a proud programme of the Office of Youth Affairs. Their energy, precision, and presence were unmatched.

Mr. Speaker, the performances did not stop there. We were thrilled to welcome back United Dance Productions, who continue to raise the bar with their

choreographic brilliance. We thank groups like Sui Generis for persevering in participation, even when odds were against them in the preparation stages. Rated E brought their trademark energy and youthful spirit, and there were many other dance groups and participants worth celebrating.

Mr. Speaker, this year's floats captured the theme with bold imagination. From the futuristic [to the fantastical,] they were shining examples of what happens when community pride meets creative daring. The Association of Filipinos in Bermuda stunned spectators with intricate, hand-crafted costumes designed by their president, Ryan de Jesus. The Department of Culture, in collaboration with Bermudian artisan Ian Tucker, featured a striking futuristic Gombey—his vision of what cultural continuity might look like.

Mr. Speaker, CedarBridge Academy once again impressed with an ambitious and visually captivating float that even featured a Macy's Day Parade style blimp. It was a technical feat and a crowd favourite, showcasing the innovation and talent of our youth in real time.

Mr. Speaker, no parade would be complete without the many walking groups that bring stories, identity, and legacy to the road. This year we saw groups celebrating milestone anniversaries—like Bermuda College—as well as proud organisations like the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated, who marched alongside their award-winning float with joy and intention. As Minister with responsibility for Sport, I was especially pleased to see Department of Sport and Recreation, Western Stars, and the Endeavour Programme take part—demonstrating how sport and culture complement each other beautifully in the public space.

Mr. Speaker, the Bermuda Day Fund once again made meaningful participation possible for many of this year's entries. A total of 20 entries were supported through this fund, allowing organisations across the island to bring their ideas to life. This vital resource continues to break down barriers and ensure our parade is as inclusive and dynamic as our people.

Mr. Speaker, this year's Grand Marshals represented the spectrum of Bermudian excellence—visionaries in media, culture, youth leadership, financial literacy, and technology:

- Glenn Jones: A distinguished career in communication and influence.
- Eugene O'Connor: Bermuda's esteemed kite master and cultural guardian.
- McKenzie-Kohl Tuckett: Championing change and empowering the next generation.
- Seldon Woolridge: Fusing arts, culture, and financial acumen.
- Coral Wells: Pioneering the future of tech in Bermuda.

Each of them exemplifies what "The Future is Now" looks like in action.

Mr. Speaker, our Gombey tradition continues to evolve in exciting ways. This year, some troupes joined the festivities along the route, adding vibrant bursts of culture throughout the day. As is tradition, the Gombey brought the parade to its official close with unmatched passion and pageantry. Their rhythmic beats echoed through the streets, a powerful reminder that even as we look ahead, our cultural roots remain deeply grounded.

Mr. Speaker, while that marked the end of the official parade, the celebrations didn't stop there. Thanks to a partnership between D'General, the Department of Culture, and One Communications, an incredible after-party truck kept the energy high and the music pumping—providing the perfect close to a phenomenal Bermuda Day. It was a finale that reflected exactly what this year's theme stood for: where we've been, and where we're going.

Mr. Speaker, I extend sincere thanks to the team behind the scenes at the Department of Culture, led this year by Acting Director Ms. Carlita Lodge. I also offer deep appreciation to the Department's Temporary Relief Cultural Programme Manager—a former student of mine, a former Head Boy of The Berkeley Institute, Mr. Aden Peets, who stepped in and stepped up—bringing the heart of an artist to the planning and delivery of an outstanding Bermuda Day celebration.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda Day 2025 has set a new standard—not just in creativity or execution, but in how we honour the past while stepping fully into the future. I thank every participant, organiser, and supporter who helped make this year's event so meaningful. Here's to the continued celebration of our culture, our resilience, and our endless potential. Bermuda, the future is now.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Minister.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr Speaker, I rise today to update this Honourable House on the tangible progress made under the Government's National [Youth Employment Strategy](#)—an initiative launched to empower Bermuda's young people through meaningful training, employment pathways, and long-term career support.

Since the introduction of the Youth Employment Strategy in 2022, we have made steady and measurable strides in reducing youth unemployment in Bermuda, demonstrating the impact of our targeted interventions and whole-of-government approach.

The Strategy was designed with clear goals: to increase training opportunities, expand apprenticeships, promote access to labour market information, and provide holistic support for vulnerable youth. I am pleased to report that we are delivering on those commitments.

Mr. Speaker, this past quarter, several key initiatives were successfully executed.

The “Learning Through Experience” Hospitality Programme provided seven young Bermudians with hands-on experience in the tourism sector. Of the four participants within the 18 to 26 age group, three gained full-time employment. This outcome not only speaks to the quality of the training but affirms the potential of experiential learning to open doors for our youth.

Through our partnership with the Gang Violence Reduction Team, two young men received structured, one-on-one support. One is now employed with Marine and Ports and on the path to becoming a ferry pilot; the other is preparing for entry into the Heating, Ventilation and Air Conditioning industry.

We also completed Phase 1 of our expanded Apprenticeship Programme. Twelve active participants now advancing in masonry, carpentry, and plumbing—fields critical to Bermuda’s infrastructure and sustainability.

Mr. Speaker, these achievements are not without challenges. We acknowledge that maintaining youth engagement post-programme, ensuring placements in emerging industries, and addressing emotional and logistical barriers for vulnerable clients require sustained attention.

To this end, the department is developing post-programme engagement tools, expanding industry partnerships, and scaling wraparound support services.

Looking ahead, Mr. Speaker, our plans are equally ambitious. In the coming quarter, we will

- launch and promote the new Bermuda Job Connect platform to enhance visibility of local employment opportunities;
- deliver orientation sessions in our public senior schools to prepare graduating students for workforce entry; and,
- roll out the “Bridge to Work” Programme to assist justice-involved and vulnerable youth with re-entry into training and employment.

Mr. Speaker, our young people are not statistics. They are our future homeowners, innovators, and community leaders. Through this Strategy, we affirm this Government’s commitment to ensuring that every young Bermudian has a pathway to sustainable employment and economic independence.

In closing, I commend the Department of Workforce Development and our community partners for their unwavering dedication and support. Let us remain committed in our efforts to build a Bermuda where our youth are not left behind but are given every opportunity to thrive.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Members, the Minister has a second Statement.

Would you like to do your second Statement, Minister?

TRADE MARKS AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to introduce in this Honourable House the [Trade Marks Amendment Act 2025](#). This Bill relates to the Trade Marks Act 2023 and supporting legislation.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is continuing its work on updating the legislation governing intellectual property. This effort includes modernising the laws governing trade marks, patents and registered designs, and making certain updates to the copyright legislation. The modernisation effort also aims for compliance with key international treaties which the UK may then extend to Bermuda. It is anticipated that updating these laws will make Bermuda more attractive for registration of intellectual property rights.

Mr. Speaker, the Trade Marks Act 2023 was enacted in the fall of 2023 as part of this initiative along with the Government Fees (Trade Marks) Regulations 2023. The Trade Marks Regulations 2023 were also laid in this Honourable House in December that year.

Since then, Mr. Speaker, the Registry General’s Department has taken various steps to prepare for the commencement of that legislation. This includes completing two rounds of training for the staff—the first of which was facilitated online by representatives from the United Kingdom’s Intellectual Property Office. That training was spread out over approximately six months. The second round of training was attended in person by the staff and was facilitated through intergovernmental cooperation between the Bermuda Government and the Government of Trinidad and Tobago.

Mr. Speaker, during the debate of the Trade Marks Act 2023, it was recognised that the new legislation places more administrative requirements on the Registry General. The Government committed to supporting the department’s efforts to update its ageing technology and that commitment is being honoured. The Registry General’s Department has been allocated the necessary funding; and the department is in the process of updating its software to assist departmental staff in meeting the responsibilities under the new Act.

Mr. Speaker, during the last year, the Registry General’s Department has taken several opportunities to engage further with members of the private sector about the new legislation (in addition to the consultations undertaken during the original drafting process). The purpose was to identify any gaps or additional changes needed. Today’s Bill is a result of this further consultation and consideration by the Registry General’s Department.

Mr. Speaker, there are only a few amendments being made to the Trade Marks Act 2023 at this time, but this Bill also includes a Schedule which contains an updated set of fee regulations. These fee regulations will replace the prior Government Fees (Trade Marks) Regulations 2023.

Since the 2023 fee regulations have not yet been brought into force, the required amendments have been incorporated into the schedule of fees and the entire set of regulations [reintroduced] as a Schedule to this Bill as a matter of efficiency.

Mr. Speaker, while the vast majority of fees have remained the same in this 2025 set of fees as compared with the 2023 fees, there are approximately eight additional fees included in this updated set. The 2025 fee regulations also include minor corrections to a few of the prior fee descriptions to ensure correct application of the fees.

Mr. Speaker, we know that industry representatives are looking forward to commencement of the legislation, and we can say that commencement is certainly imminent. In fact, the new framework, supported by the approval of this Bill, will commence on 1 July 2025.

Mr. Speaker, to complete the modernisation of trade marks legislation in Bermuda, we anticipate amendments to the Trade Marks Regulations 2023 and the introduction of the Trade Marks (Customs) Regulations 2025 to be laid in this House in the coming weeks.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank industry representatives for the time they have taken to review the various components of the trade marks legislative framework and the valuable input they have provided thus far. We look forward to continuing to work with industry representatives on upcoming legislation governing intellectual property rights.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Minister.

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

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

Mr. Speaker, today I rise to address a matter that affects the lives and livelihoods of many in our community: [the time taken to navigate our planning system](#), particularly regarding building permits. From homeowners seeking renovations to small businesses aiming to expand and developers envisioning their next opportunity, the message remains consistent: the process can feel too slow, overly rigid, and at times unclear. We understand the public's frustrations with the

planning system, whether perceived or real, as these frustrations are genuine.

Mr. Speaker, I have heard these concerns first hand, and as Minister, I take them seriously. However, I also want to speak plainly to say this: I believe in the professionalism and dedication of the team at the Department of Planning. They are not the enemy in this story; they are central to the solution. Like all of us, they are navigating the pressures of high demand, limited resources, and an evolving public expectation for service delivery.

Understanding the Root of the Delays

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, as of today, 372 building permit [applications] remain open, with an average age of 165 days. Some are much newer, some are significantly older.

We have found that the main pinch point is not the planning approvals process itself, but the building permit process, where technical details, inter-agency coordination, and inspections come into play.

However, let's also be honest about this: a significant number of delays stem from incomplete applications submitted by agents, as well as the time required to obtain follow-up information. Currently, 59 of these applications are effectively awaiting responses from agents with an average age of 170 days. The youngest of these being 20 [days old], the oldest being 481 days old.

Mr. Speaker, this is not about assigning blame; rather, it is to highlight the importance of shared responsibility. We cannot build an efficient system if applications arrive incomplete and, despite requests for the missing information, remain unchanged for weeks or even months. This situation adversely affects everyone, particularly those whose files are ready to proceed but are delayed because of these incomplete applications.

That is why I have asked the department to explore ways to separate complete application submissions from those awaiting information, so we can keep the queue moving forward for those who have met the requirements. I also lay this marker down here: I fully support the rejection of incomplete submissions that have awaited a specified timeframe with no response. This would mean that those applications would need to be resubmitted and started over.

Since my appointment as Minister responsible for the Department of Planning, I have devoted countless hours to reviewing data, reading policy statements, listening to public feedback, and drawing upon my own experience as a former agent who submitted plans to Planning before entering full-time politics. Numerous ideas have been promoted and discussed over the past few weeks. I would now like to address some of the ideas that we plan to explore and aim to implement as swiftly as possible.

Clarifying the Director's Role in Approvals

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I need to address a public misconception. Some have questioned how certain applications are approved, especially when the name of the director appears on the approval letter.

Let me be clear: except in exceptional cases, typically when the director is acting as a plans examiner, the Director of Planning does not personally see or vet applications. Planning approvals are granted by the Development Applications Board or by delegated planning officials in the case of Permitted Development applications, commonly referred to as one-day permits.

To avoid this confusion and to protect the integrity of the department, we have instructed that approval letters indicate that decisions are made “by the department” or “by the Development Application Board” rather than being attributed solely to the director. This is a matter of public clarity and institutional accountability.

Key Reforms Underway

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Now, Mr. Speaker, let me outline key improvements the Ministry are exploring, together with the department, to modernise and streamline the system:

1. **Boosting Permit Processing [Capacity] and Internal Reorganisation.** With only one full-time permit processor and one supervisor, the team was overwhelmed. The director has brought in two experienced consultants, one working full-time and another part-time, with a third looking to be added if necessary. This immediately expands the building permit review bandwidth and is already reducing the backlog. The department is currently implementing its internal reorganisation and actively driving recruitment. In recent months, as mentioned a few days ago in the budget debate, five new staff members have been onboarded.
2. **Competent Persons Scheme (CPS).** Legislative amendments are in progress to permit the introduction of regulations for the CPS. This scheme will initially enable certified solar installers to carry out installations without traditional inspections, supplemented by casual visits by Planning inspectors to ensure compliance. Other trades will be incorporated after the concept is tested, and capacity within each industry is expanded and confirmed.
3. **Exploring a Revised Building Permit Review System.** We are actively exploring a new review model that matches scrutiny with risk:
 - **Track 1: Certified Fast-Tracking.** Applications endorsed by registered engineers (structural, electrical, mechanical) can be fast-tracked with minimal [internal] review. This empowers professionals and streamlines project approvals with expert oversight. Although this is typical of commercial applications, extending to residential applications could allow building permits for residential developments to be processed more quickly.
 - **Track 2: DIY and Minor Works.** Homeowners undertaking small projects, such as fences or sheds, could use a simplified form and a checklist-based process.
4. **Expanding Self-Inspection on Residential Projects.** Self-inspections—already a standard practice with commercial projects—allow qualified engineers to inspect their own projects and subsequently submit signed documentation. We are seeking to extend this practice to residential projects on an opt-in basis. This decreases the reliance on our limited pool of government inspectors and assists in keeping construction on schedule.
5. **The “One-Day Permit” Review System.** Small-scale works should not be delayed for months. We are considering reinstating dedicated review days, during which all relevant agencies—Planning, Health, and Building—collaborate to assess minor [permits] in real time. We are also evaluating the General Development Order (GDO) to expand what types of projects qualify for this fast-track treatment.
6. **Smarter Vetting Through AI Technology.** According to data from the Department of Planning, a significant percentage of applications submitted are initially incomplete. This results in prolonged, frustrating cycles of back-and-forth conversations between agents and the department. To break this cycle, we are considering the introduction of AI tools that screen applications on the front end, identifying missing data before it enters the review pipeline.
7. **“Soft Refusal” Reform.** Allowing common sense to prevail with applications. Too often, worthy applications are rejected due to minor conflicts with the Bermuda Plan, only to be approved on appeal at a later date. A policy to address this is being advanced through the introduction of a new tool: Ministerial Waivers. In straightforward cases, where the merits of the proposal are clear but minor conflicts with the Bermuda Plan arise, upon request from the Department of Planning or the agent, the Minister will be able to issue a targeted policy waiver that permits the application to proceed as usual to the Development Applications Board for their review and approval. This reform will save time, reduce paperwork, and avoid unnecessary appeals.
8. **Better Communication and Service Access.** To address public frustrations about unanswered

emails, delays in callbacks, and clarity on file status, we will look on how we can introduce

- dedicated office hours for in-person consultations;
- using Smart Online Query Forms to get inquiries to the right people; and
- tracking response timelines to improve service.

This isn't about building permits—it's about rebuilding trust.

Closing: Everyone Has a Role to Play

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, we are not just improving a process—we are restoring confidence in a public service function that is vital to our economy.

I would like to again thank the Director of Planning and her team for their ongoing partnership, professionalism, and willingness to evolve. I also extend my gratitude to the many architects, contractors, engineers, and homeowners who continue to work with us—and challenge us—to do better.

These reforms are just the beginning. Our goal is simple: a planning system that is clear, fair, timely, and responsive to everyone.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Ministers.

Members, that brings us to the conclusion of the Statements by Ministers and Junior Ministers for this morning. We will now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: That takes us to the Question Period for today, and we will start with responses to written questions that require an oral response, and then we'll move on to the questions from Statements that were given this morning.

The questions this morning, a written question this morning, is from MP DeCouto to the Minister of Finance/Premier.

Would you like to put your question?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, good morning, and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA HOSPITALS BOARD, GOVERNMENT FINANCING TERMS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide information for this Honourable House on the outstanding principal,

the interest rate, and the remaining term of the financing guaranteed by the Government of Bermuda for the Bermuda Hospitals Board?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as noted in the financial statements and Budget Book, as of 31 March 2025, the total financial obligation stands at \$690 million. This includes scheduled debt payments of \$246 million and interest expenses amounting to \$141 million. Additionally, life-cycle, equity and maintenance-related expenditures total \$303 million.

These figures are presented in nominal terms prior to adjustment for inflation or exchange rate fluctuations, and the applicable interest rate is 6.6 per cent, with the obligation maturing in 2044.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Could the Honourable Premier please provide some examples of the . . . I believe it was the life-cycle maintenance obligations?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm not sure what he's asking me to answer.

The Speaker: Could you provide some clarity to what you're seeking?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, the Premier identified an amount that was due for, I believe it was like, I believe it was . . . he was speaking quickly, so I did try to write it down, \$303 million for those life-cycle maintenance obligations. Perhaps I misheard, and if I have misheard, then I apologise. I was seeking a concrete example of what might be included in that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: For my clarity, the Premier gave a dollar value to life-cycles. That's what you're asking?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are you trying to figure out what are examples of how that dollar is spent on a life-cycle?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm not sure if it was life-cycle, but I'll try to read the answer again. I would advise the Honourable Member, if he's asking questions of figures, it might be easier for him to ask for written [answers].

Nonetheless, as of 31 March 2025, the total financial obligation stands at \$690 million. This includes

scheduled debt payments of \$246 million and interest expenses amounting to \$141 million. Additionally, life-cycle, equity, and maintenance-related expenditures total to \$303 million. These figures are presented in nominal terms prior to adjustments for inflation or exchange rate fluctuations.

The applicable interest rate is 6.6 per cent, with the obligation maturing in 2044. This is a PPP project that was done, designed, billed, maintained, and, therefore, maintenance expenses are included inside of the entire project in and of itself, which I'm sure the Honourable Member knows and understands.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Second question, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: Second question.

QUESTION 2: CORPORATE INCOME TAX—TOP PAYERS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you kindly.

Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide for this Honourable House the fractions of the total estimated Corporate Income Tax (CIT) to be paid in fiscal year 2025/26 that are expected to come from the top 10 largest and the top 25 largest CIT payers? Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, in accordance with Standing Order 17(5)(h) which prohibits questions that solicit speculation or hypothetical projections, I will decline to answer this question as it requires speculation on matters which are, at present, unknowable.

As indicated during the Budget Debate, filing . . . Bermuda constituent entities have until 10 days before the initial payment to register. At this point in time, we are not able to provide information, and that information will be provided once the Government does receive it.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I understand the Government has quite a lot of confidence in its CIT projections. Perhaps the question could be answered—

The Speaker: You can put your question. You can put your question.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Put the question.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Based on the Government's CIT projections as used in the budget that have already been computed, what would be the top 10 or top 25 payers according to that modelling?

Thank you, Mr. Premier . . . I mean, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I will refer to the answer which I gave, but the Honourable Member is barking up the wrong tree.

Projections have not been done on an individual basis by individual companies. The projections which were arrived at were a broad scale at which I have stated before. Data has been received from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, which collects country-by-country reporting data on an anonymised basis. That is the basis by which the Government can understand the quantum of how much is expected. We make adjustments from there and have projected out. And we have used the conservative estimate which has been in place since 2024 of \$750 million on average any given year.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Would you like to put your third question or supplementary to that?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I have a second supplemental, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. What is your supplemental?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: And it is probably to clarify my understanding. So, my understanding is that the Government does not know who the material taxpayers for the CIT will be or the amounts that they will pay.

Could the Honourable Premier confirm if that is indeed the case or if I am incorrect? Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I want to stop the Honourable Member because his habit is to try to ask questions to then go and engage in speculation, go to the press and say how can the Government say this and the Government doesn't know. So let me try to clarify for him, Honourable Members and the listening public.

Clearly, we will not know how much is to be paid by entities until they file and tell us how much that is to be paid. That is the first instance. The second instance is, as I referred to previously, the Government's projections are based upon information that has been received by the OECD, which is the only entity that

would have the complete information of Bermuda constituent entities. Modelling which could be done by local firms can only be done on publicly available information, but the scope of taxpayers is not just publicly held companies because there are also a large number of privately held companies in Bermuda.

I understand where the Honourable Member is trying to go because it is the speculation of which others have had. But what I must remind you, Mr. Speaker, and the Honourable Member opposite, is that this Government has an excellent track record of laying out projections and exceeding those expectations budget after budget after budget. These are conservative estimates which have been laid out. The \$750 million estimation which has been in place since 2024, as I have stated on numerous occasions, is expected to be achieved. We cannot say how much individual companies are going to pay until they tell us how much actual income they have had. I'm sure the Honourable Member understands that.

The Speaker: You've had your two supplementaries. Would you like to do your third question?

QUESTION 3: CORPORATE INCOME TAX: CRITERIA AND METHODOLOGIES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My third question is, Will the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance please provide for this Honourable House a description of the criteria and methodologies to be used to determine how Corporate Income Tax receipts will be allocated between the Tax Reserve Fund and the Consolidated Fund, and what role the Corporate Income Tax Agency has had in determining those criteria and methodologies?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, there's a note in the question. It notes the Tax Reserve Fund. A Tax Reserve Fund does not yet exist. There will be legislation that will be brought to this House to establish a Tax Reserve Fund and those other matters. And I think that those questions and debate would be appropriately reserved for that time.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Tax Reserve Fund is, in fact, explicitly called out in the Corporate Income Tax legislation. So, the question is . . . we have estimates in the Budget Book of money that will be going into the budget. We clearly must have Corporate Income Tax receipts. So the question is: What policies, criteria, and

methodologies were used by the Government in setting the budget to allocate funds into the Consolidated Fund, as presented in the Budget Book or otherwise, to be held back now or in the future or into a future Tax Reserve Fund, which by legislation will be set up, which we know?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as stated in the budget statement last year, this year's allocation is a quarter of the estimated amount that is to be received on an annual basis to the Consolidated Fund for Corporate Income Tax. Mr. Speaker, \$750 million divided by four equals \$187.5 million, which is the figure that has been placed inside of the budget for this year—which has been answered on numerous occasions and I've answered again today.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I'm actually going to restate the question because he didn't answer it.

What was the criteria and methodology used to arrive at that allocation, which I appreciate the answer is one quarter. We would like to understand how the Government has arrived at one quarter.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: We've arrived at one quarter, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: How?

The Speaker: And that's both of your supplementaries used on your questions. You've had all three questions put. So, Members, that brings us to an end of the written question period.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: We will now move on to questions from Statements given this morning. But before I do that, I'd just like to acknowledge in the Gallery a former member of this House, Mark Pettingill. Welcome to the Chambers.

[Desk thumping]

[Question Period, continuing]

The Speaker: The first question this morning from statements is for the Premier, the first question for your first Statement, Premier. The Shadow Minister of Finance would like to put a question to you.

MP DeCouto, in reference to that first Statement.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA MONETARY AUTHORITY ANNUAL REPORT 2024

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And we were grateful for the Statement around the BMA annual report. They are a very important part of our economy and what we do here. And my question is around the staffing. I believe the number was 302 permanent FTEs. We know that, and especially for an agency like the Bermuda Monetary Authority, which requires a large amount of specialised expertise in this industry, there can be a lot of recruitment challenges.

Approximately how many of those staff are employed on Island versus remotely? And do they have a pay differential based on their location of employment?

The Speaker: The question is, how many are actually on Island and the pay differential?

The Speaker: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, I'll refer to Standing Order 17(9)(a)(vi), and we'll ask the Honourable Member to submit that question in writing so an accurate answer can be provided by the BMA.

The Speaker: Because the information isn't contained in the Statement that was given, if you feel the answer, if you can provide the answer . . . it's better to seek that question in writing so you can get the full answer. Okay?

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: A supplementary?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: No, thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Premier, that's the end of questions for that Statement.

The next Statement that has questions this morning is from the Statement by the Minister of National Security.

Minister, the Opposition Whip has questions for you.

QUESTION 1: HURRICANE PREPAREDNESS

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. My apologies. Just a quick question then.

Considering we're going into (I believe it was page 2) meetings on preparedness for a hurricane . . .

first, let me say the Minister has always done a great job at informing Bermuda on things to look out for and what we should be doing. I was just curious, because hurricane season starts in June, I was just thinking that maybe if the Minister could, when he gets into his meetings later on in June, maybe we should be looking at preparedness maybe a month or so ahead of the actual preparedness time.

And the reason I'm saying that is I am one of those weather junkies who sits up late at night looking at the weather and what's happening around the world and how it might affect us, even if it's something in the Pacific Ocean. And if we look at what's happening in the Pacific Ocean right now, there are literally dozens and dozens of volcanoes underwater that are erupting and causing of some strange weather patterns in the Pacific.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

The Speaker: I got your . . . I got your first question—Your first question was can they do their meetings earlier?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, my apologies.

