



2025/26 SESSION
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BERMUDA HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY
OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

6 MARCH 2026

(Sitting number 28 of the 2025-2026 Session)

(pages 2199-2336)

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

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10:02 AM**

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

The Speaker: Members, good morning.
Mrs. Beale will now lead us in the prayers this morning.
Mrs. Beale.

PRAYERS

[Prayers read by Mrs. Kara Beale, Deputy Clerk]

The Speaker: Thank you, Mrs. Beale.
Good morning, Members.

[Gavel]

The Speaker: The House is now in session.

CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

[Minutes of 2 March and 4 March 2026]

The Speaker: Members, the Minutes of the 2nd and 4th of November *[sic]* have been . . . of March, rather, have been circulated.

Are there any amendments required?
No amendments.
The Minutes will be printed as confirmed.

[Minutes of 2 March and 4 March 2026 confirmed.]

MESSAGES FROM THE GOVERNOR

The Speaker: There are none.

ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE SPEAKER OR MEMBER PRESIDING

The Speaker: There are none.

MESSAGES FROM THE SENATE

The Speaker: There are none.

PAPERS AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS TO THE HOUSE

The Speaker: There is one paper this morning in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.
Minister.

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

The Speaker: Good morning.

BERMUDA FINTECH STRATEGY 2026-2028

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to attach and submit for the information of the Honourable House of Assembly the [Bermuda FinTech Strategy 2026-2028](#).

The Speaker: Thank you.

PETITIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS AND JUNIOR MINISTERS

The Speaker: We have two Statements this morning.
The first is in the name of the Minister of Economy and Labour.
Minister.

BERMUDA FINTECH STRATEGY 2026-2028

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address this Honourable House today and lay before it the [\[Bermuda\] FinTech Strategy 2026-2028](#). It is a comprehensive roadmap to firmly evolve Bermuda's financial technology ecosystem. In other words, this strategy sets out clear steps to help [Bermuda integrate FinTech](#) into society with the aim of making digital financial services more prevalent across the Island.

This Strategy is aligned with the broader Economic Development Strategy (EDS) 2023-2027. It reflects Bermuda's commitment to innovation, inclusivity, and international cooperation.

Mr. Speaker, at the heart of this Strategy is a robust digital identity framework and a clear focus on InsurTech, building on Bermuda's strength in insurance and reinsurance. Digital identity is the framework and the tool that allows persons to prove who they are, securely, in online environments. It supports security, trust, and efficient service delivery across the digital finance landscape.

There is also a focus on InsurTech as we build directly on what we already do best: insurance and reinsurance, where Bermuda has global credibility, deep

expertise, and a strong regulatory reputation. The Strategy sees FinTech growth as grounded in a proven sector rather than starting from scratch.

This Strategy therefore supports a wider ambition to modernise how money moves across the economy: across government, business, and financial services. It also reflects the Island's ambition to keep its economy inclusive and competitive. It aims to make payments and financial services faster, safer, and more efficient.

This is not a theoretical exercise, and it is not just a plan on paper. We are already seeing digital onboarding become a reality in our local banks, for instance. Also, the government is already working with partners to modernise payments.

Mr. Speaker, the FinTech Strategy seeks to provide a robust foundation in the following priorities:

- attracting investment;
- helping Bermuda compete globally;
- fostering collaboration;
- ensuring strong data protection;
- driving innovation and growth;
- providing regulatory clarity, consumer protection, and compliance; and
- closing gaps in services and improving access for more people under the banner of inclusivity.

The resulting Strategy is built on three key pillars and corresponding action [items] to create a dynamic, sustainable, and inclusive FinTech ecosystem.

The three strategic pillars of the FinTech Strategy are:

- a progressive and agile regulatory environment;
- innovation growth and capacity building; and
- international collaboration and market access.

Mr. Speaker, pillar one, *a progressive and agile regulatory environment*, is essential for fostering true innovation. By maintaining an agile framework, Bermuda can swiftly adapt to rapid technological advancements and emerging business models, thereby reducing regulatory friction and increasing certainty for new businesses. This pillar is about keeping the rules clear and up to date, so that responsive new firms can operate with confidence as technology changes and legislation evolves.

The second pillar, *innovation growth and capacity building*, is about building local talent and supporting Bermudian businesses so more innovation and opportunity can happen here at home. This pillar focuses on cultivating a thriving internal environment by enhancing our local capacity for innovation. This involves supporting both start-ups and established businesses while equipping the Bermudian workforce with the necessary tools, skills, and knowledge to lead in this sector. Also, it includes supporting digital finance literacy so that residents and businesses can use these new services with confidence.

Mr. Speaker, the final pillar of the FinTech Strategy is *international collaboration and market*

access. This pillar is about strengthening partnerships with leading FinTech centres, recognising that access to international markets is vital for economic [sustainability]. By collaborating with global FinTech hubs and regional accelerators, Bermuda can fast-track local development and open new doors for investment.

Bermuda's regulatory clarity is strengthened by solid collaboration between the government, the regulator, and the private sector to ensure frameworks continue to work. This pillar therefore seeks to deepen this collaboration and to promote innovation. With this approach, Bermuda is positioned to possess the infrastructure, talent, and regulatory clarity that are necessary to solidify its position as a global FinTech jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, within each of these three strategic pillars, the Strategy has identified steps that will guide Bermuda towards sustainable economic growth by leveraging its unique strengths. This approach supports real economic growth. It is not only about technology for its own sake: it is about it being a core driver of the economy.

Each pillar of the FinTech Strategy includes key initiatives with practical actions to improve infrastructure, grow skills, and keep rules clear. These actions will ensure that Bermuda remains an agile and responsive jurisdiction, providing the necessary infrastructure, talent, and regulatory clarity to further its position as a [premier] global FinTech jurisdiction.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Economy and Labour is committed to the ongoing implementation of this Strategy. We will track its progress against specific actions under the pillars and report regularly to ensure transparency and accountability.

It goes without saying that this Government will continue to collaborate with stakeholders and provide the public with regular updates on its progress.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, the government is confident that this Strategy will pave the way for a more prosperous, sustainable, and inclusive future for all Bermudians.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

Minister.

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

STANDARD PREMIUM RATE FOR THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR, UPDATE

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, I rise today to advise Honourable Members of an adjustment to the [Standard Premium Rate](#), effective 1 April 2026, as previously outlined in the 2025 Budget Statement.

The Standard Premium Rate was last increased on 1 November 2021, when it was set at

\$400.31 per member per month. Since that time, now more than four and a half years, the rate has remained unchanged.

During this period, through the difficult economic aftermath of the pandemic, the Government made a deliberate decision to shield residents from increases to the Standard Premium Rate. Funds from the Excess Borrowing Fund were used to provide temporary support and maintain stability within the health financing system while protecting Bermudian households from further additional financial pressure.

Mr. Speaker, health care costs, however, have not stood still. Across the world, medical inflation continues to rise. It affects the cost of clinical care, medical equipment, pharmaceuticals, and hospital operations. Bermuda is not immune to these pressures. In addition, the Bermuda Hospitals Board recently concluded negotiations with the Bermuda Public Services Union representing unionised hospital staff. Those negotiations resulted in a salary uplift of 18.23 per cent, along with a cost-of-living allowance, covering the period April 2022 through October 2025. As a result, retroactive payments totalling \$38 million were owed to staff who have continued to provide essential services during that time.

Mr. Speaker, these payments recognise the dedication of the nurses, clinicians, technicians, and support staff who sustain Bermuda's health care system every day. Ensuring that our frontline health care professionals are fairly compensated is essential to maintaining a strong and resilient health system.

These retroactive payments will be issued in two equal instalments, the first was paid on 30 January of this year and the second is due by 30 April 2026, in accordance with the negotiated agreement.

While \$19 million has already been set aside, the remaining funding requirement must be supported through a combination of government reprioritisation and an adjustment to the Standard Premium Rate. Following an independent actuarial review, it has been determined that an increase of \$39.24 per member per month is necessary to maintain the financial integrity of Bermuda's health financing system. Accordingly, the Standard Premium Rate will increase to \$439.55 per member per month effective 1 April 2026.

Mr. Speaker, this decision is not taken lightly. However, it is necessary. The adjustment is driven primarily by the funding requirements within the Mutual Reinsurance Fund.

The Mutual Reinsurance Fund is a cornerstone of Bermuda's health system. It supports high-cost and hospital-based services and ensures that risk is shared broadly across the population. It is what allows essential treatment to remain available when individuals face catastrophic illness or complex medical need. If the Fund is not stable, the system cannot remain stable. Honourable Members will recall that the Standard Premium Rate has remained unchanged since November 2021. During that time the Government provided

temporary support to shield Bermudians from increases during a difficult economic period. Again, as I said, health care costs have continued to rise. The hospital labour agreement has introduced permanent funding obligations. Maintaining the freeze is therefore no longer sustainable. This adjustment restores balance to the system and ensures that the resources required to sustain hospital services remain available.

Mr. Speaker, the Standard Premium Rate forms part of the premium structure across health insurance policies in Bermuda. As such, this adjustment may be reflected in both public and private insurance premiums. For clarity, the \$39.24 per member per month represents the increase directly associated with this policy decision and the funding needs of the Mutual Reinsurance Fund. Any additional premium adjustments would reflect insurer-specific decisions and should be discussed directly with those providers.

I also wish to note that this adjustment will not apply to individuals enrolled in the FutureCare plan.

Mr. Speaker, we have one acute care hospital in Bermuda. That hospital must remain strong. It must remain properly resourced. And it must remain capable of delivering the critical services our people depend upon: Emergency care, surgery, diagnostics, and treatment for serious illness. Every day Bermudians rely on the professionals at the Bermuda Hospitals Board to provide that care. Ensuring that the system which supports that care remains financially sound is our responsibility.

Mr. Speaker, the adjustment to the Standard Premium Rate is a necessary step to support the sustainability of hospital services and ensure that Bermuda's health care system continues to function for the benefit of our people. Our duty is not only to manage today's costs, but to safeguard the system on which every Bermudian may one day depend.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

We now move on.

REPORTS OF COMMITTEES

The Speaker: There are none.

QUESTION PERIOD

The Speaker: Members, we have one question. There aren't any written questions, there's only questions from the Statements this morning.

We have Members who would like to put questions or references to the Statements this morning. The first is to Minister Hayward on his Statement this morning.

MP Campbell would like to [ask] a question.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Good morning and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA FINTECH STRATEGY 2026-2028

Mr. Vance Campbell: Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the Minister how many jobs currently in the FinTech field are occupied by Bermudians?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, that is a matter of public information. On an annual basis, the Ministry of Economy and Labour releases a FinTech report that highlights the number of companies and the number of jobs associated with those companies.

The Speaker: So, the information is contained in the public domain already.

Supplementary or new question?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Mr. Vance Campbell: Supplementary.

Is the Minister confident as of right now that the number of Bermudians who are occupying jobs in FinTech are sufficient to satisfy the local talent pool that he spoke about in his Statement?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Statement primarily refers to developing capacity. And so, it is our aim to have more Bermudians working within FinTech and utilising FinTech. We are looking at FinTech beyond just businesses moving to Bermuda, but enabling businesses that are already in Bermuda and then also ensuring that we have the level of digital literacy in our community required so that people can function in the current and future world of work.

The Speaker: Supplementary or—

Mr. Vance Campbell: Supplementary.

The Speaker: Okay. Second supplementary.

Mr. Vance Campbell: Given the Minister's response, can the Minister advise us if there are any shortfalls?

And his Statement is about a Strategy for 2026-2028, which is not a very long timeframe. Where there are shortfalls. How long does it take a Bermudian to really become proficient, where they can participate in that talent pool and be part of the available talent that the Minister spoke about?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, there are a variety of jobs in this sector, and there are a variety of competencies that need to be built for people to navigate our environment. And so, the answer will vary based off of where one currently sits at and where they desire to be. And we would have to determine on a case-by-case scenario what is required for those individuals to close the gap.

But generally, the FinTech training that we provide and the digital literacy training, everybody in our community can benefit from that particular training.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Second question?

QUESTION 2: BERMUDA FINTECH STRATEGY 2026-2028

Mr. Vance Campbell: Second question. I thank the Minister for that response.

Is the Minister concerned about any jurisdictional risk in applying this strategy going forward? That is reputational damage to Bermuda if this goes wrong.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, I think the Honourable Member is misguided as it pertains to what the Government is attempting to do in this particular space.

I believe he is hearing the word FinTech and automatically relating it to the digital asset industry, which this strategy expands way beyond just digital assets or the double legislation that we have in place. Yes, that is a component of our overall FinTech ecosystem. But what this Strategy specifically talks about is ensuring, number one, that we have an agile regulatory environment.

And so, the risk will be mitigated by the strength of our regulatory environment. And I am sure that Bermuda has an awesome track record as it pertains to the way in which we regulate companies in Bermuda, and I am confident that the risk will be mitigated as best as we possibly can.

The second pillar talks about innovative growth and capacity building. And so, what we really want to do is have a true ecosystem where we move financial technology from the fringes of our society to mainstream utilisation.

And then the third is talking about international collaborations and market access, how we can lure more companies to operate in Bermuda, but then how we can also learn best practices from what other jurisdictions are doing. Based off of that, I believe that we are well-positioned to progress in this in a reasonable way and reduce and mitigate against any risk that may exist.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary, or—

Mr. Vance Campbell: No further questions, and I would like to thank the Minister for his answers.
Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay, thank you.
MP King would like to put questions to you as well, Minister.
MP King.

QUESTION 1: BERMUDA FINTECH STRATEGY 2026-2028

Mr. Robert King: Good morning, Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House and the listening public.
Regarding FinTech, one of the major constraints to FinTech growth internationally is access to banking. What steps has the Government taken to ensure local banks are able to provide services to the licensed FinTech firms?

Hon. Jason Hayward: The question is kind of spanning outside of the report that was actually provided, but I would say that the Government is in ongoing consultation with industry and our banking industry to find ways in which we can close the gaps that exist.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary, or a new question?

Mr. Robert King: Supplementary.

The Speaker: Okay.

SUPPLEMENTARY

Mr. Robert King: What specific investment targets and benchmarks are expected to be achieved in 2026-2028, and how many jobs are expected to be created?
That's my final question. Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Mr. Speaker, [item] 5.1 of the document speaks to the pillars that we have identified and the steps that we would actually take. And so, it is very detailed as it pertains to what we aim to do. You will note that it is a two-year strategy and not a longer strategy because of the way in which the technology is advancing. If you have a four-year strategy, by the time you complete your four-year strategy, technology has evolved. And so, we have a very aggressive target point and the initiatives, the key initiatives, are clearly laid out in the document presented to the House of Assembly this morning.

The Speaker: Thank you. No supplementary.

Minister, that was the end of questions for your Statement.

Minister Wilson, Minister of Health, there are questions for you as well.

Opposition Whip, MP Cannonier, would you like to put your question?

QUESTION 1: STANDARD PREMIUM RATE FOR THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR, UPDATE

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and good morning, colleagues and good morning to Bermuda.

The Minister mentioned, I think, on part of page three and part of page—let me just pull it up here—part of page four, *health care costs, however, have not stood still*. And I think my question is . . . and I commended the Government for the standstill for a couple of years in the premium. But as we move forward, I am just curious about the forecast going forward as they speak with their team and the actuaries and they're trying to figure out what to do with premiums.

Is the plan going forward to incrementally increase on a yearly basis due to the fact that there are costs going up, or are we going to try and hold with this \$39 increase in premium for the next two, three years, or maybe even four years, and then look at it again?

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you. I thank the Honourable Member for his question.

Mr. Speaker, as we indicated, we have not raised the premium in almost four and a half years. The actuaries had suggested or supported an increase of 10 per cent. I need to also make note, make mention, excuse me, Mr. Speaker, that of that \$38 million which is being applied, part of it with respect to the negotiated settlement, the Government did pay \$19 million of that. So, half of that was paid for by the Government because it could have been a higher amount.

So, in that regard, it also should be noted that this represents a 2.4 per cent increase per year. And insofar as continued increases, we will be looking at that because there is a school of thought that suggests that there should be an increase on an annual basis, based on utilisation, the modelling, and the like, as opposed to waiting "X" number of years, therefore, which creates a bigger bump.

However, recognising the Government was concerned about the impact of the increase, particularly following COVID-19, with the persons in the community having to incur another increase, which is why when there was a suggestion two years ago, we took money from the Excess Borrowing Fund to shield residents from having to pay that increase.

So again, it represents a 2.4 per cent per annum increase, whereas the actuary suggested health care inflation runs at 10.0 per cent per annum.

The Speaker: Okay.
Supplementary or new question?

SUPPLEMENTARIES

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, just a supplementary so I can be clear. So then, are we saying that the intent is about a 2.4 per cent or thereabouts annually going forward, or are we still trying to decide for the latter years what that is going to be?

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, Mr. Speaker, at this point, it is hard to say because the increase is based on a number of things, not least of which is utilisation, health care costs, and the like. So, notwithstanding the question, I understand the Honourable Member's sentiment insofar as the increase. If utilisation drops, which is unlikely, then so would the anticipated modelling. But again, health care inflation normally runs at 10 per cent per year.

The Speaker: Supplementary or new question?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, second supplemental. Considering that answer and fully understanding, but also understanding that even with this \$39 increase, we are behind. As I have mentioned before, we are getting a \$500 premium for a package of \$800 probably in coverage.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So . . . I have been saying that. I have said that about three or four times. Want me to say it again? Want me to say it again?

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Would it be more efficient to then set a rate of maybe 3.0 per cent, 3.5 per cent, just to try and climb back to where we need to be?

Thank you.

The Speaker: Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Yes, thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, again, with respect to the premium amounts, we do . . . there are a number of factors that go into this insofar as to ascertain what that increase should be.

I thank the Honourable Member for acknowledging the fact that these premiums, HIP and FutureCare, are heavily subsidised by taxpayers. So notwithstanding that there is a \$400,00 and . . . what is it going to be, \$498.00 . . . sorry, \$439.55 for the Standard Premium Rate and the . . . obviously, every package of insurance includes the Standard Premium Rate. HIP and FutureCare will remain to be subsidised. And of important note is that this increase will not impact

those of our members who are on the FutureCare policy.

The Speaker: Supplementary or further question?

An Hon. Member: Second question.

The Speaker: Yes, yes, you used up your supplementary. Second question.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Second question.

QUESTION 2: STANDARD PREMIUM RATE FOR THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR, UPDATE

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Considering the massive profits that the private sector is making in the insurance industry, 70 per cent, some almost doubling in some quarters, is the Government planning on looking at how we can get them to also contribute to lowering the premiums in the private sector, considering they are making these huge profits?

The Speaker: Minister, when you are ready.

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

Notwithstanding [Standing Order] 17(9)(iii) of the House [Standing] Orders, this does not apply because this is not a question that came from my Ministerial Statement, there are discussions. Obviously, private insurance is controlled by their contractual arrangements with their policyholders.

However, insofar as the policies that continue to increase (and the Honourable Member said it, I did not, that they are going largely to their profits, not that I disagree), there are discussions that we have spoken about previously in this House as it relates to areas, as it relates to mergers and acquisitions and legislation. So, there are things that we have to look at.

But again, Mr. Speaker, regrettably, it's a contractual arrangement between the private insurers and the policyholders and the employers who are required legislatively to offer that insurance.

The Speaker: Supplementary?

No? Okay.

Minister, MP Tucker would also like to put questions to you.

Ms. Robin Tucker: Good morning.

The Speaker: Good morning.

QUESTION 1: STANDARD PREMIUM RATE FOR THE UPCOMING FISCAL YEAR, UPDATE

Ms. Robin Tucker: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I just have just a very simple question, Can the Minister just sort of clarify why only FutureCare

policyholders will be exempt from the increase rather than HIP and even GEHI.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Minister.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Mr. Speaker, the rule of thought behind that is that the majority of individuals who are on FutureCare are seniors that may very well be on a fixed income. And as such, we wanted to shield that population who are more vulnerable than not, because of that circumstance with respect to the fixed income, from having to incur an increase. So, this is just Government's way of ensuring that we provide further protection for our seniors.

In addition to that, you will recall on Wednesday during the Budget Statement, I did indicate there will be further sums that have been given to the Ministry of Health to further protect 2,200 low-income seniors as it relates to their premiums.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Supplementary? None?

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, I know that the question was not directed to me, but may I provide clarity to the Honourable Member on the question regarding GEHI, as GEHI falls under the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance. If I may, with your leave?

The Speaker: Member, would you like more clarification for your [question]?

Ms. Robin Tucker: Yes. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Go right ahead, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, as you would note with the public officers in regard to the agreement that was reached last year, there are increases to GEHI premiums. And in addition to the fact of the increases, the [Standard Premium Rate] SPR would factor and filter through with that as it filters through all insurance plans. But as per our agreement with all public officers no public officer will see a decrease in their net pay as the Government will have to eat this portion as it is part of our agreement with public officers. So, I just want to make sure that we are clear there.

Now, that, of course, does not apply to those of us in this House; but it does apply to public officers.

The Speaker: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Premier.
That brings us to a close of the Question Period for this morning.

We will now move on.

CONGRATULATORY AND/OR OBITUARY SPEECHES

The Speaker: The next item on the Order Paper is Congratulatory and/or Obituary Speeches, and I see the Deputy Speaker is on her feet extremely quickly this time.

So, you have your three minutes.

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning to the House, and good morning to the listening public.

Mr. Speaker, regrettably, I am standing here to give condolences to two families. We have lost two women, one, Mrs. Cynthia Lottimore, a long-time educator in the eastern area. In fact, I worked under Mrs. Lottimore. She was the deputy principal when I worked at St. George's Secondary School. I had a very close relationship with her. Needless to say, that she was also my neighbour. She lived next door to me, and so I would like condolences to go out to her son, Donald Lottimore, and his wife, Margaret. And I would like to associate [MP] Dennis Lister III and Member Kim Swan and [MP] Renee Ming and the Premier, and [Minister] Diallo Rabain. I think Mr. Lottimore belongs to the same fraternity as many of the gentlemen who sit in this House and want it to be recognised.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to give condolences to [the family of] Mrs. Cheryl Wade, mother of Nadir and Nasir and their sister.

[Inaudible interjection]

Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo: I would like to associate the whole House, a big PLP supporter, a good friend of mine. At Cup Match, I was there with Cheryl enjoying her homemade wine. It's sad to hear of her passing, and I would like for the House to send condolences to her family.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Does any other Member—Minister?

You have your three minutes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Like the speaker before me, condolences to the family of Cynthia Lottimore. As articulated, she was a true pillar of the East. Although she was born in Warwick, she did make her home in St. George's for over 80 years, with a deep commitment to that community. Not only was she an educator and deputy principal for over 40 years, helping to shape the young minds of the children in St. George's, she also led the Richard Allen [AME] Church as superintendent of their Sunday school for just over 20 years.

As articulated, this loss is particularly personal to me. Donald, her son, is a fraternity brother of mine. And we have known each other since high school. Visiting with him yesterday was truly a sobering moment. But he can take solace in the fact that his mother was a well-loved and a well-looked-after person from St.

George's. So, condolences to her [family] and to Donald and his wife, Margaret, as they go through this troubling time.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to send condolences to the family of Emma Brice. Emma Brice was a constituent of mine who passed earlier this week just after reaching the ripe old age of 102. When I visited Ms. Brice at her home on her birthday, which was February 18th, while she had slowed down, she was still quite sharp. She recognised me, we laughed and joked about the birthday card I brought her, and she was able to give me a hug, which ultimately turned out to be the last time that I would see her.

One moment that does stand out in my mind about Ms. Brice was last year's election, which happened to fall on her birthday. And she was turning 101. I did offer the services of her being able to vote at home, but she immediately shooed me away and said, *No, no, no, no, I must show up to the poll, and I must go and vote on my own steam*, which she certainly did. And she walked in and did her vote and then did her typical Gombey dance as she came out of the polling booth.

Ms. Brice was a life member of the Progressive Labour Party, and some of the stories that she could tell of some of the stalwarts of this party as young men and women of the community were truly awe-inspiring. And so, I would send condolences for my constituent and a pillar of the Devonshire community and her family, condolences on their loss.

Lastly, again, on the same train, condolences to the family of Pastor Lloyd Duncan. And I'm sure there are other Members that will get up and give testimonies to Brother Lloyd Duncan as well.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: You can associate yourself—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: His brother, I do apologise . . . I associate myself with those. I do apologise. I wasn't here on Wednesday.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

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

MP Swan.

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

I would like to be associated with the condolences to the Lottimore, Wade and Pastor Duncan families as well. And may they be comforted during their time of bereavement, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, on a happier note, I would like to associate you and Member Emilygail Dill and Member Jamahl Simmons especially, and [MP] Scott Simmons in congratulating Ms. Capree Smith, who is

the student school principal of Dalton E. Tucker [Primary School]. And the reason why I am standing up is because most people would know that that's my alma mater and I have made it a point of spending some time there. Because it is one thing to name a school Dalton E. Tucker, it is another thing to know who Dalton Tucker was.

The Speaker: Yes.

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: And I think I am well positioned to have done that. And I did it through the sport of golf. And young Miss Smith is one of my charges. And just on Sunday, she was with us down at Belmont, along with young Joel Trott. And the beautiful part of that is that they were accompanied by either parents or grandparents, sometimes both. And I was able to mentor both the children and mentor parents on how to coach, in my absence, those gifted children. And it's a blessing.

And it wasn't lost on me that at 2:30 pm on Sunday past, that 60 years ago that same Dalton Tucker had us children who were being raised by single parents in Granaway Heights, at her house in Coral Acres on the waterside, singing loud so the fishermen who weren't in church could hear the melodious voices of these children. And so, all I'm doing is passing along what was given to me. Not by a school building, but by a principal whose name is carried forward. And I just wanted to say that, Mr. Speaker.

And finally, as this is International Women's Week on Sunday, I think it's important for us men to appreciate our role. And I think it's important for women to appreciate men's role in empowering women as well. I am proud to have participated in that when I had my first responsibility running a government quango, to have hired the first Bermudian women professional golfers and brought the first women's professional golf tournament to Bermuda back in the 1980s, which was very novel. But the way in which you empower people is to let them see their peers of high excellence.

Thank you.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, sir.

Does any . . . oh, Premier.

You have your three minutes. Let me restart the clock. Here we go.

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

Mr. Speaker, first, I rise to be associated with the remarks of condolences issued by the Deputy Speaker to the family of the now late Cheryl Wade. Mr. Speaker, I know that you knew Ms. Wade well, a pillar of the Somerset community. And as many people in this House know, I am good friends with Ms. Wade's children. And I just want to . . . she was an amazing soul. I remember when my wife had first moved to Bermuda

in 2011, she was one of the first people she had met. It was at a football match. And for those of you who knew Cheryl Wade, you used to know that Cheryl Wade always had a very colourful mouth when she was ready. And the way that she was cheering, cajoling, and I guess I would say *encouraging* the players on the pitch is something that stuck with my wife and myself for a long time.

But she was always very generous with her time, has raised and mentored numerous children in the Somerset community, and she certainly will be missed. And so, I would certainly hope that the House of Assembly would send a letter of condolence to her children: Nadir, Nasir, and her daughter, Nadia.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask that this Honourable House do send a letter of condolence to one of my constituents. The constituent is Ms. Leah [Richardson], who works at the post office. Her daughter, Ms. Tare Brangman, unfortunately passed away on Monday at the young age of 32 years old. I knew Tare because Tare worked on all of our campaigns in constituency 18. Ms. Leah Richardson is someone who has been a member of our branch, someone who served as deputy chair, the family is very close. She's a godmother to my firstborn. And Tare was battling illness, yes, but unfortunately succumbed to that illness on Monday at a very young age.

It's without question very tragic for the family, especially losing someone so young. But I do want to ask that the Honourable House do extend a letter of condolence to Ms. Leah Richardson (nee Brangman), and her family.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

Does any other Member . . . Minister Weeks.

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

I would like to start off by saying I would like to be associated with the remarks for Ms. Cheryl Wade and her family. Cheryl and I . . . as I became an MP, we shared a lot of laughs about politics whenever we crossed paths, Mr. Speaker. She always had some advice or questions for me. So, I am going to miss her and those conversations. I send my thoughts and prayers to her children, Mr. Speaker, her grandchildren, and her wider Somerset family. And I hope they all find peace and comfort during this very difficult time.

As we also reflect on the loss of loved ones, Mr. Speaker, I want to acknowledge that today is being observed by many in our community as Grief and Loss Awareness Day, led by Gina Spence Farmer. Grief is something that touches every family at some point, Mr. Speaker. And today reminds us that those carrying the weight of loss should never feel that they must do it alone. So, to the families who will gather today to remember loved ones who are no longer with them, please know that our thoughts and prayers are with

you. I also commend those in our community who continue to support compassion and space for healing in those navigating grief.

Mr. Speaker, on a brighter note, yesterday I had the pleasure of spending time with the bright students at Victor Scott Preschool as part of World Book Day. I read a story called *The Chimp with a Limp*, which shares a simple but powerful lesson about helping others and being honest about our responsibilities to one another, Mr. Speaker. The children certainly enjoyed the story. I even had to demonstrate what it looks like to limp. So, you can imagine the youngsters when I was trying to walk back and forth across the classroom, demonstrating what a limp was. But we all had a good time, Mr. Speaker. Moments like this are a joyful reminder of how important it is for us to encourage reading and kindness and community spirit.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, I want to congratulate Bermuda Women's Gombey Warriors for representing Bermuda in the Concacaf qualifiers this week. Their determination and their resilience shone through right to the final whistle. The final result obviously did not go our way. But hats off to those Lady Warriors that was out there fighting right to the end. And I encourage all Bermudians to get up and support our young men and women as they represent us on the international stage.

And finally, I want to recognise women across Bermuda's uniformed services as today is International Women's Day.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Timer chimes]

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other . . . MP Reverend Dill?

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

I want to take the opportunity . . . I am not sure if we have shared this already, but I want to congratulate the members of the Progressive Labour Party on their Founders Day and Drum Major Awards, which took place on the 22nd of February.

In particular, I must stand to highlight the three individuals from the Sandys community that were honoured, which were Mrs. Barbara Dillis, Mrs. Norette Simmons, and Mrs. Cecille Snaith-Simmons. Along with the others, Mrs. Terry Smith and Mr. Mickey Robinson. We celebrate these individuals and thank them for the wonderful contributions that they continue to make in our community. And they certainly stand as drum majors for justice.

I would also like today to join with the Minister and thank Ms. Gina Spence Farmer for her diligence in lifting up in this community grief and the many families that have lost loved ones. And in particular, today, as we will honour the lives of those who have been lost to road fatalities and stand with our families and first responders as today is the second annual Grief and Loss

Awareness Day. And we thank Dr. Gina for the work that she has done, and certainly the families that have lost loved ones. We lost our nephew several years ago to a road fatality and it is very, very painful to experience that. And so, we thank her for lifting that up and thank those in our community that will stand in solidarity with the families that have lost loved ones.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister Wilson.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I too would like to join in the chorus as we mourn and celebrate the life of Cheryl Wade.

I recall one of the early interactions I had with her. I was canvassing with former member Walter Lister, and her husband had just passed. And I remember being struck by the remarkable resolve and calmness that she exhibited. It was almost like a sense of peace.

As we shared our condolences about her husband, who of course she was then raising three . . . a set of triplets. I also recall canvassing her on occasion and walking up Cooks Hill and seeing her build a wall. And she was very enterprising and I thought, wow, this is another side of her physical strength.

And I laughed and I said, *Do you have anybody helping you?* And she was like, *No, I can do it all myself,* as she continued lifting the blocks and the rocks with respect to this wall that she was erecting.

In addition to that, Mr. Speaker, she probably was one of the first people to start a community garden. She did have that community garden on Cooks Hill—

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: —and she shared vegetables with people and gardening tips and the like for persons who were interested in learning more about gardening.

I would like to extend my condolences to her three remarkable children. She raised some very, very remarkable young men and a remarkable young woman. And she will certainly be missed in the Somerset community, and our prayers go with her family.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Would any other Member like to make a contribution at this time? No other Member?

Before we move on, I too would just like to add my words of condolences to the Wade family. Those of you who have spoken already and know the Somerset connection would know that Ms. Wade and I were extremely close [due to] the activities we've done in the community together, but also on a personal friendship level.

And if you knew Ms. Wade, you knew she was very spirited in presenting her viewpoints. And I touched base with her sons since she's passed, and I was reminded that they . . . they reminded me that they

can remember the many spirited conversations, or debates, if you want to call them that, that she and I would have in her house. And it was part of helping to shape their view of life going forward and politics going forward.

So, it's a sadness, but also [with] pleasant memories that I'll always think of Ms. Wade and the contribution that she made in my political growth and the support that she gave to me personally. But also, in what she gave to our community. You can say that she was a mother to many, and the young men that she helped to take under her wing and guide. She will truly be missed, and our deep sympathies go out to her entire family at this time.

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, and the Minister of Works is going to introduce it on behalf of the Minister of Transport.

Minister?

GOVERNMENT BILL

FIRST READING

MOTOR CAR (LICENCE DUTIES REDUCTION) AMENDMENT ACT 2026

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

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 Motor Car (Licence Duties Reduction) Amendment Act 2026.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. There are no other Bills this morning.

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

The Speaker: There are none.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

The Speaker: For our listening audience, this now brings us to the purpose of why we are here today for the continuation of the Committee of Supply for the further consideration of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditures for the year 2026/27.

And for the listening audience, again, once we start the debate, it's an eight-hour process. And the Speaker will be out of the Chair for that entire time, and the House will be in the hands of a chairperson. And that chairperson will be represented by the panel of Chairs.

The first Chairman this morning will be MP Pearman. And the first debate this morning is Education, which will take four hours, and then it will be followed by Finance, which is another four hours. Those debates will start, just a minute—

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Those debates will start in a minute.

We'll call on the Government to move us into Committee, and then the Chairman will take the Chair.

ANNOUNCEMENT BY THE SPEAKER

HOUSE VISITOR

The Speaker: Before I do that, because this is my last time to speak this morning before I leave, I just acknowledge in the Chamber this morning, we have Senator and Minister of Education [Crystal] Caesar, who is with us this morning while her Ministry will be debated first.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: And then we also have in the Chamber former Senator Jones, who is visiting us this morning as well.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: So, I will call on . . . Minister, will you take us into Committee?

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Mr. Speaker, I move that the House now resume in Committee of Supply to consider the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for 2026/27.

The Speaker: Are there any objections to that? I didn't think so.

MP Pearman, you have the Chair.

House in Committee at 10:55 am

[Mr. Scott Pearman, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Chairman: Good morning, Members.

We are now in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2026/27. And for the benefit of the listening public, as the Speaker has just indicated, we have a four-hour debate starting now for the next four hours, minus the lunch break. And that will be on the Ministry of Education.

The Minister of Education obviously sits in another place, and my understanding is that the former Minister of . . . no, I'm sorry. I'm being told that Honourable Member Dennis Lister III is going to lead the debate on behalf of the Government.

The . . . what does that say? Yes, 10:55 am is the start time.

And MP Lister, you have the floor. Do you want to move your heads?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Yes.

The Chairman: Thanks.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Mr. Dennis Lister III: To initiate consideration of the heads, Mr. Chairman, I move the following heads: Head 16, Ministry of Education Headquarters; Head 17, Department of Education; and Head 41, Bermuda College, be now be taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister.

It has been moved that Heads 16, 17, and 41 be moved. Is there any objection to that motion?

No objection. Agreed to.

Junior Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Good morning, Mr. Chairman. On behalf of Senator, the Honourable Crystal Caesar, JP, [MP], Minister of Education, I am pleased to present the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the Ministry of Education for the fiscal year 2026/27.

These estimates cover Ministry of Education Headquarters (Head 16), the Department of Education (Head 17), and Bermuda College (Head 41). The budget is a clear statement of what the Government prioritises for children, families, and educators, reflected not only in the spend, but how the resources are allocated. This budget is a demonstration of

responsible choices that will create lasting benefits for Bermudians.

In 2025/26, the Minister introduced a stabilisation focus so the public school system could deliver consistent high-quality learning and instruction while longer term improvements continued. In 2026/27, the Ministry will continue to build on the stabilisation plan to advance sustainable transformation with equitable investment across all public schools.

The total Ministry of Education budget for 2026/27 is \$156.5 million, a year over year increase of \$7.3 million, or 5 per cent. This increase strengthens the system's capacity to improve learning outcomes, fill critical staffing gaps, and invest in safer, more effective learning environments. The budget is allocated to

- strengthen school improvement, supervision, and learning outcomes;
- expand high quality professional learning for educators to deepen subject knowledge and teaching practice.
- fund and fill long-standing vacancies in critical leadership, school staffing, curriculum, and operational roles;
- increase grants that support professional development for staff, early intervention, and enrichment in lifelong learning across the community;
- advance the transformation of Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy; and
- expand youth counselling and coordinate support for child and adolescent mental health.