The Speaker: But where are you going now?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I guess what I'm getting at is that it is difficult to predict. But we know that we're looking at warmer waters in the Atlantic Ocean and how things that may be beyond us will affect us . . . if whether or not maybe we should consider . . . and he could take a question to the group meeting maybe in April or May prior to the actual June hurricane season.

So, we're a bit ahead of time. Just something that could be taken under consideration, that's all, nothing—

The Speaker: So, can you start meeting earlier, sooner?

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

We will try to accommodate the Honourable Member about the volcanoes and whatnot. But when it comes to the hurricane season, the various teams that comprise the EMO, the emergency organisation, are doing stuff all year. So, what we're doing is just a formality of us getting together to formalise what we've naturally been doing all year.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary?

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: All right. Minister, that's the end of questions for your Statement.

We'll move on to the next Statement. The next Statement that has questions this morning is the Statement from the Minister of Economy and Labour on your his Statement in reference to the youth employment strategy. MP Campbell would like to put a question to you.

MP [Campbell].

QUESTION 1: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just want to ask the Minister a quick question on the average length of the training programmes. I think that's . . . I didn't hear that in the Statement, but I feel it may encourage, if it's between two or three months, that's not that long to equip yourself for either a change of career or to improve your job prospects.

I just wanted to know if the Honourable Minister had that information available.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The programmes vary based off of the skill sets that are being developed. The apprenticeship programmes that I discussed for the construction trades, whether it be plumbing, masonry, dry welding, electricians, those are two-year programmes. And so, there's a full-fledged apprenticeship programme where those persons develop their skill sets while on the job while also taking part in vocational training.

The graduate training programme that we provide for apprentices, those programmes are around 10 weeks in duration where we place various individuals in the workplace. And then you have hospitality programmes with on-the-job training. That's about 10 weeks as well.

And so, it all depends. Sometimes when you are issuing certificates, the certificates have a requirement in terms of the modules being able to complete to obtain the certification. So, it varies. But they are comprehensive in terms of ensuring that the skill set is adequately developed so we can position our young people to take advantage of job opportunities.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Vance Campbell: A new question.

The Speaker: A new question.

QUESTION 2: YOUTH EMPLOYMENT STRATEGY PROGRESS

Mr. Vance Campbell: I thank the Minister for that answer. Another thing, I didn't quite understand, or I may

have misheard. The Minister was talking about the Learn Through Experience programme. He said seven individuals had taken advantage of that. And then he went on to say that three out of four individuals that were . . . were they of age to work? I didn't quite get that part. And they were able to gain full-time employment. So, can I, first of all, get an answer to that? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: So overall there were seven participants in the programme. Of the seven participants, four were in the age group of 18 to 26, which we would consider to be youth. As a result of those four persons embarking on that programme, three of those persons obtained full-time employment.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Vance Campbell: Yes, Mr. Speaker. The remaining three, were they younger or older? Or people younger than 18 cannot enter these programmes? Just out of curiosity.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The persons that fell outside of the category of 18 to 26 were older.

The Speaker: Supplementary or a new question?

Mr. Vance Campbell: No. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Minister.

The Speaker: No problem.

Minister, you also have a question for your next Statement, and that's from MP Pearman.

MP Pearman, I put your question to the Minister.

QUESTION 1: TRADE MARKS AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to the listening public, and thank you, Minister, for the very helpful Statement this morning on the Trade Marks Amendment Act 2025 and the Bill that will be tabled in this Honourable House later today, as I understand it.

Just one question, and you referenced in your Statement industry feedback. I declare my interest. I am, as a lawyer, likely to be within the industry that provided feedback, although I did not specifically provide feedback.

Just a high-level question. In your Statement, you referenced updating technology, increasing staff, and increasing (potentially) fees in relation to that department. But I was just curious, what sort of industry

feedback was there? What was the topic of the industry feedback or the suggestion that might now be meriting this further Bill? Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The amendments to the Amendment Act . . . so, just to give a scope of the process, there was original feedback to get the 2023 Act to Parliament. Subsequent to that, that Act was never enacted, or it never commenced, which gave us an opportunity to review the entirety of that Act while we were developing regulations along with industry.

As a result of that exercise, there were additional suggestions made by industry, which will be contained in the Amendment Act, which clarifies a few things, and also clarifies some of the descriptions of fees within the Schedule. I do not have a comprehensive list of the stakeholders, but I'll endeavour to provide that. There is an opportunity for me to provide more clarity when I give the brief to the Bill.

So, I welcome the questions, and I'll ensure that if I can't provide the answers at this point in time, I'll ensure that they're incorporated in the brief so that the Member can get the clarity that he requires.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that very helpful answer. I have no supplementaries.

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister, that's the end of questions for your Statement. The next statement was from the Minister of Cabinet.

Minister, you have Members who want to put questions to you as well. The first is from MP King.

MP King.

QUESTION 1: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House and community.

Regarding the Department of Planning, absolutely, we commend the works and efforts of the persons who work there to ensure that buildings are built in a timely and efficient manner because it promotes jobs.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Yes, just setting the table. Don't worry, I'm getting there. Okay, fair enough. There have been delays that have been identified. It's 372 permits open, 165 days average age, 59 applications awaiting response, average age 170 days, youngest 20 days, oldest 481 days. When were the delays first flagged as being problematic? Because this has taken some time to get to that amount.

The Speaker: The question is, how long does it sit before it realises there's a problem with it, I guess?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that clarity.

I would say you really can't tell how long because the planning application, or in this case what we're referring to are building permit applications, could be reviewed and then you get 50 per cent through and then you see there's an issue and you reach out to the agent. They could get 10 per cent through and you realise there is an issue. I would have to ask the Department of Planning to see how they could actually look at that, but it is something that we are trying to see.

When we talked about having AI complement that . . . to actually look through them in their entirety to try and find missing things up front and then we can address them, the department can address those more holistically.

Currently, how the vetting process goes is you start, and you look, and you look and when you come across problems, you reach out. Sometimes the answer to those problems creates additional problems or they may solve things that you hadn't even noticed before. It's not an exact science and that's why I made great pains to talk about the respect that we have for the persons who are up there actually doing the work because it's not entirely their fault that there happens to be projects that are delayed 160 days versus some delayed 20 days.

When I say delay, I think "delay" is the wrong term here. We're saying they're just that old, meaning they've submitted, and six months have passed by and they still haven't been approved. Where some come, they get approved within a few days, some for whatever reason, there are things lagging that require it to stay up there a little bit longer. But we are looking to see how we can streamline all of those services and bring them together and get the projects out much quicker than what has been happening in the past.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Robert King: For clarification, Mr. Speaker, the word "delays" was actually used in the Ministerial Statement, so if that was not the appropriate term, maybe something else should have been used.

Regardless, what are the performance measures? What is the intended target for response time to the applications to reduce the delay time? There must be a target to be achieved if we accept that the delays are unacceptable. Thank you.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Again, Mr. Speaker, it's an impossible question to [answer] because not every application is the same. And what you're looking to do is have all of the applications then and compiled at the

same [time] so they can get vetted and moved out versus the rest of it. We'll continuously monitor what's going on up there and we'll continually make those tweaks as they need to be made.

But as I know, as an agent, it's no straightforward answer to say why one application takes two days and one application takes five days because in any other type of scenario, those type of applications, it could be five days over here and two days over here. But they'll continue to monitor, tweak, and try to do things differently so we can get projects out of the Department of Planning faster.

The Speaker: Second supplementary or new question?

Mr. Robert King: Second supplementary.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Mr. Robert King: Fifty-nine applications awaiting response from agents, 170 days. Youngest, 20 days. Oldest, 481 [days]. So, what we're talking about is awaiting a response, not a decision that is being made. So, I'm wondering what the performance measure is for response.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The department is waiting for agents to respond. If they take 20 days, they take 20 days; if they take 100 days, they take 100 days. What I did mention is that what we're looking to do is look at . . . if he's asking for a performance measure, to look at a certain number of days and say, *Hey, if you haven't responded, we're going to push this to the side and take it out of the queue and work on other things, and you'll have to come back and resubmit.* So once . . . and as I said, these are mitigations that we are looking to implement. So, when we come and decide on a day, that'll be something that we announce to, obviously, the public so they know. If you don't respond in 30 days, your project gets taken out of the queue. If you don't respond in 60, it gets taken out of the queue.

It's just something that we need to have, you know, to really work on what that final timeline will be for that process.

The Speaker: New question?

Mr. Robert King: New question, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes.

QUESTION 2: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Robert King: How many Bermudians applied for the supervisor's position? Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Is that in the Statement?

Mr. Robert King: Sorry?

The Speaker: Is that in the Statement?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, it is. In terms of two new experienced consultants and a supervisor, that was in your Statement. So, the question is, is how many Bermudians applied for those positions? Thank you.

The Speaker: I'm not sure if that was part of the context of the Statement, though. The Statement was . . . and I'm trying to put it in the context of what was said. I think the reference to the supervisor was just the fact that there was a new supervisor.

But the Statement itself was about the procedures of the Ministry, right?

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: The Statement was about procedures of that they are trying to clean up for how functionality in reference to applications, and it didn't necessarily address the process for the replacement of supervisors. It just mentioned that there was a new supervisor.

So it may be out of the context of the question of the Statement . . . your question is out of the context of what the Statement was.

Mr. Robert King: May I ask a question, Mr. Speaker?

The Speaker: You're seeking clarity?

Mr. Robert King: Seeking clarification, yes.

The Speaker: Okay.

Mr. Robert King: I was speaking to boosting capacity when it was stated that a permit processing person . . . two experienced consultants had been hired to fulfil the role of permit processor and supervisor. So, my question is in relation to the hiring of consultants, and my question was, How many Bermudians applied for those specific positions?

The Speaker: So, the Statement did make reference to the fact that two persons had now been employed to assist (my words). So, he is asking now, how did those two persons . . . what was the process for those two persons?

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER (Standing Order 17(5)(g)(xi))

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

Mr. Speaker. I will refer to Standing Order 17(5)(g)(xi), which speaks to the fact that the Minister cannot answer questions that he is not accountable for to the Parliament.

I think that it is important, the Honourable Member, for his particular information. As he would know, the Minister, of course, would have no information on that, as Ministers of the Government are not involved in public sector hiring.

And as a former public officer, I am certain that the Honourable Member is aware of that.

The Speaker: I was trying to find how it related. And the point that the Premier has made reference to is a valid point here in that the employment of the public sector employees is outside of the remit of the Minister.

So, the Minister didn't include that in the Statement and wouldn't be able to give you an answer to it right now. Okay?

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Do you have a . . . that was your second question. Do you have a third question you may put or are you done on that?

Mr. Robert King: That will be it for my submissions. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you.

Minister, you also have questions from other Members, MP Pearman. Would you still like to put your question?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I thought the Whip was ahead of me in the queue, but I will go as you have directed me.

QUESTION 1: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Honourable Minister, for that helpful Statement. And I certainly commend the fact that the Government is looking at this. And I agree with you that this is a very frustrating area for planning, being a very frustrating area for people. It's something we hear a lot of.

My question is in relation to your point seven in your Statement where you discuss the Ministerial Waiver. And I was just wondering if you could perhaps give us a little bit more clarity on how that will work as a process. Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you for the question because it is quite topical.

Many of us would remember the . . . we would all remember the recent appeal process for the seniors'

home in St. David's. The seniors' home was not, could not be approved because it ran afoul of a policy within the Bermuda Plan. However, it was approved on appeal upon recommendation of everyone involved, including the Department of Planning and the Development Application Board, that if we could waive that, we would have approved it. And so, it comes to the Minister as an appeal.

So, what I have done is sought how we could fast-track that process. And the process is that if there is something within the Bermuda Plan that is minor, but we all agree that if we were able to look past that, it would be a good project, then the Minister is then allowed to provide a letter that says you can waive that for this application only. It's a very targeted waiver. It's only for that. It would only be for that specific case.

That does not mean the project doesn't still go through the regular vetting process. It could still even be rejected by the Development Applications Board. If it comes down to that, it could still be objected to by the people who object as well. But it does allow a project to be approved if it . . . if all of the other merits are good, except for just that one piece within the Bermuda Plan that everybody actually agrees that if we could, if that wasn't there, we would just approve it anyway.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, supplementary. Thank you, Honourable Minister, for that detailed answer.

Just in terms again of the waiver, how does the Minister anticipate that the request for the waiver would get to the Minister? Would that be by the applicant or by the officer or by the board or all three?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you for that. And as we develop this, what we've come up with is the opportunity for the department to apply for the waiver, opportunity for the agent to apply for the waiver. In an ideal case, both of them would send the same document, but we recognise there may be cases where the agent thinks there's merit to a waiver and where the department may think there's merit to the waiver.

There's also . . . we also intend for this policy to be recorded and published on a quarterly or bi-, or once or twice a year basis of how many waivers have been issued and what projects they applied to as well.

The Speaker: Second supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, second supplementary. Thank you again, Minister, for that detailed answer.

In terms of the waiver and the scope of it, would it just be curtailed to breaches of the Bermuda Plan or might it be more broad in your thinking?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm actually not sure what else it could cover. Development applications are by the Bermuda Plan, period, and nothing else. But you do have the City of Hamilton Plan. You do have the North Hamilton Plan. And as you would know, the North Hamilton Plan and the City of Hamilton Plan that we just passed here provides that leeway to the agents of planning now and the next Bermuda Plan, we're looking to incorporate that as well so that there is more flexibility for them to say, *Hey, in this case, we can look past that.*

Mr. Scott Pearman: Second question.

The Speaker: Second question, yes.

QUESTION 2: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Yes, thank you.

Following on again, still in the same topic of the waivers. In terms . . . you just indicated to this Honourable House that what you would do is probably publish twice a year a list of waivers that had occurred. If a member of the public, i.e., not someone who's in favour of the waiver potentially, wanted to challenge it, how would they know or how might they know? Is that something that you've given consideration to?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: If there is an objection to a planning application that comes during the vetting process, and they . . . if someone is that keen, they will be following it. And normally the persons who do make objections are following the plan. All of these records would be our public records. You can go on the planning.gov.bm website, do a search for the address you're looking for. And all of this documentation would be there for you to look at, download at your leisure.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

Mr. Scott Pearman: It's actually third question.

The Speaker: Third question.

QUESTION 3: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Mr. Scott Pearman: Still the same topic. Final question. I'll just wait while the discussion is being had between the Premier and Minister. Thank you, Minister.

Just in terms again of the challenge, presumably the waiver would also be open to challenge in the usual way that any other element of the application would be open to challenge. Is that correct?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Absolutely.

The Speaker: Okay.

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

The Speaker: Opposition Whip. [Would] you still like to put your questions?

QUESTION 1: DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING UPDATES ON STREAMLINING MEASURES

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. And thank you.

The Minister has given some great detail, so most of my questions were already answered. Just one last question.

On page six of seven, the Honourable Minister talks about better communication and service access. And one of the . . . in relation to callbacks and the like, and one of the dotted items there and solution is *dedicated office hours for in-person consultation*. So, I'm assuming this has to do mostly with applications that probably have already come in.

There's been a lot of talk also in the past about pre-consultation as well, before we even get to that point. So, I was wondering how the Minister has been making out. And when he says these hours, does that involve pre-consultation as well and informing people how to get their applications right in the first place?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, pre-consultation still takes place. I know I might have been reading fast during the budget, but we did talk about pre-consultation in the budget and how they still do that. The idea of the dedicated office hours is what the department is finding out, as people come there whenever. And when someone is reviewing a planning permit, and then they got to leave and go talk to someone, and a five-minute conversation turns into two hours, that's two hours of vetting that has not happened.

And we also, they're so . . . they're very . . . they understand the frustration. So, when they receive an email, they're leaving what they're doing to respond to this email, and sometimes it becomes a back and forth. And so, the suggestion that I had when we were sitting was like, well, why not dedicate specific times for that? And so, you know, Thursdays . . . if you want to come and talk to someone, this is the day to make an appointment, versus how it is now where people just come in whenever they feel like it and expect . . . and they get the service of people leaving what they're doing to come and actually talk to them. And I think it would . . . I believe it would lead to less frustrations if it was just a regulated thing.

But pre-consultation before you begin on a project is something that is always asked for, and if you . . . when we talked about the Bermuda, the City of Hamilton plan, the pre-consultation was a big part of my

presentation to say, hey, we encourage you to come, we encourage you to be there, we encourage you to come and talk to the Department of Planning first before you begin, because that also leads to less frustration of putting something in, and then the back and forth of finding out that it's not going to work, or you're going to have to curtail it more so than you originally had thought.

The Speaker: Thank you. Supplementary? No?

You're good? Okay.

Members, that brings us to a conclusion of the question-and-answer period for this morning.

We will now move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: Would any Member like to make a contribution at this time?

Minister, you have your three minutes.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: I rise this morning to offer congratulatory remarks to the Devonshire Recreational Club on the . . . sure. And I will associate honourable colleague in contingency 15 with these remarks, and the Premier as well.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: And in celebration of their contribution, not only to our community, being a beacon, not only of hope during times when in our history, there was nowhere else for our community to gather. And so, I recognise their 80th anniversary, and the contribution of the eight entrepreneurs, the eight Black men who saw fit to purchase that Frog Lane premises. Recognising also their contribution to sport, namely football and cricket in our community, as well as the Diamondettes who are a part of the history as well, and the legacy that the Devonshire Recreational Club has for our community. And specifically, as the Devonshire North West representative, I'm honoured also to represent them and their voice in this Honourable House. I look forward to joining them on Sunday among celebration of this history, this legacy, that they will continue to do for our community. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? Mr. Tyrrell—

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Good morning, Mr. Speaker and colleagues. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I rose to my feet on Monday in this House to bring congratulations to four senior members in my Warwick area, just to express that the elderly are living longer, but today I have to add to that list that I brought on Monday of a person who is celebrating their birthday today. This person has much connection in this House in the likes of being the aunt to one of my Ministers here, Minister Weeks. She also lives in the constituency of either the Premier or Minister Jache Adams, so I'm going to associate them as well, but I want to bring happy birthday wishes to my mother-in-law—

An Hon. Member: Associate me, too.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Valeria Duffy Dill Butterfield who was married to the famous [Clarence] "Bussie" Butterfield. Today she's celebrating her 96th birthday. She's as sprightly as ever. She even promised to probably kick me if I did announce her name today and her age, but I have to do it because I love her so much. I want to wish her a happy day, and as I said, I'm associating the Minister and the Premier and Minister Adams as well.

So, thank you, very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister Weeks, would you like your three minutes?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

I'd like to start off my remarks with being associated with the last speaker, acknowledging his mother-in-law, who is one of my aunties, my Aunt Duffy up there. She's from St. Monica's, but she now lives in constituency 18. So, happy birthday, Auntie.

Mr. Speaker, as the school year winds down, and when we recognise the greatness again, it's that time of year, Mr. Speaker, Harrington Sound Primary School—

An Hon. Member: Yay!

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: And as I get started, I'm reminded every year that I should declare my interest. I kind of know the administrator of the school, and so I would like to associate the MP from constituency 15, Minister Darrell. I think his son also goes to Harrington Sound, and is an alum, but Mr. Speaker, in my three minutes, I just want to roll off some accomplishments that they have done.

The champions again in the primary school, interschool sports, the first in the Bermuda Day Parade Primary School Float category—

An Hon. Member: Yay!

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: They had a strong showing in the Bermuda Day Children's Marathon Race. They won the Boys Super 8 Cricket Tournament just this week, Mr. Speaker. Their students were on the winning team for the Education Minister's Debate Challenge. Top five in the Bermuda National Spelling Bee. Awesome work in the Primary School Art Show, and they brought down the house, Mr. Speaker,—

An Hon. Member: Who wrote that for you?

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: —at the Primary School Spring—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Al.

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Yes, yes—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: He should know. And just think—

[Laughter]

Hon. Michael A. Weeks: Mr. Speaker, while I have got my one minute left. There have been many individual student firsts in many categories. So, congratulations to the Harrington Sound School for another outstanding year under the leadership, Mr. Speaker, of their dedicated and amazing principal, Mrs. C. L. Weeks. Thank you.

[Laughter and desk thumping]

The Speaker: Minister, Minister, Minister, you forgot to mention that they even had the Speaker come and address the class on a mock programme that they were doing . . . But go ahead.

Any other Member? Minister Darrell.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning to you and the listening audience.

First of all, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take this morning to recognise a couple of creatives in our midst, in our community, and the first is actually a young dedicated public servant who is a creative outside of her work hours, and that is Ms. Aalai Wolffe on the launch of her new song, which is called *Dum Da Da*. Like I said, she's a public servant, and we wish her much success in her continued singing career. I also associate the Honourable Deputy Speaker of this House, as she says that she is her constituent.

Also, I would like to congratulate one of . . . more popular footballers on this Island, Mr. Tre Ming, as some would have caught that he not only competed in the Bermuda Day half marathon, but he had an interesting event take place towards the end, and that was a marriage proposal. So, we want to say congratulations to him on his double victory that day, on finishing the track from St. George's, as well as proposing, and I believe she said yes.

Also, congratulations in the local footballing scene to Mr. Jarreau Hayward, who recently has been appointed as the new head coach of the Dandy Town Hornets . . . associating MP from constituency 2, I think also associating with . . . former executive at the Western Stars Club, Mr. MP Michael Weeks. I will associate them.

Also, I'd like to congratulate Bermudian midfielder, Mr. Willie Clemons, for his recent signing for the Southern League Premier Division Central side Leiston. So, I want to congratulate him. He is one of many Bermudians that although may not be at the levels of one Mr. Nahki Wells, but they are professional athletes nonetheless over there in England, and are continuing to fly the flag for Bermuda. So, congratulations to him.

And as you will get used to this one, another congratulations to RTwoG2, as well as Fire Wayne, on the launch of their new song, which is called *The Weekender*. It was very catchy. I think many of the Bermuda Day videos that have been taken by the creatives are attaching this song with it. It talks about it being a Friday, and with Bermuda Day being on a Friday, it was very fitting, and he did—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: You'd have to come down to Devil's Hole Club later this evening, MP Campbell, to hear me sing it. But I just want to congratulate him because they continue to do good work, and again, put Bermuda on the map.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? MP Smith.

Mr. Ben Smith: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to have a message of condolences be sent to the family of Edric White from Beaming Hill. He's been my neighbour for my entire life, a plumber from Wilfred White and Sons Plumbing. He is the father of my best friend. I know that his entire family was devastated with his loss. As somebody who . . . that pool that is at his house is where I learned how to swim. He's been an important part of my family, and I want to make sure that condolences are sent to their entire family at this time. Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Swan, back of the room there.

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

Mr. Speaker, I would like to be associated with condolences that were already expressed in a previous session to Ms. Peggy Delpeche of the Paynter family from St. George's, whose family I know very, very well. Her husband I knew extremely well, and her brothers and her siblings as well. I just feel for them at this particular time.

I would like to have congratulations expressed to two Bermudians doing well in a community I have adopted called Bristol. My daughter lives in Weston-super-Mare and attended university in Bristol. So, Nahki Wells was honoured for his community service, and I can tell you in the school that my daughter teaches at while she's still doing her master's work—his name was mentioned. She mentioned his name, to a problematic student, eyes lit up, and where other teachers couldn't communicate with him, she had a natural in. He is an iconic figure amongst the young people of greater Bristol.

And now St. George's rooted Dage Minors is training there, living there, and winning there—won the Bristol 10k, which is an outstanding feat as he continues to go on to strength to strength.

And I would like to say thank you to Principal Shanda Simmons from Dalton E. Tucker Primary School, my alma mater from that greater White Hill, Death Valley, Rose Hill community who welcomed me to teach a few of their children. I have had the honour on two occasions over the last couple of Thursdays to take six well-behaved, very enthusiastic youngsters with the blessing of the chairman of government golf courses up to Port Royal, and with the likes of Dwayne Pearman, and Camiko Smith, and Cornel Bean, and Glenn Simmons, and Darren Woods, and myself, and many others coming out of that school, I see the future bright, and I see future Bermuda championship golfers coming out of Dalton E. Tucker just through this programme, just lighting a spark as the late, no not the late, but the great Lionel Turner did with many of us.

And I'd like to be associated with the 80th celebration . . . years of celebration for Devonshire Rec because Mr. Joe Christopher and Herman Basden certainly did a lot of work and shared that with me. Thank you.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Swan. Does any other member—the MP Reverend Dill.

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

It is with a heavy heart today that I offer condolences to the family of the late Dr. Melvyn Bassett.

The Speaker: Yes.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: He was an outstanding educator—

[Inaudible interjections]

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: —and we associate the entire House—

The Speaker: Yes.

Rev. Dr. Emilygail A. Dill: —with these condolences.

He was an outstanding educator and community leader. He was my deputy principal and has been an inspiration and mentor over the years, and he will certainly be deeply missed. In particular, his work in later years with the reintroduction of the Child Evangelism Fellowship here on the Island of Bermuda. So, we ask that condolences be sent to his family.

Also, I'd like to offer condolences to the family of Mr. Alfred Ambrose Scott. He was a member . . . and I associate several members, the Premier. And okay, I understand that that has been shared already, so I certainly offer my condolences to his family.

On a more positive note, I'd like to offer congratulations to the [College of Natural Health Sciences Bermuda] at their recent graduation, and I'd like to commend them on the work that they are doing in this community to develop natural health practitioners, and I also like to congratulate the individuals. They also, at their graduation, offered honorary doctorates to three outstanding athletes in our community who are Mr. Raymond Swan, Mr. Albert J. Donawa, and Mr. Kevin Smith, and we certainly congratulate them on this accomplishment, and we commend the [College of Natural Health Sciences Bermuda] on acknowledging their contribution to the community. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

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

MP Fahy.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, I think this is the first time in this Honourable House I will offer congratulations. I've done an obituary.

It's with great pleasure that I offer congratulations to the Warwick Academy Class of 2025 . . . and I declare my interest because that is the one with my son in it. So, I will do that. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay, any other Member?

MP DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I would like to associate with the condolences to the family of Mr. White, and I'll just add a quick anecdote. I had the pleasure as a teenager to sail with him and his family members as part of the Knight-White Syndicate. It is an actual name of a family member before people next door get fed up—

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —where they resurrected one of Bermuda's traditional fitted dinghies and built a programme from scratch, which is a bit of an act of madness if you think about it, and those who observed that programme will know it was a testament to Mr. White's intensity and passion and purpose, and my condolences go out to his whole family, most especially Jonathan.

I also send condolences to Mr. Phil Heaney and his family, and he was a well-regarded rugby player in his time, and he was noted for his sharp-witted personality, and having canvassed him a few times, I can attest to that as well, Mr. Speaker. He was not a gentleman to take for granted, and you had to earn it every time.

I also congratulate Ms. Jessica Lewis, as you know, one of Bermuda's outstanding athletes, recently at the World Para Athletics Grand Prix in Switzerland. She has won yet another gold medal in the 200-metres—

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —and a bronze medal in the 100-metre and 400-metre events, and as you know, she's a frequent occurrence in these congratulatory sessions, Mr. Speaker.

And another person who appears frequently in these sessions is also Mr. Kaden Hopkins, one of Bermuda's international cyclists. He had recently won the Grand Prix Jack Auto race in Guadeloupe, and again, also just came fifth in the opening stages of the Grand Prix USL race there, also recently, and I have no doubt we'll hear many more things about his successes in cycling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make—MP Pearman.

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

Mr. Speaker, last night I had the pleasure of attending the Spring into Arts Festival arranged by the Department of Education up at CedarBridge [Academy], and I see the Premier, who I was about to acknowledge, no doubt will join me in commending it because he was there as well. I believe maybe one or both of his children were on stage. It was excellent.

There were six or seven schools involved. I declare my own as one of my children was on stage as well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: It was excellent. There were six or seven schools there, but what I would like to do is give a shout-out not to my son's school or indeed to the Premier's son's school, but to the school that I thought just blew the doors off, and that was West Pembroke, and Mr. Robinson, who is their conductor. Their performance clearly, clearly took a lot of hard effort and time, and I think the audience was immensely impressed given the young age of those children and what they pulled off last night. That might have been before you were there, but it was excellent.

So, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and my commendations to all of those involved in putting on that effort. It was truly a great showcase of young Bermuda talent. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to—Opposition Whip.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you very much. Again, good morning colleagues and listening Bermuda.

I just want to send my condolences as well and be associated with Mr. White's untimely passing just out of the blue, seen him two hours before and then gone. So I would like to be associated with this, but I want to just, in honour to him as a father . . . not many may know, but Mr. White is the father of Johnny "Boops", as we call him, White, the owner of ESC, one of the well-known members up at Warwick Workmen's Club, always up there. So in honour to his father, just passing, to bring up his son in the likes of Johnny, who thought nothing of being a member of, all of us probably know who he is, a member of Warwick Workmen's Club, speaks to the fact that there are many of us in Bermuda who believe that we should be working with one another regardless of race. And so, to have a loss like this here is pretty devastating for Mr. White to have passed away and I know that his son, a very, very close friend of mine, Johnny, it's tough for him and the family. So, our condolences go out to the White family.

The Speaker: Any other Member wish to make a contribution? Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, although I've already been associated with the remarks, the whole House has been associated, I would like to add my comments, certainly, to the Honourable Member from constituency 36 on the passing, the untimely passing of Dr. Melvyn Bassett.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to associate myself with the remarks on behalf of the Honourable Minister of Education, who sits in another place, that were offered by the Shadow Attorney General, the Member for constituency 22, on last evening's Spring into the Arts show. He rightly recognised that both of my children were in the Northlands Primary School Choir, but there were certainly excellent performances that were from all the schools, and it is an important event that is put on every year by the Ministry of Education. And so, I would like to certainly commend not only all of the schools, but all the teachers, all the persons behind the scenes, and certainly the officials in the Department of Education, who make sure that our arts continue to be recognised and cherished in our schools.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I wish to also extend and be associated with the congratulations offered by the Minister, who represents constituency 14, Honourable Minister Alexa Lightbourne, on the congratulations to the Devonshire Recreation Club on their 80th anniversary, which they have been celebrating all week, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Minister rightly stated the history of this club. As you know, Mr. Speaker, I am well associated with the Devonshire Recreation Club, but they continue to go from strength to strength, wanting to do their best to serve the community, want to do their best, and they put on a series of events that is taking place this week, and I would encourage Honourable Members on both sides of the House to support those events if possible. If we get out early today, there is a fair on their field, and on Sunday, as was mentioned, there is the gala, which I will be attending along with other Ministers on that evening to acknowledge the 80th anniversary of this historic community club.

It is a club without question that has certainly resonance and links with Bermuda Progressive Layer Party, as you'd be well aware, but it is not a partisan affair. This is a club that has had a strong, proud, and rich history, and it is something that we should celebrate the achievements, especially 80 years on, from the founding of this incredible, incredible community organisation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Is there any other Member? No—MP King.

Mr. Robert King: Yes, good day, Mr. Speaker. I attended yesterday the Long Service Awards at Pier Six. The Honourable Premier and Minister of National Security were there for the uniformed services who received commendations for their years of service to this community. Thank you—hats off to all of them. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you. Any other Member? MP Campbell.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to encourage everyone to come up to the National Sports Centre on Wednesday night to encourage our Gombey Warriors, our senior men's national team, who take on the Cayman Islands. They then follow that up days later in Cuba against Cuba. They are still . . . I'm congratulating them in advance and trying to get our people out there to support them to victory. If they win these two matches, they are in with a very good chance of progressing to the next phase. So, encourage all. Tickets are available on GPass. There's no tickets available at the gate. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay. Any other Member? No other Member?

Before we move on, I'd just like to be associated with the condolences that are expressed to the family of Dr. Melvyn Bassett and, of course, it goes without saying, a Somerset fellow as I am, I've had a long history of relationship with Mr. Bassett going back to my early years and then later when my wife and I came back to Bermuda. She was . . . and she taught at Sandys for a lot of years. I can't remember the number of years, but Mr. Bassett was there the entire time, starting as a deputy and then as a principal when she left. But our relationship continued right up until very recent years and projects that we've done with Mr. Bassett in the community. So, we feel his loss as the community feels his loss.

With that said, we will now move on.

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's one Government Bill to be introduced by the Minister of Economy and Labour.
Minister.

BILL**FIRST READING****TRADE MARKS AMENDMENT ACT 2025**

Hon. Jason Hayward: 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. The Trade Marks Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Thank you.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: That brings us to the business of the day, the Orders of today and the first item today is the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 in the name of the Premier and Minister of Finance. But I think it's going to be led by the Junior Minister. Am I correct?

Junior Minister, you have the floor.

BILL**SECOND READING****CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025**

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

Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation, I move that the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?

There are none. Continue, Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, as requested now to give the considerations of the Bill entitled Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025, the Bill proposes to amend the Customs Tariff Act 1970, the principal Act, with measures . . . that lower the duty rate on building materials and supplies, eliminate custom duties on all motor vehicle parts, lower the duty rates on air conditioning units and parts, increase the duty exemption for returning residents, provide the continuing duty relief available to the Bermuda Hospital's Board for the hospital's operation supplies, and lower the rate of duty for diesels and fuel oils used by BELCO for the production of electricity.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, it's more than \$6. As we said the other day, Mr. Speaker, this is just the beginning.

The measure of the Bill affects both the First Schedule and the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act. Mr. Speaker, let me just say that it is this Government's goal to lower the cost of living for Bermuda. In doing so, we are confident that we will not only ease the daily burden of making ends meet but also offer new opportunities for our economic development. One of the major tools that we have at our disposal in achieving this aim is reducing the cost of selected imported goods by lowering rates of custom duties.

The Bill proposes to repeal and replace the First Schedule to the principal Act in order to lower the duty rates on building materials and supplies, and air conditioning units and parts, eliminate custom duties on motor vehicles parts, and increase the duty exemption for returning residents.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill provides wide range duty relief on a selected building materials, prefabricated supplies, and raw materials for both interior and exterior work. This includes, but it's not limited to block, stones, glass, plastic, fabric, wood, metal, chemicals, including glues, resins, and paint. The duty rates associated with 481 tariff codes will be lowered as follows: 429 tariff codes will be lowered from 25 per cent to 10 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimated \$4.9 million; 8 tariff codes will be lowered from 15 per cent to 10 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimate \$293,000; and 44 tariff codes will be lowered from 12.5 per cent to 10 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimated \$325,000. It is estimated based on our prior year's data that these amendments will reduce the cost of construction and building repairs for revenue by \$5.5 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill will provide duty relief on air conditioning units and parts. The duty rates associated with 6 tariff codes will be lowered from 35 per cent to 10 per cent. It is estimated based on prior year's data that these amendments will reduce the cost on these items by over \$1.8 million.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill provides wide-ranging duty relief on parts and supplies for motor vehicle repairs, such as I said, shafts, engine transmissions, electrical, glass, belts, tubing, and interior furnishing. The duty rates associated with 65 tariff codes will be eliminated as follows: 45 tariff codes will go to zero per cent from 35 per cent, providing cost reduction of an estimated full revenue, \$2.5 million; 22 tariff codes will go from 25 per cent to zero per cent, providing cost reductions of an estimate \$217,000. It is estimated based on prior year's data that these amendments will reduce the cost of repairing Bermuda motor vehicles by a total of \$2.7 million.

Mr. Speaker, in order to effect the over 500 duty rate amendments necessary to lower the duty rates on building materials and supplies, air conditioning units and parts, and motor vehicle parts, a number

of consequential amendments to the First Schedule of the principal Act were needed in order to maintain the structure of the Bermuda nomenclature. This necessitated the proposed introduction of 26 new tariff codes, the deletion of one tariff code, and the amendment of 12 tariff codes. Further, while conducting the review of the First Schedule to the principal Act, a further 12 textual inconsistencies were identified, which did not impact on any rates of duty in our proposed for amendment.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill next provides for an increase in duty exemption from \$200 per person to \$300 per person, an increase of 50 per cent. This rate allowance was last changed in 2012. Based on prior year's travel, this is expected to ease the collective tax burden on returning travellers by an estimated \$2 million.

Mr. Speaker, I now turn to the measures of the Bill affecting the Fifth Schedule to the principal Act. The Bill proposes to repeal and replace End-Use CPC 4240 so as to remove the existing end-use condition limiting the period of duty relief for imported hospital operating supplies to 1 April 2022 through 31 March 2024 only. Honourable Members will recall that CPC 4240 was amended in July of 2023 after being introduced in April of 2022, to extend the duty period relief within which qualified goods must be imported to Bermuda to 31 March 2024 from 30 September 2023.

Mr. Speaker, after further consideration, the Minister of Finance, in keeping with the commitment of Government to ensure that our hospitals have adequate resources, considered it expedient to remove the end use condition requiring that hospital operating supplies be imported with a fixed time period. This amendment is intended to provide continued duty relief to hospital administered by the Bermuda Hospitals Board by offsetting operating expenses.

The Bill next proposes to amend the End-Use CPC 4703 and CPC 4705 for the purpose of lowering the rate of duty for diesel and fuel oils used by BELCO for production of electricity. In the 2025/26 Budget Statement in support of the Estimate of Revenue and Expenditure, the Government acknowledged the frustration many feel when they open their BELCO bill. While the Government cannot control the cost of fuel on global markets, we're doing everything within the power to lower the underlying costs that contribute to those rates.

Mr. Speaker, in 2023 the duty on fuel used to generate electricity stood at 20 cents per litre, put up by the One Bermuda Alliance in 2018. Honourable Members will recall that in July of 2024 this Government reduced the tax by 60 per cent to 8 [cents] per litre. This Bill proposes to reduce the tax further to just 4 cents per litre. The combined effect of these changes will result in an 80 per cent reduction in this tax since 2023.

Mr. Speaker, this measure demonstrates the Government's commitment to delivering sustained relief on energy costs. While there is more work to be done across the energy sector, this initiative ensures

that the tax policy supports lower electricity costs for every household and business in Bermuda. It is estimated based on prior years' data that this will cut Bermuda's electricity bill by \$1.7 million in addition to concessions introduced during 2024/25.

Mr. Speaker, this further reduction in the duty paid on fuel is expected to reduce custom duty revenue by \$4.2 million. I will comment further on the measure of the Bill in Committee.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

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

Shadow Minister DeCouto, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, and thank you to the Junior Minister for the brief.

I know that the Government can get quite anxious to know if we will support a Bill or not, so let me just start off with that, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We will as a whole . . . we do support this. There are some reservations, and let me talk about that, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: As you know, this Bill was tabled on Monday—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —and I need to say, because, Mr. Speaker, we have a duty as we are MPs, Members, to come in here to have adequately reviewed and assessed and taken a decision for ourselves what we view as to a particular legislation. And I know you appreciate the seriousness of that, Mr. Speaker. And I know that the Standing Orders and so forth, they make provisions, allowances, so that we have the appropriate time to consider those details.

The Minister made reference to 481 classifications of duty, and for those who are listening, the actual Schedule that's being amended is 461 pages.

We did reach out on Monday to the relevant people to get information to help us understand that better, because, of course, we need to assess and build our own understanding as to what we are agreeing to when we come into this Honourable House, Mr. Speaker. And I do want to commend the public servants who put the work in to provide us a breakdown of the actual changes in this Tariffs Act. And I know, Mr. Speaker, that breakdown in itself is over 50 pages.

I would say, unfortunately, we've only received that this morning, so while we are grateful for the work,

you can appreciate, Mr. Speaker . . . and while we are going to agree with this Bill, it is with some measure of goodwill and taking certain things at face value that, frankly, is not how this process is supposed to work.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The Bill was tabled under the requirements inside of the House of Assembly. In addition to that, the Bill has been tabled with the time. The Customs Tariff Annex is always that long whenever it's amended. It is repealed and replaced. It is the same thing that happened when they were in Government and we were in Opposition.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: That is the exact same thing. It is the Customs Tariff. The Bill, in and of itself, is not 400 pages.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Of course, Mr. Speaker, you can appreciate if we agree to a Bill that says the Schedule is to incorporate the customs tariff, we are there, of course, agreeing to the customs tariff, which I've already stated we are going to agree to.

So . . . and I also stated we are grateful for the efforts applied.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But I hope you can understand, Mr. Speaker, we have to put a qualification. We have not had the time to fully investigate all of the things on the paper in black and white.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, we will take the Government's statement at face value and in good faith and in the spirit of collaboration. And we are also grateful for the work, as I mentioned—and I'd like to repeat it for the public servants—to break that information down for us.

I also know, Mr. Speaker, that the Premier and his Government have been quite clear about how they want to increase transparency and increase efficiency. So, I hope that going forward they can keep those principles in mind when they bring legislation to this House so that those of us who are tasked with this very serious . . . this very serious mandate to agree or disagree on legislation are provided with all the appropriate information. And I also know that they are talking about

government modernisation. I can only presume, and I hope that the public officers in the Customs Department have been provided with the appropriate tools and technologies to do this in an efficient and modern way.

So, moving on from there, Mr. Speaker. Like I said, generally speaking, we agree with the construction materials cuts. As you know, we like that. We do have a question, if perhaps the Government could consider further cuts, perhaps down to zero per cent duty for appropriate projects such as those perhaps to create units that would be under rent control. That would be one way to do it. And that would be consistent with our philosophy over here. How can we provide cuts that are targeted, Mr. Speaker? And that seems like that would be a great way to target cuts.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The hospital supplies, again, Mr. Speaker, that is an also excellent example of providing targeted relief to an area where we know the costs are becoming prohibitive and burdensome to those in Bermuda. [We] support the other cuts as well.

On the duty allowance exemption, to be honest, I wonder if the Government considered perhaps not doing that. We appreciate that inflation costs go up, and you could make the case that that allowance should go up with inflation. But perhaps those of us who have the wherewithal to travel on a plane ticket of over \$500 most likely are hired, typically take taxis, buy hotel rooms. Perhaps we don't need to save another \$25 on buying materials that are overseas and competing further with Bermuda's retail sector which employs Bermudians and pays taxes, Mr. Speaker. So that's something that we would like to see there.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That is a question. That is a question. And yes, those are my questions on that, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

MP Fahy.

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

I do join my colleague in the point about the duty relief at the airport. It does not add up in terms of the message from the Government about supporting the retail sector at all. And I'm curious as to why we feel that that's a necessary amendment. Again, it's buried within the rest of these rates, so we have to go along with it. I do not support that.

The second piece I query, and I did laugh a little bit during the budget when we talked about reducing duty on car parts. Good. But is it a tacit recognition of

the poor roads, which is perhaps why we need to make sure that people can repair their cars for a cheaper price because of the poor roads that we currently have? Yes, a bit of a churlish comment, but I think that's on most people's minds. Other than that, we have to go along.

Construction costs—again, the Shadow Minister has made remarks about the construction material duty relief. Again, it makes sense, but there are other ways that you can achieve the same goal by reducing to zero, as the Shadow Minister has said, in relation to particular projects, especially when we have the housing crisis that we do. There's a recognition by the Government of that by reducing those duties. I accept that. But we can go further, as we have said in this debate already in this House when we debated the budget line items.

In relation to energy, again, as part of the Shadow portfolio, certainly support continued duty relief in relation to fuel, and we will look to see again how that translates into people's bills on an ongoing basis. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

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

Government Whip, MP Tyrrell.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Mr. Speaker, thank you very much for recognising me. I would like to speak very briefly on the Customs Tariffs Amendment Act.

This is not my subject of expertise, of course, but I do help the CEO of my house to run the household account, so I know how it will hit my pockets in terms of these reductions, and I want to commend the Minister for looking at these wide-ranging reductions, especially the one on returning residents, which my friend over there appears not to want to agree to, but I don't want it to go unnoticed. There's going to be a lot of joy there.

So, I certainly, again, support the Bill in total, especially as it lowers duty rates on things, and the new tariff codes, I certainly recognise them as well. So, I just wanted to support the Minister on this Bill. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Whip.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? There are none? Oh, Premier—I was going to call you Junior Minister. Okay, Premier.

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

Mr. Speaker, of course, this Bill is a culmination of the things which were set out, or one part of the things which were set out in the Budget Statement, which, of course, started this budget session on 2 May. And, of course, Mr. Speaker, I will not reflect on the debate which took place on Wednesday, but it must be reminded that this is one of a number of Bills to accomplish the reduction in taxes that is in excess of \$45

million that this Government is putting in place for the people of Bermuda. I want to repeat that again, Mr. Speaker, part of a package of tax cuts that is in the area of \$45 million estimated to benefit the people of Bermuda.

This Government is cutting taxes that will benefit every single person in Bermuda. And it is important because . . . because . . . this is important because we hear, my opinion, Mr. Speaker, pretty soundbites from the other side, but completely impractical.

And I have experience in this, Mr. Speaker, because I understand the desire to try to target tax cuts. The honourable . . . officer from the Department of Customs is here. He knows of the difficulty of which we've had on some of these measures. I recall that during 2022, when we tried to do targeted tax cuts and targeted relief and the amount of administrative burden and the difficulty of doing it outweighs the challenge of getting it done.

Now, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, if Bermuda had personal income tax, then these things would be far easier to administer because in other jurisdictions, they are able to target relief based on person's income.

Now, what I will state is it is also important to note that when related to matters of labour income, this Government has reduced taxes on workers and increased taxes on higher earners, which allows us to make sure that we have the budget capacity to continue cutting these taxes.

Let me just go to a particular suggestion that came from the Shadow Minister of Finance. He spoke about that we should cut building materials, not for all, not for the construction projects, not for the private sector, not for all the rest of things.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier is misleading the House. In fact, I said perhaps they would additionally consider cutting to zero for targeted things such as construction to provide units underneath the rent control threshold. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: I am so happy that he reiterated that point.

I am so happy he reiterated that point because I'm going to go back again. Nice sounding soundbites, completely impractical in reality.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Here is the reason why, Mr. Speaker. You do not know if something falls under rent control until after it is constructed and assessed.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: So again, Mr. Speaker, it sounds nice.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of information, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: I do not yield. It sounds nice.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: It sounds nice. But again, it is impractical.

But here is what we have done, Mr. Speaker. We do provide customs duty relief to projects that are with the Bermuda Housing Corporation to construct affordable housing, and those are at a zero per cent duty.

We have end-use reliefs inside of the customs tariff. [They] don't need to be added as new because they are already there. That is important.

And the only changes to the end-use relief schedule are in the actual Bill. So, the Honourable Member does not need to say . . . does not need to say, *Oh, I could not read through the 400-something pages of the custom tariff in and of itself* because the changes to the customs tariff codes are the ones in which were outlined in the Budget Statement.

So again, what are we cutting?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier, the Honourable Premier is perhaps misleading the House—

Hon. E. David Burt: Perhaps?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —because of course we're not here to vote on the Budget Statement. We're here to vote on this particular piece of legislation that was tabled without the full information that we knew in black and white was being associated with that legislation. Not prior statements. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, that Honourable Member just has misled the House because it was tabled with the full and complete information as is in the Standing Orders of the House.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, the Premier is misleading the House.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Bill referred to a Schedule. The Bill's Schedule referred to an online Schedule. The online Schedule is the prior customs tariff, not the tariff we were being asked to agree.

Now I am grateful to the Premier and the public servants for when we followed up on asking—

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading this House. The Honourable Member is acting as though his Whip did not agree to move forward with the Bill that we are discussing right now.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, therefore, we are discussing what this whole House has agreed to.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I will continue. But at some point in time, Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we convene a Committee of Standing Orders so that both sides can be educated on what actually constitutes a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Several Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. E. David Burt: Because this is actually getting slightly ridiculous.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: This is actually getting slightly ridiculous. So now, Mr. Speaker, allow me to continue. Because I will take my time and start again.

This Bill is a culmination of the effect of the tax cuts that were previewed in the Pre-Budget Report, contained in a Progressive Labour Party Election Manifesto which returned this party to Government with 25 seats, and, Mr. Speaker, outlined inside of the Budget Statement. And so, yes, it reduces the duty rate on building materials and supplies.

And why? Because affordable housing is a major issue in this country. And we have to go ahead and understand how do we address those issues, Mr. Speaker. And it was the determination of the Government that to make sure that we are not only supporting the private sector in creating additional supply in

whichever way that supply is created. Because as we understand from economics, additional supply is what is needed.

So, whether or not that is in things that are in rent control, items that are not in rent control, whatever it is, more supply is better for the economy to deal with the matters related to house prices. And as stated in the budget, and as stated in the Junior Minister's brief, it's important to note that all matters will be reduced to 10 per cent. These are for things such as air conditioners, which were at 35 per cent. There are matters related to doors, and windows, and steel, and aluminium, and rods, and furniture, and fixtures, and tubs, and toilets. All of those particular items, Mr. Speaker, which are subject to significant custom duties are going to be reduced.

And I heard that on the other side they support this, but I know who does support this, Mr. Speaker. The building contractors, those who are looking to provide housing, those who are looking to build companies, et cetera, because it is good and positive for the economy.

Now let us move on to the next item, which was stated by the Honourable Junior Minister, and this is the elimination of customs duty on all motor vehicle parts. It is interesting that the Honourable Member from constituency 20, who used to sit in another place, called his own comment as *churlish*. That's not my word. That's his word that he used. But I would, if you would allow me to, Mr. Speaker, refer to the Budget Statement on page 13. And it says, and I quote, "Mr Speaker, recognising the strain vehicle repair costs can place on families and businesses, customs duty will be eliminated on all motor vehicle parts imported into Bermuda. Whether it is keeping a family car on the road or a company's fleet operating, this measure is aimed at lowering maintenance and repair costs while the Government works to repave Bermuda's roads."

An Hon. Member: Say it again!

Hon. E. David Burt: So, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, that is not the first time that was said. That was said inside the Pre-Budget Report. That was said when we tabled the Pre-Budget Report here. That was stated when we debated this. It is here inside the Budget Statement, and it is just a clear—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Speak—

[Laughter]

The Speaker: We need to hear, we need to hear the one Member who's on his feet.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the man will have as much . . . the Honourable Member will have as much

sound authority as he wants, but he had the opportunity to speak, and I am now responding. So, they can't have both ways.

They can't say you don't respond to the questions, and when you respond to the questions, they don't like it. But here's the reality, Mr. Speaker. The reality, Mr. Speaker, is that tax policy and economic policy has to—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —be in line with the things which are necessary and required. This budget, as you know, contains a significant investment in road paving. We just saw an announcement from the Honourable Minister of Public Works and Environment that the new road paving equipment has arrived on Island to even speed up further—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: —the work of which we are doing. And we know that road repaving works are taking place.

Mr. Speaker, can you call for order?

The Speaker: The speaker's on his feet. We're trying to hear what he has to say.