Capital funding has increased by 73 per cent to support stabilisation and transformation through targeted upgrades across the entire public school system. Priorities include

- phased safety and security upgrades, particularly at middle and senior schools;
- upgrades to school electrical systems;
- strong information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure to support continuity and learning, parent communication, and daily school operations;
- improvements required for accreditation standards, and
- improvements to classroom air quality and cooling.

The Ministry scholarships and awards funding has increased by \$420,125, bringing the total to \$2.2 million for post-secondary education. Funding is also provided for Bermuda College, supporting delivery of its 2025 to 2030 Strategic Plan, expanded programme accessibility, strong alignment with Bermuda's workforce and economic priorities, and an accreditation review.

Overall, the 2026/27 budget positions the Ministry of Education to move from stabilisation towards continuous cycles of system improvement, prioritising safety, equity, inclusion, workforce alignment, stronger

outcomes for students and staff effectiveness and well-being.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to now turn to Head 16, [Ministry] of Education.

The Chairman: Thank you, please continue.

HEAD 16—MINISTRY OF EDUCATION HEADQUARTERS

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, as found on page B-135 for the 2026/27 financial year, Head 16, the Ministry of Education Headquarters has been allocated \$6,968,027, a decrease of \$547,125 compared to 2025/26.

The Ministry is responsible for providing strategic leadership and policy direction for education and lifelong learning for the people of Bermuda. The supporting objectives of the Ministry are delivered under its sole programme, 1601 General, which consists of the following business units:

- 26000 General Administration
- 26080 Grants to External Bodies
- 26090 Scholarships and Awards, and
- 26140 Project Offers or Education Reform Unit, as named in the Budget Book.

Business Unit 26000, General Administration

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 26000 General [Administration] is budgeted at \$1,155,636, representing an increase of \$55,020. This business unit funds the salaries of the Ministry of Education Headquarters' small team of six full-time equivalents. This business unit also funds training, travel, advertising and promotion, local consultant services, rentals, board and committee fees, office supplies, and the Minister's annual debate challenge initiated in 2024 by the former Minister of Education.

Bermuda's premier debate competition was created for public and private school students 10 to 14 years of age. Debating fosters critical thinking, advanced research skills, and structured persuasive communication. Helping to prepare and inspire future lawyers, youth parliamentarians, and a new generation of aspiring legislators and leaders.

Business Unit 26080—Grants to External Bodies.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, business unit 26080 Grants to External Bodies is budgeted at \$987,000, an increase of \$262,000. The 36 per cent increase in this allocation reflects the importance of education, social and economic investments in young children, families, and educators.

As per the Minister's strategic direction, funding for grants is awarded to support the stabilisation priorities and advance educational transformation. These grants strengthen early and emerging literacy, provide

educational assessments to children who may have learning differences, support continued professional learning for educators, and guarantee local post-secondary tuition support for eligible public school graduates through the College Promise Programme. Grant recipients possess experience in their respective fields, and they are critical partners to education.

Grants directed to programming and services for young children and students in the public school system who are

1. local service providers who provide programmes and services that support stabilisation and educational transformation,
2. specialists in their fields, and
3. attuned to existing challenges, changing needs, and advances in research and best practices.

The grants allow investment in qualified local in-service providers and strengthen the sustainability of educational programmes and services.

Mr. Chairman I am pleased to announce the grant to external bodies for 2026/27 will fund targeted reading instruction and intervention services provided by the reading clinic for students who are struggling readers, including learners with dyslexia and learning differences. This grant provides screening and assessment where needed and evidence-based structured literacy support to strengthen students' abilities to assess the full curriculum across subject areas, improving overall teaching and learning outcomes.

It will also combine educational, therapeutic, recreational programmes provided by WindReach Bermuda. Using approaches to help students, particularly those with special needs or developmental challenges, build communication, self-regulation, social skills, and functional independence. These supports strengthen readiness to learn, reduce barriers to attendance and engagement, and complement school-based learning plans through structured activities in safe, accessible environments.

The Sloop Foundation innovatively provides STEAM education services, which are partner-delivered science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics programmes that strengthen student engagement and foundational skills. Activities may include robotics, electronics, design and digital making, supporting mathematics and literacy skill development, problem-solving, and creativity that support school curriculum.

Bermuda Zoological Society science programmes, consisting of interactive science classes and field-based learning, which reinforces science curriculum outcomes, builds student understanding of Bermuda's ecosystem and conservation effort. This programme is delivered through the Bermuda Aquarium Museum and Zoo (BAMZ).

In-school and community music education programmes taught by the Menuhin Foundation that include weekly group string instruction in primary schools

and performance opportunities. Music learning strengthens students' well-being and engagement, builds discipline and teamwork, and supports the whole child development that complements classroom teaching and learning.

Public school science education programmes provided by the Bermuda Underwater Exploration Institute (BUEI), experiences and sustainability education, including Eco-Schools, which is the international award and student action programme, where students carry out sustainability audits and implement sustainable practices. These programmes strengthen science learning experiences through hands-on enquiry. They build environmental literacy and provide authentic context for teaching and learning across science, social studies, and project-based work.

National Educators Institute (NEI), professional learning programmes invest in teaching practice, instructional leadership, and system capacity to deliver improvements in teaching and learning. NEI is a professional learning hub that provides training, networking, research, and resources for Bermuda's educators.

Coding instruction taught by Connectech, so public school students can learn coding concepts through practical, age-appropriate activities. This builds computational thinking, problem-solving and creativity, and supports student pathways for future learning in technology.

Keep Bermuda Beautiful's (KBB) school-based environmental education programme, which consists of waste reduction lessons, marine debris surveys, school assemblies, and related activities. This programming builds student environmental stewardship and enquiry skills and provides applied learning opportunities connected to science and social studies.

Public school experiential learning field trips to reinforce classroom instruction through real-world experiences. Funding offsets cost, increasing access for student participation in learning experiences, both locally and abroad, which is available through an application process.

C.A.R.E. Learning Centre Bermuda provides an alternative learning environment, academic upgrading, and computer-assisted learning. Programmes help students and adult learners strengthen core skills, re-engage with education, and progress toward recognised credentials (i.e., GED preparation or testing support), improve employability and lifelong learning outcomes.

College Promise student awards to provide tuition for up to two years for eligible Bermuda public senior school graduates to attend Bermuda College. The awards can be used to fund certificate programmes, associate degrees, and/or credits that can be transferred to a four-year institution. It should be noted that beginning this year, the GPA requirement is now 2.5, which will allow even more students to access post-secondary education at Bermuda's only college location.

Mr. Chairman, each grant is consistent with the Ministry of Education's Stabilisation Objectives and the Department of Education's Supporting Priorities, which will be detailed under Head 17, the Department of Education.

Business Unit 26090—Scholarships and Awards

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, business unit 26090, Scholarships and Awards, is budgeted at \$2,185,150, an increase of \$420,125. The 24 per cent increase brings the total spend on a wide range of scholarships and awards to \$2.2 million.

In the fiscal year ending 2025, over 70 Bermudian students benefited from Ministry scholarships and awards, in many instances providing life-changing opportunities for aspiring and continuing students. For the upcoming fiscal year, the Ministry is proud to indicate that an increased number of students will be able to access tertiary education.

In particular, the Bermuda Government scholarships have increased by two, specifically to support students demonstrating proficiency and interest in creative arts and health and sports-related fields. This is being done in response to the noted additional number of applicants who are interested in those areas of study but find it difficult to secure funding elsewhere. It is this Ministry's aim that students are prepared for a diverse range of fields for Bermuda's future world of work in the economy. Increased funding in these intended and necessary careers supports that vision.

Additional funding has also been allocated across several other award categories, including technical and vocational, applied science, nontraditional, teacher education, and teacher's sabbatical awards.

Mr. Chairman, scholarships and awards are delivered through a structured annual cycle that includes application management, scholarship committee assessment and recommendations, and the timely disbursements of approved awards. The vast majority of the work under this business unit is conducted behind the scenes but is highly visible during scholarship season.

The Ministry informs, supports, and attracts applicants with diverse interests, backgrounds, experiences, and academic and technical pursuits. To improve access to scholarships and awards, the Ministry, through the scholarship manager, continues targeted outreach and service improvements, including:

- Bermudascholarships.[com] portal and partner coordination with the Bermuda Foundation for Insurance Studies (BFIS);
- participation in monthly Bermuda Scholarships steering committee meetings to strengthen portal visibility, functionality; and
- long-term direction, including maintenance planning, marketing, user experience improvements, and expanding islandwide access.

Supplementary support includes scholarship promotion and application assistance through weekly accountability workshops and career fair engagement.

Parent and family engagement. Delivery of targeted parent-facing information sessions, including participation in the Mirrors programme, "Finding Funds for College" webinar to provide families with clear scholarship timelines, application guidance, and practical planning tools.

School-based outreach. Scholarship presentations delivered to students and youth-serving programmes, including The Berkeley Institute and Cedar-Bridge S4 assemblies and informationals and the Peer-Forward Spring Training Camp, among others.

Youth-led promotion. Use of scholarship recipients to increase awareness and credibility of Ministry support, including student contributions during the Mirrors webinar highlighting how Ministry funding supported their academic pathways.

Communications and marketing. Continued use of past recipients to promote scholarships, including animated promotional videos to strengthen engagement and application uptake.

Mr. Chairman, promises made, promises kept. The Ministry of Education has achieved the mandate of increasing the scope of scholarship offerings and expanding the College Promise Programme to support young adults in their academic pursuits.

Business Unit 26140—Project Office (ERU) and Professional Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, Business Unit 26140, which supports the Project Office (formerly known as the Education Reform Unit) and associated professional services, is budgeted at \$2,640,241, a decrease of \$1,284,270. The decrease in this allocation is due to the conclusion of the last contract for the overseas consultants Innovation Unit (now ThirdStory), valued at \$2,194,311 for 2025/26.

The Project Office is a programme within the Ministry of Education Headquarters which assists in stabilising the current state of public education while continuing to transform to the desired future state of an improved education system. The focus of the Project Office has been tightened to focus on teaching, learning, and student outcomes. Mechanisms for coordination and collaboration between the Project Office, schools, and the DOE are in place to assure alignment and cohesion of the critical transformative work under development.

Mr. Chairman, the phrase *platform in motion* validates active, ongoing progress and the transformation of Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy represents a significant milestone for the educational transformation work that has commenced for special education. A structured, evidence-formed, and research-based process is underway to design a new specialised school model for students with severe to profound

intellectual disabilities and complex developmental delays who require multi-layered interdisciplinary support. Foundational work has also been completed, including research to ground the approach in current and international best practices, early engagement with parents and staff, and a clear, co-designed methodology to guide decision-making and build shared ownership.

Progress to date also demonstrates exceptional momentum and participation, as demonstrated by 36 applications and a selection process that resulted in a diverse, multidisciplinary school transformation team made up of educators, parents, therapists, industry technical experts, and community stakeholders.

Onboarding phases are well underway, with strong attendance and a practical structure aligned to priority areas such as infrastructure, curriculum, pedagogy assessment, therapeutic supports, stakeholder engagement, and unique school features.

This workstream is being led by a local educator, Mrs. Clindel Lowe. Mrs. Lowe has been actively engaged in the transformation work to date, and as a result, she has developed the necessary capabilities and agile mind-set which positions her to build and lead this transformation journey in excellence.

Simultaneously, the Ministry is delivering on the mandate to promote and proudly celebrate home-grown talent leading system improvements and transformative work that will impact the lives of students and families. To support this workstream, scheduled collaboration with school leadership, teachers, and the student services section with the DOE is arranged to maintain alignment, accountability, and transparency. Regular engagement with parents and staff is a strong component of the methodology. Recently, the lead of this workstream provided an overview of the work to date to the Bermuda Union of Teachers, as several of the members of the transformation team are educators.

Mr. Chairman, stabilisation and educational transformation work underway within the special school will also be supported by policy development and special education legislation in 2026/27 and guided by the insights emanating from the design process.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Education continues to deliver on the mandate of an Education Authority, which requires transparency and a strategic rollout plan. In spite of past delays in addressing potential legal considerations, I am pleased to advise that a draft Bill, after several rounds of deliberation to establish an Education Authority, has been achieved.

In line with our ongoing commitment to meaningfully engage in two-way communication with education partners and stakeholder representatives, the Ministry of Education will meet with unions, school boards, PTA executives, Department of Education staff, teachers, principals, and others on the development of the Education Authority. This is an important opportunity for the Ministry to listen to various interests and questions and to use the feedback to refine and improve iteration of the draft Bill and a collaborative approach.

That includes stakeholders in the continuing Education Authority phases of work, which requires legislation and shared implementation.

Mr. Chairman, as we reflect on what has been shared so far in this brief, it is very evident that transformative practices and principles of change management remain as a priority, and hard work has not been paused. From manifesto to milestones, the journey of a series of milestones and achievements have been summarised today. Effective transformation is not about a single moment in time, but a commitment to continuous improvement cycles and focussing on variables that have the most impact on student outcomes. The Ministry of Education Headquarters remains steadfast in the pursuit of providing all students with a quality education as we continue to work through structural tier changes inclusive of infrastructure challenges.

Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, I now turn to the subjective analysis of current account estimates on page B-136. The subjective analysis of current account estimates are shown for the Ministry of Education Headquarters.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: You're welcome.

The Chairman: [Page] B-136.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Yes. Salaries stand at \$717,000 and show a minimal increase of \$40,000 when compared to 2025/26. The travel expenditure line item of \$97,000 remains the same when compared to last year. This funds the attendance at conferences and engaging other jurisdictions that have implemented education improvements that may be beneficial to the Bermuda public school system.

Expenditure for grants and contributions increased by \$672,000. The full breakdown of the \$3,125,000 budgeted for grants and contributions can be found on page C-18 of the Budget Book.

Mr. Chairman, \$2,118,000 has been budgeted for professional services. This reflects a decrease of \$1,260,000 for consultancy services primarily as a result of the end of the Innovation Unit, or ThirdStory, contract at the end of 2025.

Mr. Chairman, on page B-136, the number of full-time equivalents, or employees, in administrative education remain the same as last year at six FTEs and funds all posts except for the permanent secretary.

Finally, Mr. Chairman on page B-137, 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'll take a water break.

The Chairman: Thank you.

As the Minister is pausing there, we are in the Committee of Supply for Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the budget year 2026/27, and we are in the first hour of the Education debate, which is being presented by the Junior Minister of [Justice], MP Lister.

MP Lister, you have the floor.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

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 July 31st, and all grant finances and stated outcomes were reviewed by March 31st.

For business unit 26090, Scholarships and Awards, the Scholarships and Awards Committee made recommendations for recipients to the Minister by the deadline of July 31st, and the Ministry HQ ensured that scholarship funds were disbursed by October 31st of last year.

Mr. Chairman this budget reflects the commitment to stabilisation, impactful transformative practices, and school improvement planning that is student-centred while maintaining fiscal responsibility. I am confident that the approval of the budget for Head 16 will provide the enabling conditions to achieve the strategic priorities.

Before closing, I would like to acknowledge the work of the entire team, ably led by the permanent secretary that supports one of the government's largest ministries, which impacts a large portion of Bermuda's community and ultimately our future.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman This concludes my presentation for the budget for Head 16, the Ministry of Education Headquarters.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Lister.

You are going to now take us on, I believe, to Head 17 when you're ready.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Yes.

HEAD 17—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I will now present the budget for Head 17, the Department of Education. The 2026/27 budget has been increased by \$7,816,000 to bring the total allocation to \$156,460,000. This represents a 6 per cent increase to deliver the priorities of stabilisation and educational transformation.

Mr. Chairman as we continue to advance education transformation, we remain committed to ensuring that each and every learner in Bermuda's public schools, regardless of which school they attend, has access to high-quality, culturally relevant, future-focused learning experiences. Our work is anchored in a clear vision, an education system where all young people are educated to lead personally and professionally, compete locally, and contribute globally.

Our mission, which advances our vision and supports system stabilisation, charges us to provide all students with equitable access to holistic, high-quality instruction that empowers them to reach their full potential.

Mr. Chairman, our priorities for the 2026/27 academic year reflect both the aspirations of our transformation agenda and the operational realities of our schools. These priorities include strengthening our students' literacy, numeracy, science, and digital literacy skills, monitoring curriculum implementation, enhancing instructional and assessment practices, and embedding social-emotional well-being into the daily life of every school.

We are also focused on targeted student interventions, celebrating staff and student excellence, developing staff and leadership capacity, and improving our protocols, data systems, and progress monitoring processes. Together, these priorities ensure that our work remains focused, accountable, and responsive to the needs of our learners.

Mr. Chairman our key overarching activities also advance our vision. We are increasing academic rigour and student engagement through diverse and differentiated curricula. We are ensuring career, college, and workforce readiness by integrating academic and vocational pathways through signature programmes at our senior schools. We are using professional development to strengthen and enhance the quality of teaching and leadership and to drive sustained improvement in student achievement. We are investing in infrastructure, cleaning equipment, and resources to ensure that students learn in clean, healthy environments. We are strengthening operational systems to enable a high-performing public education system.

Mr. Chairman this budget brief outlines the financial investments needed to support our priorities and to continue building a school system that is inclusive, innovative, empowering, and grounded in the Bermuda context, all with the clear aim of improving student outcomes.

1701—Central Administration

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Programme 1701, Central Administration, has been allocated \$11,039,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$2,752,000.

Mr. Chairman, within that programme, there is business unit 27000, General Administration, which is allocated \$1,484,000, an increase of \$932,000. The budget for this business unit provides for the procurement of essential educational resources, cleaning supplies, and operational materials that support teaching, learning, safety, and daily school operations.

This allocation ensures that teachers and students have the core materials needed for teaching and learning, that administrative teams have the supplies required for smooth operations, and that custodians

have the materials and equipment necessary to maintain clean and safe school environments.

This funding keeps schools adequately supplied throughout the year, preventing shortages that could disrupt instruction or daily operations.

27001—Office of the Commissioner

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27001, Office of the Commissioner, is allocated \$1,119,000, an increase of \$298,000. The Office of the Commissioner provides strategic leadership, system-wide oversight, and regulatory stewardship to ensure quality teaching, effective school operations, effective department operation, and accountability for student outcomes across Bermuda's public schools. This Office drives school improvement, implements transformation initiatives, and monitors performance to strengthen outcomes for all students at the school level and the system level.

Mr. Chairman, under the stewardship of the Commissioner of Education, this business unit provides strategic leadership and system-wide oversight to ensure curriculum delivery, quality teaching, and effective school operations across Bermuda's public schools. It ensures regulatory stewardship through policy compliance, adherence to standards, and the application of legal requirements. It drives school improvement and the implementation of transformation initiatives that strengthen instructional quality and organisational effectiveness. It monitors school and system performance to improve outcomes for all students. It supports operational planning to enable equitable delivery of education services. It implements strategic initiatives that advance the priorities of the Bermuda public school system.

In 2025/26, the Office of the Commissioner implemented a new continuous improvement structure. The school improvement plan, structure, and school improvement cycle were revised and linked to the principal evaluation system to strengthen coherent, data-driven improvement and instructional focus. The revised school improvement plan and cycle, linked to principal evaluation, establishes a unified, data-driven approach that sharpens instructional focus and strengthens continuous improvement. Collectively, these initiatives undergird efforts to improve student outcomes.

Additionally, the increased financial investment for 2026/27 will strengthen operational oversight by adding dedicated leadership capacity to manage procurement, budgeting, compliance, and reporting. It will also improve service quality and responsiveness across schools by ensuring timely administrative support, streamline workflows, and reduce bottlenecks for principals and instructional teams. In 2026/27, priorities will focus on strengthening discipline delivery and accountability across the system.

27030—Human Resources

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27030, Human Resources, is allocated \$672,000, an increase of \$17,000. Mr. Chairman, this increase reflects incremental adjustments in compensation levels necessary to sustain reliable administrative services and workflows.

In fiscal year 2025/26, this business unit supported staff morale and organisational stability by holding an award celebration to recognise employees who achieved five-year service milestones through a formal, long-service celebration. This recognition strengthened staff members' sense of value and belonging and contributed to a more positive and motivated workplace culture, which supports retention, continuity, and stability across our schools.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2026/27, the business unit's primary priority is to fill the administrative assistant, secretary, and file clerk posts substantively, ensuring sustainable administrative services and increased efficiency by using digitised systems. This will improve workflow management, accelerate processing of documents and correspondence, and reduce bottlenecks caused by rotating or temporary staff.

27031—Staff Development

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27031, Staff Development, is allocated \$913,000, an increase of \$131,000. The budget for business unit [27031] provides funding for a substantive staff development officer, mentor teachers, and the system-wide professional development programme that supports educators across the BPSS.

The staff development officer is central to strengthening the coordination, quality assurance, and alignment of professional learning across the BPSS. This dedicated role will enable the department to streamline system-wide professional development, ensure consistency across schools, and embed research-based practices that directly support improved teaching and learning.

Funding for mentor teacher salaries remains essential to the effective delivery of the Bermuda Teacher Induction Programme (BTIP). BTIP mentors provide high-quality, personalised professional development and coaching that strengthens the skills, confidence, and retention of new Bermudian teachers during their first and second years in the system. Their support ensures that beginning teachers develop strong instructional practices, understand system expectations, and contribute positively to school culture. This mentoring work supports stabilisation and complements broader system improvements.

27090—Educational Standards and Accountability

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27090, Educational Standards and Accountability, is allocated \$1,112,000, an increase of \$101,000.

Mr. Chairman the Educational Standards and Accountability (ESA) unit, monitors system-wide standards for teaching, learning, and school performance, ensuring every school is working toward meeting those expectations. The unit strengthens principal development by providing coaching and leadership support that build strong instructional leaders. It also coordinates professional development so that leaders have the skills, tools, and practices needed to raise student achievement.

During the 2025/26 school year, ESA facilitated principals' professional learning sessions on the development and implementation of school improvement plans (SIPs), including the use of implementation data, progress monitoring data, and the full set of processes and procedures required to execute SIPs competently. Through professional learning, the ESA unit enables principals to translate system priorities into daily practice, resulting in more coherent instructional delivery, more responsive student support systems, and measurable gains in student learning across Bermuda's public schools.

Mr. Chairman, Attendance and Registration Services has been returned to business unit 27090, Educational Standards and Accountability, and no longer business unit 27095, School Attendance. This team implements systems to ensure children of compulsory school age are enrolled in school and attending daily. It oversees the annual school registration and transfer process, monitors attendance trends across all schools, and supports systemwide efforts to reduce chronic absenteeism through consistent reporting, data audits, and continuous process improvement.

It also provides data and recommendations to Ministry and department leadership to support decisions on enrolment, placements, and capacity planning. The functions and main activities of this unit include daily attendance monitoring and school support, such as guidance on attendance practices, training for school staff on PowerSchool entries and coding, and daily contact with parents or guardians to confirm unexplained absences and ensure student safety.

This unit also manages the full annual registration process across year levels, including timelines, open house schedules, placement criteria, capacity constraints, award letters, appeals and transfer processing. In addition, it delivers high-volume data collection and reporting including monthly attendance reporting.

In 2025/26, attendance monitoring was strengthened due to training and daily parent contact protocols. School administrative assistants received training and attendance officers were included in multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS) discussions so that students missing 10 per cent or more of school days could be identified earlier and supported more consistently. Looking to 2026/27, priorities are focused on modernising attendance practices and conducting a comprehensive review of the attendance officer role.

27160—Substitutes

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, business unit 27160, Substitutes, is allocated \$5,739,000, an increase of \$1,273,000. This programme ensures uninterrupted learning and stable school operations by deploying trained, qualified Bermuda Educators Council licenced personnel to provide classroom coverage whenever teachers or staff are absent.

Mr. Chairman, the additional funding strengthens year-round staffing stability by ensuring allocated substitutes are available daily at every primary, middle, senior, and special school. It expands the pool of trained, qualified substitutes, improving the programme's ability to respond quickly to teacher and staff absences. This critical programme safeguards instructional and service time and supports student well-being by maintaining continuity of teaching and learning across all public schools.

1702—Student Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, programme 1702, Student Services, is allocated \$21,671,000 for the 2026/27 year. This represents a decrease of \$42,000.

Student Services exists to ensure that every student, regardless of ability, background, or need, has equitable access to education and the individualised support required to succeed. This unit is grounded in the understanding that learning is not a one-size-fits-all, and students arrive with diverse strengths, challenges, and circumstances that require differentiated approaches. Student Services provides specialised expertise and targeted interventions through the multi-tiered system of support process, working with school teams to remove barriers to learning and promote full participation in the educational experience. Ultimately, Student Services exists to uphold equity, inclusion, and the right of every child in the Bermuda public school system to reach their highest potential.

27061—Behaviour Management

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27061, Behaviour Management, is allocated \$1,883,000 for 2026/27, an increase of \$49,000. This business unit provides targeted behavioural support across the school system.

The Education Officer supervises educational therapists and educational therapist assistants in implementing individualised classroom management plans, behaviour intervention support plans, functional behaviour assessments, and behaviour intervention plans. The majority of spend for this business unit covers salaries.

1702, Behaviour Management

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman the performance measure for this unit tracks the percentage of students

whose behaviour intervention support plans (BISPs), were created with full fidelity. These plans are an essential part of the multi-tiered system of support, ensuring that students with significant behavioural needs receive structured, evidence-based interventions.

For the 2024/25 school year, this unit achieved its target of 100 per cent conformity in the creation of BISPs. This reflects strong adherence to required processes and a clear commitment to supporting students with the highest behavioural needs.

Information about business unit 27062, Success Academy, which is allocated \$28,000, will be provided under business unit 27084, Alternative Education Programme.

27063—School Psychology

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27063, School Psychology, is allocated \$1,335,000, an increase of \$40,000. Funding for this programme supports the work of school psychologists with clinical expertise, as well as the assessment tools and materials required to complete student evaluations.

School psychologists provide comprehensive services that promote student success across academic, social, emotional, and behavioural domains. Their work supports schools by consulting with educators and families, conducting psychoeducational assessments, delivering interventions, and contributing to initiatives that strengthen student well-being and learning outcomes. The programme operates through direct support to individual students and support to school teams.

School psychologists also work with teachers, families, and leadership teams to identify learning needs and barriers to success. In addition, school psychologists conduct comprehensive psychoeducational evaluations and provide recommendations that guide interventions. They support mental health and well-being by helping schools strengthen classroom supports and improve school climate, and they contribute to crisis prevention and response so schools can protect student safety and emotional stability during critical incidents.

In the fiscal year 2025/26, all schools had a school psychologist assigned, ensuring access to assessment support and consultation throughout the year and continuity of services regardless of school placement or staffing changes. Where urgent demand increased, the team also redeployed capacity to meet those needs. The additional funding provided last year was utilised to secure additional services to support a high volume of assessments for one senior school where timely psychoeducational evaluations were most urgent, enabling students to receive evaluations and appropriate supports.

In fiscal year 2026/27, the programme's priority is to strengthen capacity to respond to complex mental health and behavioural needs while preserving early

intervention and preventative support. For this unit, the performance measure tracked the percentage of psychoeducational assessments completed between April 1, 2025, and January 31, 2026. This performance measure is significant because it tracks the timely completion of psychoeducational assessments, which are essential for identifying learning needs and ensuring students receive the appropriate supports to strengthen academic rigour and engagement.

Between April 2025 and January 2026, 24 referrals were assigned and 19 were completed, resulting in a completion rate of 73 per cent. To improve performance, this unit will continue working closely with schools to streamline the assessment process, ensuring timely submission of required documentation, and support parents in attending feedback meetings. Strengthening coordination between schools and psychologists will help reduce delays and improve completion rates.

27064—Adapted Physical Education

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27064, Adapted Physical Education, is allocated \$346,000, an increase of \$14,000. The Adapted Physical Education programme provides developmentally appropriate physical education opportunities for students with diverse needs. Its purpose is to help students to get active and stay active by offering the individualised support, modifications, and adaptive strategies needed for meaningful participation in physical education.

Through this programme, students are integrated into the regular physical education curriculum to the greatest extent possible, promoting inclusion, skill development, and improved physical well-being. This programme is delivered by Adapted Physical Education teachers. These specialist teachers work across Bermuda school zones and provide direct support to students who require adaptive instruction, while also advising and coaching school staff to strengthen inclusive participation in physical education.

In 2025/26, one of the programme's most significant achievements was strengthening the partnership with Special Olympics Bermuda and successfully delivering the Adapted Physical Education and Special Olympics National Track and Field Invitational in May 2025. This collaboration expanded opportunities for students with diverse needs to participate in inclusive athletic events, showcase their skills, and engage in meaningful physical activity within a supportive community environment.

Business unit 27065, Hearing, is allocated \$214,000 for 2026/27, an increase of \$7,000. This business unit supports students who are deaf or hard of hearing so that they can fully access instruction and school life. The purpose of this programme is to remove communication barriers by ensuring students receive specialised services, the right communication support, such as sign language, classroom amplification

systems or captioning, and learning materials adapted to their individual hearing profiles. In 2025/26, the programme strengthened staff capacity through professional learning in differentiated instruction and learning styles.

In 2026/27, priorities will focus on strengthening dedicated hearing services by securing protected time for hearing-specific work, enhancing early identification and monitoring through regular checks and classroom observation, and expanding timely access to assistive technology such as amplification and captioning tools.

27066—Vision

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27066, Vision, is allocated \$119,000 for 2026/27, an increase of \$70,000. This business unit supports students who are visually impaired so they can access learning on equal terms with their peers. Students receive specialised instruction, books, and learning materials in accessible formats, including braille, large print, and digital media, and the equipment and technology needed to participate fully in both core and expanded curricula. The programme's functions and main activities centre on building transferable skills that enable independence and participation. This programme is also strengthened through partnerships including Vision Bermuda, which supports post-secondary transitions and planning.

In 2026/27, priorities will focus on strengthening MTSS capability for vision services, so tiered supports are delivered consistently, improving mathematics instruction using students' learning preferences to increase engagement and confidence, and strengthening reading comprehension through explicit strategies aligned to help students access text through either braille, large print, audio, and tactile supports.

27069—Gifted and Talented

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27069, Gifted and Talented, is allocated \$131,000, an increase of \$6,000. The increased funding to this business unit will support innovative learning experiences and resources for students identified as gifted and or talented.

27071—Office Support

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27071, Office Support, is allocated \$634,000, an increase of \$23,000.

This business unit supports the administrative backbone of student services so that learning support, school psychology, counselling, behaviour management and other specialist supports can operate smoothly and consistently. Its purpose is to ensure that essential student support processes, scheduling, documentation, communication, and records are handled efficiently so specialist staff can focus on providing direct services to students and schools.

In 2026/27, the priority is to reduce communication gaps and strengthen timely information flow across staff, families, and stakeholders. This is intended to support smoother operations, more effective coordination, and stronger partnerships that ultimately improve student outcomes.

27072—Counselling

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27072, Counselling, is allocated \$3,432,000, an increase of \$231,000.

Mr. Chairman, this business unit supports a comprehensive counselling programme that strengthens students' academic, social, emotional, and future career success. Its purpose is to provide a structured, developmental system of support grounded in international standards through classroom guidance, individual planning, responsive services, and system-level coordination aligned to the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS).

In 2025/26, the programme strengthened cross-government collaboration by partnering with the Department of Health to integrate mental health activities across primary, middle, and senior schools. Evidence of strengthened programming includes the Primary Movie Mental Health Initiative on May 12, 2025, the Middle School Mental Health Roadshow and Senior School Youth Mental Health Summit on October 16 and 17, 2025, and Children's Mental Health Awareness Week activities the 9th to 15th of February 2026.

In 2026/27, priorities include revising classroom guidance lessons to integrate additional mental health-focused activities that strengthen students' coping skills, resilience, and emotional literacy, and continue to strengthen partnerships with local mental health providers, including through professional learning days and sustained collaboration with the Department of Health.

27073—Summer Programme

27074—Learning Support

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 2703, Summer Programme, is allocated \$18,000.

Business Unit 27074, Learning Support, is allocated \$4,755,000, an increase of \$290,000. This business unit supports specialised learning support and special education services across preschool, primary, middle, and senior schools, as well as at the Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy and with trauma-responsive programmes at the Success Academy. Its purpose is to ensure students with diverse learning needs receive targeted, evidence-based interventions that promote academic growth, independence, and equitable access to the curriculum.

In 2025/26, professional development strengthened delivery capacity across the system. Training in differentiated instruction and learning styles strengthened teachers' ability to tailor instruction.

MTSS training strengthened consistency and competency in tiered interventions and restorative practices.

In 2026/27, priorities include continuing to strengthen MTSS implementation through ongoing training, coaching, and support across school teams, target overseas recruitment to hire learning support teachers with specialised credentials in autism, developmental delay, and other high-needs areas.

Performance measures for individual education programmes (IEPs), 1702. The department monitors the individualised education programme (IEP) process to ensure that students identified with specific learning disabilities receive appropriate, high-quality support that is responsive to their individual needs.

For the 2025/26 year, the system achieved 100 per cent KPI targets, meeting both the established baseline and the annual target. This level of consistency reflects strong procedural adherence and underscores the importance of maintaining robust supports for learning support teachers. Budget allocations directly sustain this performance measure by funding learning support teacher positions, instructional resources, and targeted professional development that strengthens the quality and consistency of IEP implementation across schools.

27076—Early Childhood Education

27079—Paraprofessionals

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27076, Early Childhood Education, is allocated \$137,000, with no change from 2025/26, which reflects a salary and required resources.

Business Unit 27079, Paraprofessionals, is allocated \$6,857,000, a decrease of \$475,000. This funding supports paraeducators who provide essential in-class and one-to-one support across the full educational spectrum. Paraprofessionals are responsible for assisting teachers in reinforcing instructional activities, providing one-to-one support for designated students, including academic, behavioural, and functional supports to align to IEP goals, implementing behaviour plans through prompting and redirection, supporting toileting, mobility, and personal care needs with dignity and safety, and providing vision and hearing support, such as adapting materials, scribing, and assisting with access to assistive devices.

In 2025/26, professional development strengthened paraeducator practice. Training in differentiated instruction and learning styles strengthened skills to support diverse learning needs and improve engagement. MTSS training clarified roles and strengthened data-informed tiered interventions.

In 2026/27, the priority is continued MTSS training so paraeducators have a common language and practical tools aligned to tiered intervention expectations.

27083—Autism Spectrum Disorder

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, Business Unit 27083 Autism is allocated \$741,000, a decrease of \$185,000. The Autism Programme's core functions are to ensure appropriate placement of documented and eligible students into Autism Spectrum Diagnosis. ASD, classrooms, or the least restrictive environment based on individual needs, provide specialised instruction using evidence-based practises that support communication, social development, behaviour regulation, and academic growth. And ensure system-wide support for students with ASD across primary, middle, senior, and special school settings to promote continuity of service and equitable access to resources.

In 2025/26, there was a notable increase in successful and meaningful inclusion. Students were integrated more regularly from ASD classrooms into general education classrooms with or without additional support. This reflects improved readiness and strong collaboration between autism programme staff and school teams and reinforces the department's commitment to meaningful access to the least restrictive environment. As evidence, approximately 10 children in primary and middle schools are successfully participating in mainstream programmes this year.

Looking to 2026/27, the priority is to establish an additional autism classroom to accommodate the increasing number of students who require specialised support.

27084—Alternative Education

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27084 Alternative Education Programme is allocated \$1,041,000, which is a 10 per cent decrease of \$112,000. This business unit supports Success Academy and other alternative education provisions for students who require a different environment to regulate behaviour and ultimately reintegrate into regular classroom settings. These alternative placements help students reengage with learning and in order to progress towards recognised qualifications.

They also provide personalised and flexible learning experiences, emphasise life skills and practical knowledge, and aim to prepare learners for future opportunities in vocational fields, higher education, or employment while maintaining an appropriate, safe, and inclusive environment.

Alternative education is designed to focus on reengagement and hands-on learning to help build students' confidence and see a realistic pathway to transition and completion of the educational journey.

In 2025/26, students demonstrated growth by achieving personalised milestones. For some learners, this included earning a General Education Development (GED) high school equivalency diploma, or progressing through key GED subject areas, such as completing three out of four subcategories. These outcomes reflect steady guidance from school counsellors and alternative education staff and show that with

consistent support and a clear plan, students facing significant barriers can make real progress toward recognised qualifications.

Looking to 2026/27, priorities focus on expanding appropriate, equitable access to alternative placements and strengthening safe environments in which alternative learning is delivered. Part of the plan is to explore additional community partners across parishes in order to provide a wider array of alternative experiences for the students in these programmes.

Programme 1703, Finance and Corporate. Programme 1703, Finance and Corporate, is allocated \$7,964,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$963,000. This programme supports financial, facility, information technology, compliance, and operational safety and health for the Department of Education and Schools.

27002—Finance and Corporate Services

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27002, Finance and Corporate Services, is allocated \$790,000, a decrease of \$8,000. This business unit supports the Department of Education to operate efficiently, transparently, and sustainably by providing financial stewardship, corporate governance, and essential administrative services.