Member, continue so we can hear what you're saying.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I appreciate that call for order.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: You can call for order, too, if you wish. I just know the rules of the House, see?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And now, Mr. Speaker, moving on.

The next item that is covered inside of this particular Bill is the increase in the amount of duty-free allowance for returning residents, which has not been increased since 2012. It is right, it is proper, it is good, and I'm sorry that Honourable Members opposite do not support it.

But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, they talk about local retail, they talk about all the things. Let us not forget what this Government has done for local retail. Expansion of tax credits that we've done, reduction of duty rates, sorry, and payroll tax rates for that particular industry inside of a Bill, Mr. Speaker, that it should be reminded in 2023 that they did not support.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Important to note, when we change all of the taxes, increase taxes on high earners, reduce taxes on most workers of this country, reduce tax for every single local business in the country. Because we were raising taxes on high earners, they did not support the legislation.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Understand, but we reduce those taxes for retailers, Mr. Speaker. This is important to recognise and understand. So, it is a broad base of the work of which we are doing.

In addition, Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill provides continuing duty relief available to the Bermuda Hospitals Board for hospital operating supplies. This is something that is important, it is something that is contained. It is the continued expansion of this particular duty relief, which has been in place because we want to make sure we do everything to support our hospital. And I think that we can all agree that I do not think that a public hospital should be paying duty to the major government on the supplies which they operate. So, they can save that fund, those monies to make sure they can provide better services for the persons that are there. Combined with the increased funding that this Government has given to the Bermuda Hospitals Board contained inside of this budget, supported, Mr. Speaker, by the sound management of the economy underneath this Progressive Labour Party Government which has led us to record the second projected Consolidated Fund surplus in a row.

Let us move on, Mr. Speaker, to the final point.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And the final point, Mr. Speaker, is lowering the rate of duty for diesel and fuel oils for BELCO for the production of electricity.

Some history, Mr. Speaker, as I am certain that you do know. In 2012, when the Progressive Labour Party left Government, the—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Absolutely another history lesson for you, Honourable Member Fahy, because it may not just be for you. It may be for the people who are listening, because they deserve to know the difference.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The difference is . . . the difference is in 2012, customs duty taxes on fuel were 10 cents per litre. In 2014, the party opposite increased them to 15 cents per litre.

Some Hon. Members: No!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: In 2016, they increased it again to 20 cents per litre.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: They doubled the taxes on gasoline in this country, increasing costs to residents of this country.

But what, Mr. Speaker, has this Government done? In 2022, when gas prices were going up across the world, hitting record highs, we froze the price of the pump, saving consumers money throughout. Saving money for consumers throughout the country. And here's what's interesting.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: What is interesting is, they recommended that we freeze the funds, but they said the Government should reduce the cost, but they don't have the money to reduce the cost. Funny, we did have the money, and we reduced the cost.

Second, Mr. Speaker, what did we do? Last year, the fuel was at the tax, which was doubled under them, was up to 20 cents a litre. We cut that to 8 cents per litre. This year, we are cutting it in half again, a total reduction over in a year of 80 per cent on fuel costs.

Now here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, and I will quote for the members who are listening in the public, if you will allow me.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: "To date, government fuel due to relief has reduced average monthly electricity rates by approximately 6%. The additional reduction," (that we are doing today, Mr. Speaker,) "will bring the total relief to 8%, saving the average customer \$300 per year. This estimate is based on average residential usage, and the actual savings will vary depending on consumption."

So here we are, Mr. Speaker. All of these matters will benefit Bermudians, will benefit Bermudian businesses, will benefit Bermuda's households, seniors, and working families, Mr. Speaker. That is the record of this Progressive Labour Party Government. And of course, Mr. Speaker, I support the legislation in my name. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Premier, it's now that time. I was hoping we would have gone to Committee beforehand, but—

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: You wouldn't want to move us into Committee beforehand, would you?

Hon. E. David Burt: No, I would not, sir. I know there are more persons to speak.

The Speaker: Okay.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House do now adjourn for lunch to return at 2:00 pm.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that?

There are none. The House now stands adjourned for lunch until 2:00 pm.

[Gavel]

Proceedings suspended at 12:31 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:00 pm

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon, Members. I trust everyone had a good break.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now back in session.

When we broke for the lunch period, we were still in the House on the Customs Tariff Amendment. Is there any other Member who wishes to speak to that in the House, or are we going to the Committee?

Minister Hayward.

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

Mr. Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the Bill, the motive behind the Bill, the features contained in the Bill, and I am pleased with the impact that these changes would have on our community. The positive impact.

Bermuda is one of the countries in the world that maintains a high cost of living. As a result, there is pressure on both businesses and residents to continue to operate in an environment where both are finding their purchasing power diminished by the high cost of living. It is the Government's responsibility to understand what some of those pressures are which are leading to the stresses and put appropriate policy solutions in place that benefit, yes, our business community, but also the residents of Bermuda.

In order for the Government to exercise fiscal policy, it needs to be in a position to do so. So, what is being lost is that the Government now finds itself in a position where it has the fiscal capacity to make the necessary adjustments which are required so that we can provide greater levels of relief to businesses and the residents of Bermuda. These measures should be fully supported. It is a balance between providing relief

to residents and providing relief to our business community.

The measures that are contained within the Customs Tariff [Act] 1970 (which we are changing), to be clear, fall into six categories. We are lowering the duty rate on building materials and supplies. I first ask, who benefits from that change? The answer to the question is the entire community. Investors who are looking to develop, persons who are looking to renovate their properties, persons looking to acquire properties which may now be affordable because the construction costs will be lower. Those segments of our community benefit from this particular change. And so, this change should be well supported.

We complain that we have a housing crisis. We complain that we have reduction in inventory. And so, when we do things that are deliberately designed to support investment and development in a space where we have a need, it should be commended. If the Government has done an analysis and says that we can't go all the way to zero because that's currently not what our fiscal capacity allows, then it should be at least acknowledged that we are making a meaningful step in the right direction. It should be meaningfully acknowledged that we have consulted with the business community who have requested these changes, and we have acquiesced to those requests by facilitating the change through changing our legislation and rates.

The second would be elimination of duty on all motor vehicle parts. We ask ourselves, whom does that benefit? It benefits the residents who are required to make maintenance and repairs on their vehicles, who will now make lower payments.

I heard the chirping by the Honourable Member Fahy, who said because of our bad roads. However, maintenance and repair on vehicles transcends any challenges we may be having with our roads. And if you find yourself in the unfortunate position where you get in an accident that has absolutely nothing to do with our roads, this change still supports you. And so, what we do is we take into consideration what the community is saying, and we adjust to it.

Just like when there was a removal of a ferry route. I then saw the Honourable Member Fahy in the newspaper applauding the Government for restoration of that very same ferry. Do you know why? Because the residents complained and we responded.

So, we have a track record of understanding where there are pain points and adequately responding. That is what this Government is expected to do. And so, we are making those adjustments. We are also lowering the duty rate on air conditioning units and parts. A lot of us can empathise with coming up in an environment where we didn't have air conditioners in our homes. I had two misfortunes. You see, when you stay across the street from the dump, you don't have the luxury—

[Laughter]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I hear the Honourable Member DeCouto laughing because I stayed across the street from the dump.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Honourable Minister is misleading the House. He doesn't know what I was laughing about and there was some sidebar conversation on an unrelated topic.

I know he's the speaker, but not everything is revolving around him today, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, it may be misplaced laughter, I'll accept that. But for the residents who lived on Parsons Road, like I lived on Parsons Road, this is not a laughing matter. Because not only did we have the dump, but there was a stream at the bottom of the dump called the pond. And on a hot summer day, the pond emitted an odour that if your windows were left open in your house during a hot summer day, you entered your house and you thought that a rodent had died and decayed in your house. So, our windows were closed on hot summer days without the luxury of central air conditioning.

Now we advanced from that particular space where we did get window units. And unfortunately, because I had a window unit on a ground level, I learned the hard way of having a window unit on a ground level of Parsons Road, where somebody kicked in my window unit, got into my house, took all my valuables and walked right back out of that window. So, this is the reality.

But had the duty rates been lower on air conditioning units and air conditioning parts, we may have been able to get central air conditioning, which didn't require a window unit, which would have allowed us to keep our windows closed to protect us from the stench of the pond, but also keep our houses safe from persons who are prepared to kick in our window units.

I then later learned that those window units are more expensive when it comes to your electricity rates. And so, I am pleased now when I see that when Government is reducing the duty on the fuel associated with our electricity, it also provides relief to those individuals. But I ask, who benefits from these changes? And I'm left with the only conclusion, and that is the people of Bermuda benefit from these changes. And we don't discriminate whom those people actually are.

When I look at the next measure, when we're providing duty relief to the hospital, we have a mantra that we want to see accessible and affordable hospitals

and health care for all. This takes us a step further in that direction. The hospital caters to almost the entire residential population. It also caters to the visitors to our shores. The entire country collectively benefits from us easing some of the financial pressures on the hospital.

The Premier indicated that altogether the relief that we're providing to the citizens of Bermuda equates to more than \$45 million . . . \$45 million. It has to be viewed from a lens where the Government has positioned itself to be able to provide relief to the residents of Bermuda. And while the Honourable Members on the other side may oppose extending the duty relief at the airport—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

The Speaker: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Minister is misleading the House. We did not say we oppose. In fact, I started my response in this debate specifically saying we support this Bill.

An Hon. Member: But . . .

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But we did suggest that they could have considered a different approach.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: His point was, he said that persons opposite may oppose the duty relief rate, not the Bill. He meant something specific.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member Fahy stood to his feet and opposed the relief to the residents of the people of Bermuda. And—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: What? No, he did not.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

POINT OF ORDER

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I literally stood to my feet and said we support it.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Wait, wait, wait. You made reference to, not yourself, to the other Member. The other Member said he supported the Bill, but he was opposed to a particular piece of the Bill.

An Hon. Member: He said it too!

The Speaker: That's what he made reference to. He pointed out the piece that you made reference to, that you were opposed to.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Jason Hayward: We have to operate with some level of integrity in this House, Mr. Speaker.

You cannot stand to your feet, oppose something, and then when somebody highlights that you've opposed relief to the residents of Bermuda, you're trying to draw back from that. The reality is we have a different point of view on that particular piece.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Jason Hayward: I know that my residents, my constituents, will be happy to take advantage of greater relief when travelling back from abroad. Sometimes, persons travel abroad to get goods because there is a lack of availability of those goods on the Island. This is not necessarily to reduce the successfulness of our retail sector because we've put other measures in place that actually support our retail sector.

It is this Government's desire for a vibrant retail sector. So much so that we're focused on embarking on putting a framework in place which we will consider to be our national entrepreneurship strategy, which promotes small and medium-sized enterprises in Bermuda. But we have given relief where relief has been requested from our retailers. And so, when you look at this entirety as a package, you have to say that this Government has taken practical steps to reduce the cost of living.

And then you say, how are they able to do that? They are able to do that because they have created a level of fiscal capacity.

What is actually heartwarming to me about this relief that we're providing now, it's on top of relief that we have provided over the last seven years while in Government.

So, the Premier highlighted, and it was also highlighted last time he was in this Honourable House, in terms of what we've done for the workers in terms of reduction of payroll tax for those who are working. How we've increased the minimum wage for those who are working. Two measures that benefit the workers of this country directly. And if you're unfortunate enough to be unemployed and you need assistance, we have also increased the eligibility and benefits that one can receive through financial assistance. I don't know how the actions of this Government cannot be viewed as ones which are human-centred and in the best interest of the residents of Bermuda.

As I move on, this is not the first time we've amended duty rates. We highlighted essential food items, and we've reduced the cost and the duty associated with those essential food items. Whom does that change benefit? It benefits the residents of Bermuda. It

benefits the families of Bermuda. It benefits mothers of Bermuda who are trying to feed their kids. This Government has been responsive. We have done a lot, and we have a lot more to do.

I think that when we come here, we have a responsibility to the constituents who elected us here to make the argument as it pertains to whether or not the changes benefit those constituents or not. And I'll challenge any Member of the Opposition to stand up and say, *I oppose these changes because they do not benefit the constituents who elected me to this House*. I can support that argument if they have come to the conclusion that this does not support their constituents. But they can't.

So, when persons oppose, I ask, on what basis? If they're here to represent their constituents and their constituents will benefit from the change, on what basis is the Opposition coming from? It is not based on the sound principles of good governance.

I spoke about the minimum wage. And we will come back to this House, like with other tax changes, to progress the minimum wage even further. I did a national economic update, and I highlighted that in every industrial sector in Bermuda, employment income was up. I continue to hear things surrounding a stagnant economy, but that's far from the reality of our economic situation. And so, our economy is growing, government finances are stable.

Don't take my word for it, Mr. Speaker. Standard & Poor's recently released a report as it pertains to their independent assessment of where we are as a country. I did not hear the negativity that is spewed and the rhetoric in that report that is spewed when I come to this House and the Opposition paints the picture of where we are. I saw sound and stable government policies. I saw words as such as *responsive*. I saw our rating and our outlook remain stable with no grave area of concern. [Do] you know why? Because we are on the right track.

Bermuda continues to be a high-performance jurisdiction. We continue to punch above our weight level in a number of areas. I, for one, Mr. Speaker, am proud to be a Bermudian. I am proud to be a member of the Progressive Labour Party and I'm proud of the work that we are doing to support the residents of Bermuda.

And as a result of that, I wholeheartedly support the changes which are in front of this Honourable House today. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution? MP Pearman.

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

It is interesting that this debate and the other one on Wednesday over tax issues have become

rather fractious. So, I'm going to try and just take the heat out of this a little bit and be a little bit more measured. And you will be delighted to hear as well, Mr. Speaker, that I intend to be brief.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Yes, I am delighted about that.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I just have two points of principle that I wish to make. The second one, rising perhaps unwisely to the hook that the Honourable Minister put in the water, but he's asked for an answer, and I'll give him one. And that's my second point but let me deal with the first.

Mr. Speaker, this is not a Bill of staggering complexity. It's a Bill about tariffs, and that is duty relief, and that is taxes. Right? So that is what we are talking about here. We are talking about taxes. And the first point of principle I want to make, because it got lost, I think, in the shuffle a little bit earlier before lunch, was the very valid point that was made about transparency and good governance.

When we come up here, all of us, to look at tax legislation and to impose taxes upon our fellow citizens and upon ourselves, we must be transparent about what we're doing. And therefore, when there is a Schedule to a Bill that is less than transparent, it is perfectly proper for anyone in this House to say, *Hang on a second, I can't tell what's going on from this Schedule*. And it's perfectly proper for anyone in this House to invite the Government—because they're the Government, we're just the Opposition—to do better.

Now one of the speakers earlier said, *Well, that is how we've always done it*. And doubtless, that speaker was right. And that speaker said, *Well, that is how the OBA used to do it too*. And again, doubtless, that speaker is right. I was not around then. But the fact that it has always been done like that does not mean that that is how we have to always do it.

Let's dare to be better. Let's dare to pass legislation that when an ordinary member of the public wants to see if his or her tariff duty on the item that is trying to support their retail shop is going up or going down, they can tell. Now that is not actually hard to achieve. You put one extra column in that Schedule saying what the duty is, and the column saying what the duty is going to be.

Now I can understand why some governments might not want that. If the duty is going up, they may not want to be attacked for the duty going up. But if the duty is going down, they may wish to be praised for the duty going down. And so that is why I make the point of principle about transparency. If you can tell . . . you should not have to be a lawyer to look at a law that we pass to understand it.

So, it is fair to all Bermudians to know, is the tariff on this item going up? Is the tariff on this item going down? And so, I would invite whoever is in charge

of these things, be it the Government, be it the civil service, be it this particular department or Ministry, to just bear that in mind. And next time, let us try and have a Schedule where we see what it was and what it becomes. So that's the first point of two points of principle. And I would respectfully say that it's a point that should echo with this Government, because of course this Government has been talking about fairness. And what could be more fair than being transparent to the people so they can understand the legislation we are passing?

The second and final point of principle, Mr. Speaker, is about the idea of passing on tax relief. Because there was a big debate, and I appreciate that there are differences of philosophy, and there are differences in policy, but it is a point of principle. If you are going to grant relief, you can do it in one of two ways. You can grant relief across the board. Everybody gets a tax cut. Or you can be targeted in your relief. You can ask yourself, *Who really needs this tax cut, and how can we make sure that the person who really needs it is getting this benefit?* So those are two philosophically different approaches to taxes.

And on this side, we are saying that where this Government . . . and we are not the government, probably won't be for a while.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You got that right.

Mr. Scott Pearman: But where this Government . . . and I hear from the Honourable future Premier, Zane De Silva. *Got that right*, he said.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: So where this Government decides to give greater relief to Bermudians, and where this Government has the benefit of the support of the Opposition, as it has had over this Bill and the last one, to give relief, it is not criticism, or unwarranted criticism, or unreasonable criticism, for the Opposition to point out that perhaps the tax relief, when given and supported by us, should be more focused, should be more targeted. Why? Because if you target relief to those who need it most, you can give them more relief.

And that is the point, with respect, that MP DeCouto was making. That there are people on our Island who do not need certain tax breaks. And there are people on our Island who absolutely need those tax breaks.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: And I have just been asked by the Honourable Minister, Jason Hayward, "who determines that?" And the answer is the Government.

The answer is the Government, right?

So, the old saying, the Government . . . you know, Opposition gets its say, the Government gets its way.

Listen, the Honourable Minister, MP Jason Hayward, who spoke before me, invited us to respond as a point of principle, and I am doing that. And if he wishes to disagree with me, that is fine. If he wishes to say, *No, no, all cuts should be across the board, because we should treat everybody equally, and everyone should get a cut*, that is fine, if that is his point of principle. But I'm respectfully disagreeing with that argument.

My argument is that you focus on the people who need the help most, and if you only focus on them, you can give them more help. You can expand the amount of help being given to those who need it, rather than taking some of that money away and giving it to people who really do not need it. That is the philosophical argument, and I think, I hope—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Scott Pearman: No, no, I know. I know that the Honourable Minister understands that argument. I know that the Honourable Minister understands that argument. And so when we come again, and I am sure this Government has said they're going to come again and give more tax cuts. Great, and you will get our support if it is well intentioned. But let's try to target those who need it most, and ensure that they get more benefit, because we do not need to be giving tax cuts to the very wealthy on this Island, frankly. We do not.

One last point before I take my seat, and it's still on the second point of principle. One of the discussions being had here is around the retail sector, and the Honourable Minister is not taking the time to listen to the point I am making, and I would invite him to do so, respectfully, since he asked me to answer the question. And since I have answered it, he might want to just at least consider what I am saying.

So, the retail sector, they need help. They need a lot of help. I do not know what sort of consultation was done with the retail sector, but I would imagine that most people in the retail sector of Bermuda are not delighted that we can go and shop overseas, and bring more things in, and get greater customs duty relief.

And when I say we, I mean everybody. So, everybody now is going to get a bigger break at the airport, and I really doubt very much that the retail sector of Bermuda is going to have said, *That's a great idea*. I have a feeling they would have said, *Well actually, do we have to do that? Couldn't we do this in some other way? Couldn't we give us a bigger break on imports of the particular things that these Bermudian businesses, these Bermudian small retail businesses, medium-sized retail businesses, are bringing in?*

So again, it's a point of principle, it's a point of political philosophy. We may not agree, the Minister may not agree with me. But we believe that we need to help. We just think let's be targeted, let's help those who need the help the most, and let's give them more.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Deputy Premier, would you like to add a few comments?

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I would, Mr. Speaker, thank you very much.

The Honourable Member who just took a seat, I believe he just said, *Let's try to help those who need it most*.

Did I get that right?

Mr. Scott Pearman: You did.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: He's shaking his head and saying yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: I'm nodding. Nodding.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yeah, you're right. Those who need it, let's see that those who need it most get it.

Let me remind the Honourable Member, in 2012, when they came into power, the first thing they did in the House, the first session, Mr. Speaker, was change the staggered FutureCare premiums that we had in place so that those that could least afford it paid the less. They changed it so that everyone in the country were going to pay the same amount.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now these are the same people who are now saying to do just the opposite. You see?

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, you see—

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, you see, Mr. Speaker, what this tells me is . . . an old saying comes to mind and it's called grandstanding.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, that is what it is!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It's grandstanding.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member, who was referring to me and precisely what I said, has now just imputed an improper motive.

An Hon. Member: What?

Mr. Scott Pearman: Well, perhaps he would care to clarify who he meant was grandstanding.

An Hon. Member: Not a problem.

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, certainly you have been here long enough to know when someone's grandstanding. And I'll tell you what, from where we sit, it's a lot of grandstanding that's been taking place in the last 24 hours.

So, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections and crosstalk]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order. Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. The Member has now clarified that he was referring to us and was referring to me in the last 24 hours and he's imputing an improper motive, which he should not do.

The Speaker: Member, when you speak, just remember the Member is entitled to his opinion.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

The Speaker: On different viewpoints.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

The Speaker: And that viewpoint . . . that view may differ from your view of the matter, but it doesn't necessarily mean it's a negative.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, Mr. Speaker. Well, let me clarify that. My view is that some of the Members opposite use this House on many occasions to grandstand. And I'm going to leave it right there.

An Hon. Member: No point of order?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, Mr. Speaker, I find it rather rich.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: I find it rather rich when I hear Members opposite say some of the things they say. In particular, the Member that just took his seat.

An Hon. Member: In particular.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Because, Mr. Speaker, we had a long debate last session that should have been five minutes, about \$6. For the Honourable Members next door, on the other side, to talk about helping those who need it most, and we should be doing this, we should be doing that. Imagine what we could do for the people of this country with \$250 million we have spent, and are still spending at Morgan's Point.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Mr. Speaker, \$250 million and counting.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier should be the last person to mention anything to do with airports.

An Hon. Member: Or music studios.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Or music studios, too, because I think he had his hand in that.

An Hon. Member: Ooh!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, the fact of the matter is, Mr. Speaker, is that—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Did I hear the Honourable Member just say that I was involved in the music studio?

An Hon. Member: I think he did.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I just want to make sure I'm hearing correctly. This point of order, he's completely misguiding the House. I was nowhere near it.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order, Mr. Speaker, I never said that.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes! You just said it! You did say that.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I did not say it.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That is exactly what you said.

The Speaker: Members . . . wait, wait, wait.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I did not say that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I did not.

The Speaker: Look, look, look. Members, we're fresh in the afternoon. Let's keep it at a tone where we don't get out of hand.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Hey—

The Speaker: We had a—Aah, aah, aah, I am still talking.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, okay, sorry.

The Speaker: We had a reasonable morning. Let's have a reasonable afternoon. You got some points to make on the topic of the Bill? Speak to the topic of the Bill and leave the others out.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I will gladly do that.

Mr. Speaker, but I think it is important that the people of this country never forget—

An Hon. Member: —Never.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —never forget—

An Hon. Member: —Never.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: When we are talking about helping the vulnerable, helping those who need it in this country, the \$250 million and counting of the very same taxpayers of which we speak about today are paying. Here as we sit, the clock is ticking. The clock is ticking. In fact, before today is over, I am going to work out what it is per minute that we pay because it's substantial, Mr. Speaker. It's substantial.

So, with that said, Mr. Speaker, let me emphasise the point. The points which were made earlier from this side of the House are that these tax reductions . . . I am looking forward to them driving this economy and helping the people of this country. And it may start from \$6, but it could end up at \$600, and that could be per

month. It could be \$6,000 for a month, Mr. Speaker, depending on what we use these additional tax cuts for.

So, as the Premier is going to continue to bring these deductions, as he did in the pre-budget, bring them to this House for passage, look forward to us helping the people who need it most in this country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member . . . MP Cannonier.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker, and to my colleagues, good afternoon, and to the listening public. Let me be as balanced as I should be.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: As I should be. The interpolating has already started.

Certainly, I do support this. But what I will do is clarify that in some of the comments that have been made in who this invariably is helping, I will say that my constituents probably are some of those who spend a lot of money importing goods from above . . . across the ocean, I should say, not above, but across the ocean. So, any kind of relief in that matter, they would welcome.

As I said, they probably spend more time flying than many of us who on average fly, maybe once or twice. So, they certainly will take advantage of the opportunity, and I think the whole idea of maybe a targeted approach does not fall by the wayside on anyone. There is opportunity.

Now, the Government has decided that this is the first tier of opportunity that they would like to take, and I take note of that. But I also take note of the fact that reducing diesel prices is not certainly going to fix the soot that's on people's roofs. So, we have got some big problems here that we need to resolve.

And I also recognise that when I hear the comments about small businesses, I have said it many times in this House, you know. We may be reducing tariffs and duty, but the biggest problem that small and medium-sized businesses have at the end of the day is cash flow. And so, we need to be looking at the opportunities to relieve that, because if we don't fix the cash flow for them to survive, which they are already in debt, those who have been able to survive up until now, they have no real way of being able to pay their debt back. And the relief may be one way of approaching it, but one of the other ways that we need to approach this situation is we need to improve the economy so that it is growing at a faster rate than our debt is for people and businesses. They've got to pay back—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. I hate to interrupt the Honourable Member, as you know, he and I have a good relationship. But what he just said was that we need to ensure the economy is growing faster than the debt. And guess what, that is exactly what is taking place in Bermuda.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, thank you.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: The business's debt, not yours.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, so . . . yes, yes, yes, that is what I am talking about.

So that is exactly . . . I prefaced it all by small to medium-sized business. So, my challenge is this, is that they are in debt—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —and they are unable to get to a point where they are at zero.

I did say, and I qualified my statement, these tariffs will help. But the cash flow problem is where they will go out of business. And unless we fix that problem, we are going to continue to have to go to an almost point of zero tariffs, zero duty on things, because we are trying to help people rather than getting the economy and whatever it takes to boost the economy at a rate that can keep them surviving and keep cash flow growing.

And so, the Premier has stood up, and he says, you know, we have a good relationship. I know and understand what it means to be a small and a medium-sized business owner. Certainly not a large business owner, but I know what it's like to have to meet the payroll when that time comes, and things are tough. And despite the fact that we have reduced tariffs, the challenge is that we still cannot keep up, and that's today's reality.

So, on the one hand, this is one part of the relief. But on the other hand, I believe that we can do more to grow the economy. Am I saying to the Government that they are not (under the numbers that they have presented) that we are not looking better? Certainly. But I do recall a time coming along when I was a student, I could pay for my tuition school fees because I was getting paid well to mow grass for people in the summertime, and pay for my sister's school fees. We are not at that point anymore right now.

And so, what we want to do is we want to be able to have a position whereby the private businesses, which is what these tariffs are for, essentially, outside of the hospital, are to help. But what we need to do is

find a way to get more money into small to medium-sized businesses, which invariably means more money into the private citizens' pockets, and we will have a much more healthier position.

So, what I would like to hear more about is rather than getting . . . you know, we are talking about fuel and diesels and these kinds of things. And I wanted to say about the fuel thing, you know, the Premier brought up the issue of the fuel. But when the fuel concessions came first to Bermuda when we were going through COVID-19 and the fuel companies decided to collectively say, *Okay, we are going to offer relief.*

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Sorry?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So the fuel company offered to Government relief. It was to hold the price of fuel.

Hon. E. David Burt: When?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Premier made a statement about it. I was a part of it, so I know what I am talking about. Maybe the Premier is not sure.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: But we, when the prices went up . . . when the prices were about to go up, the . . . I can't remember the exact year now. I will have to look at it. The insurance *[sic]* companies sat down with the Minister and said, okay, well, we can put some relief in place. You know, we'll give a—

The Speaker: The fuel company. Fuel company.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Sorry, fuel company. Yes, fuel company. We can put some relief in place. But that relief had to be paid back. So, you might have gotten a relief for two to three months. The public might have gotten a relief for two to three months on their fuel. But that relief, the public still had to pay back.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, point of order. Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I sincerely hate to interrupt this, but he is completely misleading the House and completely misrepresenting what took place. In 2022, upon my return to the Ministry of Finance, I found that fuel prices went up on something under the authorisation of the Minister of Finance without coming across my desk.

I went to the technical officers, and I said there will be no more fuel increases. And we came up with a fuel pricing mechanism which reduced the taxes on gasoline fuel that was imported into the country and no one has had to pay that back. That has come out of our customs tariff revenue. So, the Honourable Member should withdraw that statement. It is factually incorrect. I'm not sure what he's talking about, but it cannot be for fuel at the pump. That was not a discussion with the fuel companies.

We said, this is the action which we are taking and we said we are going to reduce the taxes, and we are not going to move the cap. It is going to go down. That is what happened. There were no funds that needed to be paid back.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Mr. Speaker, I will provide you with that letter with the relevant Government Ministers on it. For sure.

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: For sure.

The Speaker: We will leave it there until we get it.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Oh, yeah. For sure.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: For sure. We will call that out for sure. I was in that meeting.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, then we started talking. I heard some comments being made about the roads as well and the relief for parts, for cars and the like and rightfully so. I think that we should be implementing some kind of tariff relief when it comes to cars, especially with the situation that we are right now with the roads. On 24 May, as I watched TNN on their bike the whole way up from St. George's, it was visual. You could actually see the challenges with the roads as the runners were going up and the cyclists and the like.

Then the Premier talked about the amount of money that was being put aside for roadworks. Well, I must say that the amount of money that was put aside for roadworks is really no different than what was put aside the previous year. And in the previous year, Mr. Speaker, we only spent half of that money on the roads. So, if we are going to put \$5 million to roadworks, we want to spend that money.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I accept where the Honourable Member is coming from, but I think that it's important that people would hear that only \$2.5 million—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Is that a point of order?

Hon. E. David Burt: It is. Misleading the House. That \$2.5 million—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That is a point of information. I did not accept a point of information.

Hon. E. David Burt: No, no, misleading the House, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I did not . . . No, I am not.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

The Speaker: State your point of order now.

Hon. E. David Burt: He is misleading the House. Persons who would have heard what the Honourable Member said would have heard that we have not spent \$5 million in roadworks. That is not correct. The fact is that because the roadworks are done and because there are reimbursements that happen, the total value of work that was done last year is far in excess of the \$5 million that is recorded in the budget.

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

As I looked at the Budget Book, we can certainly go and take a look at the line item for roadworks. Five million dollars was allotted for roadworks and \$2-point-something million was spent. The actual number there. So, the Premier can say what he wants, but the Budget Book does stipulate that. He is trying to bring in invoices coming in for all of these other things. The [Budget] Book specifically states that we are going to put another \$5 million to the roadworks.

Quite frankly, for the next year, I am not sure we will be able to reach the level that the Government is saying. I hope that people . . . quite frankly, with the challenges that we are having, the businesses take advantage of this relief on the parts. But at the same time, I am not sure the private sector at the end of the day, with the way that the situation is, is going to benefit a whole lot at the end of the year, because of this here.

Parts are already here. You know how long it takes to get parts in Bermuda. You have to sit here and wait for Lord knows how many months just to get something here. We might appreciate the fact that the relief is being put here, but for the next fiscal year, let's just be clear, we will be talking about this next year and how much the roads haven't gotten done. I mean, we are still waiting for the asphalt plant to get up. It won't be

here until 2026, and we are hoping that it is here in the first quarter. But that deadline keeps changing and changing and changing.

So, if I go off of the record as some of our Government says, on how they are doing so wonderful, if I go off of the record of just roadworks alone, that thing is not coming any time soon because it keeps getting changed.

I appreciate this Bill and the attempt that it is doing. Hopefully, the relief that gets to people will reach them in a feasible time. We are already at May. We are already almost a quarter behind time. Let's see what happens. But what I can guarantee is this: Unless we start growing the economy so that people can get out of debt and these businesses in particular who are trying to make ends meet, if this economy does not improve at a faster rate, we're still going to be giving more and more and more relief.

Now, to anyone who would be interested in the Island and investing in the Island when it comes to the local economy, the local economy is struggling. It is struggling. And we see a lot of relief going into place. I have been saying year after year after year, the challenge is cash flow. And we haven't fixed it. We still haven't fixed it. I see it first hand. It hasn't been fixed. It's getting worse. And the banks are not friendly. It takes you . . . my goodness, you've got the money, some people. It takes you more than . . . almost a year just to get a mortgage sorted out. So, we are in some serious, serious challenges here going forward.

And so, I'm praying that people can make it throughout this next year with these reliefs. I know it sounds good when we list off all of these wonderful things for relief and especially in the construction industry. Yes, we can put all these things in. But guess what, Mr. Speaker? We just heard how many days it's taking for applications. So, this year might not even . . . this stuff might not even come to fruition for those who are putting in an application to build a house because it's going to take that long.

So, I am identifying that you are doing one part, yes, but there's a whole other part of it that is connected. And I am just asking the Government, as it moves along, there is another part here, which is what some of my colleagues are saying, we need to move with some more pace on helping relieve Bermuda by improving the economy because that way . . . now when I say . . . let me qualify that when I say improve the economy—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —by speeding up the pace of the improvement of this economy so that people can pay their salaries. Right?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So that people can . . . Listen, Mr. Speaker, Bermuda wants to pay its way. The only reason they are looking for relief is because they are struggling. So that is an admittance, if the Government is having to do this, that people are struggling. That is the reality.

I'm not knocking the Government because of this here. It is a reality. If we were doing wonderful, I am not sure all of these reliefs will be coming in place. My assessment and my opinion is that we are seeing these reliefs because they are hearing from the people, as we heard from Government already. They are doing this because our people are struggling. They are hurting, so they have got to do some stuff. That is what they are saying.

So, we still got issues to solve. And I tell you what, the best social programme I heard from an Honourable Minister who used to be in the House is a job. And a well-paying job. So that is the other part of this equation.

I support this Bill. I believe that this relief is needed, and I believe this relief is needed because people are struggling. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Cannonier.

Before I call on anyone else, I would just like to acknowledge in the Gallery the former Member of this House, former Opposition Leader, Mr. Cole Simons. Welcome to the Chamber this afternoon.

[Desk thumping]

[Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025, second reading debate continuing]

The Speaker: [Would] any other Member like to make a contribution at this time?

None other? Junior Minister.

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

Mr. Speaker, I am convinced whatever this Government does will never satisfy the Opposition. Never satisfy the Opposition.

A Government from 2012 to 2017, they talked about we listen and we heard and we are doing something about it. They heard the same voices, Mr. Speaker, the whole five years and never did anything about it but increased taxes year after year after year. We are here, we have heard the cry and we're doing something about it. That's the difference. And that's the difference.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: That's why you're sitting on that side and we're sitting on this side because we're listening and making things happen.

Mr. Speaker, for those individuals, just to give you a few different points. Mr. Speaker, slate will go from 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. Paint will go down from 15 per cent down to 10 per cent. Don't you think people want to hear that? Sinks, you buy a sink, it will go from 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. Wash basin, 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. Doors, 25 per cent down to 10 per cent. There is a decrease and it's affecting the individuals who are going to do constructions. These are great benefits.

So, we spent so much time trying to convince a party on that side who seemed . . . they complain about the \$6, but we're giving more and they're still complaining. I don't understand it. Where are you satisfied?

Mr. Speaker, this Government will continue to listen and will continue to make decisions. We will continue to deliver real results for the people of Bermuda.

So, Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Deputy Speaker, would you like to take the Chair?

House in Committee at 2:55 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill entitled the [Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025](#) be committed.

Is that approved? Yes.

I call on the Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that all clauses be moved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider all clauses together.

Any objections?

There are none. Continue, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

This Bill seeks to [repeal and replace] the First and [amend the] Fifth Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act 1970, ("the principal Act).

Clause 1 provides the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 repeals and replaces the First Schedule to the Customs Tariff Act 1970 by the contents of

the Schedule to this Bill. The First Schedule is published on the Bermuda Government Portal at the following [web address]: www.gov.bm/schedules-customs-tariff-act-1970.

Clause 3 amends the [Fifth] Schedule to the Customs [Tariff] Act 1970 by repealing and replacing CPC 4240 (Hospital operating supplies) and by amending CPC 4703 (Goods of tariff code 2710.192 (Diesel)) and CPC 4705 (Goods of tariff code 2710.194 (Fuel oil)).

Clause 4 provides for commencement of the Bill.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the clauses?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25. Member, you have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. Regarding clauses 3(3) and 3(4), the diesel and fuel oils, was there any consideration to do a graduated or a progressive way of looking at this tax that could have been adjusted . . . so that this duty relief could have been adjusted according to usage? Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Junior Minister, is a point of clarification needed?

Hon. E. David Burt: There is, yes.

The Chairman: I recognise the Premier from constituency 18.

Member, could you clarify your question so that it can be answered?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, referring to the Bill, Madam Chairman, the clauses I referenced adjust the tariff code on diesel and fuel oil usage respectively down from \$0.08 per litre to \$0.04 per litre.

My understanding of this, of course, flows through into your BELCO bill fuel adjustment rate and it is much touted by the Government as a tax saving to the end-user of electricity on this Island.

It is also well understood that those who have the privilege and the luck to have the larger, more expensive houses and run a lot of air conditioners and use a lot of electricity will have the same duty break, the same rate change from \$0.08 down to \$0.04 per litre will flow through into their bill, which will by a necessity be much larger than someone who perhaps makes less money and is in a smaller house and uses less electricity.

My question is, did the Government consider a mechanism by which those who use the most electricity might perhaps not get the same reduction as those who use the least electricity and perhaps struggled the most to pay their electric bill?

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

I recognise the Premier from constituency 18. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I tried to explain this in the full House. I'll try to explain it to the Honourable Member again, but I know the Honourable Member is, you know, trying to play to the media and trying to say X, Y, and Z. So let me help him out.

Number one, the way that these taxes are done is a question of imports. What he is suggesting is an entire remake of a tax importation system, which will not make sense, number one.

Number two, the reason why custom tariffs are amazing is because they are simple and easy to collect. We have one person versus the other mechanism to which he's speaking about. The second thing, which I am certain the Honourable Member is aware of, is that when it comes to retail tariffs for residential customers, those who use less actually pay less, not just because they consume less, because under 700 kilowatt per hours, it is a lower rate, and then it goes up, and then it goes up to those persons who need more.

So that is being done. And the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs, who is responsible where we saw matters, has written to the Regulatory Authority for further matters to look at how we can better address it.

So, I understand what the Honourable Member is saying. But people listening to him would think that the Government . . . everyone is paying the same. That is not correct. The retail tariff methodology means that persons who consume less do pay less. And as they do more the kilowatt hour charge on those rates goes higher and higher and higher. So, in fact, the persons who—

The Chairman: It's bands.

Hon. E. David Burt: Exactly. There are bands. The people who are large consumers of electricity are paying more.

So, the truth is that the overall reduction affects and impacts those at the lower level to a higher extent than it does to those in the upper level. What he's asking to be achieved is actually achieved through the mechanisms that exist.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

I recognise the member from constituency 25. You have the floor.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I actually did not ask for any particular thing to be achieved. I asked if the Government had considered that. I believe the answer is no, they did not, because it is complicated.

That's my takeaway. Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

I recognise the Member from constituency 18. Mr. Premier, you have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, I would sincerely hope that this Honourable Member would come up with new tactics, because his tactics are very predictable. The reality is that the reason why he's posing "consider" is because I think he already knows the answer. And it goes back to what the Honourable Member said, that sometimes the speeches which are made are for the effect outside rather than actually dealing with the policy here. Because if the Honourable Member—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: If the Honourable Member was serious about the policy here, he would note and understand what I said. Because during the general debate they said to ensure that those persons who may be able to afford less are able to benefit from this relief. And the explanation that I just gave with the way that retail tariffs are done on electricity means that the impact will be greater for those at the lower level.

But it is across the board on the fuel adjustment rate. So, it also affects the small businesses, the same ones that the Honourable Member from constituency 12 was talking about in regard to cash flow. It applies across the board.

It is important when we're talking about electricity rates. But the retail tariff methodology does have lower rates for those persons with lower consumption, to encourage lower consumption as well.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you, Premier.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the clauses?

There being none, I call on the Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: Yes.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move the clauses.

The Chairman: You moved them for consideration.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, I move all clauses be passed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the clauses be approved.

Are there any objections? There are none.
So approved. Continue.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 4 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: The Schedules . . . you are moving the Schedules? We will do the preamble but we also need to do the Schedule.

It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections? There are none.
Continue, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will move the Schedules also.

The Chairman: Yes. It has been moved that the Schedules be approved.

Are there any objections? There are none. So approved.

[Motion carried: Schedules passed.]

The Chairman: One more—you move that the—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: Thank you.

It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that?
There are none. So approved.

[Gavel]

[Motion carried: The Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 3:04 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none. The matter has been reported as printed.

Thank you, Members, for your participation in that matter.

We will now move on to the second item to debate this afternoon, which is the second reading of the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 in the name of the Premier.

Is the Premier or Junior Minister doing it?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I will do it.

The Speaker: The Junior Minister is carrying this one as well?

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

The Speaker: Okay, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's recommendation, I move that the Bill entitled the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Any objections?
None. Continue.

BILL

SECOND READING

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting to this Honourable House the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025. This Bill will amend the Land Tax Act 1967 by decreasing the base rate tax for residential units, another tax reduction.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Finance stated in the budget speech, Bermuda's land tax is a significant revenue earner for the Government, but it also represents a burden for homeowners and renters alike. In 2019, a new base rate was introduced and set at \$300 a year. Given the Island's fiscal progress, more tax relief can be provided. The Government will reduce the base rate of land tax from \$300 per year to \$150. This reduction will apply to all homeowners and renters who pay land tax.

Mr. Speaker, as Honourable Members are aware, annual land tax is managed in two periods, from 1 July to 31 December, and 1 January to 30 June each year. The proposed change to the land tax base rate will go into effect as of 1 January 2026. This ensures that the Office of the Tax Commissioner has sufficient time to make the necessary adjustments to billing amounts and notices to be provided to impacted homeowners.

Mr. Speaker, we hear the cries from our people who are finding it difficult to navigate our economic landscape and offer assistance as we can. Once again, listening to the people, Mr. Speaker. This reduction will assist all homeowners and renters.

I also add, Mr. Speaker, that the majority of the workforce, which we can safely assume also includes a number of homeowners, have seen their taxes decrease in prior fiscal years. Having done this and achieved balance, we believe this is the right time to provide further relief. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Junior Minister.

Does any other Member . . . the Shadow Minister of Finance.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I believe it was stated by the Premier that they know what questions I am going to ask—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, I would have hoped they perhaps could address them in the brief so we could just get through all this.

But listen, we support this.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Don't give me the "but" now.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We support this, Mr. Speaker, but I want to talk about this: the base rate. And I guess the question is, or the suggestion to the Government is, why is everybody getting this break on the base rate? Again, it's the same principle which we discussed of targeting the relief to those who need it most.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I was able to get a copy of the valuation list that's publicly available. Perhaps I had an out-of-date copy, I don't know. But by my assessment, about 55 per cent of the residential ARVs (Annual Rental Values) fall underneath the rent control threshold. Also, based on the number of units in the valuation list, again, my estimate of what this tax relief is costing the Government is about \$9 million to \$10 million.

Perhaps the Government could clarify what that cost is. But if you think about that, Mr. Speaker, that means about half of that \$9 million to \$10 million, that break is being given to people above the rent control ARV threshold. Now, we could have a spirited debate about, if you didn't want to give everybody this \$150 a year break, where would you draw the line? And that would be an interesting debate.

But I would submit to you, Mr. Speaker, and to the Government, that there is probably a line of ARVs where this break will not impact people that much. Whereas underneath that line, the people impacted could have enjoyed and benefited in a much more meaningful way, a larger break.

Now, I won't get into it anymore because, of course, I think we've all fully discussed the principles behind that, Mr. Speaker. So, I look forward to the Government's response. But as I said, we do support, and I did think I had one or two questions in there as well.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Minister for Cabinet, would you like to make a contribution?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I know my colleague next to me referenced grandstanding, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I think for the listening public, I think the definition of grandstanding is important here.

The definition, according to Cambridge, is *acting or speaking in a way intended to attract the good opinion of others who may be watching*. And we definitely get to see this on a regular basis, Mr. Speaker. I do know that that Member has not been a Member of this House for that long. I do know that he prides himself in being the intellectual financial guru that all of us wish we could be, Mr. Speaker.

I am old enough around here, Mr. Speaker, to understand when we first brought the changes to land tax, and I'm sure my Honourable Member who introduced this Bill will be able to talk to this when he does reply, that when we did bring this, we heard the same argument.

But, Mr. Speaker, the changes that we made then greatly affect the persons at the higher end of the ARV listing than the people at the lower end. This was put in place to in fact give relief, back then when it was dropped to \$300, the base rate, to give relief to almost . . . and I want to say, if my memory serves me correctly, almost 70 per cent. Seventy per cent to 80 per cent of the people paid less than what they had ever paid before, while the people at the upper end paid almost double of what they were paying before.

An Hon. Member: That's right.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: So, Mr. Speaker, doing this creates even more relief for those persons at the lower end, unfortunately. And so, I would ask that Member to go back—and I know that he's really good at looking at Hansard—to go back when we first debated this, because this brings relief to almost the vast majority of persons that pay. Not, as he said, 50 per cent are under the threshold and 50 per cent above. It doesn't actually work that way, because if you look at the bands, it works on bands. And so, there are persons now who pay \$600 a year, will now pay \$300. That's \$300 more that they did not have. And that's all they will pay.

But the bands above that are not affected, and the way they are staggered is they increase exponentially as you go up. So, the people at the top of the list still pay a heck of a lot more than the people at the bottom of the list, Mr. Speaker.

And so, I'm actually . . . and I mentioned the grandstanding because we spent a lot of time in the last debate, and I am not reflecting on that debate, but the

Member from [constituency] 25 was speaking about, you know, why don't we do the tax relief on persons who fall under the rent control? We didn't hear that argument now, because everybody under rent control will see a \$300 difference this year. Everyone. And they will not pay a dime more.

An Hon. Member: That's significant.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Everybody above the rent control ARV, will still pay more. So, I don't know if it was good enough to mention before, but it's not good enough to mention . . . to argue now. Again, I'm assuming that's where my learned, my friend next to me gets the term grandstanding from, because it sounds like grandstanding.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I do believe the Honourable Minister may be a little confused, because my understanding is this Bill impacts the base rate, and that base rate applies to all land taxpayers. So, in fact, even at the higher bands, the discount in this Bill would be received, is my understanding. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for that non-point of order, because I did say that it affects everybody when I was speaking.

The Speaker: Well, he was just clarifying. But go ahead.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, but this, once again, is tax relief that people will greatly appreciate. And especially, I know when I go out and canvass, Mr. Speaker, because I have a lot of . . . in my little constituency, in [constituency] 13 we have a lot of landowners, and we have persons who rent, and we have a lot of units that are under that threshold ARV. So, they will greatly accept that they're going to pay \$300 less per [year].

This puts more money in our renters' pockets to go out and spend in the economy, because they're not paying that. Some people do charge the tenants the land tax. The persons who do not charge, the persons who are living in their own home, that's \$300 more that they have. And I do believe that when we look at this from its entirety, I mean, we went from a previous debate arguing that, you know, \$6, and we said it all adds up. Now we're up to, according to this, we're now up to \$306, \$372 per year. And as we continue to have these

discussions, we will find that even more tax relief is coming to our constituents, Mr. Speaker.

But I thank you for allowing me that time, Mr. Speaker. I look forward to . . . I wholeheartedly support this, and I'm glad that we did bring this. And thank you, Junior Minister, for bringing it forward. And I hope we don't have any more discussion on this, Mr. Speaker, so we can just move on.

The Speaker: Everybody's entitled to add their comments to it.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Everyone's entitled. Yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

My colleague already stated that we support this, but I just wanted to bring something forward from my time in canvassing that I've noticed a lot of seniors over the age of 65 who qualify for an exemption underneath the current legislation are not truly aware, and I've walked through this process with a lot of them. And I just wanted to bring that up because since this relief is coming in, it's going to mean a lot to seniors who fall under that \$45,000 ARV.

And I just wanted to know whether or not—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I just wanted to inquire and bring this forward to the Government as to whether or not they've considered making this exemption automatic for our seniors who qualify for it. Because what I've heard from constituents on the doorstep with mobility issues or all manner of things that prevents them from potentially getting this in or having to call in a younger member, I think that it would make a huge difference if we're talking about relief. I've met seniors who are 75 years old and older who haven't been getting their exemption at this time. And we have to fill it out for them and sort that out.

So, I just thought it would be a great suggestion to look into a way to make sure that that's automatic for seniors who qualify. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

[Would] anyone else like to make a contribution? Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, this particular Bill—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: This particular Bill I am well aware of. The biggest challenge that we have when it comes to a person automatically at 40, 60, 65 getting an exemption is because there are individuals that own

10 houses in their name. So, it's the main residence. So primary residence, absolutely right. So, can you imagine what that would be? And I'm sure that Mr. DeCouto would be on his feet talking about that if he gave everybody who owns like 10 houses or 20 houses. So that's where you've got to own it. And if there are individuals, we would thank you for that. But there are people who actually do it.

Mr. Speaker, I can say without a shadow of a doubt that during the time of the OBA Government from 2012 to 2017, they had two major increases in land tax and affected every single one during that time. Every single one. Where the Progressive Labour Party has been more progressive in ensuring that those individuals, like some of you guys in this room, who have ARVs over \$120,000, be charged a significant amount more. Trust me, I felt the pain myself. And so, the increase went from 14 per cent over \$120,000 ARV to 25 per cent. Trust me. It was huge. Absolutely right. So, it was huge.

So, the Government has done progressive things over the years to ensure that individuals who have these higher ARVs pay more. So that benefited Bermudans overall. And I said for \$120,000, and then of course, what my honourable colleague said, are bands.

And so right now the base will be \$300 . . . sorry, \$150 per year. So, it would be \$75 per every six months. There will be a bill to these individuals. And you can work out that \$150 divided by 12, how much a person is paying. So, we've helped out a significant amount of people who fall within that bracket. And I mean significant.

Also, not only the owner, but mainly a lot of landlords pass on the land tax to the individuals who rent their property. So, this is a great move by the Government. And the reason why we are able to do these types of things, Mr. Speaker, is because as the economy improves and the Government gets more revenue, we are able to ease up the burden for individuals who pay tax. And that's the purpose. Once again, we are listening and making things happen.

I'll tell you what we did do, Mr. Speaker. In 2021, commercial properties were being charged 7.0 per cent by the One Bermuda Alliance. Their commercial friends had properties 7.0 per cent. This Government increased it to 9.5 per cent. So of course, at the end of the day, we were ensuring that those individuals who have property . . . and I am going to tell you right now, I met with them. I was very much involved in those days in meeting with individuals. And we were able to come to the agreement of 9.5 per cent.