The functions and main activities cover the core finance operations that keep the system running. The team processes the salaries for over 1,000 educators and staff, processes payments to suppliers and vendors, ensures accurate reconciliation of leave entitlements, advises on financial efficiencies, and plays a key role in identifying cost-saving measures.

This unit's work also supports procurement, operational planning, and compliance so that schools and programmes receive the resources and services they need when they need them.

Looking to 2026/27, the business unit will also continue strengthening compliance controls, particularly for school-based processes such as petty cash, through training, timely signatory updates, and increased monitoring for higher-risk sites, helping to protect public funds and maintain stable operational support to schools.

27003—Office Accommodation

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27003, Office Accommodation, is allocated \$1,044,000, an increase of \$9,000. This business unit funds the rent, telephone services, electricity, and cleaning services for the Department of Education office space.

Mr. Chairman, the Department of Education previously operated with staff spread across the central office and satellite sites, and many officers were placed in schools because of long-standing space constraints. With the establishment of the new consolidated site, the department can now accommodate the majority of

its officers in one location. Centralising officers in a single location has strengthened collaboration, communication, and cross-team coordination, enabling more cohesive planning and more consistent implementation of system-wide priorities.

A unified site is helping to build a stronger organisational culture, which in turn is creating more coherent system leadership and more reliable, high-quality support for schools and students.

27040—Educational Stores

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27040, Educational Stores, is allocated \$671,000, an increase of \$105,000. The Stores Division serves as the centralised hub for procuring, receiving, safeguarding, and distributing essential materials, supplies, and equipment required for the effective functioning of all public schools.

This team ensures that schools are consistently equipped with the educational resources, cleaning supplies, personal protective equipment, and operational materials needed to support teaching, learning, safety, and daily school operations. The Stores Division manages the full procurement cycle, purchasing items in direct response to documented needs from curriculum officers and school leaders. It maintains storage facilities and inventory and monitors stock levels to ensure timely replenishment.

27041—School Transport

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27041, School Transport, is allocated \$557,000, an increase of \$49,000. This business unit supports safe, reliable daily transportation so that students can access specialised and therapeutic programmes without transportation barriers.

It provides daily transport for students attending Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy and for primary school students who participate in programmes at WindReach, ensuring consistent access to the educational and therapeutic supports those programmes provide.

27042—Buildings, Grounds and Equipment

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27042, Buildings, Grounds, and Equipment, is allocated \$1,908,000, an increase of \$512,000. This unit funds one salary and covers the cost of repairs and maintenance for facilities at all educational and administrative sites that fall under the Department of Education. These include pre-schools, maintained primary and middle schools, Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy, alternative education sites, and the Department of Education.

This business unit provides services in concert with external vendors and public works to ensure that public schools operate in safe, healthy, and secure

environments. It does so by maintaining buildings, essential equipment, and life safety systems, providing custodial care and pest control, conducting health and safety inspections, and supplying manned security where needed.

In 2025/26, three achievements stand out for their impact on students and staff.

First, the installation of non-skid, non-wax vinyl planking in multiple schools, improving floor safety, durability, and cleanliness in high-traffic areas.

Second, targeted work to address indoor air quality issues, improved classroom comfort and well-being.

Third, the installation of double-glazed polyvinyl chloride (or PVC) windows with in-stack screens and upgraded frames improved environmental control and comfort at some schools.

In 2026/27, priorities focus on ensuring reliable water and sanitation systems to prevent health risks and avoid school-day disruption, modernising ageing infrastructure, including electrical systems, HVAC units, and structural components to reduce breakdowns and improve comfort. And strengthening preventative maintenance and health and safety compliance through routine inspections, scheduled servicing, and timely repairs. These priorities protect instructional time and reinforce public confidence that schools are safe, clean, and well-managed.

27050—Information Technology Support

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27050 Information Technology Support is allocated \$2,994,000, an increase of \$296,000. This business unit exists to make sure the Ministry of Education, the Department of Education, and the Bermuda Public School System have the day-to-day technology support they need to operate smoothly. In plain terms, this means keeping school systems running, protecting information, supporting staff and students to use digital tools confidently, and ensuring that technology improves teaching and learning rather than disrupting it.

Information Technology (or IT) Support is responsible for the essentials that schools rely on each day: stable internet connections, reliable wireless access in learning spaces, working devices, and prompt support when something breaks. The team also sets common standards and oversees projects and suppliers. It maintains information security controls and business continuity arrangements so learning can continue and sensitive information remains protected.

In fiscal year 2025/26, the business unit made measurable progress in strengthening communications and connectivity, such as the Bermuda Public School System telephony architecture redesign, which is transitioning schools to a single centrally managed telephone system hosted within the Department of Education Data Centre to improve reliability and enable enhanced services such as automated school notification.

Piloting Wi-Fi 6 at West Pembroke [School] and Victor Scott Primary [School] improved wireless access by increasing speed and reliability for day-to-day classroom use. Upgrades at Harrington Sound [Primary], Dalton E. Tucker, Dellwood [Middle School], and St. George's Preparatory [School] to improve the stability and responsiveness of school connections so that essential devices and services work more consistently.

The unit also reports performance measures focused on reliable school connectivity. For wireless coverage, the baseline and annual target are 90 per cent, and the actual performance met the target. Where weak signals are reported through the DOE IT Service Desk, additional wiring and access points are installed as needed.

For fibre-optic connectivity, the baseline and annual targets are 100 per cent, and actual performance met the target across preschool, primary, and middle school campuses.

Internet availability is also tracked with a baseline and annual target of 100 per cent, and actual performance meeting the expectation for active connectivity. The department monitors usage and undertakes bandwidth upgrades when needed.

The unit also tracks minimum connection speed and Wi-Fi availability in key spaces. All campuses are required to maintain a minimum Internet speed of 70 megabits per second with a baseline and annual target of 100 per cent. Actual performance met the target.

All campuses are also required to maintain full Wi-Fi availability in school libraries, gymnasiums, and computer laboratories with a baseline and annual target of 100 per cent. Actual performance met the target of 100 per cent.

In fiscal year 2026/27, priorities focus on better day-to-day use of key systems, stronger security, and ensuring core tools are current and supported.

Mr. Chairman, I now turn to page B-140 to discuss Programme 1704, Preschools, which encompasses the total budget for all 10 government preschools.

The Chairman: M.P. Lister, if you want to just pause there for a breath, I will just inform the listening public that we are in the Committee of Supply at the moment, considering Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

This is a four-hour debate on the Ministry of Education. MP Lister is taking us through on behalf of the Minister who sits in another place. We have already heard Head 16, and we are now in the middle of Head 17. For those following in the Budget Book, that would be now, the MP is taking us to page B-140, and I believe the next topic is preschools.

MP Lister, you have the floor. Thank you. Please continue.

1704, Preschools

Mr. Dennis Lister III: To discuss Programme 1704, Preschools, which encompasses the total budget for all 10 government preschools.

The total budget allocation is \$5,808,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$807,000.

Preschools build the foundational developmental and learning skills children need to succeed. Through structured play-based learning guided by the Creative Curriculum, children develop communication, problem-solving, and peer engagement skills in preparation for year one in the primary school phase.

Some of the additional funding for preschools will allow the department to purchase additional learning materials and expand experiential learning opportunities, including field trips that connect classroom concepts to real-world community settings.

Mr. Chairman, in fiscal year 2024/25, we can now confirm that the programme delivered strong early learning outcomes, supporting readiness for the next stage of schooling. This programme also strengthened assessment quality. Of the 52 teachers utilising the Teaching Standards Gold Assessment, 85 per cent completed Interrater Reliability [IRR] Certification training, supporting accurate and consistent assessment practices across classrooms.

Performance Measures

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, the programme's performance measures provide accountability for foundational learning and whole child development.

Performance Measure 1, Preschool Literacy and Numeracy Achievement. This measure tracks the percentage of preschool students meeting established literacy and numeracy standards using Teaching Strategies Gold. For 2024/25, baseline results were 94 per cent for literacy and 93 per cent for numeracy, exceeding the target of 90 per cent by 4 percentage and 3 percentage points, respectively.

Performance Measure 2, Preschool Social, Emotional, Physical, and Cognitive Development. This measure tracks the percentage of preschoolers meeting system standards across social, emotional, physical, and cognitive domains using Teaching Strategies Gold checkpoints. The 2024/25 baseline indicated 89 per cent achievement across the three domains, one percentage point below the target of 90 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the planned priorities for fiscal year 2026/27 are focused on sustaining outcomes while strengthening rigour and Primary 1 readiness.

1705, Primary Schools

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Mr. Chairman, Programme 1705, Primary Schools, is allocated \$34,683,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$2,532,000. This allocation supports the operational cost of providing high-quality education across this school level.

The Primary School Performance Measure for Writing assessed the percentage of P3 through P6 students achieving a score of 3 or higher on the end-of-year writing assessment. The target was set at 65 per cent, and the actual outcome was 41 per cent.

The Primary School Mathematics Performance Measure tracked the percentage of P3 through P6 students scoring 3 or higher on summative mathematics assessments, which evaluate mastery of the units taught throughout the year and students' overall conceptual understanding. The target was set at 70 per cent, and the actual result was 40 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the planned priorities for fiscal year 2026/27 are focused on increasing quality instruction and such that Primary School will deliver increased outcomes that are more in line with targeted expectations.

1706, Special Schools

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Programme 1706, Special Schools, is allocated \$1,189,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$23,000. This programme and business unit support Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy, Bermuda's special school for children with severe and profound learning disabilities and complex care needs. Dame [Marjorie Bean Hope Academy] provides specialised therapies, individualised instruction, adaptive equipment, and a trained staff team designed for student growth, progress, and well-being.

In 2026/27, priorities focus on stabilising day-to-day service delivery while beginning school transformation work that results in a more modern model of provision for a new facility and modernised programming that better meet student needs.

1707, Middle Schools

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Programme 1707, Middle Schools, is allocated \$13,599,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$31,000.

27590—T. N. Tatem Middle School

27530—Clearwater Middle School

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The allocation for business unit 27590, T. N Tatem Middle School, is at \$0. And the \$65,000 for business unit 27530 Clearwater [Middle School] is for rent and utilities.

Mr. Chairman, the 2024/25 percentage of M1-M3 students scoring 3 or higher on the summative mathematics assessment was 45 per cent against a target of 60 per cent. The percentage of M1-M3 students scoring 3 or higher on the summative writing assessment was 55 per cent against a target of 60 per cent.

The percentage of Middle School students passing IGCSE exceeded the average target of 85 per cent, with an 84 per cent pass rate in mathematics and

a 100 per cent pass rate in English. The pass rate for the City & Guilds assessments was 84 per cent against a target of 90 per cent.

1708, Senior Secondary Schools

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Programme 1708, Senior Secondary Schools, is allocated \$31,612,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$242,000. This business unit supports Bermuda's public senior schools so that students are prepared for life beyond the classroom and become responsible citizens who contribute to the overall development and sustainability of Bermuda.

It funds the delivery of the Bermuda's Signature School Diploma and aims to support learning experiences that are academically challenging, culturally enriching, and connected to real-world pathways.

The main functions and activities include preparing students to graduate annually by meeting the graduation requirements established by the Ministry of Education; providing learning experiences that are rewarding both academically and experientially, and supporting students to grow athletically and culturally through structured programmes and school life activities.

This business unit also works to expand access to advanced and internationally recognised credentials, where appropriate, strengthening post-secondary readiness and future opportunity.

In 2025/26, senior schools expanded access to advanced and international credentials through a strong Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC) business delivery that emphasises entrepreneurship, employability, digital fluency, and real-world application. These programmes support students to build practical skills and understand how learning connects to workplace expectations.

Looking to 2026/27, priorities focus on improving graduation and post-secondary readiness, supporting student growth and success through expanding programmes that make learning relevant and connected to real-world experiences.

Performance measures, 1708, Senior Secondary Schools and students gaining college acceptance. This measure captures the percentage of graduating students who receive at least one college acceptance reflecting readiness for post-secondary pathways. It is an outcome measure based on verified acceptance documentation submitted to school counsellors. The target for 2024/25 was 60 per cent and the actual performance reach was 66 per cent.

Students passing City & Guilds Assessments for English and Math. This measure reports the percentage of students passing the City & Guilds English and Math assessments internationally recognised credentials that validate foundational academic employability skills. It is an outcome measure based on official City & Guilds examination results. Actual performance was 58 per cent for Math and 91 per cent for English.

Mr. Chairman, as I near the time, I would probably read the one last section before we —

The Chairman: If that suits you, Minister, please do.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Okay.

Students Passing IGCSEs for English, Math, and Science. This measure reports the percentage of students achieving grades A to G in IGCSE English, Mathematics, and Science. It is an outcome measure based on externally validated Cambridge International results.

The 2024/25 targets were English 60 per cent, Math at 50 per cent, and Science 50 per cent. Actual performance results were English 99 per cent, Math 83 per cent, and Science 85 per cent.

The Chairman: Thank you, MP Lister.

Minister Lightbourne, would you be kind enough to move us to lunch?

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I now move that we adjourn until lunch—

The Chairman: Return here at—

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: Return here at 2:00 pm.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we adjourn for lunch and return at 2:00 pm.

Any objections?

There being none, we shall adjourn until 2:00 pm.

Proceedings in Committee suspended at 12:28 pm

Proceedings in Committee resumed at 2:07 pm

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

[Continuation thereof]

The Chairman: Good afternoon Members, we are going to resume in Committee of Supply on the Ministry of Education, continuing with Heads 16, 17, and 41.

Good afternoon all.

[Gavel]

The Chairman: Minister, just go straight ahead—Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and welcome as we have a new Chairman. The previous was MP Scott Pearman, so it's nice to see MP Lovitta Foggo sitting in the Chair. In her proper representing International Women's Day today.

The Chairman: Indeed, indeed. And it's nice to be seen.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: That's good.

The Chairman: Yes.

HEAD 17—DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

[Continuation thereof]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: All right, so I will continue, Madam Chairman.

Students passing advanced placement exams, score of three or higher. This measure captures the percentages of students earning a score of 3 or higher on AP examinations, indicating college level mastery. It is an outcome measure based on official college board results. The target for 2024/25 was 80 per cent, and actual performance was 71 per cent. The Budget Book states 33 per cent, but after the report from the officer, it states 12 out of 17 (71 per cent) had a score of 3 or higher.

Students graduating with a Bermuda School diploma (BSD). This measure reports the percentage of students earning the BSD, reflecting successful completion of graduation requirements. It is an outcome measure based on verified graduation records. The target for 2024/25 was 92 per cent, and the actual performance was 97 per cent.

On time graduation rate, S1 to S4 cohort. This measure captures the percentage of students graduating within four years, reflecting system effectiveness, and supporting timely progression. It is an outcome measure based on cohort tracking data. The target for 2024/25 was 85 per cent, and the actual performance was 82 per cent.

Graduates earning an external or internationally recognised credential. This measure reports the percentage of graduates earning at least one external credential, reflecting readiness for post-secondary pathways. It is an outcome measure based on verified credential records. The target for 2024/25 was 90 per cent, and actual performance was 90 per cent, meeting the target.

Students graduating with one or more industry recognised credentials. This measure captures the percentage of graduates earning at least one industry recognised credential, reflecting alignment with workforce readiness priorities. It is an outcome measure based on verified certification records. The target for 2024/25 was 90 per cent, and actual performance was 50 per cent.

1709, Curriculum and Assessment

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Programme 1709, Curriculum and Assessment, is allocated \$3,325,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$224,000.

The Curriculum and Assessment division serves as the instructional anchor of the Bermuda Public School System, focusing each day on supporting teachers and school leaders to ensure that students experience high-quality, holistic, and equitable teaching and learning experiences.

27020—Assessment and Evaluation

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27020, Assessment and Evaluation, is allocated \$520,000, an increase of \$7,000. This business unit supports the administration of external and internal assessments for all school levels, from preschool through to senior school, including Cambridge International examinations, City & Guilds, and internationally benchmarked reading assessments.

It also supports everyday classroom assessment so teachers and school leaders have reliable information about student progress so that learning gaps can be identified early and instruction and support can be adjusted before students reach critical examination points. In practical terms, the unit sets and coordinates the annual assessment schedule and ensures that schools receive materials, guidance, and support.

The business unit is supported by the Senior Education Officer for Assessment and the Education Officer for Research and Measurement. Together, they maintain the assessment calendar, support schools to administer assessments correctly, and help ensure that results are interpreted and shared appropriately so schools can use them for planning and improvement.

27520—Design, Development and Implementations

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business unit 27520, Design, Development and Implementation, is allocated \$2,343,000, an increase of \$208,000. This business unit is responsible for the design and development of curricula for the subject areas delivered across the Bermuda public school system and to build support for schools to ensure learning happens effectively across the system.

Madam Chairman, day-to-day delivery focuses on implementation support. Education officers provide leadership to instructional teams, advise principals and teachers on effective instructional strategies, establish criteria to evaluate programmes using locally and internationally recognised standards, and recommend modifications to curriculum documents and instructional programmes. They also design and deliver professional development so teachers have the subject expertise and pedagogical skills required for high-quality teaching.

In addition, the unit supports curriculum delivery by helping manage the acquisition, maintenance, distribution, and inventory of instructional materials. It undertakes monitoring activities, including site visits and structured walkthroughs to reinforce consistency in learning intentions, success criteria, and formative assessments across schools.

Fiscal year 2025/26 reports three achievements with system-wide impact. First, the unit supported the modernisation of core curriculum through revised English/language arts, mathematics, and science proficiency skills, including family-friendly versions to help parents understand expectations and support learning at home. The submission reports 100 per cent teacher engagement in targeted professional learning across English/language arts, science, modern foreign language, and social studies.

Second, the unit expanded holistic and arts education through community-partnered learning. One thousand-plus students participated in Spring into the Arts [Festival], and 100 per cent of primary students participated in field learning through heritage partnerships such as the National Trust and the St. George's Foundation.

Madam Chairman, third, the unit strengthened human capital and wellness. The submission reports 100 per cent specialist coverage across the four parish primary schools and the reintroduction of FitnessGram, enabling collection of student physical health metrics supported by 95 per cent attendance at physical education and health workshops. It also notes a partnership with the Bermuda Diabetic Association to introduce the FitStepPro pedometer programme. In fiscal year 2026/27, priorities are directed at strengthening teaching quality and system consistency.

27524—College and Career Pathways

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I now turn to business unit 27524, College and Career Pathways, which is allocated \$462,000, an increase of \$9,000. This programme exists to ensure that students at Bermuda's public senior schools graduate with clear, supported routes into post-secondary study, training, and employment. It does so by expanding access to college-level learning through dual enrolment at Bermuda College and by providing signature learning pathways aligned to priority sectors including business, STEM careers, and hospitality.

Madam Chairman, the programme's functions centre on connecting the Bermuda public school system's graduation requirements with Bermuda College credentials and industry-recognised qualifications. In practice, this means supporting students to earn college credits or credentials while still in school, coordinating academic and timetabling arrangements so that the pathway learning is coherent and achievable, and maintaining working relationships with Bermuda College training providers and employers so that the learning experiences reflect real-world expectations.

Madam Chairman, the main activities supported through this business unit include dual-enrolment opportunities leading to a two-year associate degree pathway alongside the Bermuda school diploma, targeted certifications such as nursing assistant certification through Bermuda College, technical and vocational certifications such as HVAC and other skilled trades-related qualifications, employability skills development, and alternative diploma routes including the Penn Foster option as a pathway towards college. The programme also supports industry-recognised learning options such as ACCA Pathways (where appropriate) and facilitates the coordination required for students to participate in work-based learning and other signature learning experiences.

Madam Chairman, there are three outcomes from this programme that have greatest impact on students.

First, the nursing programme is preparing students for entry-level employment upon graduation. The programme reports that, on average, 80 per cent of participating students obtain the nursing assistant certification, providing a concrete credential and practical entry point into health sector employment and future training.

Second, the dual-enrolment programme is strengthening readiness for college and employment. Students can graduate with the Bermuda school diploma while also earning additional qualifications such as national high school diplomas and, where applicable, industry certifications. This improves students' confidence and preparedness by ensuring they are familiar with post-secondary expectations before leaving school.

Third, the programme has established relationships with business and industry partners so that students learn directly from employers and gain a clearer understanding of workplace and tertiary expectations. The programme reports engagement with as many as 21 learning partners, which broadens exposure and strengthens the relevance of pathway learning.

1712, Early Childhood Education

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Madam Chairman, I now turn to programme 1712, Early Childhood Education, which is allocated \$3,028,000 for 2026/27. This represents an increase of \$284,000.

27175—Child Development

Mr. Dennis Lister III: This programme funds Business Unit 27175, Child Development Programme, and 27700, After Preschool Care. Business unit 27175, Child Development, is allocated \$2,906,000, an increase of \$289,000. The Child Development Programme has served Bermuda's community since 1977 and exists to collaborate with and empower families of children from birth to [age] 5 by providing quality

services, support, and guidance that maximises every child's potential.

Madam Chairman, the programme provides both prevention and early intervention services. Preventative services include developmental screenings for children between 18 and 48 months, diagnostic assessments, family counselling, and parent education. Early intervention services include parent education, behaviour intervention, occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and physiotherapy. Together, these services help identify developmental concerns early, reduce barriers to timely diagnosis, and support families so that children can enter preschool and primary school with the right supports and placements in place.

The programme's functions and main activities fall into two service streams, screening and assessment, and intervention and family support.

Screening and assessment services help families and schools understand children's functioning across key domains and coordinate referrals so that children are assigned to the appropriate services in a timely manner. Intervention and family support services include coordinated early intervention for children with developmental delays, autism, behavioural challenges, and communication needs, as well as support for families of premature infants.

Parent education and support builds skills in responsive parenting and positive interaction. A key service is the home visiting programme based on the National ParentChild+ model, which strengthens the parent/child relationships through play and verbal interaction using developmentally appropriate activities. In addition, the Family Counselling Programme provides evidence-based clinical services to parents and adult family members to address challenges such as communication, boundaries, stress, grief, trauma, and co-parenting.

Madam Chairman, the programme's success in 2025/26 reflects strengthening capacity and safeguarding quality.

First, Cabinet's approval of a new organisational structure with additional and redefined posts including clinical and developmental psychology, screening leadership, a parent and family education and support coordinator, support therapists such as occupational and speech language pathologists, and dedicated early intervention case management addresses long standing service delivery gaps and is intended to strengthen access to services and reduce inequity for families who cannot afford private screening and assessment.

Second, the programme maintained its accreditation through recruitment efforts, revision of policies and processes through performance quality improvement, and systematic data collection and reporting.

Third, the programme continued to strengthen leadership capacity and clinical competency through organisational reorganisation and internal leadership

development designed to build resilience and succession planning.

Madam Chairman, in fiscal year 2026/27, the programme's priorities are to implement the new organisational structure to strengthen delivery capacity, reduce delays in screening, assessment, and intervention, and maintain accreditation and quality standards through ongoing performance quality improvement and regular data reporting. The programme will also continue leadership development and staff learning so that service standards are sustained over time. These priorities support early identification and stronger readiness for children entering preschool and primary school while reducing avoidable barriers for families.

[Programme] 1712—Child Development Programme Performance Measures: Performance Measure 1: Percentage of clients assigned to or eligible for early intervention who receive early intervention services.

The early intervention service administered via the Child Development Programme (CDP) is fundamentally aligned with the BPSS priorities. Specifically, it addresses the critical pillars of targeted student interventions and the enhancement of data analytics and reporting. By intervening during the formative years (birth to age 5), we ensure that the Department of Education can identify and mitigate developmental challenges, consider transition supports, as well as placements well before a child enters the primary school system.

This measure tracks the efficacy of the programme in converting referrals into active support. This output measure tracks the proportion of children, both those referred and those deemed eligible, who successfully receive intervention services. The annual target is 50 per cent and the result to date is 68 per cent. The target of 50 per cent was established as a realistic threshold necessitated by the fact that only one staff member was available to provide service. I am pleased to report the service achieved a 68 per cent success rate, significantly exceeding the set target.

Performance Measure 2: Percentage of clients who make progress towards their early intervention goals. This performance measure is a critical indicator of the efficacy of the Child Development Programme. It aligns directly with the Bermuda Public School System priority for targeted student interventions and data-driven reporting.

For the current reporting period, the programme set an ambitious annual target of 75 per cent. The actual result of 72 per cent represents a high standard of clinical delivery falling only three percentage points short of the target. This achievement is particularly noteworthy given the current human resource constraints within the department.

27700—After Preschool Care

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Business Unit 27700, After Pre-school Care is allocated \$122,000, a decrease of \$5,000.

Madam Chairman, for fiscal year 2026/27, the Ministry of Education Capital Development acquisitions for schools totals \$12,950,000. This significantly increases investment in public school facilities and equipment to support system stabilisation and education transformation across preschool, primary, middle, senior schools, and Bermuda College.

Capital funding in 2026/27 is directed to four connected outcomes.

1. Safer, more secure schools, phased safety and security upgrades, including CCTV replacement and targeted fencing repairs with particular attention to middle and senior schools.
2. More reliable school infrastructure, upgrades to building systems, including electrical works needed for dependable daily operations and modern learning environments.
3. Healthier, more comfortable classrooms. Improvements that support indoor air quality, cooling, water access, sanitation and hygiene, helping protect instructional time and well-being.
4. Technology that supports continuity in learning. Stronger IT infrastructure and devices that enable learning, assessment, parent communication, and school operations across the system.

This programme combines minor works, safety and compliance, major site works, education reform learning spaces, and capital acquisitions. Minor works at primary schools address immediate everyday learning conditions. Examples include bottle filling stations, window replacements, durable flooring upgrades, and ADA-compliant playgrounds so more children can participate safely.

Safety, accessibility, and compliance projects include replacement CCTV, asbestos assessments, and indoor air quality testing and replacement of specialist equipment such as the hoist systems at Dame Marjorie Bean Hope Academy. Major works and renovations are planned for key sites including CedarBridge Academy, Whitney Institute, The Berkeley Institute, and Bermuda College to improve safety, functionality, and readiness for teaching and learning.

Improved learning spaces include classroom fit-outs for furniture and fixtures and related works to support parish primary reform classrooms and phased implementation. Equipment and playground replacements, improve safe play, classroom function, and day-to-day learning as replacement ground equipment and classroom boards. And technology acquisitions strengthen infrastructure, servers, networking, Wi-Fi upgrades, security, two-factor authentication, platforms, and licensing for Microsoft 365, and devices for students and staff including laptops for high school

students and additional Chromebooks for students and paraeducators.

Over time, ageing facilities, deferred maintenance, and uneven learning environments have disrupted teaching and learning. This year's capital programme prioritises high-impact upgrades [where] schools feel immediately safer, have more functional classrooms, healthier spaces, and reliable technology. The approach improves the existing school estate while longer-term facility planning continues, helping to ensure that stabilisation is achieved through visible, practical improvements across the system.

Madam Chairman, I now refer to page B-142, the subjective analysis of current accounts estimates for the Department of Education, which shows the aggregate of detailed line-item expenditures and year over year variances.

Madam Chairman, salaries increased by \$4,492,000, or 6 per cent, compared to 2025/26 in order to fund the department's staffing and personnel requirements across schools and services. Wages increased by \$1,031,000, or 12 per cent, compared to 2025/26 to fund uplifts to the department's staffing and personnel requirements across schools and services.

Other personnel costs increased by \$21,000, or 4 per cent, compared to 2025/26 to fund the department's staffing and personnel requirements across schools and services. Training increased by \$55,000, or 21 per cent, compared to 2025/26 for professional learning and training. Repair and maintenance increase by \$661,000, or 32 per cent, compared to 2025/26 in order to support required upkeep of facilities and systems to protect safe and functional learning environments.

Materials and supplies increased by \$459,000, or 23 per cent, compared to 2025/26 in order to support classroom and programme resources required for day-to-day high-quality teaching and learning. Grants and contributions increased by \$873,000, or 3 per cent, compared to 2025/26 in order to support grants and contributions for schools, including aided schools at the middle and senior levels and primary school grants.

Overall, current account expenditure increased by \$7,816,000, or 6 per cent, compared to 2025/26 in order to support the department's core educational operating requirements.

Madam Chairman, pages B-143 and B-144 show 1,034 full-time equivalent posts for 2026/27, a decrease of 48 compared to 2025/26.

Madam Chairman, with all of that being said, I have now concluded my presentation on Head 17, the Department of Education. I would like to thank all teaching staff, principals, administrative staff, support services, and all education leadership for their continued commitment and belief in the Bermuda public school system.

I will now move on to Head 41.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister.

I'll take the time to inform the listening public, as well as those Members present, that we are now in Committee of Supply on the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

We are listening to the budget debate under the Ministry of Education, and the Junior Minister is now going to take us to Head . . . what is it?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: [Head 41].

The Chairman: Head 41, which is the Bermuda College.

Please continue.

HEAD 41—BERMUDA COLLEGE

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Head 41, Bermuda College.

Madam 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.

As found on page B-148 for the 2026/27 financial year, Bermuda College has been allocated an annual grant of \$15,570,710 by the Ministry of Education, similar to last year, with an additional capital grant of \$1,090,000 for campus maintenance and upgrades.

Madam Chairman, the College is led by a Board of Governors chaired by Mr. Nasir Wade and its President, Dr. David Sam. It maintains high standards as an accredited institution by the New England Commission on Higher Education, (NECHE). During the past year, the College engaged fully in the Commission's comprehensive evaluation process, submitting its self-study in December 2025 and facilitating the official site visit in February 2026. The College now awaits final notification of its re-accreditation status anticipated in October or November 2026 as it remains committed to the delivery of quality, internationally recognised education.

Notable achievements for the past year include the success of the dual-enrolment programme with 41 participants this past year, with three dual-enrolment students graduating from the College before earning their high school diplomas during the May 2025 commencement.

Four students of excellence accepted the invitation to the Phi Theta Kappa Honour Society, adding to the 75 members of the College's Chapter, Beta Chi Upsilon, established in 2019. Additionally, one mathematics faculty member received an honorary membership in recognition of outstanding contribution to mathematics education.

Experiential learning was further strengthened through a grant received under the United Kingdom's Turing Scheme, which enabled 28 students to participate in international internship placements in Belgium, Cyprus, and Italy, thereby advancing the College's focus on employability and global engagement.

Madam Chairman, the College also collaborated with the Ministry of Health and other stakeholders in support of youth mental health initiatives, including participation in the National Mental Health Anti-Stigma Campaign and serving as the host venue for the Mental Health Youth Summit in Fall 2025. The College also continued to partner with organisations like [Bermuda Environmental Sustainability Taskforce] BEST for environmental sustainability initiatives and host influential events like the annual Roche Science Week to engage the community in science and conservation.

One of the most significant milestones this year has been a successful expansion of articulation agreements across key academic disciplines, notably in nursing, with Kentucky State University, and STEM teacher training with Keene University. These agreements are designed to create clear, accessible pathways for students to transition seamlessly between various levels of education, thereby removing barriers and encouraging lifelong learning. Additionally, Keene University will offer locally delivered master's and doctoral programmes to assist Bermudian educators in advancing their expertise. The doctoral programme in educational leadership will specialise in STEM education leadership, curriculum, and instruction, as well as early childhood education.

Madam Chairman, significant educational milestones were celebrated, including the graduation of 95 students across various disciplines. The College also graduated four students with bachelor's degrees in business administration in partnership with Mount Saint Vincent University.

In May 2025, the Athora Professional and Career Education [APACE] Division awarded 280 professional designations and workforce development certificates that included 11 public high school students who received their certificate for nursing assistance as part of the Department of Education's dual enrolment programme with the College, underscoring the College's role in workforce development.

Last year, APACE introduced a new micro-credentialing framework and professional development pathways for adult learners. Looking ahead, APACE will continue to expand micro-credentials, deepen employer partnerships, and scale contract training to align learning with Bermuda's evolving workforce needs. In a groundbreaking move beyond U.S. borders, Bermuda College has become the first international Grow with Google partner, positioning Bermuda at the forefront of global workforce innovation.

Madam Chairman, this landmark partnership expands access to critical digital skills training through flexible, accessible programmes focused on high-

growth fields such as digital marketing, IT support, data analytics, project management, UX design, and artificial intelligence (AI)—skills directly aligned with the demands of today's employers. For Bermuda residents, this means access to industry-recognised credentials backed by one of the world's most respected technology companies.

Financially, the College's revenues come from government grants, student tuition, and other sources totalling approximately \$19 million. Salaries and benefits are the most significant expense, accounting for, on average, 70 per cent of budgeted expenditure. The College also invests in campus improvements and educational resources supported by the Bermuda College Foundation, which contributes to scholarships, programmes, and sustainability projects.

Madam Chairman, the Bermuda College Foundation plays a critical role in supporting and enabling the College's efforts to modernise its campus and programmes. Bermuda College 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. Bermuda College continues to strengthen its national impact through major milestones in community engagement, strategic planning, and academic excellence.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda College launched its 2025-2030 Strategic Plan titled *Innovate, Inspire, Impact*. This plan sets the College's direction for the next five years and strengthens alignment across programmes, services, and partnerships to support Bermuda's education and workforce. For the first time in the College's history, Bermuda College entered the Bermuda Day parade with a float. This historic milestone elevated the College's public visibility and national identity.

Madam Chairman, the College also expanded outreach across Bermuda under the leadership of President Dr. David Sam. Dr. Sam led engagement with public and private schools from primary through to senior school, strengthening awareness of Bermuda College pathways and encouraging early connection with prospective students and families.

Bermuda College launched its first-ever strategic enrolment plan for 2025-2030 titled *Transforming Lives Through Connection, Access, and Achievement*. This plan provides an intentional, data-informed approach to how the College will grow enrolment and improve student success through stronger recruitment, retention, progression, and student support.

Madam Chairman, for the first time, Bermuda College also had a visible presence at the annual Cup Match Classic, including signage on site and an advertisement in the classic programme. This strengthened the College's outreach and engagement with the wider community at one of Bermuda's major sporting events.

Madam Chairman, the College also launched its Built to Last campaign to highlight the importance of skilled trades and technical education in Bermuda. A signature recognition ceremony was held on October 8th at Bermuda College, honouring almost 30 individuals and four corporate partners whose work and support have helped to build Bermuda.

The event recognised Bermuda College alumni and former employees who have made significant contributions in trades, technical fields, culinary arts, and hospitality. It also recognised the Chubb Charitable Foundation Bermuda, Hamilton Princess and Beach Club, Efficiency Limited, and Bermuda Motors Limited for their support of technical, culinary, and hospitality education. The ceremony further recognised former Bermuda College Foundation Chairs Mark Berry and Garry Madeiros for their long-standing service to the College's development.

Madam Chairman, at this Built to Last ceremony, the College conferred the title of Professor Emerita on Mrs. Patricia Robinson for her exceptional contribution and lasting impact on hundreds of students. Bermuda College continued its commitment to honouring service and institutional legacy through its retirees' luncheon held at Coco Reef. The luncheon brought together approximately 40 retirees for an afternoon of reflection and celebration.

During this event, the College bestowed Professor Emeritus or Professor Emerita titles on 10 retired faculty members. Dr. Gloria Frederick, Dr. Paul L. Shepard, Dr. Charles Zuill, Dr. Jeremiah Faries, Dr. Sharon Virgil, Dr. Edwin M. E. Smith, Dr. Jolene Bean, Mr. Leo Betschart, Dr. Barbara O'Shaughnessy, and Dr. Angela Barry.

Madam Chairman, the College advanced applied learning in health and wellness through a new hands-on initiative within its medical nutrition course in the nursing allied health curriculum. Led by Dr. Andrew Dhanoo the initiative provides health care students with practical experience in medical nutrition, diagnostics, and wellness assessment. Students complete supervised assessments and structured interventions with volunteer participants, helping them better understand how nutrition, lifestyle, and biology influence health outcomes.

Madam Chairman, Bermuda College also achieved a defining milestone in academic quality assurance with the nursing programme receiving initial accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Education Nursing, known as ACEN, a globally recognised accrediting body in the United States.

Madam Chairman, this accreditation strengthens opportunities for Bermuda College nursing graduates to further pursue study abroad and supports employment mobility by confirming the programme meets rigorous international academic and clinical standards.

Madam Chairman, these achievements reflect Bermuda College's continued commitment to excellence, relevance, and national service while positioning

the institution to meet Bermuda's evolving education and workforce needs. We are grateful to the Board of Governors, faculty, and staff for the unwavering commitment and steadfast stewardship of Bermuda's only college.

Thank you, Madam Chairman. This concludes my presentation for the budget for Head 41, the Bermuda College, and my overall presentation for the 2026/27 budget for the Ministry of Education, consisting of Heads 16, 17, and 41.

The Chairman: Thank you, Junior Minister.

We continue to be in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, debating the Ministry of Education for Heads 16, 17, and 41.

Are there any Members who wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41?

I recognise the Member from constituency 8, the Opposition Leader.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

First, I'd like to thank the Junior Minister for providing that brief this morning and into this afternoon.