So once again, Mr. Speaker, this Government has been progressive. We recognise the burden that falls on our people. So, we started with the \$6, as the Honourable Member complained about \$6. But as you can see that we've continuously . . . and I've still got one more to go, and there are more to come, that we

continue to give tax breaks to the people of Bermuda. I'm sure that they appreciate it.

So, Mr. Speaker, with those few further remarks, I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 3:21 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Chairman: Members, it has been moved that the Bill entitled [Land Tax Amendment Act 2025](#) be committed.

Are there any objections to that? So approved. I call on the Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, if everyone agrees, I will move all clauses.

The Chairman: It has been moved that all clauses be dealt with at the same time.

Are there any objections to that? There are none.

Continue, [Junior] Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman. The primary purpose . . . hold on.

This Bill seeks to amend the base rate for residence units under the Land Tax Act 1967.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 2 of the Land Tax Act 1967 by decreasing the base rate of land tax payable in respect of rental units within all annual rental value bands. It also amends a reference to the Schedule to the Land Tax Act 1967 to the correct column containing the rates for each of the annual rental value bands.

Clause 3 provides that the Bill come into operation on January 2025 [sic].

The Chairman: Six.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Six . . . sorry.

The Chairman: Yes. Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to the clauses?

There are no other Members who wish to speak to the clauses?

Yes, there's one other Member who wishes to speak to the clauses and that's the Member from constituency 18, the Premier. You have the floor.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I do note on these particular clauses, and I certainly wanted to provide for full clarity to the Honourable House, as I know the Junior Minister stated about the base rates. Certainly, these rates were increased in 2018 or 2019. They were one of the changes where we did an across-the-board change and this is around bringing further relief. It is a simple Bill. It is a nice Bill, but it will cut everyone's land tax bill in this country.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1, 2 and 3?

There being none, Junior Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be . . . clauses, sorry, be moved.

The Chairman: He has moved that clauses 1, 2 and 3 be approved.

Any objections to that?

There are none. So approved.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 3 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: He's moved that the preamble be approved.

Any objections to that? So approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: He has moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Any objections?

There are none. So approved.

[Motion carried: The Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 3:24 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 being reported to the House as printed?

There are none. The Bill has been reported as printed.

The Speaker: Premier—Junior—

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

The Speaker: We're doing a third reading?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes—

The Speaker: Oh, you're doing another Bill?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: No, one more Bill, Mr. Speaker. This is Payroll Tax.

The Speaker: Okay, so for the listening audience, we're doing the second reading of the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025, and the Junior Minister will lead us in that.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 29(1)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, again, I move that Standing Order 29(1) be suspended to enable the House to proceed with the second reading of the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025.

The Speaker: Are there any objections?
Continue, Junior Minister.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 29(1) suspended.]

BILL

SECOND READING

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, with the Government's recommendation, I move that the Bill entitled the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read the second time.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to this Honourable House the Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025. This Bill will make amendments to both the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995 and the Payroll Tax Rates Act 1995.

Mr. Speaker, and Honourable Members, the effect of this amendment is to exempt the employee portion of the payroll tax on payments made to employees on account of redundancy or otherwise in connection with the permanent termination of employment.

Mr. Speaker, this Bill represents our commitment to supporting employees during the uncertainty that comes with job loss. By providing payroll tax relief on redundancy and like payments, it ensures that more money stays in the hands of those affected. This Government, once again, is committed to providing a relief and assistance to the people who need it most.

Mr. Speaker, the first amendment will establish a special provision in the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995 for remuneration paid to an employee in connection with the permanent termination of employment on account of redundancy or otherwise. Under the current legislation, such payments will be subject to payroll tax on both the employer and employee portions for up to three years following termination. This amendment will now exempt those payments from the employee standard rate bands thereby providing meaningful relief to the employee during a crucial period of transition . . . critical period of transition, I should say.

Mr. Speaker, the second amendment pertains to the Payroll Tax Rates [Act] 1995, which currently outlines tax based on employee rate bands. This amendment introduced a significant change by prescribing a zero per cent rate on the employee portion of payroll tax for remuneration paid in connection with the permanent termination of employment.

Mr. Speaker, in conclusion, I wish to reaffirm that this Government remains steadfast in its commitment to listening to the people. We continue to act with fiscal responsibility and sound governance while delivering meaningful relief where it is most needed.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Would any other . . . Shadow Minister.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'm almost afraid to stand up and voice my opinion that some people in the Government seem to think we're not allowed to express opinions up here.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: We definitely support this Bill.

An Hon. Member: Yes, *but* . . .

Some Hon. Members: But.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Let him speak. Let him speak.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Speaker, we definitely support this Bill *and*—

Several Hon. Members: Ooh!

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —*and* we would like to congratulate the Government on bringing such a well-targeted piece of legislation.

Several Hon. Members: Ooh!

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: You like that?

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: *And* while they are looking at payroll tax legislation, Mr. Speaker, I would make a gentle suggestion. Perhaps they could look at how things like health insurance impact people's . . . rises in health insurance are impacting people's payroll tax amounts paid or the setting of the payroll tax bands in relation to inflation and how salaries in some industries are hopefully connected with that.

But, of course, we support this well-targeted piece of legislation. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: All right!

The Speaker: Does any other Member—

An Hon. Member: Lightning and thunder outside.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: MP Ming—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Come on, Ming!

Mrs. Renee Ming: Yes, good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and listening audience. I am . . . I actually am really glad to hear that the Opposition have supported this piece of legislation. Each and every one of us who sits in this space probably knows someone who has lost their job through redundancy.

And besides the financial impact that it has had, it's also what it does to our mental psyche to know that there is no further pay cheque coming at this time.

So, this Bill is, I'm going to say timely, but maybe overdue as well. But it's okay because we are now doing it and I think that those persons who have felt this will be pleased because there is nothing worse than if you are kicking a horse when it is already down and they can know that there's some savings that's coming to them during the time of redundancy.

So, I just want to say thank you to the Minister for bringing it. I know he's probably tired of hearing my mouth on it. I'll find something else to lend my voice to soon. But I think that in terms of our people and the impact that redundancy can have, like I said, not just financial but also on our psyche, this is good work, and I am sure that it will be appreciated.

And I just, like I said, thank the people on my side as well as the Opposition because most of you have heard from me on this and I appreciate the support, and I appreciate the Government for bringing it at this time.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Any other? The Minister for Cabinet.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I will not be long. I just wanted to lend my support.

Thank you. And I know this is something that MP Ming has advocated for and I'm so happy to see it finally come to fruition.

It is an especially poignant moment for me is because today at lunch I ran into someone, and she gleefully said she had found a job and she started this week. The irony of this is I do not know who this person was when I ran into her a month . . . or about six weeks ago. I do know she stays in your constituency, Mr. Speaker. I just don't know who . . . and she said, *Hey, I just got made redundant. I heard that there is supposed to be some sort of relief for having to pay payroll tax and can you look into it?*

And that's when I realised we had not . . . I know it had been discussed, but we had not passed it yet. And so, I saw first hand, MP Ming, someone who said, you know, *I'm being made redundant. And when I got my redundancy check, \$8,000 was taken out for payroll tax and it's just completely unfair.*

And I just happened to run into this young lady today while we were buying lunch and I told her, *hey, that, you know, that thing we talked about is getting passed today.* And she was just absolutely ecstatic for persons to come after her. So, with that . . . that very real example of making a difference, it feels so much better when you actually know that someone was looking out for that and they noticed there.

Mr Speaker, I just want to say thank you for bringing this. Thank you, Junior Minister for shepherding this through. Thank you, MP Ming for your advocacy and thank you Opposition for your 1,000 per cent support along with the "ands."

The Speaker: Any other . . . Minister Hayward, Minister of Economy and Labour.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, thank you. I support this Bill wholeheartedly. This is part of a government framework to increase both labour and social protections.

When we looked at what is required to ensure that we provide the proper social safety nets for our residents, we provide the necessary labour protections. This is one change that is in alignment with that philosophy that we want to increase the level of social protections available to the residents of Bermuda. This change goes in alignment with the change that was made recently to increase the maximum redundancy or severance payout according to law. And so now the amount of money one can receive in terms of the benefit that they are due will increase for some who have been long-serving employees and the amount that they retain as pertains to the take home pay would increase.

This has to be viewed by all in a very positive light. The situation surrounding redundancy is very precarious. We have tried to strengthen our law as it pertains to redundancy in terms of putting consultation periods in place so that we can better equip persons for the path to redundancy. We want to ensure that all options are exhausted as best as we possibly can. I think the legislation is written in a stronger manner than is actually practiced.

And so, these consultation periods which is supposed to lead to positive outcomes are not necessarily always meaningful consultations. They sometimes are used as a means to justify an end, which is redundancy. Notwithstanding, there could be other options worked out between the employer and the employee so that that person does not find themselves in a period of redundancy.

This has also got to be viewed in the light of what we have done in terms of the sudden hardship benefit that we have extended for financial assistance for a three-month period. If somebody's income or persons find themselves in a precarious situation, if the home breadwinner has lost their job, how do we ensure that they receive some level of support during this period of transition? And the period of transition can be rough for some persons, and it can be a period where you never fully rebound because you can get in debt in that particular period.

And missing your rent for a few months can be very detrimental to a number . . . you know, the impact can be felt in a number of years of your life moving forward. Not just the financial hardship it brings, but the social and emotional hardship and stress that it brings when people do find themselves in precarious situations.

So, I don't want this Bill just to be viewed from a tax standpoint. This Bill is part of a holistic set . . . a suite of policy measures to better support our residents and the people of Bermuda. Being the Minister responsible for Economy and Labour and having control over the Department of Labour, I have certainly not been immune to the horror stories. Being a former president of a union where you're sitting at a table and somebody's fate is at your hands and hearing an employer telling an employee that this is their last day of work and that employer leaves the room and the employee looks to you as the union rep and says, *What next?* And you don't have an answer for him. You provide a little bit of confident words, and you give them a process in terms of what they can engage, how they can engage in moving forward. But the real question is never answered as it pertains to what next and how that person moves on.

Now those persons who were in my position have a better story to tell in terms of the level of protection that they can provide. So, you can say, *Okay we can see if you qualify for the financial assistance short-term benefit. We know that based off of your length of service you may get a higher payout now.*

We also know that based off of the changes that were made today that there should not be any deductions as it pertains to tax to that particular payout. And so, the story is becoming better as you can explain to employees *what now*. There still needs to be a better method of how persons are treated during redundancy and we are looking at that as well.

I have been told a person comes to work, gets called into a room, gets told that they have been made redundant and do not even have the courtesy . . . don't even [get] the courtesy to go back to the desk and collect the stuff. They have somebody else . . . security collecting their stuff. Their swipe cards are gone. They do not [receive] the courtesy to even log out of their computer. And so, the way in which persons are treated, I continuously, when I meet with employers, explain that we must have a human-centred approach to our processes.

If you plan on making somebody redundancy, can you also provide wraparound services? Can you provide the necessary employment engagement services that may be required? You do not know if that person may have some social-emotional impact. Can you even give them, ensure that they have Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) assistance? It is very hard for somebody to hear who's going through a medical emergency that their health insurance, their major medical, will be cut off immediately as well. How do we transition to ensuring that this person at least have health insurance for a period of time?

All of these things are things that we are looking into. And so, I do not want persons view this in isolation. I think everyone who has advocated for progress in this particular space, because it does impact the lives, and not just segments of Bermudians. Bermudians at any stratum and tier within our society. So, I thank the Honourable Junior Minister for bringing this Bill, and I wholeheartedly support it.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

There are none. Premier?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to make sure that no one else wanted to speak before I got up, so that the Junior Minister can close out.

Mr. Speaker, the Bill before us today is what responsive and responsible government looks like. Because, Mr. Speaker, this is not something that was inside of the Government's 2017 or 2020 Election Manifesto, but it is something that was raised from a constituent to one of our political colleagues, the Honourable Member for constituency 1, who spoke in support of this earlier. And it is something of which we have added into our programme of work, something that was in our election manifesto, and something that we are delivering today.

It is important because in the exact same way that others have told the stories, Mr. Speaker, I too have a story, but mine is a little bit more recent. Mine was just from a week ago, out on the parade route at Bermuda Day, where someone had said to me, *Why are you charging me payroll tax on my redundancy pay?*

And I was able to say, unfortunately, it will not help you if you've already been made redundant. But when we go to the House next week, we are going to pass that change so that redundancy pay is not subject to payroll tax going forward. Again, what responsible and what responsive government looks like.

We are, Mr. Speaker, a labour party. We are a labour government. You've heard from the Minister of Economy and Labour, who just took his seat, of the various measures of which we are taking inside of this area. And this is just one more step that this Government is doing to ensure that Bermuda is made more fair. And so, I welcome the support of the party opposite. The party opposite had said that they support this. And I think it was an "and" and I don't remember specifically what the "and" was. Maybe it was around going further, or more targeted, or more relief, or other ways. But I think it provides an opportunity for those persons listening to reflect on the fairness that this Government has brought to the payroll tax system.

Because though, Mr. Speaker, many of us may not recognise and understand, we have many constituents . . . those persons who may be labourers on construction sites, who may be cashiers at our various grocery stores, who are making \$23 an hour. And I say \$23 an hour, Mr. Speaker, because it's important. Because I want to highlight, as we are talking about the general principles of this Bill, and we are talking about the Payroll Tax Act, what this Government has done insofar as making sure that we are targeted and help those persons who need the help most.

So, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker. If you are making \$23 an hour, in 2018, we reduced your annual tax bill by \$360. In 2020, we reduced that tax bill by a further \$960. In 2022, again, making \$23 an hour, we reduced your tax bill by another \$240. And in 2023, we reduced your tax bill by a further \$480. That's someone making \$23 an hour. And I'm sure, Mr. Speaker, many of us know people who are making \$23 an hour—whether you're a student, whether you're someone in . . . whether you are in hospitality, whether you are somewhere else. And of course, we understand about payroll taxes on tips. I guess the gentlemen overseas may have taken that from the Progressive Labour Party Government. Yet I digress, Mr. Speaker.

So, the total annual reduction in taxes paid by someone making \$23 an hour, Mr. Speaker, is \$2,040 a year. That is real and meaningful relief. And that person, of course, they have a cell phone, will pay \$72 less a year as well. So we're adding on to that as well.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: And if that person has a land tax bill where they're paying, they're going to be paying, and that's going to be added on that as well, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, and if that person has a BELCO bill, that BELCO bill is going to be cut because we're adding on to that as well, Mr. Speaker. Relief across the board.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the cumulative savings for that individual making \$23 an hour since this party was returned to Government is \$9,480.

An Hon. Member: Wow.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, \$9,480.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No point of order on that is there?

Hon. E. David Burt: That, Mr. Speaker, is what fair, responsive, targeted towards those who need it most government looks like. That is the record of this Progressive Labour Party Government, Mr. Speaker. For those persons who need the relief, we make sure that we deliver that relief. And how was it paid for, Mr. Speaker? It was paid for by increasing taxes on those making over \$200,000 a year.

And it is important to note, Mr. Speaker, because I will continue to repeat it as long as I have a place in this Honourable House, that those changes to reduce taxes on 86 per cent of workers in this country and increase it on the high earners was opposed by the One Bermuda Alliance.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes. Yes, it was.

Hon. E. David Burt: So that \$9,480 of cumulative savings for that cashier at MarketPlace, that labourer on the job site, that person who's working in our hospitality industry otherwise was opposed by the party opposite but supported and delivered by this Progressive Labour Party Government.

Our labour roots run deep, and we will continue to deliver the relief across the board while also making sure that we deliver the targeted relief, because you can walk and chew gum at the same time.

And that, Mr. Speaker, is the record of this Government. Thank you.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Any other Member? Junior Minister?

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.
With all Members supporting this Bill, I move that the Bill be moved to Committee.

The Speaker: Okay. Deputy.

House in Committee at 3:48 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Chairman: Members, it has been moved that the Bill entitled the [Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025](#) be committed.

Any objections? There are none.
Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that all clauses be moved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that all clauses be approved.

Are there any objections?
There are none. Approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, this Bill seeks to amend the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995 and the Payroll Tax Rates Act 1995, the "Rates Act," to reduce to zero an employee's liability to pay payroll tax on remuneration given in connection with the permanent termination of employment.

Clause 1 provides the title of the Bill.

Clause 2 inserts new Section 9E into the Payroll Tax [Act] 1995. This provides that an employee is not liable to pay payroll tax at the employee's standard rate, bans in relation to any remuneration falling within Section 7(1)(c) of the Act (payments made or things or value given in connection with the permanent termination of employment on account of redundancy or otherwise), but instead at the rate prescribed by the Rates Act. The employer's liability to payroll tax on such payment is not changed.

Clause 3 inserts new section 4D into the Rates Act which prescribes zero per cent as the rate of payroll tax chargeable to an employee for such remuneration.

Clause 4 provides for commencement on 1 July 2025 and confirms that the rate change will apply in relation to remuneration given to an employee or former employee on or after that date in connection with the permanent termination of employment, regardless of the date of termination.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak in consideration of the clauses?

There being none, Junior Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that all clauses be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that all clauses be approved.

Any objections? There are none.

All clauses are approved. Junior Minister.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 4 passed.]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Any objections? There are none.

Approved.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Madam Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections? There are none.

So approved.

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 3:51 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 being reported to the House as printed?

There are no objections. The Bill has been reported as printed.

The Speaker: Now, we will do our third readings. Junior Minister.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Okay. Any objections?

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title [only] and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Do your next item.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

LAND TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Land Tax Amendment Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections? None.
Continue.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT ACT 2025

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I move that the Bill be now read a third time by its title only and passed.

The Speaker: The Bill has been read a third time by its title only and is now passed. Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Payroll Tax Amendment Act 2025 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Honourable House do now adjourn until 13 June 2025, and I have been informed that there will be Members speaking to the motion to adjourn, Mr. Speaker.

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

Minister Hayward.

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

The Speaker: Good afternoon.

GOVERNMENT'S STEADFAST COMMITMENT IN DEVELOPMENT OF DOMESTIC INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS COMMUNITY

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, since I took on the role as the Minister of Economy and Labour, part of my remit is to ensure that we have robust and sustainable economic growth and development.

When I took on this portfolio, the first step that I wanted to make was to ensure that we have a robust strategy. So, we went out to develop economic development strategies that would guide the vast majority of our strategic focus and priorities as it pertains to economic growth and development in this country.

Part of that is ensuring that we have more inward investment and we expand our business sector in Bermuda. We encourage more companies to domicile in Bermuda, and we assist those companies that are currently here to expand their business activities in Bermuda. Oftentimes I have the pleasure to meet with CEOs of local companies both in the international business community and in the small and medium-sized businesses which fall in part of the other sectors in our community. And I am able to directly get a first-hand understanding of the trajectory of where those

businesses are going, as well as explain to them some of the policy measures that we are putting in place.

Oftentimes when I'm on the road internationally and I'm meeting with persons who are determining where to domicile, I have to explain Bermuda's value proposition because it's not readily understood by all worldwide what Bermuda has to offer. They have heard of Bermuda in some way or another but from a business standpoint and a business ecosystem standpoint, there are certainly knowledge gaps. From an economic standpoint, they don't fully understand what's the drivers of our economy and the type of sophisticated business environment that we have. I think collectively we can all take credit for the current business environment that we have. That business environment allows us to champion Bermuda in a way which is deemed to be attractive to international business.

When we look at the economy, there is certainly a positive story that I'm able to tell those particular companies. I am able to tell a story that since the pandemic we have had strong and robust economic growth. I am able to explain that in 2021, our economy in real terms grew by 5.8 per cent. That's followed by a whopping 8.0 per cent in 2022, followed by strong growth in 2023 of 4.9 per cent. The real growth in 2022 was 6.5 per cent and we are projecting to have at least 6.5 per cent growth in 2024.

When that is viewed comparatively worldwide, we are exceeding growth of the majority of advanced economies in the world. That is viewed positive by potential investors. I then go into and break down the significance of our international business sector, how that represents roughly around 29 per cent of all economic activity in Bermuda. But then I am able to go into something that many would not appreciate. And that is we had a business sector who had employment of Bermudians [that had] less than 10 per cent in the 1990s to one that is at its highest level now of over 5,047 employees. That over 50 per cent of those employees are Bermudian.

It speaks to how we have invested collectively in the development of our human capital to power a thriving business community. Oftentimes, you hear individuals try to create this segregation between international business and our domestic economy, but there is a direct connection. The direct connection is the Bermudian talent that is actually powering that sector. And the Bermudian talent that continues to filter in that sector.

The opportunities now for young persons in Bermuda are greater than they have ever been before. Our young people now are taking their skill sets, going globally, applying their trade, and coming back to that same community. That is one of the stronger areas of value proposition when we are selling Bermuda as a jurisdiction.

We are able to promote the way in which we invest in human capital and the talent that is actually available on our Island to support companies when

domiciling in Bermuda. We are also able to promote and highlight our regulatory environment. The Minister of Finance laid [on the Table] today the Bermuda Monetary Authorities 2024 Annual Report, which highlights the significant body of work.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Oftentimes, in each and every one of those reports, it's a segment within those reports that outlines legislative changes on an annual basis. Those legislative changes come to this House of Assembly and are approved by this body. We are often asked or told, or this notion is raised, that the Government has nothing to do with the success of our international business community. But you cannot say that, if we create the regulatory framework that is appreciated, that enables business and attracts businesses into our environment. You cannot say that when we are investing in the human capital that that is actually empowering that particular sector. We have a large role to play in the success of that sector, and we have a large role to play in the success of Bermuda as a whole. You cannot detach the two.

We are experiencing some of the lowest unemployment rates that we have ever had, Mr. Speaker. There are a number of factors for that, but the reality is that the persons who have remained on Island are generally working.

We now have a greater imbalance as it pertains to the supply and demand of labour than we have had in previous years. And with the imminent opening of Fairmount Southampton in 2026 that problem is going to get worse. So, the Department of Workforce Development will be working in overdrive on training programmes, apprenticeship programmes, to ensure that we prepare persons for the opportunities that exist in our economy.

We will continue to work with our schools to prepare persons for the future and current world of work in Bermuda. I think the work that we have done thus far needs to be highlighted because we have done a fundamental job in terms of creating bridges to employment. More work needs to be done, but we have worked extremely hard in that particular area.

In the coming weeks I will be issuing the latest labour force survey. Many will be stunned by the result of that survey as they see the ongoing trend as it pertains to the number of Bermudians and unemployment decreasing. You heard the Minister responsible for Youth, Social Development and Seniors, when she tabled the annual report for financial assistance, regarding [how] the number of able-bodied persons on financial assistance decreased dramatically. All of that is trending in the right direction. When I looked at employment income by industry, in every industrial category employment income was up. It signals for us two things: It signifies an expansion of employment, and it also signifies wages progressing.

When we paint the picture of Bermuda, we need to paint an accurate picture. We need to tell the truth as it pertains to where we sit, where we lie, and where we currently are. Having an honest conversation, though, to get from where we are and where we desire to be is, I believe, critical, because it allows us to make the policy adjustments to close those gaps. Let's not just paint a picture of doom and gloom, and Bermuda somehow falling into the cracks, because that is not our reality.

And the success of our young people is something that actually needs to be celebrated. We have young people now in Bermuda who make more than their parents ever made. We have a record number of young persons in international business but also servicing other areas of our community as well.

The number of young persons who go away and get a secondary education is also increasing in Bermuda. The access to scholarship funding, the access to internships when they return home, all of that is increasing. That is a positive outlook for young persons who are looking to progress careers in Bermuda. This is part of a positive success story. We are creating opportunities for our young people, but Bermuda still remains a desirable place for workers throughout the world.

And as the Minister responsible for Immigration, I continue to ensure that I strike that balance, that I preserve and protect the opportunities for Bermudians as best I possibly can, while identifying gaps, ensuring that companies get the labour that they require. I think that approach is measured. I think that approach is reasonable. And I think that approach is actually appreciated by the community as a whole.

We will embark on a census in 2026 that will give us some better information on our population numbers, but also our demographic numbers. But there is always one correlation that remains evident in our census data, that is that individuals who have progressed levels of education have a higher economic outcome. That means, notwithstanding where persons are at their current stage, that we need to ensure that all boats are rising.

So, in my last meeting with my team in the Ministry of Economy and Labour, the message was that we have done well to have economic growth. But our main focus now is inclusive economic growth, ensuring that everybody else, or the entire country, feels the success of our economic prosperity. This is why we are going back to the drawing board as it pertains to how we better support small businesses and entrepreneurs by putting a national entrepreneurship strategy in place. This is why we are revisiting cooperative legislation. As an additional measure of economic diversification, having the legislative framework in place for when that option comes to fruition, persons can exercise their right to form or be part of a cooperative or invest in a cooperative.

We are going to make it easier for our small business owners to register their businesses. We are trying to streamline the government as best we possibly can. We will be embarking on a full Digital Economy Strategy. That Digital Economy Strategy will have four major pillars, Mr. Speaker. We will focus on ensuring that we provide enhanced digitized, automated government services. We will ensure that there is better digital access for private sector establishments, that there is better digital interaction between those establishments and our community.

I want to ensure that we increase our e-Commerce footprint. We want to ensure that we invest in human capital so that our people are moving forward with the technology that we are implementing. And we need to ensure that we have the infrastructure, whether that be a legal and regulatory environment, or putting physical infrastructure in place that supports innovation within our society.