I would firstly like to state from the beginning—

The Chairman: And I just want to let you know that you have approximately an hour and 45 minutes or so.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So, the first thing that I would like to do is state how important education is to every community, but specifically at a time when the world is changing so quickly and without having the tools to be able to go into this future with artificial intelligence and all the different changes that are happening, we have to make sure that we are educating our young people to be prepared for that future.

It also means that education is really connected to almost everything that we discuss when we're discussing our budget. In every industry . . . I always like to say it doesn't matter whether you're a doctor, a lawyer, whatever it is, a teacher was responsible for you getting to that point. So, I'd like to start by thanking all of our educators for the hard work that they continue to do for our young people.

It's difficult because there are so many times that the conversation is only negative. But we have to remember that there are students that are participating in our schools every day, and they have dreams the same way that we would want them to have dreams for the future of Bermuda. And we have teachers that are trying to do their best to make sure that they're educating our young people to be prepared for that future.

Madam Chairman, it's also important that we are realistic and honest with where we are today. Because although we heard several numbers which tell us that we are once again spending over a hundred million

dollars on education, the question becomes are we receiving the results for that investment?

So, Madam Chairman, I am going to start where the Junior Minister in the beginning was referring to the increase in the education budget of . . . I believe he said it was \$7 million at the time, and you can see that on page B-134, that \$7.269 million was the increase.

We have had schools close recently. But we are still seeing the number of the budget climb. Not only do we have schools closing, we also know that the population, the childbirth, in Bermuda has continued to decline. So really before we go into this debate of students in Bermuda, how many public school students do we have in total? How many students are we actually talking about? Because recently, in the last five years we know that between private education and public education, those numbers got really close to each other.

So, I wonder if we would be able to know whether that now has been more students in private education than public education. And the reason that that's important is because as we continue to invest these large numbers of money into education, the customers, right, the person . . . the parents that are putting their children into public education, if we are seeing more of them move away from public education we have to have an understanding of why that is happening. And are we doing what is necessary to stop that outflux to private education? Because it's taxpayers' money that is paying for everything that we are about to discuss in education, public education. And then parents are having to then put out significantly more funds to send their children to private education. So, they're taxed, and then they're having to pay.

So, starting on Head 16, page B-135, the number presented here for 2026/27 is \$1,156,000, a difference of \$56,000 additional for General Administration. So that is under [business unit] 26000. But if you look at 2024/25, that number was \$769,000. So, the real increase has happened over that two-year period.

I would like to have some information on why that admin number continues to climb the way it does. And the reason that I am going to ask that question is because later on you will see that I am going to be asking questions about how we seem to be having less teachers, less support, but more admin costs.

The Chairman: Is that a specific question that you're giving to—

Hon. Ben Smith: That is a specific question. Okay.

The Chairman: Okay, because I want to make sure that it gets captured.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Hon. Ben Smith: Still on [page] B-135, [business unit] 26080, Grants [to] External Bodies.

So, the Junior Minister spent some time giving us some of the details within who was going to be receiving the grants but didn't really connect the dots to how much money was going to each of these bodies. I'm wondering if the Junior Minister will be able to provide for us the kind of details that you would see in the grants that are for sports, as an example, right? So, you would find out that the Sloop Foundation is going to get this amount of money. And each of these bodies is going to have a specific number.

So, if they could provide us with each line, what body is receiving money and what the amount is. And the reason that that's important is because although there is this increase of \$262,000, because we're moving from \$725[,000] to \$987,000, in 2024/25, the actual number was \$1,786,000. So, we were at a significant number. We seem to have dropped off by a million dollars, and now we are creeping back up.

So, can the Junior Minister explain what was the impact of dropping off the way it was in 2024/25, and are we seeing this change to now start to add funding because of whatever the impact was of dropping the funding so significantly in 2024/25?

The Chairman: We are in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Expenditure and Revenue for the year 2026/27 on the Ministry of Education, and currently we are speaking to Head 16.

Continue.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So, Madam Chairman, under [business unit] 26090, Scholarships and Awards, we in the Opposition support any finances that we can give to our young people and our not-so-young people that allow them to get further education. So, increasing that number is something that we support.

The question that I have is considering that the cost of education has continued to rise outside of Bermuda . . . so when you are going to get that education, is this increase matching the increase in overall education costs outside of Bermuda?

It's easy to say that we're going to be able to give scholarships to more students. But the question is if we continue to have a number that is being outpaced by the increase in cost of education, then maybe we are not able to match at the level that is necessary to help the people that we want.

Madam Chairman, [business unit] 26140, Educational Reform Unit. So obviously this is a question that is . . . you know, there have been a lot of headlines about because there were consultants that were brought in specifically to deal with the reform and the significant reduction of \$1.2 million is because that contract has ended.

The Chairman: Are you asking that or are you stating that?

Hon. Ben Smith: The Junior Minister actually stated that was the case.

The Chairman: Okay. Right.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, what I'm asking now is, Could the Junior Minister provide us with the details of what happened in the last year from that contract so that we make sure that we have completed everything that was necessary from that consultant prior to it being ended?

And the reason I ask that question is because when I met with those consultants, there were certain things, certain benchmarks that had to be reached. There were certain things, targets that they had had. So, the question is, because I asked this question last year, was this going to have to be something that we continue to have to top up? Because if you move in a direction that a consultant has been part of, do we need to continue to have them to take us on the next steps?

So, can the Junior Minister give us the details of that, because when you reduce it by this amount and that group has now left, does that put us in a vulnerable position?

The Chairman: So, are you asking whether or not they met their targets?

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ben Smith: Moving on to page B-136, I am gathering that the . . . really a lot of salary changes are based off of an uplift in payment. So, most of those movements are going to be based on that. So, there's not a lot of reason to go into the details on those specific pages.

What I will do now is move on to page B-139. I am going to move on to Head 17.

The Chairman: We are now moving in the Committee of Supply for the year 2026/27. And the Opposition Leader and Member for constituency 8 is now beginning to pose questions on Head 17.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So, starting with 1701, the Central Administration. I am going to start with 27001, Office of the Commissioner. The revised [amount] was \$821,000 for 2025/26. And now we have an estimate of \$1,100,000, which is an increase of \$298,000.

Madam Chairman, if I move to page B-143, I note that there were four staff members under the Office of the Commissioner. And now the estimate is for six, which is an increase of two. So, can the Junior Minister let us know what the increase is for?

The Chairman: Okay, all right.

Hon. Ben Smith: On 27090, on the same page B-139, the Educational Standards and Accountability was a portion that the Junior Minister spent some time on. There is an increase to \$1.1 million, which is a \$101,000 increase. But once again, I have to highlight that compared to the 2024/25 number, which was \$325,000. So, can the Junior Minister give us some details on what that increase has provided for from the 2024/25 to where we sit now? Because that is a significant increase. I know that some of that was discussed because of the school attendance that came from the Junior Minister, including how that would be the kind of data they would get from it, and what that meant.

But my question for that would be, Could the Junior Minister provide us with details on this since this transition has happened? Has there been an improvement in attendance by students across the schools? Because if you are making a larger investment in it, we would like to know whether that has actually resulted in the improvement that we were looking for.

So, can the Junior Minister connect those dots for us?

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ben Smith: Under 27160, Substitute Teachers is an issue that has been discussed in several budgets. Because at one point, we were at almost \$8 million in 2024/25 for substitute teachers. The revised [amount] for 2025/26 is \$4.4 [million], and now we are moving to \$5.7 [million], so we are creeping up again.

So, the question that I have is, Do we have a reason why we are having to rely so much on substitute teachers? Is that number because we do not have full-time teachers? Is there something else happening that means we are relying on substitute teachers? Can the Junior Minister give us some information? Obviously, when you see this number increase by \$1.2 million, there seems to be a reason for it happening.

Now, once again, I will go to the full-time employee numbers and note that —

The Chairman: That is page B-143, is it?

Hon. Ben Smith: Page B-143. So, under substitutes, you will note that in 2024/25 that number was 36 substitutes. It has moved to 55, and we now estimate it will move to 60.

So that increase of funding, which is \$1.2 million, is that based [on] a need that we have seen happen in this last year and anticipated going forward? Because once again, as you close schools, there should be more teachers available, potentially. So, is that the case? If not, are there more teachers not in the system, which is why we are having to rely on more substitutes? So once again, I do not want to be assuming. I prefer if

we actually had some concrete answers on why that change is happening.

So, back to page B-139. The changes that I see . . . Give me one second. I just have to move to my—

The Chairman: Okay, you are fine.

For the listening public, we are debating Head 17, the Ministry of Education, in Committee of Supply, and I call on the Opposition Leader to continue.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So, Madam Chairman, I am still on page B-139. I am looking under 27063, School Psychology. The funding has increased slightly by \$40,000. The staffing level has stayed the same, so I am gathering that could be just a bit of an uplift because of salary increases potentially.

My question is, given the increased concerns about youth mental health, we have just heard a statement recently by the Minister of Health that we are going to be looking for people within our population to be recommending people to certain services. It could mean an uptick in people who are taking on these services. Considering that, Would the Junior Minister be able to tell us whether he believes that with that potential increase, we have the resources to be able to cover the need?

I believe that at one point, the Junior Minister said that every school had a psychologist. I could be incorrect. So could he give us an answer of what is the actual ratio between school psychologists and the schools and what the ratio of students that is best practice for that role with students?

And following on with that question, would the Junior Minister be able to tell us what the average assessment time is from assessment to service? How long does it take after a student has been assessed and recommended to this service? How long does it take before they actually get treatment?

The Chairman: Okay

Hon. Ben Smith: So, 27072, which is Counselling, in that same vein. That is why I have connected these two together. Once again, funding is very similar. There is no change in the staffing level, so my questions are similar.

Considering the needs in our community, could the Junior Minister let us know whether it is believed that we have the support presently for the level of need in our community? And if possible, could we get what the average caseload per counsellor is and whether that matches best practices?

The Chairman: Okay

Hon. Ben Smith: Still on page B-139, I am looking at 27065, which is Hearing Impairment.

My question on this is specific to the Gilbert Institute, which I know previously had a specific programme for this. So, considering that Gilbert is closed, can the Junior Minister just let the public know where those same services have moved to and which schools have picked them up? It would be the services that were at Gilbert prior to this year.

So, 27079, which is Paraprofessionals. Once again, I am going to do the comparison. So, still on page B-139, in 2024/25, it was \$6,755,000. It increased in the last budget to \$7,300,000 and is now being reduced by \$475,000. If I move to page B-143, I will note that paraprofessionals in 2024/25, there were 104. In the last budget, there were 100, and the new estimate is 88, which is a reduction of 12. So, would the Junior Minister be able to give us a little bit more detail on what that reduction means? Is there a specific reason why we are having less paraprofessionals? It could be that we are using a different resource. So, if we could understand where that reduction comes from.

And considering that not just Bermuda, but worldwide there seems to be an increase in the need for students with learning differences to have more support. So, it just seems odd at a time when we are kind of having more assessments, we are learning that we have more students who have these needs. Those numbers seem to be moving down instead of up, when you would normally think more support is needed.

So, if we can get an answer on that. On that same page, B139—

The Chairman: I just have one quick question.

Hon. Ben Smith: Sure

The Chairman: Are you supposing . . . is it supposition on your part? Okay, can you slightly ask the question differently? Like, what is fuelling the decline in the numbers for paraprofessionals, as opposed to assuming that there are greater numbers of students. Just so that you can get the accurate responses that you are looking for.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, so, the fact that I used was worldwide numbers—

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. Ben Smith: —are increasing. I cannot speak—

The Chairman: Speak specifically to Bermuda, right

Hon. Ben Smith: —specifically to Bermuda. So, my question is based on the worldwide number increasing. And—

The Chairman: Are we trending in the same—

Hon. Ben Smith: And are we trending in the same direction?

The Chairman: Okay

Hon. Ben Smith: And if we are trending in the same direction, then it makes that question of why is our support number moving in the opposite direction?

The Chairman: Yes, and that is a fair question. Yes.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, under 27083, which is Autism Services, this would be the same question. Because it seems that we are reducing the support in that area by [\$]185,000. And we are also reducing the autism staff by two.

So, the worldwide trend is saying that we are increasing the number of students who need those services. So, if the Junior Minister can let us know whether those are the same numbers that we are seeing in Bermuda? Are we seeing an increase in the need for those services? And if that is the case, then why are these numbers moving in the wrong direction?

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Madam Chairman, page B-143, I have gone to this page a couple of times with some of the different staffing numbers. And I guess this is the observation that I want to make, that [in] my words, the worldwide trend is moving in one direction. And when I look at this particular page it seems specific to the needs of learners who have different learning needs, and it seems to be moving in a direction that says that we need less support in this area. So, any kind of information we can get on that is important.

The Chairman: So, you're asking why our numbers are showing an inverse relationship to that? Okay.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes. Thank you.

So, Madam Chairman, I am going to connect this to the schools. And this is where I am trying to find out what the numbers are per school and the ratio with the services to the schools. Because potentially the answer to my original question is, because we have less students, because we have less schools, the services that we have are able to actually cover a different group. Right?

So, if that is the case, it would be important for us to be able to have the information that says *for primary schools we have this many psychologists, we have this many OTs*, the different therapies that are needed in the school. So, can the Junior Minister give us a breakdown of each level of school and the professionals who are engaged in those services? What is the ratio of students, and how does it compare to the best practices?

The Chairman: Okay

Hon. Ben Smith: So, I am just going to take a quick move to page C-6. I think it is page C-6. Hold on.

I am looking for the construction, and it is the maintenance of schools.

The Chairman: Maintenance of schools, 75309.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes 75309. So, the Maintenance of the schools. And I think this one is really important right now, because the Minister actually stated that several of our schools need real refurbishment and upgrades to the tune of \$10 [million] to \$20 million.

Considering that number, and what the increases in the budget for maintenance are, can the Junior Minister let us know whether we could have a plan going forward of how much is going to be put forward per school in order to reach the target that the Minister has put out of \$10 million to \$20 million per school? Because at the rate of the increase we have now, we are never going to reach that target. And this is specifically to if you are maintaining on an ongoing basis, then potentially you do not have to have that big number at the end.

So, can the Junior Minister give us details on what is going to be maintained this year, and what funding will be needed going forward? Is he able to give any kind of details on that?

The Chairman: Okay

Hon. Ben Smith: So now I will go to the performance measures. Sorry, just before I get to the performance measures, there is . . . because the listening audience does not always have the ability to look at the [Budget] Book —

The Chairman: No, they do not

Hon. Ben Smith: —and the numbers that we are looking at.

The Chairman: Yes

Hon. Ben Smith: So, the question is . . . we can you tell you the total budget for a specific school. Yes?

Then we can flip through our Book and say this is the number of staff for that school. But it would be helpful to be able to connect the dot with how many students are in that school, so that you have an understanding that the school cost us this amount, this is how many teachers or professionals are in that school, and then connect it to how many students you have. Because of what happens, I think it is important that the population knows how many students —

The Chairman: Perhaps you should ask it like this, if you are not seeing that information: Why is the

information not presented in that way? And then the officers, the Junior Minister, might be able to give you the answer you are looking for.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So yes, my question would be, providing the number of students per school would be a very helpful comparison when you are looking through the Book to decide this is how much the school is receiving in funding, this is how many professionals are part of the school. Because, as we have found out, when a school closes, the majority of the cost of the school is actually the teachers in the school.

But what we want to know is, how many students are actually receiving the services at each individual school. Because what happens is, you close a school and people do not always understand that there were not a lot of students in a particular school. And if you put those students in another school, this is where the confusion arises for the population when you do not have the information.

The Chairman: Okay Member, I do believe that they have a figure that gets spent from the public funds on each student. And so maybe you might want to ask that question because . . . the total amount of money based on the total amount of students in our schools, and you will know at least how much money we contribute to the education of each child in Bermuda.

Hon. Ben Smith: I do! And so, the issue becomes, if the number of students is continuing to decrease, and that number is getting higher because you have to pay for all of the infrastructure for the number of schools for the number of therapists, right? So now that number actually looks a lot bigger because of what you have to cover with fewer students. That is why having that number in here would actually allow that comparison for understanding.

The Chairman: I think you should ask that question so that you can get verification that, indeed, that is how the breakdown works. And I am not telling you how to do your debate —

Hon. Ben Smith: No, no, I am —

The Chairman: But I hear the answers you are looking for, and so I am suggesting that you ask it a certain way so you can get these specific answers.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, the specific [question] would be, Can the Junior Minister give us what the total number is per student, and then give us a breakdown of how they get to that number?

The Chairman: Now, see, that is a better way of asking questions. It is clearer.

Hon. Ben Smith: Just a quick question on page B-139. I skipped over it just now, and it was . . . I note that Lions Quest Life Skills, 27067, had a budget number of \$25,000 in 2024/25, and then it zeroed out. But the reason I bring that up is that when you look on page B-143, there was an employee in 2024/25. Then there was not one budgeted in 2025/26. But in the revised, there is one. So, now we are estimating again that there is not going to be an employee. So, are we going to now see that number show up again in the revised?

The Chairman: Okay

Hon. Ben Smith: Can we get an answer on why that has happened?

I am trying to use [the] Book and [the] laptop and —

The Chairman: That is fine, Member. I will just ask if there is anyone else, while you are . . . who wishes to speak to Head 16, 17, and 41.

Are you ready to continue?

Okay, because I do have someone else that does wish to speak to—

Hon. Ben Smith: No problem.

So, I am now on page B-145. I said I was going to move to performance measures, and starting with 1712, Developmental Screening. So, it is the measure that tracks children aged 18 to 48 months who are receiving developmental screening.

The Chairman: Are you able to cite the page that you are on? Yes, because I see 1712 on page B-147, or if we go to page B-141, we have 1712, and on line item 27175 you have child development.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes

The Chairman: But you said that you wanted to go to performance measures, and that is on the page B-147.

Hon. Ben Smith: Sorry, it is on page B-147. I apologise.

So, under 1712, Early Childhood, it says children from 18 to 48 months who receive a developmental screening. So, the question that I have is what is the . . . and the reason I ask this particular question, so you have . . . there is 18 . . . for the children that are in that age bracket, we have what that number is. But how many of the children who receive that screening actually then receive services after the screening?

The Chairman: Okay

Hon. Ben Smith: And what is the timeline from screening to receiving services? Because I just think it is important, for one, I believe that everybody should be going through that screening. And if they are, knowing that

this will actually support their child I think is an important message for us to give.

Because once again, my understanding is that there seems to be a bit of a stigma; people do not want to get the result. [Especially] parents. And we have to change that by helping them understand that getting the assessment and the support as early as possible is how we are going to get the best results. So, I think it's important that I give that message on this particular line.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, just under there, it says *percentages of clients assigned to or eligible for early intervention who receive early intervention*. And the outcome is 50 per cent. So, my question is: Why are the people who are eligible to receive it . . . why are so many of them not receiving it? Fifty per cent seems like a low number if we actually need that.

And is that related to what I just said that people do not want to take on the services? Or is it that we do not have the resources to provide the services? So, if the Junior Minister can let us know what is the reason that that number is 50 per cent, I think that would be helpful.

Now, Madam Chairman, some of our performance measures. So obviously, just recently we have seen publicly what the scores are for public education, the IGCSE scores. And we have seen the Cambridge scores. So, I am going to have some questions on that, because obviously, that is where the outcomes are. And for me, some of the performance measures, I believe, could be clearer to allow us to actually understand what the outcome is that was desired and what the result is.

For example, the first one on 1705 Primary Schools. On page B-146, and it says, *P4 to P6 students achieving targeted growth for reading*. And it says 65 per cent. So, if we could understand what is meant by the targeted growth, what the expectation would be in that year period, and why the target would be 65 per cent instead of 100 per cent.?

So, if we could have an understanding of what that difference is, I think it would make that measure make more sense.

The Chairman: Okay.

Hon. Ben Smith: That would be the same situation for P3 to P6 students achieving a three or higher for summative writing assessments. It is 60 per cent. So, seeing these numbers of 50 per cent, 60 per cent, it draws your attention to them. So, if we could have the Junior Minister explain why the target would be that low, and then what the actual achievement is that we should be looking for in that outcome.

So, business unit 1707 Middle Schools, still on page B-146. We have all heard that the reform has

been paused, which has actually caused us to be in between two models.

So, it was a three-tier system to move to a two-tier system, and now we are talking about middle schools here. So, one of the questions that I have is on the assessments that have just been made public for Cambridge. Could the Junior Minister let us know which schools in Bermuda would have been part of this Cambridge assessment? Are all the schools? And if it is, knowing that would be important for us to know who is being scored with it. And is the transition period that we are going through causing some confusion in the numbers that we are going to be receiving?

And still there under students. [For] International General Certificate of Secondary Education [IGCSE] in English and math, the number in 2024/25 was . . . we are looking . . . the outcome was 84 per cent for math. And for English language, it was 100 per cent. The number for 2025/26 was 85 per cent for math, 100 per cent for English language, and we are looking for the same target outcome for 2026/27. So, can we have an indication of the number of students that are taking these tests in middle school so that we have an understanding of how many students we are actually talking about with this 85 per cent, 100 per cent? I just think having that detail would be helpful to know. How many of our students are actually reaching the level to be able to take those exams? And then what percentage of them are actually reaching these targets?

Still on [page] B-146, under secondary schools 1708, students achieved targeted growth in reading. The forecast for 2025/26 was 50 per cent, and the target outcome for 2026/27 is 50 per cent. So once again, can the Junior Minister give us clarity on why that number would be 50 per cent? What factors are being brought in that make us look for a target that is only 50 per cent?

The very next line says *students gaining college acceptance*, and the forecast for 2025/26 was 68 per cent. The target outcome for 2026/27 is 70 per cent. So, is this out of just part of the students, or is this the total student body in high school that we are seeing 70 per cent of all students in public high schools that are gaining college acceptance? Or is this based on a smaller number of just the students that are applying? I just think it would be important for us to know. And the reason that that is important is because when you look at the targets in primary school, you look at the targets in middle school, you look at how those assessments are, and what we have just seen publicly, it does not seem to line up that we would have that level of pass rate for acceptance to college. So having that information, I think, would be important.

On page B-147, still under secondary schools, students passing IGCSE for English, math, and science. It says grades A to G. Could the Junior Minister give us a detailed breakdown on the difference between an A, a B, a C, all the way down to G, and then [let] us have an understanding of what percentage of

students are falling in each of those letter categories? The way it is written presently is [the] revised forecast for 2025/26 in English 85 per cent, math 75 per cent, science 80 per cent, with the targets for 2026/27 being the same. But when you read that and understand that that is between A and G, that we are looking for that number of 85 per cent, that means something completely different. So, if there is an international standard, if there is a number that we should be aiming for in Bermuda, having this number say 80 per cent and we are actually not reaching a target that puts us in line with the rest of the world, [then that] seems to be a problem. And I think that everybody in Bermuda, knowing that we are spending a hundred and something million dollars on education, is going to want to know that that is the actual target that we are going for.

The Chairman: So, you might want to ask what letter designation is considered the pass rate. So that may be the question you wish to ask.

Hon. Ben Smith: My first question was breaking down each letter, and then once breaking down each letter, let us know what that standard would be from outside of Bermuda that would be looking for what is this standard that most people would consider a pass. And if we are not targeting at that level, then why? And how are we going to change our trajectory so that we are reaching that pass mark because our students are too important for us to have numbers in this Book that are not actually matching the reality.

Right under there is *students passing advanced placement exams with a score of three or higher*. [Provide] just a little more detail on how many students are actually participating in advanced placement exams. So, when we put this performance measure here we have an idea that at 58 per cent . . . That was 58 per cent out of how many students that were actually participating in advanced placement exams?

The next line is *graduate with a Bermuda school diploma*, and the revised forecast for 2025/26 is 97 per cent. And the target outcome for next year is 100 per cent. So, can the Junior Minister give us a breakdown of what is necessary to receive that certification? And once again, that is based off of whether you look at all the other targets and outcomes, there seems to be a huge difference between what is expected at different levels. So how does that get to a diploma that everybody is going to get . . . 100 per cent is going to receive? So, what does that paper mean? Give us the breakdown of how you receive that certification and what that certification means for each student.

Percentage of graduates earning an external internationally recognised credential upon graduation. It is 82 per cent for 2025/26, with a target outcome of 90 per cent for 2026/27. Can the Junior Minister give us the list of these external international recognised credentials upon graduation that would make up this 90 per cent? Because that would mean that . . . once

again, I guess the question that I have to ask first is, Is this 90 per cent out of every student that is in public secondary school who graduates? So, 90 per cent of them are receiving this internationally recognised certificate, 90 per cent of them. So, give us the examples of what this certification is that would make up 90 per cent of our student body getting some kind of certification.

And then the next measure is *students graduating with one or more industry recognised credential with the target of 100 per cent*. Could the Junior Minister explain to us what these industry recognised credentials are that we are going to have 100 per cent of our students leaving school with? And what does that do to help them to be in our workforce?

[Under] 1709 curriculum assessment, *percentage of primary and middle school core curricula with priority standards, pacing guides and scope and sequence documents*, the performance measure is that the target is 100 per cent. And the revised forecast for this year was 100 per cent. Can the Junior Minister please give us the details of what makes up these assessments for the curriculum? And how are we at 100 [per cent]? It has been 100 per cent across the board. So having some details on what that actually means and how we are getting to that 100 per cent target, I think is important for us to know.

[Page] B-146, there was in Middle Schools 1707, *students passing City & Guilds assessments, English and math*. The revised forecast for 2025/26 is 88 per cent, and the target outcome for 2026/27 is 88 per cent. Can the Junior Minister please give us the details on what this assessment for City & Guilds is because once again, if the other numbers are telling us that our students are significantly low below the world standard for what is needed as a pass, how are we getting to this 88 per cent number? So once again, the first question I will ask is: Is that 88 per cent from every student in middle school? Or is this using a different number other than every student in middle school? How do we get to this 88 per cent? [I ask] because we were at 84 per cent, 90 per cent, and now we are at 88 per cent.

So, [in] 1708 secondary schools, there was a section at the bottom here on B-146, *students earning the City & Guilds employability school certification*. It is 100 per cent. It has been 100 per cent across the board. Could the Junior Minister give us the details on what it means by employability skills certification? [I ask] because in this competitive market that our young people are going into when they graduate from high school, does this mean that they are prepared for interviews? Does this mean that they are prepared for resumes? Does this mean that they are prepared for the time management and what it means to be part of work? Because I know that the Minister of Economy and Labour is going to want to make sure that our students are prepared that way.

So, I am going to ask. Can the Junior Minister give us the details of what this employability certificate is? If it does everything that I just asked, then that is great to know. But if we are graduating our students out of our schools without the ability to do those things, we are not setting them up to be employable, which is a real problem when we are having to compete worldwide for jobs. It is critical for us to know that we are preparing our young people through our education system to be employable. It is easy to put 100 per cent in this Book. But if at the end of that, that young person is graduating from high school and going to try to get a job and it is not matching this 100 per cent, we have a problem in our country. Having this answer is critical for us. This is the future of our country. This is the future of work.

On [page] B-142, I do just have a quick question on transport. I know that there was some travel that was to go to certain overseas conferences about reform and those kinds of things, and that number dropped to \$49,000. But it is creeping back up to \$74,000, an increase of \$25,000. Can the Junior Minister give us some indication of what the expectation is for that travel and how we can expect that to impact how our students are performing in the classroom? Because at the end of the day that is the most important thing . . .

On [page] B-145, 1701—

The Chairman: I just want to let the listening public know, as well as the Chamber, that we have approximately 55 minutes left in this debate.

Hon. Ben Smith: —under central administration, it says *all school staff positions filled on the first day of school*, and it is 90 per cent. It has always been 90 per cent. It is 90 per cent now. The target is 90 per cent. My question is, Does that number include—

The Chairman: Member, what page was that again?

Hon. Ben Smith: [Page] B-145, right at the top.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Hon. Ben Smith: *All school staff positions filled on the first day of school*. Does that include a substitute filling for a class, or is that only full-time teachers in that class to get to the 90 per cent?

[I ask] because we also heard that there were year groups that were combined in this school year. So, when you combine two year groups, are you putting that in the 90 per cent as well? [I ask] because I think it is important for us to know we have an increase in the number of substitutes, which means that that demand is growing. If we are filling at 90 per cent at the beginning of the year, is it right away that we are needing multiple substitutes? Or was it already right from the

beginning of school that we were having to have substitute teachers fill in?

I think it is important for us because as a young person in a classroom, having that continuity with your teacher, building that relationship, that rapport is important. So, if it is chopping and changing, that is one of the reasons that it was put forward why you would move from three-tier to two-tier—because transitions cause issues with a young person's development. Having different teachers all the time also causes that same issue. So having the Junior Minister give us the details of what that 90 per cent means I think will be important for us to know.

Yes. So, [on page] B-143 I am just going to ask a question on 27042, Buildings, Grounds, and Equipment. I note that in 2024/25, there was one employee. It moved in 2025/26 to two, and now there are going to be four for 2026/27. That is an increase in the staffing. Can the Junior Minister give . . . He did mention that there were non-slip floors that had been put in place. There was an indoor air quality issue. PVC windows were put in some schools. Could the Junior Minister give the details on what schools received that and what schools should be looking forward to these changes in the upcoming year, considering that we are increasing the staffing by two?

And with that, Madam Chair, I would like to give an opportunity for the Junior Minister to answer and for anybody else to ask questions.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Well, first, let me just remind the listening public that we are in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. We are currently debating the Ministry of Education and, in particular, Heads 16, 17, and 41.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to these Heads?

I recognise the Member from constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you, Madam Chair, listening public, and Members of this Honourable House.

Going through the Budget Book under education, what struck me was the how the Book was reporting on the budget that was spent, budget allocations, and performance measures. And I also looked at the performance, the mission statement—*To provide strategic leadership and policy direction for education and lifelong learning*. And what struck me was that is a bureaucratic statement. That is not actually a mission statement. I would think that the mission statement should be to provide a world-class education to all students, regardless of ability, and a highly educated and skilled workforce to meet the needs of the community now and in the future. That would have been a mission statement that would get us energised. But I will get into the questions.

[On page] B-136, objective analysis training [for] 2023/24 was \$1,000, [for] 2024/25 \$3,000. [The] original [was] revised to zero. And then 2025/26, [it was] \$54,000. [For] 2026/27, [it is] \$4,000. What accounts for the low training budget, given that public schools achieve below-average performance in Cambridge [and] in the IGCSEs? Mathematics is identified as a critical area of need. However, [the] training budget has been cut by \$50,000 or 93 per cent. What is the rationale given this critical area of need, and especially the added stress that AI poses regarding employable skills?

Head 16, Ministry of Education, [on page] B-135, travel [for] 2023/24 [was] \$43,000, [for] 2024/25 [was] \$80,000 [for] 2025/26 [was] \$97,000. What was the purpose of travel? What were the material benefits? For example, what initiatives towards the improvement in service delivery and results were achieved? What accounts for the travel budget being \$93,000 higher than the training budget of \$4,000 given that the public school system is in crisis? The Ministry's focus appears to be on travelling and paying consultants.

The Education Act 1996 states that education is compulsory for all children from the age of five to 16, and [the] leaving age ends at 18.

The Chairman: So, Member, I need you to refrain from the narratives. And—

Mr. Robert King: No problem.

The Chairman: If you are interested in what the rationale [is] behind the Ministry doing it, then ask that question. Do not suppose that it is for the reasons that you have stated. Please ask the questions.

Mr. Robert King: Understanding that professional services accounted for \$2,359,000 in 2023/24, [in] 2024/25 \$2,625,000, [in] 2025/26 \$3,478,000, and [in] 2026/27 \$2,118,000, how does the Minister account for that in almost every subject both public senior schools are below the international average? No public school reached the CIE international average for English, math, and science. [The] primary school average for maths [was] 14 versus [the] international average of 31. [The] average in maths [was] 16 versus [the] international average of 31. CedarBridge and Berkeley did not achieve international averages in all other subjects.

Regarding the performance measures, Head 16, [on page] B-137, the signature schools. No signature schools were . . . that did not happen. So, what was causing the delay of implementation? That was in one of the performance measures on [page] B-137.

Development of signature learning programmes and introduction of signature schools performance measures under business unit 26000, general administration—

The Chairman: What page?

Mr. Robert King: Page B-137.

The Chairman: So, your question?

Mr. Robert King: What accounts for the delay in the achievement of the performance objective? [I ask] because it has been at least three years at great expense to the community.

Regarding the college pathway, [on page] B-141, how many students passed the college placement test? How many sat the exam and how many passed the exam?

Regarding the nursing programme, I remember the Minister saying that persons who completed the programme would be eligible for entry level placement as nursing assistants. Can the Minister provide us with the actual number of graduates? And also, more importantly, how many of the graduates went into the actual nursing programme to become fully qualified nurses?

Regarding the performance measures for schools, does the Minister also have—

The Chairman: What page?

Mr. Robert King: Oh, sorry. [Page] B-141.

The Chairman: For performance measures?

Mr. Robert King: In terms of the—

The Chairman: No.

Mr. Robert King: Okay, hold on a second.

The Chairman: [It is page] B-145. And which page in particular?

Mr. Robert King: Let me just get to that for you.

It was actually a question on why certain performance measures were not in there. So, we have got performance measures that are measuring particular things. But what we are not getting is information on the performance measures that ought to be in there, such as how many assaults, how many bullying incidents, how many gang-related incidents, drug and weapon seizures, et cetera.

The Chairman: So, maybe you want to ask the question: *Under performance measures, do you take an account of . . .* and list some of those things that you are asking the question on.

Mr. Robert King: Thank you. Under the performance measures, do you take account of the number of assaults, bullying incidents, gang-related incidents, drug seizures, weapon seizures, understanding that in our schools, there is a problem of violence? And . . . ([The] MP is not here.) We know that this impacts learning and

behaviour and performance in school. So, I would think that it would be important to have those performance measures, and I would ask that those be included in the future.

The Chairman: Okay. So, what you are really asking is: Under student services, *Do they take a measure of these items you listed?* Right?

Mr. Robert King: No, no. Sure.

The Chairman: I would assume that it would fall in somewhere in that category. Okay? Thank you.

Mr. Robert King: Understanding that time is of the essence, I will take my seat.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay. Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41?

I recognise the Member from constituency 8, the Opposition Leader.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chair. [I have] just two final questions.

On [page] B-134, I am just putting this under the Ministry of Education. When can we expect to see a line item for an education authority? If the Minister can give us the answer on when we can expect to see that and what the cost will be to it. Even if this is predicted, we have been hearing about it for a long time. It is important for us to have it. And most importantly, it needs to have the word *independent* in front of it.

The second question is under performance measures. So, it is going to be between [pages] B-145 and B-147. I do not see anywhere in here that shows performance measures for principals of the schools. I would hope that going forward, we would see that kind of performance measure so that we know that we have leadership within schools that is moving us in the direction to get the results that we deserve.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41?

I recognise the Member for constituency 10. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Robert King: Just one quick one. I note that there are no performance measures for the Bermuda College, and I think that is an area that needs to be reported on in terms of student college placement tests, et cetera. There need to be performance measures because that is a critical area of our educational product.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

I will let the Junior Minister handle the response to that question. Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41?

There being none, Junior Minister, are you ready to respond?

I recognise the Junior Minister responsible for the education debate. Junior Minister, you have the floor.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Can I ask how much time I have left?

The Chairman: Yes, you may. You have approximately 42 minutes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I first just want to thank the two Members for their . . . especially the Shadow Minister [for his] litany of questions that he has asked. And I think that (you know) he is right in his asking his questions. And it shows that he is passionate about education. I know him as a coach. You know, you work with young people and you want to see them succeed. So, thank you for your questions. And [I thank] Member King for his questions.

As I said there were a litany of questions, so I will try my best to respond to the questions that were asked in the time that I have. I will start. It was a while ago these first questions were asked.

I believe the question was: How many public-school students are currently in the Bermuda Public School System [BPSS] system? The answer is 3,736 students.

There was also a question under programme 26000: Why has the admin number grown despite the reduction in pupils in the classroom? Around \$40,000 represents the salary uplift under that business unit or programme.

In regard to [the] question asked on the details for grants . . . There are 12 grantees in 2026/27. I have a breakdown for a few. I believe the larger ones [are] \$450,000 for the College Promise grant, \$102,000 for the Reading Clinic, \$80,000 for the Sloop Foundation, and \$50,000 for WindReach. And then they got smaller as they go down.

[The] question was asked: What was the impact of the drop-off in 2024/25? Go back to grants. Do the scholarship increases match support needs due to [the] growing cost of education outside of Bermuda? Almost all scholarships are of financial need. And lots of options overseas for two-year, four-year colleges, and training, which are invested in Bermuda college, which is a great deal for Bermudians. So yes, it does match the growing needs due to education costs outside of Bermuda.

There was a question in regard to the former reform, or ThirdStory, I believe they are called. What was delivered by the consultants in the last fiscal year?

Did they meet their targets? It should be noted that the transformation is a continuous process. ThirdStory was hired to assist the BPSS with implementation of the transformation. The consultants provided support through 17 work streams through co-leading with selected members of the department of education. Many of those individuals have now returned to their substantive roles, which means that the work performed by those individuals is now being implemented at school sites. And for, I guess, a scope of work you can see you can visit the website www.gov.bm. So, what that says is those members that were a part of the reform are now in the schools and implementing some of the work that they were doing under the reform unit.