Mr. Speaker, next week I will be off to the Global Entrepreneurship Congress. I will be engaging in a ministerial where I will understand how other countries are putting policy measures in place to support small and medium-size businesses. I will engage in a number of bilateral [meetings] with other countries as well. You know that we have set up memoranda of understanding for economic cooperation. We have set up one with Ghana. We are seeking to execute one with Nigeria as well. We have set up the Economic Cooperation Committees. And that is so that we can leverage the skills, the capacity that they have and the capacity that we have to ensure that their economy and our economy can benefit off of the knowledge.

Often, when I speak to the business community they are very much pleased with our financial and professional services that they can obtain, the level of legal representation that they can receive on Island, the level of legal precedent that exists within our community. They are also pleased with the level of accounting services they can find. They are pleased with the level of accommodation that they can get as it pertains to office space as well.

We do not want the city just as a place where people can work. We also want to transition the city into a place where people live, work and play. And we will be taking active steps to progress in that particular direction.

What I have embarked on is setting out a holistic plan as to how we move this economy forward. Anybody who says that we do not have a plan is either being naïve, manipulative or has not sought to understand the clarity of what we are actually doing. You just do not get continued economic growth by resting on your laurels and sitting on your hands and doing nothing. It takes active intervention into the markets to ensure that the engine continues to run.

No, we cannot take credit for everything. But we have to give credit where credit is due. We do have a long list of professionals who work on an ongoing

basis. We now have industry on board as ambassadors for Bermuda who actually share Bermuda's value proposition as well.

I am impressed by the increase of small businesses. If you have listened to what I articulated regarding the BEDC [Bermuda Economic Development Corporation] during the Budget Debate you would understand that over 600 businesses engage with the BEDC. We are increasing the capacity in terms of incubators and accelerators. We are doing what is required to ensure that we continue to create opportunities that benefit the people of Bermuda. The Government is laser-focused in ensuring that we have sustainable economic growth and development. And the Ministry of Economy and Labour sits at the forefront of that.

I view the Ministry of Economy and Labour as one that is transformative, one that is focused on the future, one that is focused on change and one that is driving how we actually get there, and how we bring our people along on that particular journey. I think from the purest standpoint, if we take a snapshot of where we are from an economic standpoint, we should be pleased. That's not to say that we should not recognise that more progress needs to be made in a number of areas. We are committed to making that progress.

But, Mr. Speaker, this Government has had a steadfast commitment in the development of our domestic international business community, and in our steadfast commitment as it pertains to our investment in people. The budget process highlighted the millions of dollars that we are putting in this particular space and we will continue to do so because that is in the best interest of the residents of Bermuda.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister Hayward.

MP King, would you like your 20 minutes?

Mr. Robert King: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

NEED FOR HOLISTIC APPROACH TO CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH IN BERMUDA

Mr. Robert King: It is not all doom and gloom.

I appreciate the comments and the statements made by Minister Hayward as it relates to improving the circumstances of young Bermudians with apprenticeship programmes, providing a means for them to achieve financial independence in agency and to become contributing members of the society, many of whom have come from difficult circumstances. And we know that education is the great equaliser.

Another thing that Minister Hayward said that struck a note with me is that it is important that the truth of where we are and where we need to go . . . we need to be transparent and accountable, recognising what

the problems are, what the issues are and providing a clear path forward so that we can address the needs of the community in a meaningful way.

Minister Hayward also spoke about international business and what a profound impact it has had on this country and how through international business we are able to create opportunities. And we appreciate the efforts and their contributions.

It is also important, Minister Hayward said, that we support local businesses and the local community. And the statement was also referring to the fact that unemployment is going down, this is the trend, and when the next labour force survey comes out this will be shown. However, there is another truth to this as well. Another thing that needs to be considered. Which is the fact that financial assistance, the number of persons who are on financial assistance, is currently over 2,000. And we also have approximately 1,000 people who are homeless or who are sleeping rough in unstable—

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

What I referred to was the decline in able-bodied persons on financial assistance. I never mentioned the total population of financial assistance in my remarks.

The Speaker: Thank you.

The Minister has clarified his comments for you.

Mr. Robert King: I am not sure why there was a point of order on that because what I was speaking to was the context of unemployment in relation to the number of persons who were receiving financial assistance. Not—

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. The majority of persons on financial assistance, Mr. Speaker, are seniors, people who are not employed.

The Speaker: Have both helped? Were the comments . . . have the comments been helpful?

Mr. Robert King: The point is, Mr. Speaker, that persons who are receiving financial assistance are receiving financial assistance due to the fact of their economic circumstances. Were it not for the fact that they require public assistance to pay their bills they would not be on there regardless of age. That is the point. So, I will move on.

The homeless population is approximately 1,000. When we are looking at unemployment, yes, the trend is down. However, for the specific subset of 16 to 24 there is an over representation of young, Black Bermudian males, in particular. When you are looking at arrest rates from the police crime statistics recent and past there is an over representation of that particular age group as well, which needs to be addressed. How do we address that? We address that with apprenticeship programmes, educational programmes, attending to adverse childhood experiences. As the Minister stated, we need a holistic approach, absolutely.

The Minister will also remember that back in 2014 we sat down and had a conversation about a proposal that I had, Success through Academic and Vocational Education. What it sought to do was provide a clear path for at-risk persons to receive necessary skills and training and that jobs would be . . . there would be a clearing house for employment through a central hub so that persons would not be applying for jobs which existed, but all work permit category, persons would apply for that and be trained so that they could take their rightful place in the community.

The other thing that was mentioned in the proposal too was working with the Department of Corrections to ensure that incarcerated persons had access to a full-curriculum apprenticeship and otherwise with regularly staffed workshops so that persons who are incarcerated would be able to support themselves when they re-enter the community. As the system currently operates, the only requirement for persons to receive parole is that they have employment for three months, as opposed to persons who have served a long period of incarceration or to have the opportunity to engage in regular education and vocational programmes. At present, that does not exist. Efforts are being made to ensure that that does.

And we also understand the profound impact that will be had if persons can leave the correctional system as qualified masons, mechanics, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, et cetera, they will be able to support themselves and their families.

Many statements have been made about the intention, the vision and mission to have an empowered workforce. The One Bermuda Alliance, as Opposition, wholeheartedly supports the mission and vision. The concern that we raise is that there is no clear strategic plan with performance measures that will ensure the accountability so that these objectives can be achieved. We already know through the budget process and debate—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

We have an Economic Recovery Plan that has come here. We have had an Economic Development Strategy that has come here. The Minister has laid out those points, expanded on those points, has gone further into his comments today, has stated those, those matters were reported. He stated how they were reported.

The Honourable Member is misleading the House when he says there are no performance metrics. He has stated different things, youth unemployment down, from the Youth Employment Strategy. It is not correct for him to say there are no metrics. He can say they want more, but it is not correct for him to say there are none.

The Speaker: You get his point?

Mr. Robert King: Mr. Speaker, when I was talking about youth unemployment, I was speaking to the Labour Force Survey which spoke specifically to that age group, 16 to 24. Those statistics come directly out of that document. I am not speaking outside of the 16 to 24.

The statistics regarding crime came out of the Crime Statistics provided by the Bermuda Police Service. So, the point is, we have a convergence of that age group and an over representation in the criminal justice system and unemployment and that is where the focus needs to be.

We also know that that age group is over represented in terms of murders, violent offences, et cetera, and a comprehensive strategy with a holistic approach—as the Minister has suggested, and rightly so—needs to be resourced appropriately so that we can make meaningful changes and bring the trend down for the number of murders and violent deaths in this community.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: We debated a Violence Reduction Strategy in this House. The Minister has shared the implementation plan for that strategy. During the Budget Debate it was talked about, the resources, the increased resources that have been given for the execution of that strategy, the intervention into challenges

with families that was done by the Honourable Minister responsible for Youth, Social Development and Seniors. The Minister of National Security spoke during the Budget Debate about the increased funding that is going towards that. The Junior Minister of Justice, who sits in this House, spoke about the increased funding going towards corrections and rehabilitation and implementation of programmes. It is not correct for the Honourable Member to say that we need to put more funds there. We just passed the budget that increased the investment in all of the things that he is mentioning.

The Speaker: Thank you.

You got the point of what was said?

Mr. Robert King: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is taking out of context what I said.

Yes, Mr. Premier, I was not talking about funding at all. What I was talking about was a strategic plan with specific measurables to ensure that what we are trying to achieve, the goals and objectives clearly stated, are achieved. We have already during the Budget Debate—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: We tabled and debated in this House a Violence Reduction Strategy that contained specific metrics. The Minister has also offered to make sure for implementation plans, et cetera. There are specific metrics which have been laid out. He keeps on saying . . . first it was resources, that he said I took it out of context. We spoke about resources. Now he's talking about specific metrics and a strategic plan. We have one. We tabled it. We debated it in this House.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I just rise on a point of clarification.

The Speaker: Yes.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I just want to clarify.

The Member raised that he met with me in 2014 to present a report as it pertains to how we can integrate persons within our workplace. I just want to make it abundantly clear that I was not a Member of the Government in 2014. The One Bermuda Alliance was actually the Government at the time. So, I had no authority or power to implement any suggestion or recommendation which was made by that Honourable Member.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you for the clarification.

I am aware of that. I was speaking to the Honourable Member, Minister at the time, in his capacity as—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Robert King: Yes. In the union, in the other place, and in terms of his influence and capacity to make great changes with that population.

So, it was in the context of that, that we had a conversation. He is correct. He was not in the Government at the time. And at the same time, I know Minister Hayward was very passionate about improving the circumstances of the underserved, especially as it relates to employment. So, that has not changed.

What I am speaking to, though, is an actual strategy on how to achieve the vision and mission. I know that we have a gang czar, a gang coordinator, sorry, Pastor Doctor Leroy Bean, [MP], who sits in this House as well. But we have never actually heard statistics and outcomes in terms of what specifically is working, how many people have graduated from the programme, how many lives were saved, recidivism rates reduced specifically as a direct result of being involved in the programme. We have not heard that.

What we also know is that there is an over representation of persons who are under the age of 30 at Westgate Correctional Facility. We also know that there is an over representation of young, Black Bermudian males who are being arrested—three times the rate of persons of other colour. We know the statistics—the Government-produced statistics—tell us that this is so. This tells us that we need to, besides providing funding which is necessary, have a comprehensive and holistic approach, as was stated by the Minister, and we have to have a clear, strategic plan with specific performance measurables based on best practice and data that will ensure that we reduce the number of deaths, antisocial behaviour, and at the same time create opportunities for the youth in this community to live a peaceful and just life.

Those are my submissions. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Deputy Premier.

SENTIMENTS OF THANKS TO CIVIL SERVANTS

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to thank all of the civil servants for their work over the last few weeks, and over the last few months. I do not recall us ever really thanking those who do a lot of the work for us Ministers in this House.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, you have been around long enough, that the budget process starts many months before budget day. And I am not so sure that we give enough highlights to the work that our civil servants do. And you will know, Mr. Speaker, that there are many in the community who give our civil servants a lot of flak. I just thought that, today, at the end of the session, that it would be good for all of us to echo sentiments of thanks to our civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, not only the civil servants who work throughout all of the ministries in the government, but in your place, Mr. Speaker, from where you sit, your team that you have that supports you over this period deserves a lot of thanks. And everyone, from the Sergeant-at-Arms, to the ladies up top, to long-serving members like Mr. Scott who just happens to be sitting in the chair today, Mr. Randolph Scott, that is.

You will know, Mr. Speaker, I have seen during budget times where we come out of this House sometimes and the sun is coming up. And whilst we all go through the process, the civil servants—your team, who have to endure those long hours . . . and, yes, everybody gets paid for what they do. But, the families have to sacrifice not having their family members around.

So, I take my hat off and give thanks to all of the civil servants throughout the government, and those who are in this House.

While I am on my feet, Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the Opposition Member, one of the newest Members in this House, Mr. Dwayne Robinson—

Hon. E. David Burt: Don't thank him too much.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No, I won't thank him too much. I don't want to spoil him.

But I would like to thank him and my fellow colleague, MP Famous, for inviting me to their . . . I think it is a weekly show that they have, last night, to talk about housing issues in the country. And I thank them for that. I think the more that we can lay out some of the initiatives that we will be pressing forward with from our side . . . and as I said last night, when these initiatives start coming to this House, I am looking forward to the Opposition participating in those debates. And I expect that when those things come to this House, we will get words of support without the [word] "but" added to it.

I think that I am excited about it, Mr. Speaker. I spent 12 weeks checking the lay of the land, talking to many of the boards and committees throughout government, especially under my Ministry.

ENCOURAGING YOUNG PEOPLE TO WORK HARD, SAVE AND SACRIFICE FOR HOMEOWNERSHIP

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And whilst I am thanking people, I would also like to thank the people of the country who have an interest in housing in the country,

both affordable and otherwise, for reaching out to me over the last 12 weeks. I have made a lot of notes. My PS is probably getting a little bit tired of getting all sorts of WhatsApps and emails from me at all hours of the night, all hours over the weekend, because as I get ideas that are put to me, I immediately put them in writing. And I would just like to thank all of the people who have suggested, and I know there will be more, their ideas and views about how we tackle affordable housing in the country.

So, I would like to say thank you to everyone for their hard work and for their input.

And the last thing that I wanted to talk about, Mr. Speaker, because as Members Robinson and Famous will tell you, last night we had touched on because (what is the radio hostess' name? LA is it? DJ LA?)

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: DJ LA asked a question, As a young person how am I ever going to get a house in this country? And the only thing that I could tell her at this time, that I thought last night could hit home was my experience. And I will repeat that tonight because I think it is important in case there is anyone out there listening who is wondering how they can get my house, how can I get my piece of the rock.

Mr. Speaker, when I started working and started paying rent and had to go to Hitching Post to buy a loaf of bread and a bottle of mayonnaise for the week, I understood what it was like not to have. I understood what it was like to get my pay cheque and not have enough to pay rent. I knew what it felt like to have to work two and three jobs day and night in order to survive. And when I heard that young lady who was in her early 30s say, *How could she do it?*

My advice to her and my advice to any young person is, especially in this day and age when education is so much more important, first of all try to educate yourself as best you can. But, if not, put your head down, sacrifice and save. It is easy to go out there and work and find a job and when you get that pay cheque go out and try to compete with your friends who have the nice clothes, who have the cars, who have the bikes, who go out to dinner, who take trips. But if you really want to be serious about owning a piece of the rock, you must save and sacrifice.

And that is the experience that I had, and that is how I made it, by buying that first house up Broom Street, next to Amstel Brangman, as I said last night. And that was just a little shack. The windows were plywooded up, no water pipes, had to sleep on the floor because we didn't have furniture. My son who was born at the time, his crib was in the kitchen.

Mr. Speaker, if our people want to own they have to sacrifice and they have to save. And as I told my wife, I said, *Listen, if you want a house, there is no hair, there's no nails, there's no dresses, there's no new*

clothes. If we're going out to dinner, it's peanut sandwiches at Whale Bay Fort to watch the sun go down. That was it. But in order for us to get to that stage that is what we did. And I would tell all of our young people in the country that there is hope, that there is a way for you to do it, especially today. Financing . . . and if we have anything on this side of the House to do with it, we will press the financial institutions of this country to start looking favourably at how we can give our young people opportunities to own a piece of the rock.

Hon. E. David Burt: We have the mortgage guarantee programme.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, we do. And we have the mortgage guarantee programme going on. We have another two as I said in my speech on Monday. We have another two coming on. That is 32 young people who have gotten into their homes, now approaching 70-odd. I think it's 78. So, we are doing what we can.

But I implore our people, if you want to get a piece of the rock, save and sacrifice. Save and sacrifice. That is the way to do it. If you do not have a mother or father, or an aunt or uncle to say, *Look, here you go; here's a little starter home*, you can do it on your own. You have to put your shoulder to the wheel and you have to maybe do some jobs that you didn't want to do.

I washed dishes. I waited on tables. I swept floors. I painted roofs out in that hot sun. And the Honourable Member Craig Cannonier talked about how he used to mow grass. That's how I paid for school. I started going around Somerset knocking on peoples' doors too, *Can I mow your grass?* At the time it was five shillings.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, I did. I mowed that grass for five shillings. Yes. I would get three or four of those in a day and I was smiling. Trust me. I was smiling.

So, I would just encourage our young people to work hard, save and sacrifice. Look at what this Government is doing in terms of assisting and you can do it.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Deputy [Premier].

MP DeCouto, would you like to make a contribution at this time?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead.

SENTIMENTS OF THANKS TO CIVIL SERVANTS

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I think the MP De Silva made a very good point. And I know that my colleagues, I am

sure, would like to join me in expressing our sincere thanks to the public officers who participated in this budget process.

[Desk thumping]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Who prepared the budget.

Mr. Speaker, you probably no doubt consider that I am quite a student of the numbers since I spent a lot of time with the details of the Budget Book and the underlying materials. I have developed a great respect for those. I know the Premier has called the various names of the public officers involved with it, so I will not do that [again] because I will probably leave somebody out. But we certainly appreciate, I know everyone in this Chamber appreciates the time and effort that gets put into that, and the amount of information out there that is available to the public.

As you also know, Mr. Speaker, we are also quite interested in the ways that we can make this process a more fruitful and efficient process for all involved, not least the public officers, and we certainly look forward to engaging with you, the Government and the public service on anything in that direction. And we are also grateful to the Ministers who I would say worked with us to provide an opportunity for a good and frank and fair debate which allowed them to put their messages out, allowed us to ask questions and elicit information on behalf of the people. So, thank you to them as well.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

MP Swan, would you like a contribution at this time?

MPs ABSENT FROM CHAMBER

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

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what Deputy Premier Zane De Silva had to say. I've often said in the House of Assembly I'm just a country boy from White Hill and I know he's a country boy from White Hill too. We both were goalkeepers for Somerset Eagles. And we both come from that community. And the people who showed us . . . we were raised in that community, I salute them, and I salute the people in the community that I live in now who have embraced me.

I might not be that popular with what I am going to start off with. But, Mr. Speaker, in 1973 when Lance- lot Swan was the Minister responsible for Youth and Sport, and Dame Lois Browne-Evans was the Opposition Leader, it was the first time I ever met those two at Youth Parliament. But I will reflect on a debate that touched on Youth Parliament. It touched me because I know the contribution that was made by your family, your late wife. And your son continues that legacy. And I am mindful of that contribution.

I represented Warwick Sec after I had left Berkeley and they saw something in me that I didn't see in myself, notwithstanding all the family members who represented both sides of the House and sat in another place as well. I waited 25 years since first running in 1983 to come to this Honourable House . . . well, come to another place to serve nine years. I waited 25 years in between when I first ran to be able to sit in this House. And I get here early because I appreciate being in this Honourable House, notwithstanding I look forward to the day when young Members who sit in this House can know what it feels like to sit opposite and sit behind the front benches and sit in those rightful places and sit where persons have sat for centuries in the oldest Parliament in the west, outside of Great Britain.

I don't think I will be popular because it bothered me this Budget Debate. And I will tell you what bothered me about this Budget Debate. I come at 8:45, 9:30. If I have to go to work first, sometimes 9:45. And I stay until the bitter end. And it bothers me that I don't see these chairs filled. And that is not a fault of . . . the fault falls with my colleagues. And I am old enough and I have been around long enough that I am going to call him out.

You need to be here!

You didn't get elected not to be here.

People think that being a parliamentarian is all about just, you know, being somewhere else. You are elected to be *here*. You are elected to represent how your constituents feel.

When we talk about the ethos . . . we talked about the ethos. I took that seriously because you get the ethos from the people whose doors you knock on and then you have a responsibility to learn how the workability of that legislation impacts your people.

I listened to the Minister responsible for Labour and Economy. Yes. And a Member opposite made mention of going to him in 2014 in his capacity. He brings that capacity here. The Member that mentioned him brings his working capacity to this House. We all bring something. People always make fun that I bring golf here. Yes, I do. That's my trade. It taught me honesty. It taught me how to judge things. And things are not done by a cookie cutter. You can practice one way and then the wind is blowing a certain way, and the rain is coming down and someone is trying to put you off and you got to stay focused. So, I am encouraging persons who got elected that you should be in this House.

And I often speak about the benchmarks because the benchmarks cover employers. Employers should make a way for persons and ensure that they're here. I heard a young Member say, or someone say on behalf of another Member, that they had to be at work. And I understand that. He has to put food on his table. Those employers out there need to recognise that just like the military service, that is a responsibility that is held over a centrist to less than 1 per cent of the population.

And you do not get elected because you are bright. You get elected because some people trust you to carry their vote forward. Those persons might be businesspeople in greater numbers. They might be working-class people in numbers, but they put you there to carry them. If you are not here, you cannot represent them.

And I tell you what. I do not like coming here making sure running down here this week working at six o'clock in the morning, doing another appointment at eight o'clock, getting changed and running from where my car is parked to be here at ten o'clock and see that others do not hold that important.

Well, you said you know what, Swannie? You have been around here long enough to know that it is time that you tell them what time it is. All right?

And I quote sometimes speeches from other persons. Some of them I read at the library when we had a library. Some of those speeches that you would know, Mr. Speaker, from Dame Lois and Eugene Cox and others, L. Frederick Wade, because I read them. But many times, I was here to hear them as well.

And I said this when we first came back that there was a time when these benches were there so that people held you accountable. I know it is a lot more appealing when you are up on the hill. So, I hold out that it needs to be a matter of urgency that we go back up there too. We need to find the money. And I am saying that from the fact of being, and respecting being, in this Honourable House.

I was moved to say that because that wasn't what I had written down.

We need inward investment in this country to grow.

An Hon. Member: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And where is the growth going to come [from]? Well, I am spending far more time because I am going up to Dalton E. Tucker to try to find the next Dwayne Pearman and the next golfers that can play in the Bermuda Championships. So, I am going to where they come from, that community. But right next door is property that my family and other families, the Beads and the like were part of, Morgan's Point. And the Premier would say that we have been saddled with \$250 million and a responsibility to find what is right and how that is going to work to the benefit of this country.

And I honestly believe that from the western side of Pompano on the water's edge, which leads out right out to the ocean, out to the great blue sea with only about a five-minute leave from a dock, right along to the port there that was finished, is the opportunity for us with inward investment from overseas. And you are going to only find that through relationships.

In tourism, where I speak, where I've been involved with all my life, it has been built on relationships. When I grew up, the relationships that I formed

caddying for people, even up in Southampton, although I came to Tucker's Town afterwards, were persons who were the movers and shakers of the entire world. Mr. Juan Trippe was one of the families that sponsored me in Europe. Well, they owned Pan Am and they owned Tucker's Point and many other things as well. So, when Pan Am had that flight leaving Bermuda at seven o'clock and US Customs had to be there, the Government didn't have to make that call. No! No, no, no, my *bye!*

If one of his executives was staying up Knapton Hill, it only took a few people to call a congressman who may have been on that board or whatever the case may be to move that needle. That's where you have relationships at the top end.

I talk about history and Bermuda's connection with golf and tennis and the like. When the United States Golf Association was founded in 1895, one of its founders was the person that built Mid-Ocean. He had a house that was just sold recently called Old Battery. His name was Charles Blair MacDonald from the United Kingdom. And it was an Act of Parliament. I had the book (it's somewhere around here) that has the Act that made it possible for his children, his grandchildren to be able to have that property at some point.

I am here to say this, that Mr. Charles Blair MacDonald used to hang in Bermuda in 1895. Woodrow Wilson, William Taft in 1912. We had shakers and movers hanging around here. You have to make friends with people who can make decisions. Otherwise, you're at middle management trying to move things and you can spin your wheels. We need some serious dollars.

And I have a vision just like my uncle Herman. They talk about, *Oh, you only talk about . . .* Herman had a vision in the 1930s when he taught golf at Whale Bay, where the Honourable Member lives. The Bascome family, with the young lady . . . the young Member from . . . the young Member from constituency 36, her family owned all that property over there, the Bascome family. They had a lot of girls, so the family now . . . a lot of names have . . . but they come from Gyro Bascome's family. Right to Whale Bay Fort.

And I'm here to tell you that when I talked about developing forts, it was that everybody doesn't have to be crowded and on top of each other at one beach. We need to diversify too. The Whale Bay Fort was upgraded and cleaned up for the Bermuda Championship because at a time when I had some oversight in that area, that vision prevailed. But once it was stopped . . . and I had the former chairman of the parks come up there, the young Junior Minister who sits right here, come up there and look. And we talked about the fact that why, just like Windsor Castle and visiting those places, you know, the forts as well, modernised, offices. Why couldn't Whale Bay Battery and other forts like the, Friends of St. George's are doing down there, clearing out, couldn't do what we did up at Whale Bay, because the showcase was on us, so that people who

might be coming up there to golf or tennis or pickleball, could go down to that beach down there at Whale Bay and come up to that fort.

And when we had home porting, the vision for home porting during COVID-19 was an initiative I advanced publicly. I talked about it, wrote about it. And thanked former Minister Lawrence Scott for acting on it with Viking.

Morgan's Point could very well be a home porting base, purposely built for them to base there and with those properties there. If they are coming to build a dock . . . Let me tell you, when I was a little boy watching Paul Leseur water ski on a Sunday afternoon, many a Sunday afternoon, I was watching seaplanes land out there too. And many a Sunday, with the base personnel who were living near and around us, we might even get taken onboard a destroyer or something like that. Or we might see some large ship out in Grassy Bay, out there.