There was a question under Head 17, unit 1701 Central Administration. What is the increase for the office? It is recording around \$600,000 for teachers/principal leave accruals and increase in cost for substitutes.

Under business unit 27090 Education Standards, what has the increase provided? Salary uplift has attributed to the increase.

Under that same business unit, for substitutes, why is there a heavy reliance on substitutes? Substitutes are essential to maintaining uninterrupted teaching and student services when staff are on leave. The rise in substitute usage reflects two realities. Staff take leave for a wide range of legitimate reasons, and recent negotiated increases in leave entitlements for school-based employees have naturally expanded the number of days for which coverage is required. And just to elaborate a bit more, teachers can take vacation throughout the school year. So, if you have teachers, or if you need the substitutes, that is to the increase in substitutes.

There was a question posed under programme business unit 27063 School Psychology. What is the provider to student ratio? There is a global shortage of school psychologists, which places pressure on meeting the standard international ratio of one psychologist for every 500 students. In Bermuda, the BPSS ratio is one teacher for every 623 students. To ensure that service levels are maintained and students continue to receive timely assessments and support, we supplement our internal capacity by engaging qualified consultants who assist in delivering these essential services. So, there is a worldwide shortage. Bermuda is not alone. We are impacted, and we find ways to cope and make do.

A question under the same heading of School Psychology. What is the average assessment to service time? It is 40 school or business days.

Under business unit 27072 Counselling, there was a question: Do we have the support for the level of need in our community? The answer is yes. It should be noted that counsellors assist with academic and future career readiness, which is distinctly different from the clinical assessments provided by school psychologists.

A question under that same heading [is]: Does average case load match best practice? And what is the number of cases per counsellor? The national average for counsellors is one teacher for every 250 students. Our ratio is one teacher for 96 students. So, we are above the national ratio.

Business unit 27065 Hearing Impairment. Were the cases from Gilbert picked up in any way? Yes, students continue to receive those services after moving to new schools.

[Under] 27079 Paraprofessionals, why was there a reduction in paraprofessionals? [The] answer is if a para is required to respond to an urgent student need that has been identified and supported by data and established, there is an established process to secure services and hire a para educator. There is a fluid service model that responds to ongoing needs during the course of the school year.

[The] question under business unit 27083 Autism was: Why is there a reduction in services for this population? Service levels will not be disrupted in the event students' numbers increase. Then at that point, staffing will be assessed and addressed. As per my brief, there was a notable increase in successful and meaningful inclusion of these students in the general classroom. This reinforces DOE's commitment to inclusion of students and at least in the least restrictive environments. So, to your question, the students have been incorporated back into the general classrooms.

Under that same business Head, Student Services, is Bermuda trending in the same as the world in increase with children diagnosed with learning disabilities? Answer is yes. There are increased requests for support services, learning support, and ASD support. The needs are increasing, including intensity for a number of children diagnosed with learning disabilities. So yes, we are trending the same as the world.

Under that same business unit . . . No, a different business unit . . . But under maintenance and facilities, [the] question was asked: How much is allocated per school for facility upgrade and maintenance, and what specifically is being worked on? The response is that the Opposition Leader does know, is aware, that the capital budget is not per school. And to refer to pages C . . . And I am not sure the exact page where the minor capital works are listed in the Budget Book.

And to just further respond to his question, Why is the budget not broken down by per school, per pupil, or per service given to a more holistic view of the budget? This does not show the true cost of educating a student and singles or students who require additional supports and services.

And on the Lions Quest, I believe there was a question asked on the Lions Quest: Why is there an employee under this programme? That is just a simple printing error. So, it should be zero.

Under programme 1712, Development Screening, [the] question was asked: How many of the children who received screening received the services?

In fiscal year 2025, 11 per cent or 34 of children 18 to 48 months who received a developmental screening failed the screening, and 25 per cent or 79 of children passed the screening with qualitative concerns—a total of 113 children. All of these children are referred to service.

And I believe there was a follow-up in between. What is the timeline between screening and services received? To receive services, children and families are referred by parents, paediatricians, internal CDP staff, and Allied Health professionals. Children are referred to services two ways through a formal referral process. The coordinator receives a referral and then sends the referrals to designated service providers within five business days. The other referral method is through a monthly clinical case conference to discuss each client in a multidisciplinary process. Cross-departmental staff present individual clients for service and discuss what services and supports are needed.

The timeline for receiving these services depends on current staffing and wait lists. All children and families referred to the behaviour early intervention service will receive an initial consult. Additionally, speech and language, occupational therapy, and physiotherapy are currently provided through the Department of Health through a wait list for the following services: developmental assessments, early intervention, and home visiting. This is due to long-standing vacancies that [we] are focused on eliminating this year through a recent organisational [re]structure. To that answer, there are two ways to receive a referral. Through the coordinator—that takes five business days once screened and received. The other route takes a bit longer depending on the availability of the professionals for their services.

Under Programme 1705, the primary schools' IGCSEs, what is targeted growth for reading? The question was: What is the targeted growth, and why is it 65 per cent and 100 per cent? What are the actual achievements or outcomes? The targeted growth is eight months growth or more. Eight months is a period of time between the pre-assessment and post-assessment. The percentage of P4 to P6 students demonstrating eight months growth or more is 33 per cent.

Under the Middle Schools, what schools were a part of the Cambridge assessment and is this transition period skewing the numbers? All primary, middle, and senior schools are part of the Cambridge assessment. Primary and middle schools sit the Cambridge diagnostic checkpoint while senior schools sit IGCSE exams in English, math, and science.

The question asked again on the English, math, IGSCs: Why is the target outcome the same from the previous year? What is the number of pupils who are taking these exams, and what percentages are reaching targets? As a comprehensive, non-selective school system, all students other than students in non-IGSC courses at the senior school level sit the Cambridge exams in English, math, and science. The

majority of students are obtaining a Cambridge qualification between A and G. A “G” grade receives a Cambridge qualification.

[Under] programme 1708, there was a question asked under the secondary schools: Why is the target for assessment achievement only 50 per cent? Where do these targets come from? The targeted growth for reading is eight months or more. This is a period between the pre- and post-tests. The target is 50 per cent, and 35 per cent demonstrated eight months growth or more.

Under the Bermuda College, high schools and college acceptance, the question was asked: Why is there an incongruence with the target per level and what we plan to achieve for college acceptance—80 per cent? All senior school students are given the opportunity to apply to college or university, and the resulting percentage reflects the number of students in each school compared with the number who received one or more verified acceptance letters.

The question in regard to breaking down the grading system A to G and what the breakdown is for students. The information on the scale can be found on the Cambridge website.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Under International Certifications, the question was asked: What external credentials make up the international certifications. You have the GCSE, the IGCSE, City & Guilds, BTEC, GED, and Penn Foster.

Under the Transport, there was a question: What is the reason for the \$25,000 increase, and how does it impact student education, specifically as it refers to conference travel? This is for students to travel to and from school enrichment activities. This increase and others will go directly to students, not for travel to conferences, just for local transport. And that would be for [taking] students to Dame Marjorie and, I believe, to taking primary students to WindReach and for the programmes they provide up there.

[There was a] question in regard to School Staff: Does the goal of 90 per cent staff filled at the beginning of the school year include substitutes or any FTEs? These are for FTEs. There are international shortages in hard-to-fill posts, and sometimes staff retire or resign at the end of the school year. Or, some are leaving vacancies before school starts.

Under business unit 27042, [there was a] question in regard to buildings and grounds. The employee number increased from two to four due to the staff increase while schools receive upgrades. Currently, there is one facilities manager, and we will be going through the recruitment process to [hire] one assistant facilities manager. Some schools will receive flooring and window upgrades in 2026/27. All schools will undergo the necessary assessments to see what upgrades are required, including CCTV upgrades.

[There was a] question under Training: What accounts for the low training budget seeing that schools are underperforming? [Ther] response is there is a wide range of training provided by DOE and schools that is not only funded by this business unit. So, funding for training comes from other units.

[There was a] question on the College Pathway: How many students sit the college placement test, and how many pass the exam? Students who do not pass the placement test are offered preparatory courses in order to facilitate continuation of their education journey.

An Hon. Member: What was the number?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: There was no number.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: The number is coming to you now. Just waiting for the answer. Yes, technology. This is what we send children to school for. Yes.

Just to further answer that question, in the preceding fiscal year, 201 students were accepted and 89 took preparatory courses. Out of those 89 that took preparatory courses, 60 per cent of these were admitted.

To the question posed in regard to the Education Authority, When can we expect to see the authority, and how much will it cost? the legislative framework for a successful public school model that utilises an education authority is undergoing the required level of scrutiny and revision such a vital systemic shift requires.

[To answer the] question under performance measures for principals and why not include it, performance measures for individual employees are confidential.

And under performance measures, why are there no performance measures included about Bermuda College? Bermuda College specific performance measures will be tied to a strategic plan [for] 2025/26, which was issued in the fall of 2025. The first iteration of performance measures will be available in fall 2026.

Madam Chairman, if there are any other questions while I wait, if anyone has any more questions . . .

The Chairman: The Junior Minister is still formulating some of the answers so that he can ensure that the Opposition gets them.

We are in Committee of Supply for the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And we are debating the Ministry of Education on Heads 16, 17, and 41.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 8, the Opposition Leader. Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, on [page] C-4, I just want to ask a question [about] 75152 School Safety.

The Chairman: What page?

Hon. Ben Smith: [Page] C-4.

The Chairman: You said C-4? Okay, sorry. Go ahead.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, in the last school year, in this school year the Ministry introduced a new code of conduct with restrictions on personal devices. Is the Junior Minister able to let us know whether the increases in School Safety are to cover any necessary needs in order to cover that new code of conduct and the device restriction?

There were a couple of questions that he has not answered yet. I am not sure whether he is still looking for them. So, I am just going to quickly go back to . . . I am not sure whether the question was answered about the Office of the Commissioner.

The Chairman: Okay. Did you want to repeat your question? So just in case?

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes. So, there was an increase in the Office of the Commissioner, \$298,000. And there looks like there is an increase in staffing by two. So, I wanted to know whether those two things—

The Chairman: Are correlated.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you.

The Chairman: Yes. Okay. Thank you.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41?

At this time, there appear to be none.
Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman. Would we have to get another time check?

The Chairman: Certainly. Member, we are looking at approximately 15 minutes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Just slightly over.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Okay. The Member did say there are a few questions that I probably overlooked. Would you mind restating them just so I can?

The Chairman: I hope it is not like about 20.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I do not think it is that many.

The Chairman: Okay. Can you take your seat so that I can just ask?

Opposition Leader and Member from constituency 8, do you remember any questions off your head that until now have not been answered so we can remind the Junior Minister what responses you are still looking for?

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes. So, one of the questions that I asked . . . And I know the Minister said that we can get the breakdown of the assessments, the Cambridge assessments. We can get that by going on the Cambridge website. Considering that this is a debate that we want the Bermuda public to listen to, I am wondering if he can actually give us just a little bit of breakdown for A, B, and C, as an example. And my question that I asked was whether the standards that Bermuda is meeting . . . Right? Because our Book says A to G. What is the pass mark worldwide compared to Bermuda? [I ask] because I think it is important that we have an understanding how Bermuda is doing when we look at these numbers. So, if the Junior Minister can give us some details of Bermuda's standard and how that standard is matching to what I am going to say we are competing with, which is outside of our jurisdiction.

The Chairman: Okay. So just to just help out a little bit, the standard is from A to G, and the Junior Minister did say that G is recognised. So, are you really asking whether G is considered a failure? Or are you asking which letters of the standards A through to G are considered pass rates, and which ones are failures? That is—

Hon. Ben Smith: Correct. I want to know which one of those is what is considered a pass rate. Because yes, we can go all the way to G. But what is considered a pass, so that we know what percentage of our students are actually on the correct side of that equation?

The Chairman: Okay, thank you. I think that will help. I recognise the Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

As I wait for that answer, I think I have seen an answer to a question that was asked that I did not get to respond to in regard to the nursing certificates: How many received the certificate, and how many who received the certificate went on to enrol in the programme? We do not specifically track progression from certificate to associates in nursing as each learner's journey is unique. We can report nine learners completed the certificate for nursing assistants with a further 11 completing the same as high school students under the dual enrolment programme. Six learners completed their associate's degree in nursing.

Another question was asked in regard to how many students take the IB exams. Bermuda Public School students do not sit IB exams.

And there was a question asked around the Bermuda diploma. What is necessary to achieve the Bermuda diploma? [The answer is] 24.5 credits of which 7.5 credits are from the pursuit of signature learning course and the remainder from credits earned from English, math, science, and other encore or elective subject areas.

[There were] two questions that the Member did ask. One question [was] under the Office of [the] Commissioner, and the answer would be the addition is for leadership support posts that were vacant and unfunded.

And we are just waiting to give him the full list of the IGCSE grades from A as they come.

The Chairman: Minister, while you are formulating your answer, I would like to ask Members whether or not they wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41.

I recognise the Member from constituency 8, the Opposition Leader.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, it seems that when I asked my question on Travel, it was under the wrong line. So, I am going to correct that, based on the answer that the Junior Minister gave me.

So, on [page] B-136, the Transport number is \$97,000. So, if he can give us a breakdown on what that travel will entail because originally when I said it, I think his answer attached it to Transport instead of Travel . . . My question was actually on Travel. So, I am just making sure that it is—

The Chairman: So, you are saying—

Hon. Ben Smith: —in the correct spot.

The Chairman: Okay, so it was . . . Your question is on Travel.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes—

The Chairman: And not on Transport. Okay.

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes, on Travel, not on Transport.

And I did ask a question from [page] B-146 about the employability certification, specifically on preparing our young people for being able to leave school and go to work. If the Junior Minister can give us the details on that certification and whether it matched the things that I laid out, which was resume, et cetera.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak?

I recognise the Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: As I wait for those—the revised question and the second question that was asked—there was a question asked, I believe it was: For the people who are eligible for services, why do only 50 per cent of the population receive services? And response, there is only one staff member operating currently providing services in the early intervention service.

And follow-up question, I believe was, do we not have the resources to provide the services? Cabinet recently approved an organisational structure that had seven new posts and one redefined position. These posts include a clinical psychologist, a developmental psychologist, a screening programme manager, a speech and language pathologist, an occupational therapist, and a physiotherapist. These posts once filled will enable CDP to provide a quicker assessment response time and a broader array of early intervention services. Additionally, an early intervention supervisor is due to join CDP in July 2026. This would help to be able to address those who are eligible for the services.

And to the question from the MP, can we break down the grading system of the IGCSE, [grades] A to G? The information from the Cambridge website: an A plus, or A-asterisk, is 90 to 100; an A is 80 to 89; a B is 70 to 79; a C is 60 to 69; a D is 50 to 59; an E is 40 to 49; F is 30 to 39; a G is 20 to 29, noting that grades A plus, or A-asterisk, to G are passing, with G being the minimum. That's noted on the website.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: In regard to the question on Travel, this \$97,000 covers overseas travel for the Ministry headquarters and for Ministry work, including for educational transformation and training. So as was asked, they might have to travel overseas to different conferences or whatever.

Member, are there any questions that you think I overlooked again? Or anyone else?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Are those the responses you have thus far, Junior Minister? Or are you still trying to give us further responses?

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Those are the responses I have thus far, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Okay. I will ask all Members whether or not anyone else wishes to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41.

I recognise the Member from constituency 8 and the Opposition Leader.

Member, you have the floor.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman. And thank you to the Junior Minister for giving us the details from the Cambridge website.

But my follow-up question was, What percentage does Bermuda fit in on that scale? So the majority of our students, are they A to C? Where is Bermuda sitting right now from the assessment we just had? And the reason that that's important is because we have to compete worldwide. So, what is the world standard? Not G, because there's no way that G is the answer. I understand that that is a pass, according to the Junior Minister.

The Chairman: I think what it really means is that that's what those students are scoring at—

Hon. Ben Smith: Yes.

The Chairman: —or they are passing at that rate. I don't know if they equate it to having passed.

Hon. Ben Smith: And that's the question. Is that actually equating to a pass? And if it is not, what are we doing as a country to move us from G to the letter grade that we actually need?

The Chairman: Well, I think what you are really asking are the majority of our students passing at a rate from C to A. Yes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I would hope I would be able to get an answer to you before our time runs out, Member.

There were just a few more questions that were asked that I have responses to. What is the employability skills certification? What does it achieve? This is for senior schools to prepare students for employability.

And under industry certifications, what are industry recognised credentials that students can graduate with? The signature learning programme industry recognises . . . and I will say to the question from the Member in regard to . . . the target is for Cambridge to . . . A to C. That is our target for children to grade in between A and C. And we are supporting all students to grow and improve towards that target.

I think to the further question of where do we measure against the rest? I would have to look to get that answer to the Member as I do not have it at this time.

The Chairman: And [Junior] Minister, you have approximately four minutes before this debate ends.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41 while the Minister formulates his other response?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, I point to him to sit.

Hon. Ben Smith: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

So just quickly on the employability skills certification as the Junior Minister was just mentioning. So,

does that mean that the 100 per cent mark means that every student that leaves our secondary school is prepared to do what is necessary to be employed? And I mentioned before résumé skills, interview skills, those steps that we all know are necessary for our students to be employable. So, is the [Junior] Minister saying that 100 per cent mark means that?

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Are there any other persons who wish to speak to Heads 16, 17, and 41?

Are there any other persons?

There being none at this time, I call on the Junior Minister.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

With that and the limited time left, I again would just like to thank all the staff and workers of the Department of Education, Ministry of Education, and the Bermuda College. There are many to name, Madam Chairman.

I wish I had the memory to remember them all. But, you know, we have the Minister of Education. We have the PS, I believe, Ms. Lisa Smith-Clarke.

The Chairman: Yes, you are correct.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: We have the directors. We have the technical staff who are in-house right now. Ms. Sue-Ann Smith and Kimberly McKeown.

The Chairman: Ms. Kimberly McKeown. Yes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: There we go. And the many other teachers. The principals, we cannot forget the principals. The principals and the teachers, Madam Chairman, they do a very important job in this Island, this community, as was mentioned in my brief and was mentioned by the Opposition Leader in his comments, that education . . . the teachers do a job of raising our future from preschool, which is, I believe, three, four years of age. The teachers are in our children's lives, and they have to instil them and teach them for life. So, we again want to thank the teachers for what they do.

I just want to add in, Madam Chairman, that it is well known that my mother was an educator for almost 50 years. She taught in the public and private school system.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: And today is fitting because today is actually her birthday, the first birthday after her passing last year. And ironically, as I am standing and leading the debate on education, you know—

The Chairman: I am sure she'd be proud.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I know she'd be proud. And, you know, she was an educator not just in class, but at home. I couldn't get away from it. My brothers and I . . . we got teachers in school and lessons at home, but it has all shaped us into who we are today.

So again, Madam Chairman, I can't forget—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Dennis Lister III: —we look at all staff in the Ministry, the people who work in the administrative office, the accountants—

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: We must not overlook even the grounds staff and people that . . . maintenance staff. I want to give kudos to them.

But overall, Madam Chairman, I also want to just, again, to the students, those who have to be the clients of our education system.

The Chairman: You have like 30 seconds.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: I want to encourage them to continue in doing their studies, hoping that at the end of this year, that those who are graduating, we will see increased numbers of those that are graduating and that can go on to whether it be from primary school to middle school, middle school to high school or high school on to higher tertiary education.

But with that, Madam Chairman, can I move these heads?

The Chairman: Please.

Mr. Dennis Lister III: Thank you, Madam Chairman. I move that Heads 16, 17 and 41 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 16, 17 and 41 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none. So approved.

[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 2026/27.]

The Chairman: I call on the Member from constituency 32 to come and assume the Chair.

And we are awaiting the next Minister to take his post and that is the Minister of Finance who will be in here . . . oh, the Junior Minister will take us forward.

[Mr. Scott Simmons, Chairman]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, Madam Chairman.

I would like to 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 the Tax Commissioner; Head 39, Registrar of Companies; and Head 58, Debt and Loan Guarantees be now taken under consideration.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Junior Minister.

The [Junior] Minister has asked that we consider Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and if I'm correct, [Junior] Minister, Head 58 be asked . . . Members, your . . . and it is so approved.

I recognise the Junior Minister . . . now I recognise the Honourable Premier.

Premier, go right ahead.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I am so grateful for the Junior Minister for moving that. My sincere apologies, I was otherwise indisposed. But Mr. Chairman—

The Chairman: Yes.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE

Hon. E. David Burt: The 2026/27 estimates for the Ministry of Finance are found in section B of the Estimates Book on pages B-107 through pages B-133 and in section C on pages C-11 Capital Acquisitions and [page] C-17 Grants.

Mr. Speaker, before I, I am sorry, Mr. Chairman, before I begin my remarks, I would like to extend an invitation to the Honourable Shadow Minister of Finance. If he so wishes and desires to submit any questions of which he may have in advance, he's more than welcome to send those to the Financial Secretary.

I know that they are in touch and we might be able to, as there is an entire finance team who are standing by ready to answer, we might be able to get those answers done in good time. But we are prepared to take them from the floor as well.

The Chairman: Shadow Minister, are you prepared to accept that?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the offer. I will obviously have to prepare them to send them in electronic format, which will take some additional time.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Shadow Minister.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, just as a note, and for anyone who may be doing the same, Opposition Leader for the non-ministry briefs, please send your questions in advance. It's a lot easier to answer that

way if you have any. But no problem, Mr. Chairman, I shall proceed.

The Finance Ministry comprises seven departments led by the Ministry of Finance Headquarters 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 and grant funding are also included in the Ministry of Finance budget.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry has a total staffing establishment of 180 posts, an aggregate current account budget of \$277.3 million, excluding the cross-ministry \$14 million transformational project fund, and is responsible for collecting \$1.9 billion, or 94 per cent, of all government revenue. Of the \$277.3 million of expenditure, \$124.8 million, or 45 per cent, is for interest charges on debt; \$116.7 million, or 42 per cent, are for costs associated with pension and health care benefits for all government workers and war veterans, leaving an operational budget of \$35.8 million, or 12.9 per cent, for operational matters.

A snapshot of key information for the Ministry of Finance is shown on page B-107 of the Estimates Book.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: You want me to go slower? I can go slower. I mean, the brief is 16,321 words, so that is about two hours.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, we did not.

The Chairman: Questions to the Chairman . . . but keep up. Keep up.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate—and my sincere apologies. I will address you.

The Chairman: Keep up, Shadow Minister.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, I'm sorry.

A snapshot of information for the Ministry of Finance is shown on page B-107 of the Estimates Book. The current account allocations are as follows:

- Head 10, Ministry of Finance Headquarters, \$25.39 million, an increase of \$13.57 million, or 115 per cent, comprised of \$11.39 million of operational spend and \$14 million for the

transformational project fund, which I had stated before.

- Head 11, Accountant General, \$120.65 million, an increase of \$14.097 million, or 13 per cent, of which \$13.9 million relates to government-wide employee and overhead benefits.

[Pause]

The Chairman: Just to remind the general public that we are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27, and that Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39, and 58. The Minister in charge is the Honourable Premier and Minister of Finance, E. David Burt.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. And so, as a point, the \$13.9 million refers to the increase that is the part that is government-wide employee overhead and benefits.

- [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, \$2.5 million, a decrease of \$386,000, or 13 per cent. All of this is for mandated costs for war veterans.
- Head 38, the Office of the Tax Commissioner, \$5.31 million, an increase of \$1 million, and all of this is operational spend.
- Head 39, Registrar of Companies, \$11.71 million, a decrease of \$810,000, or 6 per cent, and all of this is operational spend.
- Head 49, Land Valuation, \$945,000, a decrease of \$32,000 year over year, or 3 per cent, and all of this is operational spend.
- Head 58, Debt and Loan Guarantees, \$124.75 million, a decrease of \$2.774 million, or 2 per cent.

Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Finance remains central to safeguarding Bermuda's long-term stability and prosperity, particularly as we navigate a complex global economic landscape. Throughout this administration's now over eight-year tenure, our focus has been steadfast, implementing a deliberate strategy to diversify our economy and support our citizens through sound and prudent fiscal management. Following many, many, many years of budget deficits, this budget marks our third consecutive year of delivering a Consolidated Fund surplus.

Key moments of this fiscal management strategy include encouraging investment and adopting tax policies that foster growth, create employment, and reduce the cost of doing business. And of course, Mr. Chairman, this is a tax-cutting budget, and it should be known that unemployment in Bermuda, and youth unemployment, are at record lows.

The Chairman: So noted, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

Reforming the tax system to make it fairer while easing the burden on workers, updating and modernising Bermuda's regulatory framework, maintaining fiscal discipline to support the long-term prosperity of the jurisdiction, and upholding Bermuda's commitment to international transparency and compliance.

Mr. Chairman, our responsibility is to ensure the highest standard of fiscal and economic management for the people of Bermuda. Achieving this often requires making difficult decisions that may not be politically convenient, but are essential to sustain economic growth, support workers, and provide the services necessary for a high quality of life. Bermuda faces ongoing challenges that, if not managed carefully, could threaten our economic stability.

The Ministry's budget has been designed to equip its staff, supported by external experts and stakeholders to manage these challenges, and to guide government policy effectively. Ensuring the Ministry is well-resourced and structured to respond to increasing demand remains a top priority.

Over the past year, reviews of key areas have identified gaps, and steps are underway to address them. Additional funding has been allocated to priority units and initiatives, while adjustments have been made elsewhere to balance resources.

Among the key initiatives to be advanced are:

- reforming banking, tax, and pension systems;
- establishing the Sovereign Wealth Fund and Stabilisation Fund;
- preparation for the forthcoming 5th Round Mutual Evaluation Review from the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force;
- promoting Bermuda as a global leader in digital finance and digital assets;
- supporting programmes to improve financial literacy and to empower individuals to manage their finance responsibly; and
- increasing the use of data to monitor an horizon plan for financial stability risks to the jurisdiction.

The Ministry has budgeted \$2.7 million of capital funding, primarily for IT upgrades throughout the department. These upgrades are essential to support increase in operational efficiency, debt collection, and compliance across the Ministry.

Mission Statement and Key Goals and Objectives

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Ministry of Finance's mission, found on page B-108, reads as follows: *Achievement of economic prosperity and to ensure the financial security of Bermuda.*

During the past year, the Ministry of Finance has been able to make meaningful progress across several important areas, and this brief highlights some

of the key achievements. These include the implementation of the corporate income tax and tax credit framework, public service pension reform to address the sustainability of the superannuation fund, maintenance of strong credit ratings through ratings agencies, and the successful completion of international assessments to maintain the jurisdiction's good standing with international bodies.

Now, Mr. Chairman, I will just go off script and say kudos to the Ministry of Finance team, led by the Financial Secretary, Mr. [Chidozie] Ofoego, who is in the Chamber with us, for the excellent work in which they have done.

The Chairman: Yes. Hear, hear!

[Desk thumping]

The Chairman: Noted.

Hon. E. David Burt: As we look ahead to the coming year, the Ministry will continue to build on this foundation with a clear focus on supporting economic growth, maintaining Bermuda's reputation as a well-regulated and trusted financial hub, and executing a prudent fiscal strategy that balances responsible management with the needs of the people of Bermuda.

Priorities include advancing the work required for Bermuda's mutual evaluation, supporting the implementation of the digital finance strategy, continuing to evolve corporate income tax credits, re-empanelling the Debt Management Committee to advise on debt repayment and ensuring that we monitor and mitigate any potential risks to public finances, including through monitoring and appraisals of government guarantees.

Through this work, the Ministry of Finance remains committed to strengthening Bermuda's fiscal position while contributing to a fairer and more secure future for all.

I will now speak to the various heads and departments that comprise the Ministry of Finance, starting with Head 10, Ministry of Finance Headquarters.

For your information, Mr. Chairman, I will do Head 10 and Head 11. Head 12, Customs, will be done by Junior Minister Furbert. Head 28 will be done by Junior Minister Furbert, and Head 38 will be done by Junior Minister Furbert. I will then pick back up on the Registrar of Companies, Head 39, and then Head 58, Interest on Debt and Guarantee Management.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Premier.

This debate began, this particular part of the debate began at 4:42 pm. It's been allocated four hours, so that will be 8:42, of which there will be the two of us will . . . two will come in and sit in this Chair.

Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: You get a break, Mr. Chairman?

The Chairman: I do.

Hon. E. David Burt: Okay. Hopefully, I will get one too.

[Laughter]

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: I am going to ignore that, Honourable Member.

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-109. The work undertaken by 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, and
- Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee (NAMLC), the most exciting unit in the Ministry of Finance.

In addition, grants and support are budgeted for the Gaming Commission—there you are, MP King, the Bermuda Public Accountability Board, and for Corporate Income Tax Support.

The Ministry of Finance Headquarters' mission is as follows, and I quote, Mr. Chairman: *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 Headquarters seeks to achieve the following outcomes:

- A Bermuda that maintains position as a domiciled choice for international business.
- A Bermuda where citizens have confidence in the government's stewardship of the public purse.
- A Bermuda where funding and resources are available for key programmes and initiatives.
- A Bermuda where taxes are administered fairly, efficiently, and effectively.
- And finally, 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 Headquarters has a staff establishment of 20 (up from 19 in the prior year) permanent full-time posts, as per page B-110 of the Budget Book. Its total budget is \$25.39 million, split between operational costs of \$11.39 million and a \$14 million cross-ministry transformational project fund.

Costs have risen by \$13.57 million against the original budget and increased against the 2025/26 revision of \$12.62 million by \$12.74 million, or 50.3 per cent. And of course, as I mentioned, this increase is due to the \$14 million centrally managed one-off transformational fund within Policy and Planning. It will support priority strategic initiatives that strengthen economic resilience and support government productivity without creating ongoing costs. The plan is to reduce ongoing costs. That's what you get from deployment of AI and deployment of the strategic initiatives of which are intended to be done there.

The \$14 million is allocated to four key pillars, and this is speaking to the \$14 million of the transformational project fund. Mr. Chairman, \$5 million to advancing our on-chain economy, strengthening our global leadership in digital assets and improving financial efficiency inside and outside of government; \$3 million to support entrepreneurship, cooperatives, local ownership, and business formation; \$3 million for deployment of AI projects within government to improve the delivery of public services, and Mr. Chairman, that is a pool in addition to the monies that were already covered in the budget that we discussed on Monday when we discussed the Cabinet Office and Digital Innovation and the Digital Transformation Team.

So, it is an additional pool of funds because we know that we cannot anticipate what may happen in the year, but we want to make sure that we have additional funds that are available. And also, \$3 million to enhance food security and supply chain resilience, especially in a place where we have tariffs popping up and all of the types of things. It is important that we deal with these particular matters.

Outside of the transformational project fund, the Ministry has budgeted \$3.5 million to continue work with tax experts to evolve the corporate income tax framework, including through the development of housing credits and \$800,000 grants to the Gaming Commission, with a further \$226,000 allocated to the Bermuda Public Accountability Board.

Revenue Projections

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, a revenue summary for the Ministry of Finance Headquarters can be found on page B-110 of the Budget Book. I am pleased to announce that \$755.7 million has been budgeted in the Ministry Headquarters (that's a lot of money), primarily for fiscal year 2026/27 corporate income tax receipts.

This follows a strong year-end result in fiscal year 2025/26, where corporate income tax revenue reached \$279 million, well above our initial estimates of \$187.5 million. That performance reflects both the strength of international business and the significant work undertaken to implement and administer this new regime. And of course, we should congratulate the board of the Corporate Income Tax Agency, led by the

amazing Ms. Cheryl-Ann Lister, the CEO of the agency, Mr. Mervyn Skeet, all of the board members, and also the staff at the Corporate Income Tax Agency.

For fiscal year 2026/27, the government projects corporate income tax revenue of \$753 million. This forecast reflects the remaining payments related to 2025 activity, adjusted for expected tax credits when final returns are assessed later in 2026, and includes an additional portion of payments associated with the 2026 calendar year. Just important to note, Mr. Chairman, because I had a conversation at lunch earlier today, and some people do not get it. Clearly, the government has collected more than \$279 million in corporate income tax during this calendar year. However, the corporate income tax regulations state that only 25 per cent of the balance can be transferred to the Consolidated Fund, and so that additional amount is held over there. So if \$279 [million] represents 25 per cent, then you can do the math to estimate how much money was collected.

Within the 2025/26 revised estimate, there is an additional \$7.85 million in revenue, as the Bermuda Monetary Authority has projected to receive a higher than expected surplus. It seems to be catching along all throughout the government of Bermuda . . . higher than expected surpluses. Through fees and stringent cost controls and plans to return 50 per cent of operating surplus net of fines in accordance with the Bermuda Monetary Authority Act 1969.

Capital Spend

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the capital spend for 2026/27 can be found on page C-4, Capital Development, and [page] C-11, Capital Acquisitions. There are no capital developments for the Ministry of Finance in 2026/27. However, capital acquisitions are budgeted at \$311,000, up from \$160,000 in 2025/26. The majority of this increase reflects the Ministry's planned investment in upgrading and modernising technology infrastructure, including critical systems and digital tools necessary to enhance operational efficiency and support delivery of more streamlined and data-driven public financial management services.

Key Performance Measures

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, key performance measures of the Ministry of Finance can be found on page B-111 of the Budget Book.

Bermuda's economy continues to demonstrate resilience and stability. Real GDP is forecasted to grow by 2.5 per cent in 2025/26, reflecting sustained activity in international business and further gains in tourism. Economic performance has been supported by rising employment income, steady consumer spending, and healthy foreign currency inflows. The target GDP growth for 2026/27 is a further 2.7 per cent underscoring expectations of Bermuda's continued economic

resilience and competitive position in a challenging global environment.

Mr. Chairman, lots has been said about the successful implementation of our corporate income tax. The projected decline in government net debt-to-GDP from 33.1 per cent of GDP to 27.2 per cent of GDP is a significant structural improvement facilitated by this additional revenue stream. A reduction of nearly 6 percentage points creates a substantial "fiscal buffer." This allows the Government to respond effectively to external shocks or future economic downturns without risking credit instability.

Mr. Chairman, the most striking achievement is the trajectory of the debt-servicing burden. Reducing interest payments as a percentage of revenue from 10 per cent in 2024/25 to a projected 6.2 per cent in 2026/27 and represents a material efficiency gain.

In 2024, 10 cents of every dollar collected went toward servicing past debt. By 2026, that will drop to roughly six cents. This 3.8 per cent "saving" in revenue is effectively unlocked capital and can be redirected toward, essential public services (health care, education), critical infrastructure investment or accelerated further debt retirement.

Cost Centre 20000—Policy Planning and Management: \$18.2 million
(Increase of \$14.5 million or 395 per cent)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget estimate for Policy, Planning and Management is \$18.2 million, an increase of \$14.5 million over 2025/26. 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 various quangos, as well as fiscal oversight and accountability for the jurisdiction and throughout the government. Total staff in the unit is eight persons.

The proposed \$14.495 million increase in expenditure is primarily related to the establishment of the cross-Ministerial transformational fund, which I spoke about earlier.

Then I will move on because I think I've covered that twice already.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: I don't need to cover it again, unless you want me to read it again.

Shadow Minister, do you want me to read it again? No.

The Chairman: The Shadow Minister declines. Go right ahead, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: No problem.

Key highlights for 2025/26 for the Ministry of Finance Headquarters include:

- overseeing the implementation of tax reforms, including tax credit legislation following receipt of the tax reform commission report;
- advancing reforms to the public service superannuation fund—a big deal;
- changes to the National Pension Scheme to cap pension administration fees—a big deal;
- managed relationships with Sovereign Tax Rating agencies and assisted in ensuring that Bermuda kept its Rating of A+, a key driver for the international business sector; and
- continuing effective administration and coordination of financial and operational matters within the Ministry.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the team who have supported both myself and the Financial Secretary.

For the upcoming year, key projects will include—and this is a long list, so listen carefully, Shadow Minister:

- Continuing advancement of the Corporate Income Tax Regime both internally and in partnership with CITA.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, you are doing it as well?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am sure you are speaking to the Chair, Mr. Premier.

The Chairman: He is always speaking to the Chair.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: Yes, he is speaking to the Chair.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, my sincere apologies. I am hoping that the Shadow Minister is paying attention to this long list of items.

The Chairman: Oh, I am quite certain that the Shadow Minister is—

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: So, the key projects will include:

- Continuing advancement of the Corporate Income Tax Regime both internally and in partnership with Corporate Income Tax Agency (CITA).
- Building capability to horizon plan for jurisdictional financial stability risks—something that is

particularly important especially in this complex global environment and of course with the advance of artificial intelligence, digital finance and other things financial stability risks can present themselves very quickly and we need to improve our way to monitor those and the same tools that I am speaking about enable that to be done in a more efficient way.

- Establishing a Sovereign Wealth Fund and stabilisation fund to support effective management of proceeds from corporate income tax and benefit future generations of Bermudians.
- Legislating for the jurisdiction's fiscal rules to support effective management of future CIT revenues.
- Re-empanel and work with the debt advisory committee to develop our strategic approach to debt refinancing.
- Oversight of the Ministry's anti money laundering, anti terrorist financing and counter proliferation policy initiatives to support the effectiveness of the jurisdictional regime.
- Working with other teams to assist the analysis of costs and to assess the financing options for major projects including housing development.
- Work with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and industry stakeholders to review home insurance regulations and explore policy reforms—those particular matters being led by the Honourable Wayne Furbert.
- 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—also to be led by the Junior Minister.
- Develop succession planning within the Ministry to support the long-term ongoing effectiveness of the Ministry.
- Invest in the IT systems infrastructure to support data robustness, data analytics and operational efficiency.

Cost Centre 20010—Fiscal Planning & Control: \$690,000 (Increase of \$11,000, or 17 per cent)

The Chairman: Found on page B-110.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes. But I can assure you that is not 17 per cent.

The Chairman: Hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: The budget for Fiscal Planning and Control is \$690,000, an increase on the prior year of \$589,000, due to salary increases. Salaries make up over 80 per cent of the budget team's allocation for 2026/27 and provides for a four-person team led by the Budget Director.

The Budget Team has continued its important work in managing the overall government expenditures and boosting revenues. Their efforts have contributed to a steady reduction in budget deficits over recent years, allowing the Government to provide additional support to Bermudians and their families. Importantly, we have been able to maintain or even exceed our fiscal targets as we progressed towards achieving surplus budgets.

And, Mr. Chairman, I just have to elaborate on that point because it is particularly important because the Budget Department does not only do its work, of course, during the preparation of the budget. They also do the . . . there is the fiscal planning with the budget, but there is also the budget control function which happens all throughout the year. And one of the reasons why we are able to continue to report better than expected results is we keep a tight handle on expenditures, making sure that people hold to their particular budgets. And, of course, when we identify budgets that are going out of whack, we have advance warning so we can have those kind of conversations and discussions with the responsible Ministers or the Financial Secretary or his team can have those particular discussions at the technical level.

The Chairman: Right.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Budget Statement details the final performance of 2024/25, which resulted in a \$29 million Consolidated Fund budget surplus, \$28.8 million above the [2024/25] original budget surplus of \$210,000.

This surplus, which was the first surplus achieved in 21 years, was delivered before a single dime of corporate income tax was collected. I know you have heard me say that many times, Mr. Chairman, but it is important to repeat.

The Chairman: Yes, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Because some will have you believe that the only reason a surplus was delivered was due to corporate income tax. And the record shows that we balanced budget and delivered a budget surplus before that fact.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: You all like it, don't you. You are going to miss me when I am gone.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: It is proof this Government has successfully managed the Island's finances while simultaneously reducing the [tax] burden on workers to the lowest level in our history—when they had it the

highest. Look at me. See, don't get me excited, Deputy Opposition Leader. Don't get me excited.

Mr. Chairman, let me talk through you.

The Chairman: Yes. Go right ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: The Deputy Opposition Leader is getting me excited. You know.

The Chairman: And you are getting him excited.

Hon. E. David Burt: Exactly. Because this is my second to last budget brief. So, you know.

[Laughter]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thrilled, Mr. Chairman.

Hon. E. David Burt: All right. Mr. Chairman, when reviewing the results from fiscal year 2024/25, the independent Fiscal Responsibility Panel said Bermuda's fiscal position is now stronger than at any time in two decades.

I want to repeat that again, Mr. Chairman, I should frame it. It says Bermuda's fiscal position is now stronger than at any time in two decades. On this clearly the Government agrees and now we must build on this solid foundation.

The 2025/26 estimates of revenue expenditure originally projected \$43.3 million budget surplus and the projected Consolidated Fund surplus for the current fiscal year is \$153.1 million, which is \$109.8 million more than the original estimate.

However, I just want to make sure—

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: —because we are in Fiscal Planning and Control. I think we are very clear on this—

The Chairman: [Business unit] 20010.

Hon. E. David Burt: Exactly . . . clear on this. But I think it's important. The main highlights for the 2026/27 Estimates, which are underneath Fiscal Planning and Control, is that we recognise that revenues are expected to reach \$2 billion. And we know the figures for current account expenditure are at \$1.25 billion, which is an increase of \$137 million. But I think it's important to note that the estimated current account balance before debt service is expected to reach \$779.4 million, and that is \$458 million, or 143 per cent more than the original estimates for this current fiscal year.

The Current Account balance will cover the costs of servicing our debt, projected at \$124.8 million. That means \$654.7 million are available to meet capital expenditure, which is coming in at \$182 million. We recognise that we are projecting a surplus of \$472.7 million, which is a significant item.

The Budget team will continue its work to achieve and maintain budget surpluses through fiscal discipline financial management.

For the fiscal year 2026/27 the unit has set objectives to

- provide support for the open/participatory budget process;
- continue development of budget preparation methodology site; and
- succession planning for the Fiscal Planning and Control Unit.

One of the things also, Mr. Chairman, of which we are going to do is that we are trying to, as we talk about building out some of those technology tools, I think one of the things is we have a budget website that we use, but the budget website does not link directly into the E1 System, which is how fiscal planning control is done, and now it's a lot easier to do some of these various things with some of the new tools which are coming on board. So that's another project that the Ministry will be in.

So, when we talk about the development of the budget preparation methodology website, it is one of those things specifically a feed into the E1 System to reduce the stress and pressure and rekeying that must happen from our budget control team

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Cost Centre 20020—International Affairs & Regulatory: \$787,000 (Increase of \$49,000, or 7 per cent)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget estimate for the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit may be found on [page] B-109. Accordingly, the budget estimate for this unit is \$787,000, as I said an increase of \$49,000 over the current 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. Of course, Mr. [Chairman], which is the most important sector of economy. So, this is a very important unit. The International Affairs unit is organised into one unit and one department. The International Affairs unit primarily formulates policy while the Registrar of Companies manages major aspects of Bermuda's compliance with international standards.

Mr. Chairman, 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; the Bermuda Monetary Authority; the Attorney General's Chambers; 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 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.

Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs unit's plan responds to these challenges through various goals focused on advancing the Unit's priorities and reflecting the outcomes that the people of Bermuda need and require.

These goals are:

- 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 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 the coordinating of financial services regulatory policy initiatives of the Government;
- to oversee the Ministry of Finance component of the financial services legislative program 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 or committees regarding matters related to financial services.

Measures and Indicators of Success

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman,

- Full implementation of Budget Statements and Throne Speeches.
- Promotion of policy approaches at home or abroad that foster a level playing field.
- Regular and normalised sharing of information affecting the financial services sector at home and abroad.
- Improved processes for registering entities in Bermuda, which we have delivered. And I am just certainly curious to find out the feedback from the market on those things.

Full implementation of recommendations made by the Financial Policy Council, and the Fiscal Responsibility Panel where appropriate, including

- improved quality of finance market analysis; and
- 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 Business Plan, the unit will undertake the following key strategic ownership goals in 2026/27:

- Matters related to the European Union.

Mr. Chairman, 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.

- 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.

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, which I wish would stop changing all the time.

- Matters related to the United Kingdom.

Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit will work with the Cabinet Office on matters related to the

financial services sector along 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 legitimate interest beneficial ownership of companies.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm. Just reminding Members that we are in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenues and Expenditure for the years 2026/27, and that we are currently looking through Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39, and 58, in the name of the Honourable Premier and Finance Minister E. David Burt.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Is that what I think it is?

Oh, my. It's a problem.

The Chairman: This debate began at 4:42 pm. My Chair will take us to 6:42 pm, and the second Chair will get us on to 8:42 pm, if the debate lasts that long.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: That was a whole mouth full of sugar tax right there.

The Chairman: Very good.

Hon. E. David Burt: All right. Let's move on. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit will work . . . sorry, this is:

- Matters related to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ("the OECD").

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.

- The Gaming Commission.

Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit also works 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 gaming in Bermuda.

- The Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation

Mr. Chairman, the International Affairs Unit work with the Bermuda Monetary Authority and the Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation to continue with the development of Bermuda's resolution framework.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, in this way, the Regulatory Unit, helps supervisors and businesses articulate the regulatory, market access and related challenges they face to the Government and the public.

Mr. Chairman, during 2025/26, the International Affairs Unit continued to play a key role in providing technical and strategic support to the financial services sector both domestically and internationally. Additional milestones achieved by the International Affairs and Regulatory Unit during this period included:

- Maintained regulatory stability by ensuring completion of the Ministry of Finance component of 15 Bills and/or statutory instruments related to the financial services sector and the corporate sector.
- In collaboration with Ministry of Finance colleagues, the International Affairs Unit provided technical and strategic advice on supervisory assessments, sovereign rating meetings and matters related to financial stability. This includes participation in technical meetings with rating agencies, government to government meetings with other Overseas Territories with participation in meetings of the Financial Policy Council.
- As appropriate, the International Affairs Unit provided technical advice on relevant UK, US and EU matters, as well as assisted in advocacy and domestic and external engagement activities. This includes participation in monthly executive and technical meetings with the Bermuda Monetary Authority, the Insurance Advisory Committee, quarterly meetings with the Financial Policy Council and annual meetings with the Fiscal Responsibility Panel.
- In collaboration with Penrose Partners, the Bermuda Monetary Authority, Coinbase and Circle, provided technical and strategic advice on matters related to the first fully regulated digital coin drop (as we call “airdrop”) in Bermuda at the [Bermuda] Digital Finance Forum—which actually required to do a whole risk assessment, you know, money laundering and all these types of things which needed to be done. But first, fully regulated, fully compliant airdrop. And we’re due to do another one this year.

So, you know, Mr. Chairman, the Members of the Opposition who used to criticise digital finance, but now have fully embraced it, are more than welcome to attend the Digital Finance Forum this year as well.

The Chairman: You'll soon find out their view.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: 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 BMA; Gaming Commission; the Bermuda Deposit Insurance Corporation and the Bermuda Public Accountability Board to meet Bermuda's domestic and international commitments and continue to implement the structural adjustments to the International Affairs Unit as outlined in the main body of this statement.

Mr. Chairman, I wish to express my appreciation to Deputy Financial Secretary, Ms. Pamela Burrows (wishing her a happy belated birthday) and her team, for progressing this important work through their continued dedication and expertise.

Cost Centre 20030—Domestic Affairs &
Economic Policy: \$461,000 (Increase of \$155,000
or 51 per cent)

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Premier.

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

Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for the Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy unit is \$461,000. The unit will be led by the Deputy Financial Secretary for Domestic Affairs and Economic Policy (DFS), currently Ms. Tina Tucker, who is acting in the role. This unit is also supported by the Economic Advisor position. The DFS role provides leadership and oversight to the Accountant General's Department, the Department of Social Insurance, the Office of the Tax Commissioner, Land Valuation and Customs (as it relates to revenue matters).

The Unit provides legislative direction to those departments, along with technical and operational advice to fulfil the Ministry of Finance's policy objectives. The Unit monitors, research and analysis of economic and financial conditions to help facilitate sound decisions on public/economic policy, fiscal, debt and guarantee management. The Unit also manages the relationship with credit rating agencies.

Mr. Chairman, I am pleased that this Unit has supported the assessment of several rating agencies throughout 2025/26 and has resulted in positive ratings being granted by Standard & Poors, Moody's and KBRA. As a reminder, we only pay for Standard & Poors and Moody's as our bond covenants require us only to have two ratings agencies. KBRA provides their matters voluntarily. We do not pay.

We remain confident that Bermuda will maintain its A+ long-term rating and A1 short-term rating with a stable outlook at a minimum. We note that meeting the economic targets associated with the implementation of Corporate [Income] Tax could further enhance Bermuda's strong credit standing—and, of course, the fact that we have now passed public sector pension reform, which removes a \$2 billion unfunded liability from the Government of Bermuda's balance sheet.

Other [key] initiatives include:

- Developing a position paper to support Government plans to strengthen the sustainability of government's contributory pension fund in an updated framework, including through the implementation of progressive contributions.
- Continuing to work on the development of economic and macroprudential 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 to strengthen fiscal stability and economic prosperity within the jurisdiction.
- Working with the relevant teams to ensure a more coordinated and effective approach to debt collection.
- Working with the teams in the division to effectively progress systems upgrades and digitalisation work to promote more effective provision of government services.
- With the introduction of Corporate Income Tax, work to build a stronger framework of fiscal discipline, with the introduction of fiscal rules, including debt reduction, financial reserves development and improved national asset management, as recommended by the Tax Reform Commission and Fiscal Responsibility Panel.
- Review the structure of the Unit to better support the Ministry's strategic objectives, both economic and financial objectives.

I would like to extend my thanks to the Acting Deputy Financial Secretary for Economic Affairs and Policy, the substantive Budget Director, Ms. Tina Tucker.

Cost Centre 20100—Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee:
\$983,000 (Increase of \$47,000, or 5 per cent)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the Office of NAMLC's budget for this fiscal year is \$983,000, an increase of \$47,000 from 2025/26. The increase is in part due to the increase to accommodate the union-agreed pay rise and to allow for necessary travel in 2026/27, as, of course, there is travel that is necessary for preparation of our mutual evaluation report.

The allocation represents the minimum level of funding required to deliver on the core secretariat services to NAMLC and to ensure Bermuda meets its financial obligations to the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force (CFATF). Part of that travel budget is also that we're required to provide assessors, and people are also required to travel to CFNF meetings. It's not just, you know, you see a trial budget, it's not just Ministers who use that. It's also public officers who have to attend these meetings.

During 2024/25, the Office received a separate grant of \$415,000 from the Confiscated Assets Fund to advance several national initiatives in preparation for

Bermuda's Mutual Evaluation which commences this year. As at 9 February 2026, the remaining balance of this grant is \$96,713.38, which will be fully expended during the upcoming fiscal year.

Mr. Chairman, the salary provision for 2026/27 totals \$560,116 and funds three established posts. This is in line with the 2025/26 budget. You will note that on page B-109 the revised headcount for 2026/27 stands at two. Recruitment for the Junior Legal Officer post has closed, and it is anticipated that this position will be filled shortly.

The Office of NAMLC continues to require overseas travel to participate in critical conferences, including CFATF Plenaries and related training missions, which are essential to Bermuda's preparation for its forthcoming Mutual Evaluation. Provision is also included for Bermuda's annual CFATF membership contribution of \$100,000.

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of the Office of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee is to provide secretariat support to the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee and to advance the Government's Anti-Money Laundering/Anti-Terrorist Financing, and Counter Proliferation Financing Policy initiatives. These efforts ensure that Bermuda maintains an effective and internationally compliant AML/ATF/CPF regime.

NAMLC plays a central role in ensuring that Bermuda has a strong and effective framework to combat money laundering (ML), terrorist financing (TF), and proliferation financing (PF). Through its coordination, cooperation, and accountability mechanisms, NAMLC also supports competent authorities in their engagement with international counterparts.

Mr. Chairman, during the current fiscal year, NAMLC has maintained its focus on strengthening the effectiveness of Bermuda's AML/ATF/CPF framework. This work has been driven by the need to ensure technical compliance with the revised FATF Standards and to prepare for the 5th Round Mutual Evaluation, scheduled to begin in the second quarter of 2026—in other words, next month—with technical submissions due in September 2026. The 5th Round places heightened emphasis on the effective implementation of AML/ATF/CPF measures.

Key actions undertaken include:

1. Technical and Operational Gap Analysis: In response to changes to the FATF Standards and deficiencies identified in Bermuda's 2020 Mutual Evaluation Report, NAMLC completed a comprehensive gap analysis of legislative and operational frameworks. The Policy and Legislative Working Group continues to monitor progress on required amendments to ensure its completion by quarter one of 2026.
2. Publication of the 2024 Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing [National] Risk Assessment: This updated assessment, available on NAMLC's website, enhances Bermuda's

- understanding of its money laundering and terrorist financing risks.
3. Completion of the 2025 Proliferation Financing National Risk Assessment: The Proliferation Financing NRA has been finalised and has been submitted to Cabinet for ratification prior to publication.
 4. Updating of the National Anti-Money Laundering/Anti-Terrorist Financing, and Counter Proliferation Financing Policy: NAMLC coordinated the review and update of the national policy to reflect revised risk assessments, international standards, and best practices. Cabinet approved the updated policy in November 2024, with further refinements following completion of the Proliferation Financing NRA. These further amendments have been progressed to Cabinet.
 5. Training on Revised FATF Standards: NAMLC secured in-person training from the CFATF for all competent authorities on the revised FATF Standards.
 6. Internal Assessment and Independent Review: NAMLC developed an internal assessment focused on FATF Immediate Outcomes and revised technical standards. An independent reviewer was engaged to assess Bermuda's written submissions and conduct an onsite review (19–23 January 2026). Findings were shared with competent authorities, Permanent Secretaries, and Heads of Agencies.

Mr. Chairman, NAMLC's priority remains ensuring that Bermuda maintains its position as a global leader in combating money laundering, terrorist financing and proliferation financing. Central to this is the 5th Round Mutual Evaluation, which will assess both technical compliance particularly in areas with identified deficiencies or revised standards and, critically, Bermuda's effectiveness over the past five years.

The Office of NAMLC will support the following national initiatives during 2026/27, the majority of which will be funded through a grant under section 55A of the Proceeds of Crime Act 1997. Those are as follows:

1. Remediation of Identified Gaps and monitoring of action items: Agencies have implemented action plans to remediate all identified gaps within the year, allowing sufficient time to demonstrate effectiveness. A follow-up assessment was completed in January 2026, and the final report has been issued. Any additional gaps identified will be added to these action plans.
2. Publication of the 2025 Proliferation Financing National Risk Assessment: NAMLC will coordinate and manage the publication of the Proliferation Financing National Risk Assessment within the required timeframe.
3. Continued Training on Revised FATF Standards: Ongoing training will be provided to

NAMLC agencies, senior executives, technical officers, public service leaders, and Ministers. Standard training with the CFATF Secretariat took place between February 23 through 25, 2026, and will be followed by pre onsite training—including private sector participation [from] April 20 through 22, 2026.

4. Technical Support for Supervisors of DNFBPs—one of the many acronyms in the Ministry of Finance. The Office will continue to provide technical support to supervisors of Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professions—that is what DNFBP stands for—through the secondment of a supervisory expert.
5. Monitoring Global Developments: NAMLC will monitor further revisions to FATF Standards and review mutual evaluation reports from other jurisdictions in the 5th Round to identify any implications for Bermuda.
6. Managing the Mutual Evaluation Process: NAMLC's secretariat will be the liaison with Caribbean Financial Action Task Force and the NAMLC agencies to ensure that technical and effectiveness submissions are complete, thorough and submitted within the timelines.

Mr. Chairman, to advance those initiatives, the Chair and the Office team will continue to work closely with the National Anti-Money Laundering Cabinet Committee, NAMLC member agencies, and other key stakeholders.

I wish to express my appreciation to Ms. Cheryl[-Ann] Lister, Chair of NAMLC, and Ms. Kozel Creese, National Coordinator, for their continued dedication and leadership in progressing this important work in difficult environments.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: Because NAMLC stuff is boring, but it is essential.

The Chairman: It is.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Not boring for you, because you make money . . . boring for those who have to do it.

Mr. Chairman, moving on to cost centre 20110, a personal favourite for the MP from constituency 10, Gaming Commission.

Cost Centre 20110—Gaming Commission:
Grant \$800,000

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the 2026/27 budgeted grant contribution for the Gaming Commission is \$800,000.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: The grant of \$800,000 represents partial funding for the Commission with the remainder of spend either funded through cruise ship income or surplus funds due to vacant posts in 2025/26.

The total operational forecasted expenditure of the Commission for 2026/27 is approximately \$1.6 million; \$230,000 of further expenditure has been earmarked as project spend, this spend is [dependent] on the evolution of the gaming framework.

The 2026/27 Commission workplan includes continuing to support the resolution of banking services being provided to casino operators and exploring potential new lines of business for the jurisdiction.

During fiscal year 2025/26, the Commission's focus has been on investigating new lines of business for Bermuda and any corresponding banking challenges to make evidence-based recommendations.

Certainly, I would like to express my sincere appreciation and thanks to the team at the Commission continuing their work in a charged political environment.

The Chairman: Clearly.

Cost Centre 20120—Corporate Income Tax:
Grant \$3.5 million (Decrease of \$1.28 million,
or 27 per cent)

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, in 2025/26 Bermuda continued to pass legislation to implement the jurisdiction's Corporate Income Tax Framework. This legislation included updates to technical provisions within the Corporate Income Tax Act, implementation of the Tax Credit Act 2025 and Tax Reserve Fund Regulations.

Mr. Chairman, following the publication of the Tax Reform Commission's Report, the Tax Credits Act 2025 was enacted which provides for refundable substance-based tax credits for insurers, as well as utilities infrastructure credits, and community benefit credits for charitable giving. The Act provides tax credits to incentivise industries that are instrumental in the growth and development of the Bermuda economy to invest in their on Island operations. The legislation, as with all significant laws and rules relating to corporate income tax, was the subject of a public consultation process, reinforcing Bermuda's commitment to transparency and stakeholder inclusion in the legislative process.

Further legislative provisions were updated and amended to reflect developments in international tax. Including providing administrative mechanisms for the assessment, reporting, and collection of tax, and the provision of a tax refund reserve fund to manage the flow of funds.

It is expected that the framework will continue evolving to align with global developments. Funds have been set aside in this cost centre to meet the cost of

external expertise required to support these ongoing changes.

In addition to continuing to build out the agency for efficient tax administration through the hiring of additional staff and developing the next phases of the Tax Administration Platform, the Corporate Income Tax Agency is in the process of assuming additional international responsibilities for Economic Substance and Exchange of Information, previously managed by the Registrar of Companies. This integration is part of the continued evolution of Bermuda's international tax framework and is designed to bring international tax matters into one place, supporting Bermuda's commitment to global best practices and international standards. CITA is expected to be self-funded through the interest from revenues that they collect.

Mr. Chairman, we remain committed to working with all stakeholders to ensure that Bermuda remains an effective and cooperative partner while addressing global tax matters appropriately.

Finally, I wish to thank the entire team within Finance Headquarters, led by Financial Secretary Mr. [Chidozie] Ofoego, for successfully advancing the Ministry's priorities over the past year. Thank you, FS.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes—

The Chairman: Ahh!

Hon. E. David Burt: —the supporting matters for Head 10. Quite robust.

The Chairman: Yes, and the Committee remains, the Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27.

We are now going through Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58, having completed Head 10.

Premier, you may proceed.

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

HEAD 11—ACCOUNTANT GENERAL

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I now present the budget for the Accountant General's Department (Head 11) which is found on pages B-112 through B-116, and also on page C-11.

The Accountant General's Department was established under section 4 of the Public Treasury (Administration and Payments) Act 1969. The department is subject to the general direction and control of the Minister and is under the control of a public officer, the Accountant General. 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 and internal controls and processes [yaaawn] that are in place with respect to the public purse.

The department's mission statement is . . . oh, you all are laughing at me. Wow.

The Chairman: No, they thought that the heads were a yawn, Premier.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: That is what they thought.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I shall continue.

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 the activities of the Consolidated Fund. This is further broken out into seven sections:

- Policy Planning and Management—developing 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, administration of the investment of the pension funds under management and administration of the insurance portfolio. Let me repeat that one more time, Mr. Chairman. Administration of the investment of the pension funds under management and administration of the insurance portfolio. The total pension funds' investments under management are \$2.67 billion broken out as follows; PSSF—\$612 million and CPF—\$2.06 billion.
- Bank Reconciliation—reconciliation of all government's bank accounts.
- Financial Systems—management of the enterprise system supporting the government's accounting platform (that is JD Edwards or Oracle EnterpriseOne).
- Trainee Management Accountant—facilitating young Bermudians in obtaining internationally recognised accounting designations, facilitating the filling of accounting positions within the Government. We love it.

- The department also has legislative responsibility for Benefits (employee pension deductions) administration.

1102—[Fund Administration], which represents the Government's share of employee benefits programs, 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), which all of us (I am sure) are particularly interested in.

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Forty-two full time posts are budgeted for in the 2026/27 estimates. This is an increase of one head from the original 2025/26 budget. The increase is primarily due to the recruitment and onboarding of the Trainee Management Accountant. The department continues to operate at staffing levels below its total complement. Currently there are seven vacancies within the department, most of these at the senior level, which the department will seek to fill following recruitment in the new fiscal year. Notwithstanding the vacancies, the department persists in efforts to identify efficiencies within its approved organisational structure in carrying out its legislative responsibilities.

General accomplishments in fiscal year 2025/26, Mr. Chairman, are as follows:

- Restarting—important—restarting the Trainee Management Accountant program.

And just as an aside, it's not specific to this line item. If you will allow me just a little bit of leeway, this is one of the many—

The Chairman: I do, Premier. Go right ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you. This is one of the many trainee programmes that are restarting in this budget, and you will see a significant expansion in trainees and other matters to make sure that we expand those matters in this budget.

- Working with the Ministry of Finance on the pension reforms to stabilise the Public Service Superannuation Fund.
- Continue working with several government agencies and departments to increase automation and 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 the scheduled Financial Instructions training in conjunction with the Department of Employee and Organizational Development

- The Compliance and Disbursement section continues to make vendor payments timely and accurately.
- Treasury functions and other operational service levels were maintained throughout the year.
- As well as these accomplishments as you will see from the KPI's on page B-115 and B-116 the department has managed to succeed in 19 of its 21 measures, or 90 per cent success rate. The only measures that were not achieved were the updates to Financial Instructions which is ongoing and the preparation of summary financial statements for the Government of Bermuda, a long time Accountant General recommendation.

Mr. Chairman, the Accountant General's Department has been allocated a total budget of \$120.7 million for the fiscal year 2026/27 which is broken out as follows:

- Consolidated Fund Administration estimate—\$6.5 million;
- Fund Administration estimate—\$114.15 million; and
- Capital estimate—\$114,000.

This budgetary allocation represents an increase of \$14.1 million, or 13 per cent, above the 2025/26 original estimates—which is primarily due to the increase in government's matching contributions for GEHI premiums and PSSF and Social Insurance contributions as a result of rate increases and increases in salaries from negotiated [union] agreements.

The 2026/27 Revenue estimate is \$2 million, an increase of \$1.5 million, above the [2025/26] original estimate. This revenue primarily relates to interest earned on the investments in the Sinking Fund—and given that you have a budget surplus, the monies go to the Sinking Fund, you are expected to get more interest and that interest will then flow into the government accounts recognised as income due to accounting standards in the Consolidated Fund.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: Very weird. But that is how it is recorded because I believe it stays in the Sinking Fund. It is just a very weird thing. But I am not an accountant; I just, you know, they have these accounting standards.

The Current Account Estimates can be found on pages B-112 and B-113.

Explanation of Significant Programme Expenditure Changes

1101 (Page B-112) CONSOLIDATED FUND
ADMINISTRATION
([\$6.5] Million—Increase of \$186,000, or 3 per cent)

Hon. E. David Burt: The current year's request reflects an increase of \$186,000, which is primarily reflective of the uplift in salaries from the salary negotiations which concluded in February 2025. 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 Accountant General and rent for the premises occupied at 51 Church Street.

1102 (Page B-112) FUND ADMINISTRATION
(\$114.15 Million—Increase of \$13.9 Million,
or 14 per cent)

Hon. E. David Burt: The Minister of Finance wants some money.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: 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 contributions (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 Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund [MMLPF].

Contributions made into the PSSF and CPF are invested to fund future pension payments to vested retired government personnel. The increase in the 2026/27 estimates for the government's cost for employee benefits is primarily reflective of the additional overheads expected from funding increases for PSSF. This is due to increases in the PSSF contribution rate from the pension reform, higher salaries from the negotiated agreements and the additional \$600 per annum per employee increase in GEHI contributions as we continue to take measures to address the sustainability of the fund.

And of course, as due to the agreement that was reached with public sector unions to secure a historic (I like to call it that) pay agreement. Because we saw all these people around the world in massive protests and massive strikes, et cetera, and we were able to come to agreement with the unions and deliver something that gave back pay and recognised that we are also taking care. But we do have to make sure that we fund these particular items. And so that is the reason why these increases are so steep.

Capital Estimates

Page C-11: CAPITAL FUNDING
(\$114,000—A Decrease of \$39,000)

Hon. E. David Burt: 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 Oracle E1 to optimise financial operations and drive continuous improvements.

The 2026/27 capital allocation will be used to progress the following projects:

- progress ongoing maintenance and development work for Oracle EnterpriseOne; and
- replacement of office equipment, photocopiers, desktop PCs.

Mr. Chairman, the key initiatives planned for the Accountant General's Department for fiscal year 2026/27 are to

- continue to work with the Government departments to automate and digitise their financial processes—of which there was significant progress that was made last year. One of the persons we even recognised with a Public Service Excellence Award doing items that took multiple days and streamlined it to a matter of hours. And so there are things that are coming from some of the trainees and other persons who come through the ranks of the Accountant General's Chambers so that is a good thing;
- review and update Financial Instructions to align with current needs and priorities. As I said, that was one of the things that was not met and that is currently in review;
- complete the Audited Consolidated Fund Financial Statements for the year ending 31 March 2026 no later than November 20, 2026. Important to note and recognise, Mr. Chairman, that last year's financial results, of course, removed the qualification on the audit opinion, a good result for the country;
- the March 2021 PSSF and July 2021 CPF statements have been submitted to the Auditor General for a full audit. The department will continue to work to progress the backlog on the other funds. The status of the audits of the public funds are as follows;
 - i. Government Reserves Fund—2025;
 - ii. Unemployment Insurance Fund—2023;
 - iii. Government Borrowing Sinking Fund—2017;
 - iv. Ministers and Members of the Legislature Pension Fund—2015;
 - v. Government Employees Health Insurance—2012; and
 - vi. Confiscated Assets Fund—2010.

- continue to deliver the 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.

With all of that being said, Mr. Chairman, I am actually done with Head 11.

I would like to extend my appreciation for the work undertaken by the management and staff of the Accountant General's Chambers under the leadership of the formidable Accountant General—I know she is listening in the Ministry of Finance Headquarters, so I decided I would give her a nice little smile, Mrs. Dionne Morrison-Shakir.

I will now move on to Head 12, Bermuda Customs, and defer to the Honourable Member for constituency 6, Junior Minister Wayne Furbert.

The Chairman: Thank you very much, Premier, for Heads 10 and 11, and I recognise now the Honourable Wayne Furbert, the Junior Minister of Finance.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Mr. Chairman, I will be doing Head 12, Customs—

The Chairman: Yes.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —Head 28, Department of Social Insurance and Head 38, the Office of the Tax Commissioner.

The Chairman: Carry on, [Junior] Minister.

HEAD 12—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 and performance measures are included within the Ministry of National Security.

Total 2026/27 budgeted customs revenue, shown on page B-117, is \$223.1 million. This is an increase of \$3.2 million, or 1 per cent on the prior year forecast of \$214 million. Compared to the 2025/26 revised estimate, the 2026/27 budget is an increase of \$166,000 or 0.07 per cent.

During the 2025/26 financial year, we responded to the cost-of-living crisis by introducing 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.

During the 2026/27 financial year, we will offer further reliefs and concessions with respect to parts for

motor vehicles, building materials, and with respect to a variety of essential commodities.

Customs Duty—\$217.7 million (Increase of \$3.7 million, or 2 per cent)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The duty forecast for 2026/27, as I mentioned, is \$217.7 [million] which is higher than the 2025/26 original forecast of \$214 million. You will also note that the forecast of duty collected for 2025/26 has been revised up by \$3.6 million to \$217.7 million based on more recently available information on actual collections of duty for 2025/26.

It is expected that during 2026/27, duty collections will remain at a level consistent with the revised estimate for 2025/26. We will be introducing additional duty reliefs during 2026/27. Broadly, these reliefs will fall into four main categories designed to lower the cost of living and stimulate economic growth:

- As I mentioned before, Mr. Chairman, you will recall that during 2025/26 we introduced wide-ranging duty reductions on parts and supplies for motor vehicle repairs. During 2026/27 it is our intention to expand upon those reliefs by providing duty reductions on an additional 10 tariff codes, covering such items as: pumps; filters; cabling; and ignition equipment. Based on prior years' data, this will reduce the cost of repairing Bermuda's motor vehicles by a further \$497,227.
- Again, building upon the reliefs introduced during 2025/26 with respect to construction supplies, we intend to introduce reliefs on a further five tariff codes, including electrical equipment and optical fibre cabling. Based on prior years' data, this will reduce costs by a further [\$397,145].
- And finally, we shall provide duty reductions on a range of imported essential commodities. These include staple food items such as fish, seafood, meats, fruits and vegetables, as well as hygiene products. These reliefs include duty [rate] reductions on more than 190 tariff codes. It is estimated, based on prior years' data, that this will cut the Bermudian household costs by \$3.9 million.

Other Revenue Sources

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Forecasted revenue sources other than customs duty, are expected to contribute a total of \$5.4 million, during 2026/27 which, based on our forecast, would equate to 2.4 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 2025/26 fiscal year to date.

During 2025/26, the Customs Department has started working with the government's Digital

Transformation Team in an effort 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 by reducing the red tape, time and cost for both customs and the entity requesting the relief.

Mr. Chairman, the above is, as already stated, expected to reduce clearance times and reduce costs for businesses while 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 move to the Head 28, the Department of Social Insurance.

The Chairman: Go right ahead, Junior Minister.

HEAD 28—DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL INSURANCE

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the Department of Social Insurance's Current Account Estimates are shown on page B-118 through B-120 of the Budget Book. The estimate for 2026/27 is \$2.4 million which is \$387,000, or 13.8 per cent, less than the original 2025/26 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.
- The 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. Wayne L. Furbert: The mission statement of the department 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. Wayne L. Furbert: The Department of Social Insurance vision is, *To be a trusted and essential source of financial security for all beneficiaries.*

Core Functions

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: 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—Under this Act, all employed and self-employed individuals in Bermuda who are over age 18 (or under age 26 in the instance of full-time students) who work for more than four hours per week, are required to pay contributions.

There are two major classes of benefits paid out of the fund: contributory and non-contributory:

- 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 benefit.
2. The 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 44 veterans or their surviving spouses in the programme.

The Chairman: Carry on, Minister.

Highlights for 2025/26

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, highlights for 2025/26 are as follows:

- On September 15, 2025, the Contributory Pensions (Amendment of Contributions and Benefits) Order 2025 was tabled in the House of Assembly. This Order increased pension benefits by 2.3 per cent effective August 16, 2025. It also increased contributions by 4.81 per cent effective August 2025, which is 2.51 [per cent] more than the benefits increased and a necessary step to stabilise the fund ahead of the work required to deliver sustainability.
- 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 Transport Control Department with respect to efforts to assist in debt collection.
- One of the department's objectives is: To educate and provide clarity to stakeholders participating in the Contributory Pension Fund. To this end we conducted and/or participated in nine workshops and presentations in 2025 where we provided valuable information to attendees regarding pensions benefits and contributions managed by DOSI.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The [department] operates with five main cost centres. The first is:

38000—Senior Management & Administration

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Administration section provides overall direction and management of the department.

The budget estimate for this cost centre is \$2.2 million which is a decrease of \$35,000 from the 2025/26 original budget of \$2.297 [million]. This decrease is due to the planned go-live in Quarter 2 for our pension administration system and less need for consulting services.

38010—War Pensions & Gratuities

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The War Pensions section administers the benefits to war veterans under the Pensions & Gratuities (War Service) Act 1947.

The budget estimate for 2026/27 is \$2.508 [million], which is \$386,000, or 13.8 per cent less than the previous year. Because it was \$2.894 [million]. The budget is based on 44 war veterans (as I mentioned earlier). [This is] 14 less than the prior year. Clearly, Mr. Chairman, this number will be decreasing every year for a while.

The Chairman: Yes, Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Currently, the significant benefits provided by the programme are as follows:

- All veterans or spouses of veterans 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 \$3,500 covered by FutureCare. This will be increased to \$5,000 as of April 2026.
- 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. Wayne L. Furbert: The Benefits section is responsible for the administration of benefits to the [members] of the Contributory Pension Fund under the Contributory Pensions Act 1970 and the Contributory Pensions and Workmen's Compensation (Reciprocal Agreement) Act 1970.

The budget estimate for this cost centre is \$549,500, which is an increase of \$28,500 over 2025/26. The original budget at that time was

\$521,000. The increase is due to salary increments for the 2026/27 budget year.

Total benefits paid for August 2024 to July 2025, the Contributory Pension Fund's (CPF) financial year was \$224,161,600 compared to \$211,392,900 in 2023/24, which is an increase of \$12,768,700, or 6 per cent. This increase is due to our rising ageing population and the 2.4 per cent benefit rate increase from August 16, 2024.

In 2024/25, of the total benefits paid \$186 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 \$11.5 million were paid and \$7.6 million (or 3.4 per cent) was paid on Non-contributory Pensions. The remaining \$4.4 million (or 2 per cent) of benefits paid for the period was for Contributory and Non-Contributory Disabilities.