We have the capacity. In fact, when they were building out at Morgan's Point, they were bringing their own ships right in port and offloading their materials. So, it is not like you need any dredging to do it. You know, Port Royal doesn't get its name from the Queen or the King visiting Bermuda. It gets its name from Port Royal harbour, which is right around Five Star Island. It was a commercial port going back centuries ago.

I declare my interest. I'm a country boy from Southampton. My families are the Halls and Burrowes and the Hughes and all those folks right around that way. And I am here to tell you, Mr. Speaker, that the opportunity to get inward investment is to get the right people here. And we have a very dynamic Minister of Economic Development. Come, let me take you all on a nice tour of that area and show you what the opportunities are. And then let me introduce you to some of those persons that I happen to know around the world, and others in this country know as well.

That's why I keep saying that the Opposition have a responsibility as well, because they may know one or two more billionaires than me. They just might.

And do not let your legacy be the legacy of "no." If you . . . but let it be this "know." If you know somebody, convince somebody to invest in Bermuda during this Government's time. It would benefit all of us, that boat will raise everybody.

And listen, we have talked about taxes and tariffs and the like. When that tide rises in this country, the folks that are my family and cousins do not benefit like my friends that I know who are in a higher economic bracket.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Let me tell you this, I didn't like spending hundreds of millions [of dollars] on something that could have cost ten [dollars].

That's the answer. I didn't like spending \$40 million on something that was unnecessary.

I didn't like Minister Fahy.

I didn't like you telling seniors money doesn't grow on trees.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: We descended on that just because I'm trying to be constructive and point out where they could be constructive. But if you are just intent on being destructive every week to find ways to hinder this Government, let me encourage the Opposition to do this.

Unfortunately, we don't have a library. But it would be nice, and I know the Honourable Member DeCouto does research. He is one of the most research-orientated persons in this country for a long time. He has a website, and he has a lot of things on there. And I would go there for years and find the Pit Report, Tumin Report, you want a report. Put up some of those speeches from Dame Lois, L. Frederick Wade and Eugene Cox as well, so that persons in the Opposition, and even some Members in my party, can see what a real Opposition did for 30 years—came with solutions!

Came with solutions. That a Government did take too.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: No, I'm not angry. No, I am not angry. I am just passionate. That's what we say. And I am loud, but Moses was loud. And I am here to tell you, what I speak of, I believe in. When I talk about volunteerism, I lead by example. And what I am here to say is this. We collectively can do more when we all tell persons out there that Bermuda is a great place to invest [in].

[Desk thumping]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And let me tell you, and I heard a little thumping. I want to say this, because many times when persons come to this House and look to find ways of criticising . . . let me say this: And you cannot argue with this one. The chance of what you say going on the front page is increased tenfold than what we say.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: That is correct.

If you get up and say something, it's far more likely that what you say is tidied up to mean what *The Royal Gazette* might want it to mean. And what we say is more than likely to be taken out of context, if anything.

POINT OF ORDER

[Imputing improper motive]

Mr. Scott Simmons: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to rise primarily for this reason: The Honourable Member, in previous statements that he made, is imputing [improper motive to] his fellow Members and colleagues in this House.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You weren't in the audience.

Mr. Scott Simmons: No, I am here now.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You weren't in the audience.

Mr. Scott Simmons: I'm here now.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: You weren't in the audience.

Mr. Scott Simmons: And Mr. Speaker, with the greatest of respect to my colleague, who I have a lot of respect for, I'm asking the Honourable Member to withdraw his comment as it relates to his colleagues. He is imputing improper motive. He does not know why his colleagues are not in this House at this particular time.

It is a known fact that Members of this House have responsibilities. But I'm more than happy, Mr. Speaker, not on this particular point of order . . . I am prepared to take my seat after the Honourable Member. But I ask him to withdraw, and I ask him to take that statement back. He has merit to a degree, but to impute improper motives to his own colleagues in this House—on both sides of this floor—is absolutely abhorrent and unnecessary and is requiring a withdrawal.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Mr. Speaker, the Member was not here to hear when I said that . . . in fact, I referred to the benchmarks to say that persons need to be protected because there are persons who can't be here. And I made reference to a Member who was sitting right there, sitting right here at the time, who I understood why he couldn't be here. And I understand Members on this side can't be here because they have to be in their place of employment.

So, I accept what the Member has expressed.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order.

Will the Honourable Member take a point of clarification or information? I'm very grateful.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Scott Pearman: The Honourable Member may not be aware, but I know that there is a funeral this afternoon. I know a number of Members from both sides of the aisle are present at that funeral.

[Timer chimes]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Okay, well I'm just . . . the listening audience doesn't always necessarily understand what is going on. They do not know how many people are sitting in the Chamber this afternoon. It is fewer than normal, and I wouldn't want any comment unintentionally to be taken in the wrong way.

And I'm grateful for the intervention of the other Honourable Member. Thank you.

And thank you for allowing me to speak.

The Speaker: Unfortunately, your clock ran out while you were sitting there just now.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Okay.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Okay. Mr. Simmons, would you like your 20 minutes?

MPs ABSENT FROM CHAMBER

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I'm not going to speak for 20 minutes. I'm not even going to keep the Honourable Members in this House who have gone through an entire Budget Debate, who have spent the time in this House.

Mr. Speaker, I just wanted to offer clarification on this particular point. Primarily because, like many of our colleagues who are not in this House, or during any particular sitting of this House, we are listening carefully on the radio. We are listening on our phones. And we are following our honourable colleagues on both sides of this House who are doing the bidding of the people of Bermuda.

The reason I rose before, and I want to make this clear so that no one is under the impression. I have a tremendous respect for the Honourable Member. He represents in the East, a constituency that he literally owns. He has done his job. He has done his homework. And he—

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Point of order.

Mr. Scott Simmons: I take that back, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Point of order.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Okay, he doesn't own it. I will take that back.

The Speaker: Yes.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: I think the Honourable Member is unintentionally misleading the House. There's no one in this House, and least of all of me, who owns any constituency in here.

And I took his point that he made, and he may not have heard everything that I said when I referred to absenteeism not being supported by employers. And I made the point that it is covered in benchmarks. And maybe, Mr. Speaker, I will run a motion on benchmarks, if the Premier permits me, so that we can delve deeper into that matter.

And it wasn't particular to this particular debate, Mr. Speaker, it was across the board I was talking about. And I do respect the clarification by Member Pearman.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I take the Honourable Member's point of information as well as his point of order.

Mr. Speaker, as far as I am concerned, and I want to make sure that this is clear and I appreciate his clarification and the clarification of the Learned Member. The one thing that I want to be clear on, because I did not want this evening for individuals out in the public to feel as though there are elements of neglect by your colleagues. Whether it be the Frontbench or whether it be the Backbench. Members of this House have a responsibility inside of this House and outside of this House. We do not take any of that lightly and we govern ourselves accordingly.

There are those of our colleagues who are in this House that do have an opportunity during these times to be able sit in this House and to be able to stay from start to finish. When the business of this House is being discussed we are here, we are represented. And when a Minister travels and a Minister is not here, his portfolio and the issues for which he represents are ably handled in this House by those who are present.

I recognise that there is a protocol and there are procedures that are clear over at our party headquarters as articulated by the Whip. And the Whip has made it crystal clear, and he has re-emphasised it. I got it.

But, Mr. Speaker, beyond the . . . there are no illusions, I do not want the public to feel this. We in this House cannot continue with the narrative that presents the impression . . . the Honourable Member has risen to say that it is not his intention; I will take it on board. I will say this. We have to recognise that all of us have responsibilities that we cannot ignore. And we must in this House also state and defend when we, for other reasons, are not here.

So, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make it clear today that as it relates to responsibilities, as it relates to what we are doing in this House, we just went through three days (by way of explanation) and three days and more of a Budget Debate. If responsibilities pull us in this House on the Monday and the Tuesday, then on the Friday, we have to . . . if we have responsibilities to

another employer outside of this House, then we make it up during that time.

Mr. Speaker, I find I cannot agree with having to stand up in this House and explain to honourable colleagues, and to make honourable colleagues aware, who, in my humble opinion, understood what it feels like to be, first of all, elected to this House. And to realise that that one . . . and I say this with the greatest of respect to the Government and to the people of Bermuda and to those who represent everybody here. A salary that, if you added it up, could not and would not—and as a matter of fact, Members of this Honourable House have articulated that already—and does not cover. And so, if you are not with the opportunity of being a Frontbencher, as a Backbencher then you must take on . . . and I am not saying that all Bermudians should take on the national past-time which is to moonlight and to have all kinds of other opportunities. But until such time, until we have the discussion on full-time salaries in this House, so that each and every Member can pay all that they must do, and are able to sit in this House and be able to say, *We take on nothing else on board*, there will always be a responsibility to someone else in the private sector to whom which we assign proper time. We all know time management and we are all in this House very good at multi-tasking.

Mr. Speaker, all I am saying is that we have responsibilities. We accept that. And we need to also understand that we must live as well. What has occurred in this House most recently as it relates to getting an increase and as it relates to receiving further compensation, I thank those who debated it. I thank those who deliberated on it, and I thank those who were for and against. But at the end of the day Bermuda is not getting any cheaper. I recognise, as the Honourable Member highlighted, that there are responsibilities attached to that. If we have not conformed to the CPA [Commonwealth Parliamentary Association], or to whatever else there is out there that dictates that we should not be out then we need—

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Recommends instead of dictates.

Mr. Scott Simmons: I apologise, recommends.

Then we have a responsibility to look at that.

And also, Mr. Speaker, I want to allay the concerns of those in the public who feel as though, when pictures were taken of individuals falling asleep in the other House, that there are individuals who are not doing their job. And they may feel that their MP, or that the individuals who represent them in this House are not doing their responsibilities. Mr. Speaker, I can attest to the fact that Honourable Members on both sides of this House take their responsibilities seriously. Some of us attach different styles to the way that we canvass, different styles to the way that we deal with our constituencies. And that is because we become seasoned,

and we know how it is and what it is that our electorate require of us.

But it should never, *never* be assigned to the fact that because *I pay you* and because of that you feel as though we in this House are shirking those responsibilities, because, we absolutely are not.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that we do not have to rise in this House and have a discussion on this again. I would hope . . . and I hope that we can get past the fact that there will be Honourable Members in this House who, because of academic standing and because of requirements on the outside and because financial requirements, find themselves under the banner of another employer—a part-time employer.

I do not see that there is any indignity in it. And I think all Members in this House benefit from employers in this country who recognise that if they are employing us, any Member of Parliament, that they give us sufficient time to serve, to do,—

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Our civic duty.

Mr. Scott Simmons: —As the Honourable Deputy Speaker stated, our civic duty, and that we need not displace the dignity of that by making statements that can be misinterpreted and that may create the feeling that they are not getting *bang for buck*.

I believe we have demonstrated that in the last Budget Debate. I believe the new Members who continue to contribute and will be contributing and all of us in this House, the Frontbenchers and Backbenchers, I believe we have represented the country well. And we should *not*, we should *not* feel and leave this place this evening feeling as though we have not served.

We continue to serve. We take our call from the electorate. I spoke on it before; I am not going to get into it tonight again. That is a subject we have dealt with. But they have spoken to us, and this Parliament takes our responsibilities seriously. You make a demand, Mr. Speaker, that we act, that we are right and that we do the things for this country. And you make certain in this House that we represent the people of Bermuda in a way that they would be proud of.

We realise that they do not get to see everything that we do. And oftentimes we feel under appreciated. But, Mr. Speaker, we realise that they cannot see all and so we continue to work and do and be according to what they instruct of us.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate you giving me this time. I wish to formally, if I may, if the Member will be happy to take it, I was a bit agitated earlier. That agitation has somewhat lifted. And as a result of that, I want to let my honourable colleague from the east know, as with every colleague in this House—

An Hon. Member: We had a healthy debate.

Mr. Scott Simmons: —with every person in this House, is that we may disagree and that we may rise

to our feet. But, Mr. Speaker, in this House we will represent the views of our people. We will admit if we are wrong. We will admit if we are incorrect. But we expect that individuals will themselves rise up and say: What is right is right and what is wrong is wrong.

Mr. Speaker, enjoy the rest of your weekend. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Premier, would you like to add to this debate at this time?

Hon. E. David Burt: I am not sure if it is “add,” Mr. Speaker, I think it is “close.”

The Speaker: Oh. Well, you can close the debate.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: You are using up your time.

PLP— A GOVERNMENT THAT CONTINUES TO FIGHT TO BUILD A FAIR BERMUDA FOR ALL

Hon. E. David Burt: It's all right. I can assure you I will not do 20 minutes, [Madam] Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, to commence my remarks today, I want to echo the thanks in the comments that were given by the Honourable Deputy Premier to the staff, not only of this Honourable Chamber, as you know it has been full throttle from Throne Speech to Budget Session, et cetera, all the rest, and also to all of the technical officers who do the work to prepare the briefs, to be here to answer the questions, and to make sure that Ministers are prepared so that the debate can happen. And so, from that perspective, Mr. Speaker, I just want to make sure I echo that thanks.

I am, of course, in the Ministry of Finance taking the budget team out for lunch when the budget director returns. But it certainly is a lot of work. And the challenge which we have for them, as they reminded me with a late budget, is that they have about one month off before the budget cycle for next year begins again. And despite the fact, Mr. Speaker, that we have been, you know, and sometimes you will say, *testy* between myself as the Minister of Finance and the Shadow Minister of Finance, it is my hope that in the future that we can improve the quality of the exchange of which we have. Because I remember the first time I was Shadow Minister, you know, it got better with time and able to make sure that we can develop a better working relationship so that we can actually have the level of debate and examination which is necessary in this Honourable Chamber.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to cover a few topics today. As we close out the budget session before we, you know, go back to the rest of the year where we will

be meeting every other week and dealing with other pieces of legislation.

But I will say this from the perspective, Mr. Speaker, that there are some who will get the impression, due to comments which may come from the Honourable Opposition, that the Government believes that everything is perfect. That is not the case. I remember listening to, you know, commentary around that while it says clearly inside of our Budget Statements, inside of our Throne Speech, inside of our public comments, inside of everything else, that we recognise that things are not perfect and we are working to make sure they are better.

And so, the summary of my comments, Mr. Speaker, is that we are not where we want to be yet. But there is no question that we are on the right path, Mr. Speaker. And as we all know, no government is perfect anywhere. No country is without challenges. But I think it is also important that you judge the work that is taking place compared to what is taking place in other jurisdictions, because we do not exist in isolation in Bermuda. We are part of a wider and broader global economy.

And what matters most, Mr. Speaker, of course, is whether or not you are standing still. But under this Government, Mr. Speaker, we are unquestionably making progress. And that progress, Mr. Speaker, does not have to come from myself. That message does not have to come from myself. The Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour gave a brilliant contribution speaking of the items which are taking place. [He] mentioned the fact that those persons who are able-bodied, unemployed on financial assistance are falling. [He] mentioned the fact that he is going to be coming out with statistics next week talking about the reduction in the level of persons who are unemployed in the country, the fact that our ratings continue to be confirmed. The fact that we continue to exceed our expectations. The fact that we are delivering the second consolidated budget fund surplus this year is evidence that we are making progress and moving in the right direction.

And so here is the thing, Mr. Speaker, we know that we are challenged with the cost of living. I think the entire world recognises that. We know it is an issue in the United Kingdom. We know it is an issue in Europe. We know it is an issue in Australia. We know it is an issue in Canada. We know that it is an issue everywhere. It is a question of how do you respond? What does a government do?

And what this Government has done, Mr. Speaker, is that we have taken action. Not with talk but with actual results. Because we know that we have cut taxes for most workers in every local business. And in this session, Mr. Speaker, we have built on that by reducing land taxes, reducing energy taxes, mobile phone taxes, and yes, Mr. Speaker, also customs duty. And we spoke about the combined value of what these will bring, \$1,000 extra for a family this year in addition

to what we have done previously, Mr. Speaker. That means something.

The Honourable Minister responsible for Housing is sitting next to me, the Deputy Premier. Record investments in affordable housing. Progress which is taking place. When speaking about home ownership our Mortgage Guarantee Programme, Mr. Speaker, 70 Bermudians on the way to the housing ladder, 50 of those already in their new homes, others approved for them, Mr. Speaker. That is the record of this Government. That is the progress of which we are putting forward. And we speak to this budget. It is the expansion of health care, investing more in the vulnerable, expanding prescription drug coverage, access to preventative care and expanding home health care options which have been called for inside of the community, Mr. Speaker. That is what this parliamentary session is about. That is the work of which this Government has committed to, Mr. Speaker.

So, these, Mr. Speaker, are not just promises. We have delivered already on the pledges that we made in February, and we will continue to do so throughout this particular session, Mr. Speaker. And this budget is proof that progress is happening. So again, Mr. Speaker, it is not a choice between perfect and imperfect. It is about a government that continues to fight to build a fair Bermuda for all.

And the importance of our time debating here, Mr. Speaker . . . and you can hear me get up often on points of order, because I understand what it is like to be a new Member of the House of Assembly. I was new once. But the reality is that the better and higher quality of debate that we have in this House is the better and higher quality level of decision-making governance that we can give. And it is important and vital that we are there dealing with the facts.

But here is what I will say, Mr. Speaker, we are not done. In this term, as you know, we are just getting started. Moving in the right direction.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right.

Hon. E. David Burt: Now Mr. Speaker, we know that there have been, you know, comments, and I am not going to reflect [on that] because I have a particular point that I wish to tackle today. We are not going to reflect on the conversation, discussions of which have been had. Because I think that we have been able to aptly state the fact that we are not dealing with matters that are across-the-board reductions. We have target items, but we have broader items, and this is wide relief across this country. And this Government has a track record of continually fighting for workers, continually fighting and making investments.

I remember the Honourable Whip got up on the other side, the Opposition Whip got up and was talking about how when he was younger, you know, he was able to mow lawns, and you know pay for university. And I asked a question you know; *Where was that?*

Because here is the thing, Mr. Speaker, Bermudians who cannot afford Bermuda College don't have to pay for it underneath this Government.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: What?

Hon. E. David Burt: It is an issue of upward mobility, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: No point of order on that.

Hon. E. David Burt: A pledge that we made. I remember, 2007, I was Chairman of the Party.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh yeah.

Hon. E. David Burt: Made Bermuda College free. And the party opposite removed that.

An Hon. Member: Ah.

Hon. E. David Burt: We put it back in the First 100 Days. And this is around opportunity. This is how you build that opportunity economy that the Opposition spoke about. But we, Mr. Speaker, are actually delivering.

Now we know what we have done in this session. I am not going to cover that again. But there is something that is important. It is important, Mr. Speaker, because oftentimes, and this is the (I call it) *curse* of being a Member of the Bermuda Progressive Labor Party [PLP].

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Hon. E. David Burt: And that is whenever you speak about economics and finance, the automatic assumption is that you do not know what you are talking about, that you cannot be trusted to run the country, that you do not understand the funds. *How dare you state this, how dare you state that. Well, you do not know what you are saying. Why would you mention these things?*

Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that this Government has maintained its ratings, despite the fact that we have beat our targets, despite the fact that, as the Honourable Minister of Economy and Labour has stated, we have the best performing economy in the Americas—North and South American region combined, Mr. Speaker—we are still subjected to, *Oh, they don't know what they are doing.* It happens all the time, Mr. Speaker. And it is not just from Members opposite, Mr. Speaker. It is not just from Members opposite. It is from the public, from the media, from spaces and places, and I am going to quote specific facts.

I am going to call someone who has been a regular detractor. It was Mr. Peter Everson, I thought he disappeared, but he came back all of a sudden,

jumping on the Opposition's bandwagon on a particular point. And this came to my mind because I was in an interview that I did when I stepped out earlier, and I was asked a question. And I reminded people where this particular matter came from, Mr. Speaker.

So, now I am going to get there. Because in our Budget Debate, in our Throne Speech, even, Throne Speech items, things that were laid out, there was one particular mention, Mr. Speaker. And that was the reality that this Government believes that with the advent of corporate income tax, that it is entirely reasonable to expect that we can eliminate our debt and build a sovereign wealth fund within 10 years. Those are the facts.

Now here is what is interesting, Mr. Speaker; the chorus of disapproval was quick and loud. You know why the chorus of disapproval was quick and loud, Mr. Speaker? Because it was David Burt and the PLP saying it. That is the reason why the chorus of disapproval was loud.

But here is the thing, Mr. Speaker, here is the thing. Do you know, Mr. Speaker, when the first mention of a sovereign wealth fund was made?

You cannot answer me, Mr. Speaker, but I am going to share.

The first mention of a sovereign wealth fund for Bermuda did not come from David Burt as Minister of Finance, or the Bermuda Progressive Labor Party, or the Progressive Labor Party Government.

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh.

Hon. E. David Burt: It came from a document that was tabled in this Honourable House in December 2023 called the Bermuda Fiscal Responsibility Panel Annual Assessment. From the Fiscal Responsibility Panel, a body that the Opposition loves to quote. A body that they set up. [A body] that we have continued, Mr. Speaker.

I am going to quote from that document, if I could, Mr. Speaker. On page 27 it says: "It would be consistent with reducing net debt to hold at least some additional revenues in a 'stabilisation fund'; this would help insure against the risk of having to borrow at high interest rates on the open market if volatility was such that revenues fell below base budget needs in any year, or if Bermuda were hit by an adverse economic shock. Beyond eliminating net debt, and accumulating liquid assets in the stabilisation fund, in time Bermuda should use excess revenues to build fiscal reserves in the form of a sovereign wealth fund."

Now that was in December 2023, Mr. Speaker. No comments from the media. No comments from Peter Everson. No comments from the Opposition. No comments from . . . No comments from anyone who finds a way to criticise the Progressive Labour Party's management of the economy.

But let the Minister of Finance and the PLP Government put it inside of a Throne Speech and watch the course of criticism erupt. Silence, when it comes to

the Fiscal Responsibility Panel, made up of persons from the United Kingdom, the United States Government and others—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: —coming in to give us advice.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The Premier is misleading the House because he is implying something about our view [of] the Fiscal Responsibility Panel. But of course, this venue is not a place for us to come and present that view. This is where we come to present our view on the Government's plans and policies. So, the Premier is implying our view of various components of the Fiscal Responsibility Panel that we have perhaps not publicly discussed. So, he is basically misinforming people what our view of components of that are.

Thank you.

Hon. E. David Burt: That's not a point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: I tried to follow—

Hon. E. David Burt: May I continue?

The Speaker: Let me follow on and see what it's saying.

Hon. E. David Burt: I got you Mr. Speaker.

So, here is the thing. See, you know you are getting close to it now because he has got it up. I do not need to say what his views of the Fiscal Responsibility Panel are. That is not what I am saying. I am saying this idea first came from the Fiscal Responsibility Panel. That is where it came up. Because governments take on advice. So, when that recommendation came, we said, let us ask our advisors what they think of this recommendation. It is not like I was just sitting in my house one day and saying, *Let's have a sovereign wealth fund!*

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: You did not just dream it up.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you! It came from the advisors. The same people who the public says we should be taking advice from.

So, now let us go because the Honourable Member everyone can read what he said about the sovereign wealth fund in his Budget Reply. I am not going to take my time to go over his comments. What I am going to read, Mr. Speaker, is a document from the Ministry of Finance, which came to us in 2024, following

the report of the Fiscal Responsibility Panel combined with the estimate for the revenue that would come from the corporate income tax to advise the Ministry of Finance on the approach of which they should take.

I will read it, and, for your benefit Mr. Speaker, I will table it.

Some Hon. Members: Oh!

Hon. E. David Burt: It says, and I quote: "A growth and stability fund can secure Bermuda's economic future for generations." (It goes on to say.) "Setting up a sovereign wealth fund entails a rigorous process but the tax revenues from Pillar Two can be an unprecedented opportunity for Bermuda to transform its economy and achieve multiple, long-term prosperity. Multiple funds with different objectives can be set up to realise different benefits."

This, Mr. Speaker, is coming from some of the best accounting firms in the world.

So, here is the thing. We get the chorus of criticism from the Opposition. We get the chorus of criticism from the persons in the private sector who will find a way to criticise the PLP. But when the PLP is doing what they say we should do—listening to the experts who clearly know more than us—the criticism comes.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am going to go ahead and read what this says. From the accounting firms. "The fund could become one of the largest in the region. In our example the fund may reach \$8.5 billion dollars in assets under management under certain assumptions and under these assumptions become the thirty-third largest in the world. Surpassing the Mexico and Trinidad and Tobago sovereign wealth funds."

Not from me, Mr. Speaker. Not from me. From the Fiscal Responsibility Panel and our accounting firms.

So, I will close by saying this, Mr. Speaker, and it is important that the persons listening understand. There will be many things that are said about the Progressive Labour Party in Government. But the facts are, as we close out this budget session, that we have proven that we can manage this country through a crisis. We have proven that we can manage transition. We have proven that we can deliver relief and make investments in this country. And we have proven that we can listen to advice and make the plans for the future that this country needs.

Mr. Speaker, I will see you in two weeks. Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Members for your contributions today. And we will have a two-week period before we return here. I trust you will all come back well rested for the session of the summer.

With that the House now stands adjourned.

[Gavel]

*[At 5:30 pm, the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am
Friday, 13 June 2025.]*

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