Mr. Chairman, we commend the manager and staff for the Benefits section who have processed the benefits on time every month without fail.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

38040—Compliance

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Compliance section monitors the compliance of employers and employees in accordance with the provisions of the Contributory Pensions Act [1970].

The budget estimate for this cost centre is \$931,200 which is \$13,500 less than the 2025/26 original budget or \$944,700. This decrease is related to the expected reduction in consultants' expense planned for the Department of Social Insurance (DOSI) in the coming year.

The total debt owed to the CPF as of 31 July 2025 was \$75 million, which is a 3.9 per cent increase over [the] July 31 [2024] amount of \$71 million. In the last financial year there has been an increase in the number of employers.

The Compliance section is actively collaborating with the delinquent employers to find practical solutions for reducing their outstanding debt. Over the past year the department has established 110 payment plans with these employers and conducted follow-ups to ensure proper monitoring.

The Debt Enforcement Unit (DEU) of the Attorney General's Chambers works closely with the department's Compliance section to help collect outstanding contributions owed to the Contributory Pension Fund. In most cases employers who fail to comply with the payment agreement are referred to the DEU. (That's the Debt Enforcement Unit.) In the past year, it has resulted in 48 employers being sent to the DEU, 37 being brought before the courts, and the Department of Social Insurance obtaining judgments against 17 employers.

The Compliance section is expecting to purchase a debt management software which is included

in the department's capital budget. Such an application will ensure contribution collections, increase voluntary compliance, limit arrears on debt, identify non-compliant employers early, and increase debt collection. DOSI will continue to work with the Attorney General's Chamber, Debt Enforcement Unit, and the Department of Public Prosecutions to collect the outstanding debt wherever needed.

38045—Contributions

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The Contributions section, Mr. Chairman, 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 \$722,000, which is \$182,000 more than the 2024/25 original budget. This increase is due to two temporary additional staff needed for the implementation of [the] pension administration system expected in Quarter 2 this year. Salary increases and increments also contributed to this increase.

The department collected \$117.7 million in contributions from August 2024 to July 2025 compared to \$118 million in the prior fiscal period, which is a decrease of \$1.2 million, or approximately 1.2 per cent.

Comparative Analysis of Current Account Estimates— 2025/26 vs. 2026/27

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, to give you a comparative analysis:

- **Salaries and Wages**—An increase of \$280,000 reflects the salary increments across the department of hiring two additional staff for the Contributions section.
- **Professional Services**—Decreased by [\$]443,400 That is because we reduced the . . . we expect 14 less veterans to service in the upcoming year. And forecast [a] \$299,000 reduction in war veterans' medical claims and war pensions.
- **Receipts Credited to Programme**—This amount represents the cost to operate the Contributory Pension Fund initially paid through the Consolidated Fund. A recharge to the Contributory Pension Fund (CPF) is made in accordance with the Contributory Pensions Act 1970, section 3(3). The recharge for 2026/27 is budgeted at \$4.5 million which is an increase of \$161,000.

Salaries are budgeted at \$268,000, compared to 2025/26 because of the increase across government, along with incremental increase and two additional staff members. However, the operational costs are expected to decrease by \$107,000 due to the implementation of new pensions administration system in the second quarter.

Activities/Plans for Fiscal Year 2026/27

Junior Minister, continue.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, for the fiscal year 2026/27, the following activities are planned for the department:

- Develop a portal to allow employers to view their accounts, which is good. Pay invoices and submit starters, terminations and unpaid leave adjustments online.
- We will be adding additional application forms to the department's website, which can be completed and submitted online.
- The department will continue to participate in various workshops and presentations where they are able to provide clarity to attendees regarding pension benefits contributions managed by the DOSI.
- Debt management system to assist in identifying outstanding debt cases, increase debt collection and limit the increase in new arrears by detecting non-compliance early.

Significant Process Changes or New Initiatives

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, we have some significant process changes or new initiatives.

- The Department of Social Insurance will collaborate with the Ministry of Finance and other agents to leverage technology for the government's digital transformation. This initiative aims to identify employers who owe funds to the Contributory Pension Fund and to ensure effective and consistent management of these debts across government.
- The department will embark on a succession planning exercise where current employees will be given the opportunity to be professionally developed and cross-trained. Succession planning will facilitate smooth transitioning when staff terminate service or retire.
- Further modernisation of the department's operations and technology to better serve the public and review business processes to create a more flexible, efficient and resilient organisation.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to express my gratitude to the public offices of Director Gershon Gibbons and the Department of Social Insurance for their commitment to providing valuable service to the local community and overseas beneficiaries.

I will now turn my time to Head 38, the Office of the Tax Commissioner.

The Chairman: You have gone through Heads 12 and 28. We remain in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And your heads, as I mentioned [Heads] 12 and 28, were looked into and you are now going to [Head] 38.

HEAD 38—OFFICE OF THE TAX COMMISSIONER

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, it gives me great pleasure to present the budget for Head 38, the Office of the Tax Commissioner (OTC), which is found on pages B-121 to B-125 of the Budget Book.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The mandate, Mr. Chairman, is simple. 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: The total expenditure, including current and capital, is \$6.5 million [and] has been allocated for this head. This represents a \$1.9 million increase, or approximately 41 per cent higher than the budget for 2025/26 and constitutes 19 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 provides the overall direction and management of the office. The budget allocation for the Administration team is \$1.4 million.
- The Stamp Duties team 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 is \$0.55 million.
- The Audit and Compliance team is responsible for ensuring that taxpayers are compliant with the Tax[es] Acts throughout the life of the taxpayer. 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 is \$1.4 million.
- The Operations team is responsible for administering 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 is \$1.87 million.

Current Expenditure

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: The OTC's current expenditure is estimated to be \$5.3 million. This represents an increase of \$1.[0]1 [million], or approximately 23 per cent higher than the budget for 2025/26.

The increase in current expenses reflects a renewed focus on debt collection aimed at addressing the government's outstanding receivables. This will include the engagement of a debt manager for oversight and four temporary additional debt collectors to support this work. Funding is also required to ensure the continued effective operation and maintenance of an eTax and other core tax administration system.

Capital Expenditure

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Capital expenditure allocated for department is \$1.23 million. This represents an increase of \$0.89 million from 2025/26. The capital expenditure budget will be used to continue the modernisation of the OTC, strengthening tax administration collections and reporting while enhancing the overall taxpayer experience.

The key initiatives include transitioning to electronic statements (eStatements) for land tax bills and identifying a modern, efficient tax processing system to replace the existing AS400 platform. The new system is intended to support tax administration and reporting, provide enhanced analytics to inform decision-making, deliver a 360-degree view of taxpayers, and improve functionality to support higher standards of customer service.

Revenue [Overview]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Increase in projected revenue:

The total projected revenue for 2026/27 is \$848 million, a net increase of \$20.3 million, or approximately 2 per cent above 2025/26 estimate. The material differences of projected revenue are as follows:

1. Payroll Tax revenue is estimated to increase by \$13.2 million, or 2 per cent from \$621 million to \$634 million. The Government is providing payroll tax relief for both employer and employee, which reflects the Government's continued commitment to easing the payroll tax burden on workers and businesses. Payroll tax rates will be reduced as follows:
 - International Business [Exempted Undertakings]: The rate will decrease from 10.25 per cent to 9.75 per cent.
 - Large Local Employers ([Remuneration] greater than \$1 million): The rate will be reduced from 10.0 per cent to 9.5 per cent.
 - The rates will be reduced for all medium-sized businesses ([Remuneration] between \$200,000 and \$1 million) by 0.5 per cent.

- Hotels, guest houses, and restaurants: [The rate] will be reduced from 5 per cent to 4 per cent.
 - Retail: The rate will be lowered from 6 per cent to 5 per cent.
 - Bermuda Hospitals Board & Corporations of Hamilton & St. George's: The rate will move from 3.50 per cent to 3.0 per cent. Nursing and rest homes will be added to this category to reduce their expenses as they care for a growing senior population.
 - Self-Employed Caregivers: In line with our platform commitments, employer payroll taxes for self-employed caregivers will be eliminated.
 - Support for Seniors: The employer portion of payroll tax is to be exempted on the first \$96,000 of remuneration for Bermudian employees aged 65 and over, an initiative to support seniors who want to remain in the workforce. It also helps out with the employer.
 - Local Dividend Exemption: Is being raised from \$10,000 to \$20,000.
 - The Government is maintaining the zero per cent or 1 per cent rates for our small businesses, charities, and Economic Empowerment Zones.
2. Corporate Services taxes are projected to increase by \$116,000, or 2 per cent based on current activity in this industry.
 3. Financial Services taxes are projected to increase by \$30[5],000 or 2 per cent.
 4. Land tax revenue is projected to decrease by \$2 million, or 2 per cent. This decrease reflects the Government's 2025/26 budget decision to provide tax relief for homeowners by reducing the land tax base rate by 50 per cent.
 5. Foreign Currency Purchase tax is projected to increase by to \$2.8 million or 9 per cent.
 6. Transport Infrastructure tax and Passenger tax are estimated to increase by \$2 million or \$2.4 million, or 18 per cent.
 7. Stamp Duty on Land Conveyance is projected to increase by \$1.2 million or 5 per cent to \$26.4 million based on current trends.

Manpower

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, the budget allocation for salaries for the department for 2026/27 is \$3.98 million, representing a marginal increase over the \$3.17 million allocated in 2025/26.

- The OTC had 29 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff in 2025/26, which will increase to 35 FTEs in the 2026/27 fiscal year.
- The additional positions include the previously discussed Debt Manager, four temporary additional Debt Collectors, and the recruitment of a

Stamp Duty Assistant. The Debt Collectors will provide a targeted focus on debt recovery, while the Stamp Duty Assistant will support the Stamp Duty section with adjudication and Primary Family Homestead applications.

Performance Measures by Business Unit

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, I am pleased to report that the department substantially achieved its forecasted performance measures for fiscal year 2025/26. This strong performance has enabled increases in several measures for 2026/27, reflecting the department's ongoing commitment to continuous improvement. In particular

Business Unit: Stamp Duties (48050)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: New performance measures have been introduced in the Stamp Duty section in order to strengthen customer service outcomes. These measures target the completion of mortgage transfers within two months of receipt, the processing of Primary Family Homestead applications within five weeks, and the assessment of first-time homeowner prequalification applications within three weeks.

Business Unit: Operations (48080)

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: In the 2025/26 fiscal year, the revised forecast was to have 71 per cent of payroll tax returns filed electronically. For 2026/27, the Operations section aims to have 79 per cent of payroll tax returns filed electronically.

In 2025/26, the OTC collected approximately \$20 million in outstanding receivables. For 2026/27, the office aims to increase collections to \$30 million. This target will be supported through the use of increased resources and the use of electronic case management enabling a risk-based approach to debt recovery. The system supports effective monitoring of payment arrangements and facilitates timely escalation of cases for enforcement or court action where required.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Mr. Chairman, some of the plans for the upcoming year are as follows: Efforts to modernise 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, which I have mentioned before, the payroll tax for our seniors. We are talking about the dividends and so on, which I have already mentioned before

Mr. Chairman, before I close out I wish to express my sincere appreciation to the Tax

Commissioner, and she is new in this position and she is doing a great job, Mrs. Joelene Lindsay; the Assistant Tax Commissioners, Mr. Antoine Lightbourne and Ms. Kim Richards, and the staff of the OTC for their diligence and commitment in collecting the majority of the Government's revenue.

Mr. Chairman, that ends my presentation on Head 38, Head of Tax Commissioner. I would now like to turn this over to the Premier and Minister of Finance for Head 39, Registrar of Companies.

The Chairman: Thank you, very much, Junior Minister, on your providing for Heads 12, 28, . . . and 38.

Premier, I think I am going to recognise you shortly.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, I will recognise you now. Go ahead, Premier.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: No, no. Go right ahead.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, and thanks to the Junior Minister for the presentation of the heads for Customs, Social Insurance and Office of the Tax Commissioner.

HEAD 39—REGISTRAR OF COMPANIES

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I now present the [budget] for Head 39; the Registrar of Companies [Department], found on pages B-126 to B-129 of the Budget Book.

Mandate or Mission

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr Chairman, the Registrar of Companies [RoC] is the Government's third largest revenue generating department and is projected to collect approximately \$75 million of revenue in fiscal 2026/27. 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 Organisation 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. As Bermuda looks ahead to FATF Mutual Evaluation the Ministry has 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 is continually evolving space with policy positions emanating from the United Kingdom, the European Union, the OECD, the International Monetary Fund and FATF commitments having been made to both the European Union and the United Kingdom. And our commitment to the United Kingdom was that we are following the European Union's directives.

The Chairman: Mm-hmm.

Hon. E. David Burt: Beneficial ownership also features prominently in Bermuda's AML/ATF economic substance and tax transparency regimes. In 2025, the Registrar of Companies assumed responsibility for maintaining the Beneficial Ownership Register, which was previously managed by the Bermuda Monetary Authority and to that end has implemented new IT systems and onboarded additional resources to facilitate the transfer.

In 2025, the Tax Treaty Unit, responsible for tax policy and international tax engagement that was in the Ministry of Finance was fully incorporated within the RoC. However, with the introduction of the still relatively new Corporate Income Tax Agency [CITA] the Ministry took the opportunity to review the optimal approach to managing Bermuda's international tax commitments and engagements. A decision has since been made to transfer responsibility for and functions of the Treaty Unit along with the responsibility for Economic Substance to the Corporate Income Tax Agency. This aligns responsibility for Bermuda's tax treaty and information exchange regimes as well as compliance regimes, which fall within the broader scope of the OECD's BEPS framework addressing international tax concerns under the auspices of one lead tax authority

and allows the RoC to put greater focus on its core mandates.

During 2025, Bermuda continued to attract new business, with a steady number of new entities being registered on the Register. Over the course of the year, 822 new registrations were recorded, comprising 660 exempted entities and 162 local entities, reflecting the jurisdiction's ongoing appeal as a place to establish and conduct business.

Mr. Chairman, the Registrar's mission is, *To leverage technology, enhance the user experience and facilitate regulation.*

The department's mission and objectives can be found on page B-126. The objectives are as follows:

- To maintain the Register of Companies and ensure the provision of current and accurate registry information in a timely manner.
- To ensure compliance with the Companies Act 1981 and related legislation in a consistent, fair and judicious manner.
- To collect all fee revenue pursuant to the Companies Act 1981 and other associated legislation in accordance with Financial Instructions in a timely, accurate and efficient manner.
- To process all company applications from the private sector in a timely, efficient and professional manner.
- To provide technical advice to the Ministry of Finance and other government departments in a timely manner.
- To provide guidance or direction to the public on matters related to the Companies Act 1981 and related legislation in an accurate, timely and professional manner.
- To diligently administer court appointed company liquidations and personal bankruptcies in a prudent and professional manner ensuring compliance with applicable legislation, primarily the Companies Act 1981 and Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1982.
- To promote and ensure compliance with the Companies Act, Partnership Acts, Limited Liability Company Act and Beneficial Ownership Act through active compliance monitoring and enforcement, supported by the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act, in accordance with FATF, OECD, and European Union standards and recommendations.
- To promote and ensure compliance with the Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Act through active compliance monitoring and enforcement in accordance with FATF recommendations.
- To promote and ensure compliance of dealers in high value goods with the Registrar of Companies (Supervision and Regulation) Act 2020 through active compliance monitoring and enforcement in accordance with FATF recommendations and Bermuda's legislative framework.

Expenditure Overview

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the expenditure overview [for 2026/27], including an analysis by cost centre [is as follows]:

The overall estimate for expenditure is \$11.7 million, down \$810 million, or 6.5 per cent from the previous year. However, the full-time equivalents are 48.

The budget for the Registrar of Companies is set out under six cost centres; they are:

- Policy, Planning & Administration;
- Finance & Revenue;
- Entity Registration;
- Insolvency & Liquidations;
- Real Estate & Licences; and
- Compliance.

The total current account expenditure, found on page B-127, is estimated to be \$11,707,000 for fiscal year 2026/27. This represents a decrease of \$810,000, or 6.5 per cent less than the original budget of 2025/26. This decrease is due to the re-allocation of responsibility for International Tax compliance to the Corporate Income Tax Agency [CITA].

Cost Centre 49000, Policy, Planning
and Administration

Hon. E. David Burt: [Mr. Chairman,] Policy, Planning and Administration can be found on page B-127. Estimates of \$6,577,000 is up \$1,333,000, or 25 per cent from the previous year.

The Policy, Planning and Administration 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.

Expenses under this cost centre include the salary of the Registrar, and all operational costs of the department. The budget increase of \$1,333,000 for this cost centre [for fiscal year 2026/27] is the result of increased accommodation costs and the cost of engaging consultants.

They are moving because they have outgrown their department. With the continued increase in personnel, the Registrar of Companies has outgrown its current office space, located at the Government Administration Building. In 2025, alternative accommodation was identified for the Registrar's offices. This location is currently being outfitted and prepared for occupation, and they are expected to relocate within the next few months.

Cost Centre 49010, Finance and Revenue

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, Finance and Revenue can be found on page B-127. The estimate for

fiscal year 2026/27 is \$773,000, up \$81,000, or 12 per cent from the previous year.

Also, revenue on this particular matter, found on page B-128, is \$74,866,000. The full-time equivalents are seven.

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 process come under the direct oversight of the departmental Comptroller.

The estimated revenue for this cost centre, reflected on page B-128, 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 (\$320,000) is derived from Licence(s) General in the Licensing and Insolvency cost centre, which I shall discuss in due course.

Cost Centre 49020, Entity Registration

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, Entity Registration can be found on page B-127. Mr. Chairman . . . I'm sorry . . .

The Chairman: Yes, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: The estimate for fiscal year 2026/27 is \$1,927,000, up \$23,000, or 1 per cent from the previous year.

Mr. Chairman, 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.

The salaries of staff recruited for maintaining the BO [Beneficial Ownership] Register are funded under this cost centre.

Cost Centre 49040, Insolvency and Liquidations

Hon. E. David Burt: Cost Centre 49040, Insolvency and Liquidations can be found on page B-127. The estimate is \$843,000, up \$146,000, or 21 per cent from the previous year.

Revenue for \$320,000, on page B-128 which I said I would discuss a little further [on].

Mr. Chairman, this cost centre is responsible for the execution of court orders to administer liquidations in accordance with the Companies Act 1981, the Companies (Winding-Up) Rules 1982, and personal

bankruptcies in accordance with applicable 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 (for example, legal, accounting, and contractors) in administering court-appointed corporate liquidations and personal bankruptcies. The budget increase will be used to pay salaries of staff currently being recruited.

The estimated revenue for this cost centre, reflected on page B-128, is \$320,000 which is the balance of the total estimated revenue mentioned earlier.

Cost Centre 49050, Real Estate and Licences

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, Real Estate and Licences can be found on page B-127. The estimate is \$739,000, up \$140,000, or 23 per cent from the prior year.

Mr. Chairman, 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 seven persons.

Cost Centre 49080, Compliance

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, Compliance can be found on page B-127. The estimate is \$848,000 and down \$1,030,000, or 55 per cent from the previous year. There are seven full-time employees, or equivalents, in this department.

The Compliance cost centre 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.

Revenue

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I would now like to touch upon the revenue generated by the Registrar of Companies. These figures can also be found on page B-128. The department is forecasting overall revenue of \$75,186,000, consistent with the original revenue estimate for 2025/26. As new companies and partnerships continue to register in Bermuda, it is expected that future revenues will continue to remain consistent at approximately \$75 million or show marginal increases.

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Analysis of Current Account Estimates

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, I now refer you to page B-127. The 2026/27 budget allocation showed an overall decrease of \$810,000. The reduced costs are primarily due to the transfer of responsibility for international tax compliance to the Corporate Income Tax Agency (CITA). This cost saving is partially offset by recent salary increases for public officers, increases in consultancy costs and by the increased accommodation costs of the proposed new office.

Capital Funding

Hon. E. David Burt: Capital Funding can be found on page C-11. Mr. Chairman, I would now wish to turn to the New Electronic Registry System which is in step with this government's modernisation efforts. 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. In 2025, the Registrar of Companies (RoC) expanded the functionality of the system to include the Beneficial Ownership Register.

The Registrar of Companies was allocated \$800,000 in capital funding for implementation of Phase 2 of the Beneficial Ownership Register, and to provide for other improvements in system efficiency. These improvements were initially expected to be completed in the current year. However, some development work has been deferred and the previously approved funding carried forward to fiscal year 2026/27.

Manpower

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the department's budget supports an establishment of 48 full-time equivalent positions, as found on page B-128. The importance and need for adequate resources is critical in staying ahead of the ever-increasing [external] threats. 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 continues to recruit for existing vacancies and is actively supported by mainly local consultants. As the department continues to grow and evolve, a revised operational structure is being developed which will provide greater operational oversight, efficiency and cost savings.

Major Achievements

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Chairman, the department has been active this current fiscal year. Some highlights include the following:

1. Administration:
 - As I said, a lease was signed in 2025 to provide alternative office space, adequate

- to accommodate the RoC's increased staff structure. The department is expected to relocate to its new offices [located at] 22 Victoria Street, Hamilton during the summer of 2026.
2. Registration: The department focused on strengthening corporate transparency, improving processing efficiency, and progressing legislative reform. Key achievements include:
 - Successful operational transition of the Beneficial Ownership regime to the Registrar of Companies.
 - Continued enhancement of beneficial ownership data quality through structured review and follow-up processes.
 - Progression of Phase II legislative amendments to the Companies Act 1981, including proposed streamlining of ministerial consent functions.
 - Ongoing review of consent-based provisions to align processes with risk-based compliance [mechanisms].
 3. Insolvency and Liquidations:
 - The department recruited a new administrator to enhance operational capacity and provide strengthened support across core functions.
 - The Office of the Official Receiver has continued to work steadily through its insolvency matters, resolving cases in a systematic [manner] strengthening case management practices.

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

The Chairman: Yes, the Deputy [*sic*] is preparing to come to Committee, Premier. If you don't mind. I am ready to take—

Hon. E. David Burt: I am happy to take a seat.

[Laughter]

The Chairman: I am ready to take . . . no, it's not the Deputy. I am prepared to invite the Honourable Renee Ming to the Chair of Committee.

Thank you. My time is up.

[Laughter]

[Pause]

The Chairman: And as the honourable Renee Ming is coming, we are reminded that this is . . . [we] are now in Committee of Supply for further consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27 and that we are currently on the Ministry of Finance, which is looking at Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38 and

39. We are on Head 39, having completed the rest. And only [Head] 58 is what is left after that.

[Pause]

[Mrs. Renee Ming, Chairman]

The Chairman: Good evening, Members.

I do not need to repeat. I know that the Chairman before me said where we are. So, we will just continue.

Thank you, Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, moving on, I am on Head 39, which is the Registrar of Companies. And I am dealing currently with the major achievements. Moving on to number four, which is:

4. Real Estate, High Value Dealers and Dealers in Precious Metals and Stones: The department continued to strengthen Bermuda's regulatory and supervisory framework [for] the real estate sector, high value dealers (HVD), and dealers in precious metals and stones (DPMS) [sectors,] (We love acronyms in the Ministry of Finance.) achieving significant progress in supervisory effectiveness, operational resilience, and national AML/ATF proliferation finance [PF] preparedness during 2025/26. Key achievements include:
 - Sustained effective supervisory oversight of the real estate sector in respect of annual licensing and AML/ATF/PF obligations, supporting Bermuda's continued alignment with FATF standards and international expectations.
 - Eliminated the backlog of real estate licence applications, significantly improving processing timelines and enhancing service delivery and operational efficiency within the division. (Which was a challenge that came to me as the Minister that these things were delayed.)
 - Led national and inter-agency coordination efforts by co-chairing the Supervisory Forum of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee [NAMLC], strengthening collaboration among supervisory authorities and supporting the coordinated implementation of the National AML/ATF/PF Action Plan and Strategy.
 - Chaired the sectoral working group for the 2024 Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing [ML/TF] National Risk Assessment, covering the real estate, high value dealer and dealers in precious metals and stones sectors, with strong cross-sector participation and engagement.

- Delivered sector outreach and capacity-building initiatives, including the presentation of the 2024 Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing Proliferation Financing [ML/TF/PF] National Risk Assessment [NRA] findings to the real estate, high value dealers and dealers in precious metals and stones sectors, attended by approximately 28 real estate professionals, significantly enhancing industry awareness of national and sectoral money laundering and terrorist financing proliferation financing risks.
 - Successfully completed Bermuda's participation in the AML/ATF/PF mutual evaluation mock exercise demonstrating a high level of supervisory effectiveness and strengthening preparedness for the upcoming 2027 Mutual Evaluation Review [MER]. One of our better performing departments which was one of our poorest performing departments. They have done significant work getting to where they need to be.
5. Compliance: The department focused on strengthening corporate governance monitoring depth and scope, providing support to the Corporate Authorisations Team in the transition of the Beneficial Ownership Regime from the BMA to the Registrar of Companies, and identifying other governance risks within the Registrar of Companies. Key achievements include:
- Implementation of Case IQ to manage all compliance monitoring, resulting in an enhanced ability by consistent, accurate statistics on monitoring activities and results through enforcement. (Important for a mutual evaluation because you have to provide statistics.)
 - Completing first draft submissions in preparation for final submissions of the Mutual Evaluation Report.
 - Providing guidance to teams within the RoC on risk identification and management.
 - Culminated the recruitment process that has seen the full staffing of the Compliance Team with substantive full-time post-holders.

Madam Chairman, this budget proposes to provide the increased resources for the effective implementation of the department's expanded mandate in support of the Registrar of Companies' pivotal role in the continued success of the international and domestic business sectors in Bermuda.

Plans for the Upcoming Year

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the department continues to review its organizational structure and required resources to facilitate the department's ability to be a robust regulator capable of meeting international standards. In this regard, the Registrar of Companies will:

1. Focus on advancing targeted legislative reforms in cooperation with industry stakeholders to modernise Bermuda's insolvency framework and ensure alignment with international standards including:
 - Reviewing Bermuda's bankruptcy legislation to bring [the following] in line with current international standards. And those things are: Official Receiver obligations, reduction of administration of debtor's and bankrupt's estates and the period spent in bankruptcy for debtors and bankrupts before eligible for discharge.
 - Introduction of fees as a percentage of assets distributed in cases where the Official Receiver acts as Trustee or Liquidator and realises assets with the aim to offset the costs of administering insolvency and bankruptcy proceedings.
2. Focus on consolidating reforms to enhance better transparency, accuracy and timeliness of information pertaining to the corporate and beneficial ownership registers, including:
 - Full embedding of the beneficial ownership verification and monitoring framework, including periodic register review processes.
 - Implementation of legislative amendments transferring specified consent functions from the Minister to the Registrar, supported by structured compliance controls.
 - Enhancing stakeholder guidance to improve filing accuracy and reduce processing delays.
 - Continued digital process improvement and system optimisation.
3. Focus on expanding the scope of its compliance reviews especially with regard to areas of change within the Registrar of Companies, and providing support to the AML/ATF Team towards the successful submission of assessments in preparation for the Mutual Evaluation Review, including:
 - Completion of beneficial ownership monitoring plans and provision of statistics for inclusion in Mutual Evaluation Review submissions.
 - Monitor the impact of the operational move of the Beneficial Ownership Register from the Bermuda Monetary Authority to the Registrar of Companies.
 - Provide support to the Registration and the Corporate Authorisation Teams in the development of policies and procedures

- necessary to address cooperation, transparency and reporting obligations.
- Continue to enhance process efficiencies through development of reporting and case management tools.
 - Develop and implement policies of engagement with the Registrar of Companies around discrepancy and legislative breach reporting.
4. Focus on advancing the regulatory and supervisory framework for the real estate, dealers in high value goods, and dealers in precious metals and stones sectors through the following strategic initiatives:
- Implementation of a targeted outreach and awareness programme to deepen the sector's understanding of AML/ATF and proliferation financing obligations across the real estate, high value dealer and dealers in precious metals and stones, including enhanced industry engagement, updated guidance, and timely licensing reminders to support ongoing regulatory compliance.
 - Legislative reform of the Real Estate Brokers' Licensing Act 2017 to strengthen the AML/ATF proliferation financing framework, to streamline licensing processes, and enhance professional standards across the sector. Proposed amendments include increasing minimum experience requirements and introducing continuing professional development obligations for brokers and agents.
 - Expansion of the risk-based onsite inspection programme, including readiness examinations for newly licensed and low-activity firms and thematic reviews of key AML/ATF and proliferation financing control areas.
 - Development and enhancement of supervisory guidance to provide greater clarity on regulatory expectations, emerging risks and compliance obligations within the real estate sector.
 - Enhancement of supervisory data collection and analytics to support risk-based supervision, sectoral risk assessments and evidence-based decision-making.
 - Continued strengthening of targeted financial sanctions and proliferation financing awareness within the real estate sector, including integration of sanctions considerations into supervisory activities and coordination with domestic competent authorities.
 - Further development of the supervisory and regulatory framework for the high value dealer and dealers in precious metals and stones sectors, to ensure

readiness to identify, register and supervise any businesses that may enter these sectors in line with Bermuda's AML/ATF and proliferation financing framework.

- Ongoing preparations for the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force [CFATF] Mutual Evaluation Review in 2027, including risk-based supervisory planning, sector outreach, and continued alignment with international standards to ensure the real estate sector is well prepared for assessment.

These initiatives reflect the department's continued commitment to strengthening transparency, operational efficiency, and regulatory compliance across the various areas managed by the department.

Madam Chairman, I would like to extend my appreciation for the work undertaken by the Registrar of Companies, to the entire management and staff of the department. And without question, would like to express my thanks to Mr. Kenneth Joaquin who does manage and run that department and does a stellar job as [there] has been a significant amount of transition over the past few years, but he has continued to progress that. And it is important to note that we continue to pass the assessment of which are given despite the challenges of staffing.

But we are hopefully turning a corner with the expansion of staffing in that department with the moving into a new premises and with the transferring of some functions to the Corporate Income Tax Agency enabling them to focus on their core mandate. And I certainly hope to report to the House in the future the streamline registration companies processed as we aim to have companies registered very quickly with our new fully electronic system.

Madam Chairman, that concludes my remarks on the Registrar of Companies, and I will move onto Head 58, which, thankfully, is very short.

HEAD 58—INTEREST ON DEBT AND GUARANTEE MANAGEMENT

Cost Estimate 5801—Debt and Loan Guarantees
(Page B-133)

Hon. E. David Burt: Madam Chairman, the 2026/27 budget allocation for interest on debt (Head 58) is \$124.8 million. This represents a decrease of \$2.75 million, or 2.2 per cent compared to the original estimate for [2025/2026] of \$127.5 million.

Madam Chairman, this reduction in our annual interest expense is the direct result of our proactive debt management strategy. By utilising our improved fiscal capacity to repay \$605 million in Senior Notes, the Government is successfully reducing the total amount of net debt outstanding and consequently, the cost of servicing it. In 2027/28 this Head will further reduce to \$102 million.

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 it furthers our prudent economic strategy and advances the economy of Bermuda with no cost to the government.

Madam Chairman, the issuance of a guarantee can result in additional revenues for government. Within the terms of the Fairmont Southampton [Princess] guarantee, government receives an annual fee equivalent to 1 per cent of the outstanding balance of the loan. Hence the \$750,000 revenue projected on page B-132 of the Budget Book.

It is very interesting, Madam Chairman, allow me to digress. The other side calls it the “give it away” when we are actually getting money into the Consolidated Fund. Imagine that! They say we are giving away and we are actually earning revenue.

Some Hon. Members: Ooh!

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh!

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, look at this! Oh, look. I got them awake. Yes, yes, yes. Don't worry. I am almost finished. Almost finished.

Madam Chairman, within the cost estimate on page B-133 you will note that there is nil cost budgeted for Morgan's Point.

Hold on a second, Madam Chairman. I would sincerely hope that when the Opposition gets to their feet, they can tell us the guarantee fee which they negotiated on the guarantee of which they gave to the St. Regis.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: None.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Note. We do it a little bit better on this side. All right.

Madam Chairman, within the cost estimate on page B-133 you will note that there is nil cost budgeted for Morgan's Point. Any costs that are incurred will be recharged to the relevant entity. The Ministry proactively manages these guarantees to ensure that entities with loans or credit facilities guaranteed by Government are effectively managing their obligations and 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,

maximisation of economic benefit and prudent economic and fiscal management, while supporting economic growth.

So, that wraps up Head 58.

Conclusion

Hon. E. David Burt: In conclusion, Madam Chairman, I wish to again thank all the teams who are part of the Ministry of Finance for their dedication and professionalism. There have been many challenges faced over the past year, but they have persevered.

It is very hard in the Ministry of Finance sometimes because there are so many different competing interests, whether or not it is all the various ministries who want the attention, whether or not there is a matter related to, you know, staff turnover, whether it is a matter of, you know, the Minister of Finance or the Premier calling an election in January and the budget having to be delayed. And then having to be redone. Or matters that are related to our continued international assessment for the preparation for our Mutual Evaluation Report or the implementation of corporate income tax. There has been a lot of work that has taken place in all matters related to the Ministry of Finance and I am, without question, grateful for the team.

This submission today, Madam Chairman, has highlighted the various threats and challenges facing Bermuda. The Ministry 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, effective management of our resources and extending economic relief where possible.

Thank you, and with that, Madam Chairman, I shall take my seat.

The Chairman: The Premier and Minister of Finance has concluded his brief on heads . . . first of all, for the Ministry of Finance, Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39 and 58.

Is there any Member who would like to speak? I recognise the Member from constituency 25, Dr. Douglas DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chair-man, and thank you to the Premier for the brief and for leaving lots of time. Unfortunately, not all of his col-leagues have been so accommodating. I also want to thank him for the invitation to send an email to the FS, and that was also a bit of a surprise. But I was able to—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —and since am I am speaking to the Chair, often I am invited to email the Premier, but he is such a busy person that he sometimes does not . . . apparently does not get my emails or manage to reply to them. But I certainly appreciate the offer, Madam Chairman.

So, while we are on that—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: He can't help himself.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: While we are on that, I noticed—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —let's talk about . . . let's talk on Head 10, Madam Chairman—

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I am going to try to keep these focused on the heads, but I may have to go back and forth a little bit. But I will try to stay focused for the listening . . . and actually, I am remiss. For those who are listening in tonight, first of all, I want to thank you for your interest in our civic affairs. Hopefully we will learn something together today.

We talked about the Gaming Commission. I guess one question I have, and here I am on page B-109, business unit 20110. My question to the Premier is, why not just shut it down?

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: But I do have some more detailed questions. What is the total revenue to the government from businesses regulated by the Casino Commission . . . Gaming Commission, excuse me. And then if that could be broken down by businesses in Bermuda, as opposed to cruise ships, I would like that.

Also in respect to the Gaming Commission, What is the total business revenue that companies regulated by that commission in Bermuda—not the cruise ships, companies in Bermuda that might pay rent or employ people—generate? I would love to know that.

My third question with respect to the Gaming Commission is, Is there any realistic expectation of their being banking available for people who wish to open a gaming operation? So, that is my question there on the Gaming Commission, Madam Chairman.

A small question here, but I think I saw . . . on page C-11, 76072, [there was] \$281,000 for furniture and equipment. That is \$150,000 more year on year. I must misunderstand. There must be something other than furniture. So, a quick explanation of that would be welcome.

Sticking on page B-109, International Affairs and Regulatory. We heard about the Financial Policy Council. What would be the key recommendations from that council in the past year? I would like to know those, Madam Chairman.

Would this be the business unit that funds the Middle East consultant, who supported the Premier on his trip there in January? We do know that about a half a million dollars has been [spent] on that consultant through a recent question. Unfortunately, the answer to the question did not include the year 2026. So, if this does include that consultant, what additional costs have incurred in the 2026 year for that consultant which we know accompanied the Premier on his trip there in January?

While we are on the topic of consultants, Madam Chairman, what cost centre would fund the consultants who are also MPs who are supporting the Premier? And what are their specific roles that are different from their Junior Minister or existing Cabinet roles? Perhaps that would also be in the consultant's line. I don't know. I would like to confirm that, Madam Chairman.

Also still on page B-109, Madam Chairman, [business unit] 20000, Policy Planning and Management. There is this \$15- . . . \$14-odd million fund . . . yes, \$14 million fund. The Cross Ministry Transformation Fund. I am struggling with this one, Madam Chairman, because of course we are being asked here to approve it. But as far as I know these funds aren't connected to any specific projects. So, my question to the Premier is, Who will actually . . . what will the process be for approving submissions for this spending to be done on? Who will make the decisions on the approvals? And I am also a little confused why these funds are not just put in the ministries that would actually do the work. And so, why is this special, extra funding mechanism being created when we already have a mechanism in this Budget Book with the Capital Grants, and so forth, that allows us to dig into that? So, I would like an explanation for that, Madam Chairman.

You know, we heard about the Sovereign Wealth Fund. As you may know, Madam Chairman, we are not super optimistic that there will be money available for that, so I would like to know the Premier's . . . the Minister's estimate [as to] when the first dollar might actually get deposited into that.

Continuing on this page, Madam Chairman, I think I covered something there . . . I do have a lot of questions on CIT, but I am trying to chunk those together, so I will put them at the end of my questions for this section. We talked about the Financial Policy Council. We talked about consultants. We talked about the Gaming Commission.

Insurance Reform was mentioned in the Premier's Statement. As the Premier may know, the One Bermuda Alliance has strongly suggested that local insurers be regulated with respect to the premiums that they can charge, the rates that they can charge. We would certainly consider a doctor . . . their acquisition of medical practices and how they control where customers can buy their prescriptions be strongly considered. I would like to know if the Government's plans would include that kind of regulation such as exists in

the United States. And it would not just be for health. It could be for your auto or vehicle insurance as well as for your property insurance. [It is a] very common thing in other jurisdictions. So, does the Government have any plans to regulate the local insurers, given the general concerns of the public of the concentration in that industry?

I asked about the furniture. All right. I will turn . . . I have some questions on the Corporate Income Tax [CIT] now, Madam Chairman. So, on page B-110, revenue item 8044. Obviously, we have budgeted for \$753 million this year and \$279 million current estimate, or revised estimate, coming in for the fiscal year ending right now.

And I think, Madam Chairman, you will appreciate that it is a bit tricky because we are being asked to approve this budget with this estimate and we have very little information to work with. And, you know, one might almost say that in good faith we could not provide an informed opinion, judgment, on this. And I think, Madam Chairman, you can appreciate this process is to enable the House to carry out its duties, to really inquire into these figures to become confident of them. So, I guess I am going to try to ask some questions in that that vein.

Okay. I think the Premier did answer this but perhaps he could just confirm. If the revised estimate for the ending fiscal year is \$279 million, and that is 25 per cent of gross receipts, that should be about \$1.1 billion in gross receipts that the Government has. So, if they could confirm if I have done that math correctly, I would appreciate that. What allowances is the Government making for tax credits to be paid out of that \$1.1 billion? So, I would like to know what that number might be. And then of the 2026/27 budget estimate for \$753 million, how much of that relates to the 2025 fiscal year?

The companies will have submitted some pre-payments and will be filing later this year. And how much of that do they think is payments in the 2026 fiscal year for companies? How much is left in the Tax Reserve Fund at this time, Madam Chairman? How many companies have paid corporate income tax to date, Madam Chairman? How much gross corporate income tax has been received, for say, the top 10 payers? Obviously, as we think about how robust these funds are, Madam Chairman, the concentration risk is important. And of course, that would be one data point that would let us think about that.

Of course, I suspect the Premier does not want to answer that. I know he has been not desirous of answering those in Parliamentary Questions, and I know the answer looks something like sensitivities with the OECD. And if that is the case, I think that underscores the point that there are sensitivities and issues around this money that we must be incredibly careful of.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, now the question is, When will this Government publish annual CIT collections information to the public? Or perhaps maybe it would be the duty of CITA to do that. Are there any plans for public accounting of that? And when should we expect to see that?

Another question around CIT income which I continue to have is . . . Those who are in the insurance industry know that insurance companies might do a stress test with the Bermuda Monetary Authority. If there were two big hurricanes in a year, how might that impact their balance sheet? Has the Government done any stress testing like that on what it might do to the CIT income? And what can they share with us about those answers, Madam Chairman?

Okay, just checking my questions here. Okay, still on this head, Madam Chairman. I turn to page B-111 performance measures. And in last year, or 2024/25, eighty-five per cent of the Ministries ended up within their budget expenditure. But for 2025/26 only 54 per cent ended up within that. I am not sure if that is based on the original budget amount or after accounting for the additional funds that were approved in Parliament. If it is based on the original amount, it might be useful to add a measure that accounts for *versus additional approved funds*, because, ultimately, that is what we are thinking about here.

And there is a performance measure about the net debt to revenue, Madam Chairman. Let's see if I can get that number for you. But I would like to know what does the Government think the best long-term target for that number is, once we pay down our debt? We know what it is now; it is quite high. And I am not comfortable with it. And so, what is the Government's target for that number, Madam Chairman?

And while we are on performance measures, Madam Chairman, . . . actually that one did not have a number next to it. So I will have to leave it at that. Has the Government considered a spending growth rule to control year-on-year spending, while we are looking at the performance measures, Madam Chairman?

[I am] checking my notes. Okay. Madam Chairman, turning back to page B-109 and [business unit] 20030 domestic affairs. I think my understanding of that includes things like auditing the pension funds. And I would be curious on the Government's timelines when all of those funds will be brought up to date. Some of the various funds seem to be up to 10 years out of date. And we appreciate it does take time. But they must have a road map, and I would like to know when that road map reaches everything up to date.

Okay. I think those are my questions on Head 10, and I might yield to see if any of my colleagues or anyone on the Government benches has any questions on Head 10, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does anyone else wish to speak at this time?

I recognise the Member from constituency 23, MP Jarion Richardson.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I rise this evening to put some questions into this debate relating to the programme, or NAMLC, specifically business unit 20100 on page B-109.

Madam Chairman, the Honourable Premier has made a point about it, but I think that it has been undersold. Very much the entirety of Bermuda's economy depends on how well we do on this examination. Because if we get marked for a strategic deficiency, either a call to action or increased monitoring programme, the cost of doing business in Bermuda will go through the roof requiring every regulated financial institution globally to apply enhanced due diligence to any business emanating from or going through Bermuda. So effectively, it is an inflexion point.

Now, the reason why I bring it up as a key point—and I am re-emphasising this for the record as well as for the listening public, Madam Chairman—is because we did very, very well on the last one, in the 4th Round. And as we go up to the 5th Round, that effectively put it in front line for the 5th Round. This one will relate to the spend and allocation that the Government is proposing to put forward for NAMLC. Again, [business unit] 20100, because the standards have changed. But they have changed in a way that is a little harder than last time. Last time they tested for effectiveness. In other words, not just that a country has the necessary laws and regulations and units, but also that we are actually using those laws and regulations and those supervisory units. But it's changing the way that is tested now.

Now, the reason this is key is because one of the Premier's key policy ideas, which is digital asset business, was not assessed for effectiveness before because there were no entities which had that licence at that time that were operating. So, what that means is that they effectively could not evaluate whether we were actually managing that space.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Huh?

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Honourable Premier, for clarifying. I am on [business unit] 20100, but I am really on page 1 of the budget. Because all the money depends on us passing this test.

[Laughter and inaudible interjection]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: And, by the way, Madam Chairman, whilst the Honourable Premier has

interjected, it does remind me he made the point of . . . I make money in this space. And so let me declare a conflict right there.

My love for anti-money laundering stems from my time in the Bermuda Police Service, specifically my final posting in [the] Intelligence Division where I worked on matters of transnational organised and local crime. And I saw the cascading impact that what we call capitalised crime has into the community. That led me to obviously seek further designations and then move to the Bermuda Monetary Authority's AML Unit where we implemented the 2008 Programme. And I was very lucky after that to then move into the private sector on a consultancy basis, including getting the contract to assist the Registrar of Companies with developing the regulatory framework for real estate agents and brokers, including some other matters such as peer-to-peer tax exchange. So, it is an area that I do still work on. But it's a passion because I know what will happen if we get it wrong.

So, with that conflict being declared, what also happens is we have new standards with countering the proliferation of financing. Again, this is different from what we have dealt with before. So, we are effectively going into a high tense . . . into a very sensitive area.

And I see the Premier has requested some \$983,000, which is an increase of only 5 per cent. And I am very concerned that that is not enough. He has already indicated that we found remediation gaps, or gaps in international compliance that were tested for and are currently being worked on. These include DNFPBs, or (as the Premier has pointed out, AML does like acronyms) that is, Designated Non-Financial Businesses and Professionals. As well as DPMSs, or Dealers in Precious Metals and . . . oh, you got me on the last one. And Stones.

We have also not typically done well in regulating high value dealers. So, undoubtedly, we have some remediation issues. And this comes down to, now, Madam Chairman, page B-111. Because the Honourable Premier has made the point that this is a sensitive moment. I am reiterating that point. But this Budget Book, on page B-111, has absolutely no performance measurements for NAMLC. Not one. We are facing one of the most critical times in Bermuda's international assessment history and they have no performance expectations whatsoever. So, I hope that that is just a typo.

Further, Madam Chairman, can the Honourable Premier speak to who is involved in the Cabinet subcommittee that is overseeing this critical national project? And can he also answer when the risk assessment for countering the proliferation of financing will be released? He said within required time frames. That is . . . the industry will need something a little stronger than that. He has also mentioned that they will currently update the National Policy. My question is, When will it be released and/or tabled in this Honourable House?

And further, I think that I have made the point that we are in a very critical time. I reiterate that \$983,000 is just not enough money to deal with what we have already identified as remediation gaps across a number of spectrums.

I am well aware, however, Madam Chairman, for the avoidance of doubt, that there are many members on the National Anti-money Laundering Committee and each have their own projects. What we are talking about is the Secretariat, or the coordinating body. And so, the Bermuda Monetary Authority, the Bermuda Police Service, [and] Customs all have their own roles to play. We are not talking about them tonight, just the Secretariat.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25, MP DeCouto.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman. I do actually have one more question on Head 10, as a . . . Well, it is sort of the Ministry overview, because it does relate to the Premier's comments at the beginning of his brief that this was a tax-cutting budget that makes it fairer. I paraphrase. And so, I just . . . I wanted to verify that for myself. So, I did a quick example, and I looked at the Government's policies proposed for this year's budget as well as over the past few years.

So, if you owned a Class A car and you use around 700 kilowatt hours a month on your BELCO bill, the various government initiatives in this budget in the past few years, and by my calculations, would save you around \$380. If you drive a Class H car and you have got a big house and you use 1,700 kilowatt hours a month, the government's programmes, by my calculations, would save you around \$1,230 over that time frame. So, my question to the Premier is, Please explain to us how that is fair to low-income people? So, that's my question. And if agrees that perhaps it's not, why are they not doing initiatives that are a little more subtle and take into account the needs of people who have less, more?

So, anyway that's that question there. And then I'll move to the Accountant General, Madam Chairman. Consolidated reporting, page B-112, under the summary, budgeted for zero. I appreciate this is complicated. It requires getting all the audited accounts from the various quangos and other bodies that feed in. But again, you know, the best way to get to the end of a journey is to start the journey. Sometimes it helps if you have a map. I would like to know when the government's map or plan for this thinks that we will get to this conclusion. So, I think that's important. Because if you don't set a timeline, you will definitely never meet it.

Turning now on page B-112, also to [business unit] 21030, the Government Employee Health Insurance, GEHI. We know that there have been

sustainability issues here. Last year the Government had to put \$19 million into it. I believe this year's budget suggests putting \$12 million into it. What is the Government's plan so that this fund can become self-sustaining? Or, if they have a different plan, is there a sort of long-term contribution amount that they plan to sort of always put into this rather than reacting year by year? And I am not saying they are reacting year by year. I am just saying we don't have visibility of what their plan might be, Madam Chairman.

Okay. Turning to page B-114, employee numbers, Madam Chairman. They have 35, that's the revised for the year ending, and they need 42. And I think there has been a pattern in there for a budgeting [of] 34, 35, wanting 41, 42. So, what's the plan to get the people that the Accountant General needs here? Because you know, it's an important job, and . . . for example, we talked about consolidated reporting as a place where we might need to add some people.

Also, last year's budget showed 41 budgeted people. This year shows 42 people budgeted. But difference in salaries of only 1 per cent. I would have thought something larger than that. So, any commentary on that would have been good. And it is similar theme with the financial reporting. Which is, how are we going to get people that we need in these . . . what's the Government's strategy to resource these critical functions? And [business unit] 21001 financial reporting was one of them.

Turning to page B-115, Madam Chairman, at the performance measures. I guess I understand that perhaps in a year if you went to update the Financial Instructions perhaps there was an election and perhaps you had to do [a] scramble in your budget and you didn't get around to that. I don't know. Maybe that has something to do with it. But what I would like to know is, What sorts of things are anticipated to be updated in the Financial Instructions, Madam Chairman?

Okay. That's my question there. I think I asked in the prior head about the audits of the various funds. And, yes, Madam Chairman, those are my questions on Head 11, so I would be happy to yield if anyone else has questions on Head 11.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does anyone else . . . would any other Member wish to speak at this time?

No?

Premier, there's no further speaker at this time.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Oh, Madam Chairman, I do have questions on the other heads. It was if anyone wanted to come in on Head 11, for the convenience of the Premier.

The Chairman: Are you asking for the convenience of your Members?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes.

The Chairman: Oh, okay.

So, none of your Members wish to speak, so do you want to continue?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Madam Chairman,—

The Chairman: Thank you. Great.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —I would love to move to Head 12, Customs. And thank you to the Junior Minister for covering that quite efficiently.

Last year we heard about . . . and I did not hear this in the brief, but I wanted to know. Last year's brief talked about the Trusted Trader [programme] and the duty relief platform, and I wonder how those are going? Are people using them? Are those systems implemented well and going on? So, I think that is my only question on Head 12, so I might just move—

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Last year's brief referred to the Trusted Trader programme and platforms to make it easier for people to apply for duty relief. And I don't believe I heard that in this year's brief, but I wanted to know if those were up and running, operationally. And are people using them? Are they going as well as we hoped?

So, moving on now, Madam Chairman, to Head 28, Social Insurance. Okay. Let's see, I am on page B-118 and looking at the department objectives. And one of the objectives is to review legislation and make recommendations for modernisation to the Ministry, et cetera. I would like to know what is the status of the Social Insurance or Contributory Pension Fund reform? What is the Government's timeline for that? I mean, we are certainly very concerned about it in the One Bermuda Alliance with those funds planned to run out not that far in the future.

I did mention last year this same question, also on [page] B-119. You know, we have employee numbers for a variety of different business units but no cost on page B-118. Although the Minister did read them out in his brief, I didn't quite catch them all. But I am sure I can go back and get the recording on that. Also, on page B-119, Madam Chairman, we have professional services for around \$3.8 million. And I didn't quite catch in the brief exactly what those were for. So, if [we] can get a brief overview of those professional services, Madam Chairman, that would be much appreciated.

Turning now, Madam Chairman, to the Compliance section. Also page B-119, [business unit] 38040. I believe the Minister mentioned in the brief that there was 700 . . . excuse me, \$75 million of outstanding social insurance contributions, up 3.9 per cent from July, with 110 companies on payment plans. So, he did actually answer some questions that I had there.

What was interesting to me was that of the 48 sent to the debt enforcement unit, only 17 have gotten

judgments. One-third. And I would like to know what lessons the Government has learned from that and why they don't get a better judgment rate on that to get this debt collected. A related question, Madam Chairman, is . . . we appreciate when you . . . these kinds of things . . . there is always going to be some debt outstanding. It's just, you just can't get everybody to pay on time. What is the department's long-term plan, or long-term expectation, of what that level of debt would be? Such that . . . I feel that they are in a sort of transitional era. They have cracked down on a lot of people who aren't paying what they are owed.

And actually, there is an interesting point here because the money that is owed, you know, half of that money is actually taken from the employees' pay cheques. So actually, for those who are listening, I would urge you . . . and actually, I will congratulate the Government on this. They have a portal you can go on and you can check your contributions. And I would urge you to make sure that your employer is indeed paying the contributions that they are taking out of your pay cheque.

So, I had a previous question, Why are only about a third of the people not paying their bills, basically, actually getting judgments in the court system? And then my question was also, What is the long-term? Given that there will always be some people not paying, what is the long-term expectation of the level of debt that they think will be in the steady state?

Oh yes, and I did mention about one of the portals there, the social insurance portal. But is there a plan to mail out the social insurance bills? Because my understanding is you get these big yellow envelopes with an old-school printout in it. So of course, that probably costs the Government a lot of money. So yes, will they have emailing of electronic bills?

Okay, Madam Chairman, I will now move on to Head 38, Office of the Tax Commissioner. Right. One of my questions here is, the Premier talked a lot about digitisation. There's a big push on here. But then at the Budget Breakfast he said they could not change the payroll tax bands because it was . . . people would have to reprogramme their computers. So, Madam Chairman, I would like to understand from the Premier why, with all the technology investment that we are doing, we can't apply some of those solutions so that we could modernise and update the payroll tax bands?

And let me give some examples to help him with his explanation. We know that salaries rise with the cost of living. We would like people not to be penalised for giving or getting cost-of-living increases. So, you can imagine the bands ought to perhaps naturally go up. Health insurance benefits are paid by employers. We know health insurance costs go up and that counts as a type of remuneration that the payroll tax goes in. So, again, another reason why—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: The Member has yielded.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

Payments into approved health insurance schemes are not subject to payroll tax. The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

The Chairman: Member.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes. Madam Chairman, I mean, in general, but there are employers, especially international business, quite a lot of international business companies actually do cover the employer portion. So, in that case, the Premier would not be correct.

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order.

The Chairman: Your point of order is?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: The Honourable Member is misleading the House.

On matters related to remuneration, payments into health insurance plans, approved health insurance schemes, which are all the health insurance schemes of which people are covered by, are not subject to payroll tax.

The Chairman: Member, the Premier has specified that they are not covered. So, I think we need to . . . you can—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Let me clarify. Because if I am an employer, Madam Chairman, and the health insurance goes up and I say, *I would like to assist my employees by giving them a raise so they can better cover their share of the health insurance* . . . they are making more money. And I think that is something to consider.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I think also something to consider, Madam Chairman, and a question to the Premier is, Has the Government considered . . . this is a new topic . . . a new topic, Madam Chairman.

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: It's not . . . this is not about health.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: You just say you changed . . . you just made an incorrect statement.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Chairman: Member.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I believe I clarified my comments, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: You clarified it, but I think that the Premier had actually given you the definition of what you said in that the initial statement, that the health insurance *payment* was subject to the payroll tax. And he let you know that that's not—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I accept that but—

The Chairman: But if you are speaking about an increase in salary, that would be looked at in a different—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: That was what I—

The Chairman: —manner.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: So, let me . . . of course, I appreciate the correction from the Premier for my misstatement, but that isn't actually what I meant. So, thank you for helping me clarify that—

The Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: —misstatement.

Yes, and as the Premier knows, sometimes people can misspeak. And I apologise for misspeaking, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Your apology is accepted. You can move on.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Now, I am still on payroll tax, but I am not talking about health insurance.

Again, has the Government considered producing a sort of tiered and progressive payroll tax for local businesses? Because, again, right now is whatever band you are in, based on your payroll as a local business, you pay that same tax rate across all of your pay that you give to your employers [sic]. So, some businesses are disincentivised to give overtime or hire an additional employee. So, has the Government considered converting that to a more marginal approach like the employee portion? So that was that question there, Madam Chairman.

An Hon. Member: There is not one employer in this country that does that.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Like I said, Madam Chairman, we have heard from several people that that's an issue. And this is . . . you know, the beautiful thing about doing your research and canvassing a lot of people and discussing with people is you understand the breadth of issues that they are facing, especially small businesses, Madam Chairman.
Moving on—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, my.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Point of order.

The Chairman: What is your point of order?

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The Honourable Member is misleading the House, Madam Chairman.

Because he said that employers are not . . . some employers will not offer overtime because they are worried about their employees going into the higher band, which is totally untrue. Because if any one employer has to pay their employees to work overtime they make more money. So, I doubt . . . I would challenge the Honourable Member to bring one example of one company that actually does that.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Member from constituency 25, please continue.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: You know, Madam Chairman, what's nice is you can go [and] you can talk to an accountant who works with small businesses, and you can say, *Hey, what are the issues facing your clients?* And then you can feed that into your thinking processes. So perhaps there are Members of this House who only work with big businesses, and they think a little bit differently. But we know that small businesses have different concerns than big businesses. So . . .

[Inaudible interjections]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay, Madam Chairman, moving on. Also Head 38, page B-123. I do note that on item zero . . . sorry, excuse me. Item 8017, [page] B-123. We are . . . the Government is forecasting a slight decrease in Payroll Tax. I would be curious why—

The Chairman: Member.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: I just . . . I just want to know where you are right now.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, page B-123.

The Chairman: Yes.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: At the top of the table—

The Chairman: [Item] 8017?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: [Yes,] 8017, payroll tax.

The Chairman: Okay.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: The \$634.9 million estimated for this budget we are reviewing today is slightly decreased from the last year's, or this year's ending revised estimate of \$637 million. So, I would like to understand that. Normally we see these things go up.

Going down to 63 . . . excuse me. I have a number here that makes no sense. Insurance . . . sorry, 8020 Insurance Services Tax, is only budgeted to go up 2 per cent from last year's budget. And I would like to know how the Ministry works out that increase. Do they speak with insurers? Do they get a forecast? I think people's experience is that the underlying rate increases are actually higher than 2 per cent. So, I wonder if people are perhaps seeing these higher rates and reducing their insurance coverage to control costs. Any insight on the Ministry's methodology for that would be much appreciated, Madam Chairman.

Similarly, going down to 8029 Foreign Currency Purchase Tax, [it] is budgeted at a 9 per cent increase. I would like to know what . . . is there . . . you know, I guess one answer is, *Oh yes, people are going to buy more foreign currency.* Okay, I get that. But perhaps is there any . . . like, why, Madam [Chairman]? You know, why are they buying more foreign currency? Because inflation is around 2 per cent, so I don't really understand that missing gap there.

Now, Madam Chairman, turning to performance measures. Actually, I am going to skip . . . I am just going to mention this item in the grants on page C-11, [business unit] 76333 Tax Administration Modernisation. We did hear some of that, but will we get digital land tax bills? Are they going to keep coming in the mail? Thank you, Madam Chairman.

An Hon. Member: We are working on it.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Working on it . . . working on it. We're working on it.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Okay.

Madam Chairman, if the Government is working on getting digital land tax bills, when might we enjoy

that convenience? That would be my question to the Government, Madam Chairman. I think I have a commitment from the Junior Minister. He is going to personally email me my land tax bills.

[Laughter]

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: I look forward to that, Madam Chairman. I won't have to go to the post office anymore.

Right. And we are still on Head 38, Office of the Tax Commissioner, and we are on page B-124, performance measures. And I want to highlight 48060 Primary Family Homestead Applications as a new performance measure to . . . excuse me, 48050, Madam Chairman (a typo there in my notes), a new performance measure there to complete primary family homestead applications within five weeks of receipt. And I assume their target outcome for this coming year is 90 per cent, which is great.

For those who are listening, if you own a house and you have not done this, you need to go out and you need to get that primary family homestead so that that homestead becomes exempt from estate tax. So, I am glad to see that it is 90 per cent.

So, the question, Madam Chairman is, What would the Government estimate its current . . . what fraction over the past year have been turned around within that five weeks?

Okay. And then also on the same page, Madam Chairman, [business unit] 48070, Compliance, to conduct at least 20 tax audits, but only 10 have been done. And can we have an understanding of what was driving the shortfall there?

I think those are my questions for Head 38, Madam Chairman. Let me just double check my notes, and indeed those are my questions for Head 38. I do know that my colleague has questions on Head 39, so I might yield the floor for him.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Before you start, I just want to . . . we have approximately one hour and three minutes left in this debate. And for the benefit of the Members and the listening public, we are now in Committee of Supply for consideration of the Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 2026/27. And we are currently looking at the Ministry of Finance, Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39, and 58.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 23. MP Richardson.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I will be sure not to take too long because I know the Premier wants to give such in-depth and sophisticated responses that completely answer all of our questions.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: So, I do not want to get in his way.

[Laughter]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Thank you, Honourable Premier, for your commitment to such.

Yes. I will be speaking to Head 39, the Registrar of Companies. And, Madam Chairman, although we often give a lot of credit to the Bermuda Monetary Authority, who, by the way, have earned it. It is really the Registrar of Companies [RoC] who is the unsung hero of Bermuda and business Bermuda. Bermuda Inc. would be hard-pressed to exist without the central function of the RoC, and as such, I congratulate the team at the RoC for their diligence and work.

To that end, I have some questions, however, because given the critical nature of their work, we have to be especially careful on these budget allocations and work expectations. Specifically, I will start with one that we have touched on a little bit, and that I am a little more familiar with. [It] is on [page] B-126, Madam Chairman. And that is on [department] objective 8, which I will read. *To promote and ensure compliance with the Companies Act, partnership Acts, Limited Liability [Company] Act and Economic Substance [Act] through active compliance monitoring and enforcement, supported by the RoC Compliance Measures Act, in accordance with FATF, OECD, and EU standards and recommendations.*

To that end, would the Honourable Premier be able to give us an outline of how the Registrar's supervisory work feeds into Bermuda's national AML/ATF risk assessment? This is quite key because the Registrar of Companies (Compliance Measures) Act was passed in 2017, which the Premier mentioned, effectively transitioned the RoC from a strictly repository entity into a more active supervisor or competent authority, which includes additional powers to penalise. So, they have a much more different role than they have had in the last 20 years. And so, my examination to-night will be looking at these roles.

Specifically, the Honourable Premier had mentioned that under the Beneficial Ownership Act, as well as under capital expenses, some \$800,000 is going to be spent on the current system to continue to upgrade it for beneficial ownership. And during that debate he had also mentioned that we will be able to rely . . . this is the register that has transitioned from the Bermuda Monetary Authority to the RoC. But my question to the Honourable Premier is . . . there is a circumstance that has arisen that is affecting all of the corporate service providers. And I am wondering how he intends to effect this issue, given that we are spending an increased amount of money?

Effectively, the transition of information from the BMA over to the RoC has resulted in some form of error and the RoC has requested CSPs to launch into

massive remediation exercises to basically update the central register of Bermuda. That is a huge exercise. There are some 84 registered corporate service providers in Bermuda, employing hundreds of Bermudians. So, we are talking about countless hours of remediation work.

And then during that beneficial ownership legislation, as well as during this debate, he made the point that we should be able to rely on that information from the BMA. That not being the case, and I see we are spending some more money on a system that, as it stands today, seems to have a critical flaw, my question to the Minister is, What is the plan this year, specifically in the performance measurements, to rectify this critical flaw in the data that is going to cost us quite a lot of money in the industry to remediate?

A further question is, How many entities out of the 13,000 entities on the register of . . . sorry, the corporate register and partnership register. How many of those have been impacted by this failure to transition the information over properly? And of course, what is the intended end state of that remediation project? That will start on . . . and that is as it relates to [page] B-126 and [department] objective 8. And I believe that the [beneficial] ownership exists under business unit 49000, Policy Planning and Admin, that the Honourable Premier had mentioned as a matter of computerised systems.

Further, I have a question on [page] B-127. The total spend on Head 93 . . . 80 . . . [Head] 39 . . . I am sorry, is \$11 million or \$11.7 million dollars. And my question is, How is the department organised, given the size of the corporate register? We actually have a relatively small one. We have always as a country (as you are well aware, Madam Chairman, with your banking background) emphasised quality over quantity. But the question is, Do we have enough people to oversee that quality?

Further to this inspection point, Madam Chairman, I note that on [page] B-128, under Revenue Summary. Specifically, revenue source 8880 . . . I am sorry, 8881, Penalties, that we are effectively seeing a doubling of the penalties. And my question is, Where are we anticipating getting that . . . seeing that increase? Obviously, this team, the supervisory team, oversees issues with the Companies Act [and] issues [with] Economic Substance. So, it seems that they are anticipating finding some serious matters of non-compliance in the sector. So, if they can speak to what is it that they are anticipating that would require them to double the number of penalties in the industry.

I further note for business unit 4902, and this would be on business unit Entity Registration, on page B-127. I note that in the 2025/26 original spend it was anticipated \$1.9 million. But revised only a million dollars was spent. So, my question is, What got missed in that area? What we are trying to do is make sure that there is a certain quality of administration in this key department, and that just strikes me as unusual given

the key role of Entity Registration in Bermuda's wider economy.

My next question, Madam Chairman, also relates to how many entities we have registered that they are dealing with. So, currently, the RoC also acts as the superintendent of real estate. Which means that they register real estate brokers and agents. Brokers are basically . . . are the one entity where agents are the people in it. And my question is, How many of those are currently registered? Because I note that we have some supervisory activity planned this year. And my question is, How many people made it through the licensing process? And the same would go for high net . . . I am sorry, high value goods, as well as dealers in precious metals and stones.

Just a funny aside, I am glad that we are regulating that space, Madam Chairman. When I was . . . when I had occasion to interview a drug dealer, obviously for work.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. Jarion Richardson: I would tell you that he said something . . . it was years ago, but he said, *You guys always worry about money laundering. You don't have to worry about that. You could just spend the money.* So, I remember thinking, *Oh, we really need to regulate these precious dealers.* So, I am glad to hear that. But I would like to know how many of them are in fact registered.

With that said, Madam Chairman, I also want to speak to the training and staffing of this department. Specifically, under Compliance, which is business unit 49080, on page B-128, where we are seeing a slashing of staff by some 56 per cent. And that's very curious because in 2024/25 on that table, we see seven staff. And if I remember, we had allocated some 14 . . . sorry, some 19 staff about that point. I see we got up into 2025/26 to 16 staff, and then we are down to 8 in the revised for 2025/26. And I see now we are in 2026/27 and we are estimating seven staff.

But, again, Madam Chairman, as I pointed out, we have some 13,000-ish registered entities, not including real estate agents and brokers, not including high value dealers. So, it doesn't seem like the direction of travel should be going down. I don't think that we should be reducing our supervisory coverage of these key areas. Especially given that we are anticipating the CFATF Mutual Evaluation Report of Bermuda.

I also further note that along with losing members of staff, we are also losing in . . . or rather training has stabilised. To that end, I am talking to [page] B-127 under the Subjective Analysis of Current Account Estimates. Specifically, under Training line item, Madam Chairman, where we are seeing \$65,000 being spent, or an increase of \$1,000, or 2 per cent. The reason why I think training is so key is because when we introduced the Proceeds of Crime ([Anti-Money Laundering and Anti-Terrorist Financing] Supervision and

Enforcement) Act into Bermuda to create civil penalty regime, which has now been quite successful, that took quite a lot of work. Obviously, it's an instrument. But it also meant that we had to be trained at the time at the BMA by the federal . . . I am sorry, the Financial Services Authority, the then Financial Services Authority, which is now the Financial Conduct Authority in the UK.

We had to be trained by the Canadian FIN-TRACK [Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada], as well as the Federal Reserve Banks of Chicago and Atlanta. So, it was a lot of work to develop the testing methodologies and enforcement mechanisms that are now so successful that we can find companies millions of dollars for AML failures.

I think that these guys in the RoC are going to need the same amount of training and investment, so I am not seeing that amount of money going into that area. And I would encourage the Ministry to increase spending to ensure that the staff in the compliance unit are equipped to tackle these jobs. Especially as it relates to professional qualifications, Madam Chairman.

As it stands, I see the training budget again is stable. I see we are losing staff members. We need not only the institutional training for these guys, but we need them to have the individual professional qualifications, such as the Association of Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialists [ACAMS], International Compliance Association [ICA] member and fellowship, as well as the technical criteria. As the Honourable Premier is shifting into a FinTech and digital asset business space, they are going to need to know blockchain or on-chain monitoring, using services such as Chainalysis. So, there is quite a lot of work that they have to do to be able to then stand up an actual supervisory unit, or at least a supervisory unit with some credible teeth. So, I think that we have to . . . we should be paying attention to that, again, anticipating our evaluations this year.

So, with that being said, Madam Chairman, let me just check any outstanding questions.

Oh, yes, Madam Chairman, I would like to ask some questions about the supervisory programme we are anticipating this year. Specifically on [page] B-129. There's a target of 700 inspections of registered entities. And given that the Compliance Unit is in fact losing members and its training is stabilising, and I am not seeing an investment in the computers that they use, then how are they going to be able to scale up to 700 inspections?

Also, what percentage of the total registry population will those 700 inspections represent? And what is the methodology for selecting who is getting inspected, across not only the corporate register, but also the real estate agents and brokers and the high value dealers?

I would like to ask the Minister, or the Honourable Premier, does the Registrar or will the Registrar publish additional supervisory guidance or regulatory expectations similar to the Guidance Notes issued by

the Bermuda Monetary Authority? He did speak a bit to that in his brief. But where I am a little worried is that the Bermuda Monetary Authority typically offers an annual report and also their annual business plan which outlines what the regulated industry can anticipate from the Bermuda Monetary Authority which, by the way, makes them so effective. So that effectively, the industry can anticipate the supervisory priorities and then adjust according.

We are not seeing that right now because I don't see an annual report coming out that outlines these. So, if I can get the Honourable Premier to speak to whether or not they are going to shift even more into their competent authority and supervisor authority role by issuing these kinds of documents.

And I think we spoke to enforcement. And yes, that's it. Thank you, Madam Chairman, I appreciate.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak?

I recognise the Member from constituency 25.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Yes, thank you, Madam Chairman.

I do have one follow-up question on Head 39. We did hear some statistics about new company registrations. Could the Honourable Premier share how many companies have been struck off or are defunct, became defunct during the year on the register? So that would be good to know.

Moving on to Head 58, Madam Chairman. Excuse me while I flip through my pages here. And in this head I also will refer to the Schedule on page C-30 of debt and loan guarantees. So, turning to [page] C-30 and looking at Schedule 5. I know that the Minister of Housing has referred to a guarantee of \$90 million to fund his initiatives this year, so can we expect to see a \$90 million guarantee from the BHC loan, [and] also show up in this table in next year's budget, Madam Chairman? So that's page C-30, Schedule 5.

We also see, Madam Chairman, a \$664 million guarantee for the Bermuda Hospitals Board. We understand that is for, you know, the total value of all the payments and interest over the next 20-odd years. But I just want to confirm with the Honourable Premier, just confirm who that guarantee is actually provided to. Who's the ultimate beneficiary of it? Like receiving the cash flows that are guaranteed. And how long do we anticipate that guarantee to stay on the Government's books? And what payments are guaranteed this year by that guarantee, Madam Chairman?

Also, the same table, we see \$75 million for the Fairmont Southampton. And I did mention just in last year's debate, you know, I used to work at a company [that] had a sign on the wall that basically said, *If you don't know why they're buying it, don't sell it.* The fact that this company is paying for this guarantee tells you there is risk in it, and therefore the Government is being compensated for that risk. I would like to know, What is

the Government's estimation of how long this guarantee will be in force, this \$75 million guarantee? I noted in last year's debate, Madam Chairman, it was stated that Bermuda can expect a reopening of this iconic building in April 2026. I am presuming we are not going to see it reopen next month. So, what is the current date of reopening?

We have heard about the Debt Management strategy. Basically, now turning back to the . . . Well, referring to the sort of main summary of Head 58 on page B-133. We would like to know exactly how the Government will put that Debt Management Committee into place. Who will be involved? And what powers will that committee have? Will it write reports and recommendations, or will it have a bit of a stronger oomph?

And then, Madam Chairman, I am flipping back to page C-30. And we have the Sinking Fund. We know that the actual number at the end of 2024/25 was \$22.746 million. And I believe the actual number for the prior year, 2023/24 was \$93.9 million. So, by my math that's around \$72-odd million that was spent out of the Sinking Fund.

I would like to know, confirm, which bits got spent on what. I know I have heard various different things, like GEHI, other expenses. And I know that some of those expenses are now included in the regular expenses in the Budget Book. So, I guess I would put a question to the Government that, If the expenses that had been paid out of the Sinking Fund between 2023/24 and 2024/25 had been actually put in the same place in the budget as they are this year, does the Government agree that it would not have been a "technical surplus" (quote/unquote) for 2024/25. So, that's my question there, Madam Chairman.

Now we know there isn't a table necessarily that shows the maturities of debt here, but we know that we have the \$605 million of debt due early next year. And an additional \$1.1 billion due at the end of 2029, beginning of 2030. One thing is (if I flip to the front of the book and I look at the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework [MTEF]), it doesn't seem to me that that allows the Government to put enough money away to properly pay down fully that debt that comes due in 2029 and 2030. And I would like to know what the Government's current thinking is on how it will handle the debt at that time, Madam Chairman.

Just checking my notes over before I take my seat.

Well, I think I am going to leave it at that, Madam Chairman, because we had quite a few questions and the Premier was kind enough to give us ample time and I would like to also respect that and give him ample time to provide his answers at this time.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to speak at this time?

No? Okay, I recognise the Junior Minister of Finance, the Member from constituency 6, MP Furbert.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, the Opposition did not ask many [questions] in regard to Heads 12, 28 and 38 but I will do my best to answer some of the questions that they put forward here.

One of the questions was, Why is there . . . I think you asked, Why is there a decrease in payroll tax? Did you ask that question?

[No audible answer]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, if you recall, a decrease of 0.5 per cent across bands, additional tax relief will be provided to employers who employ persons . . . remember the 65 years and older? If anyone is working over 65 and older within a company, payroll tax by employers, which affects the whole payroll tax itself, will cause a decrease in payroll tax. That is one of the main reasons why that will take place. Is that clear to the Honourable Member?

[No audible response]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Is that clear to the Honourable Member? Okay.

That was one of the questions.

The other question, I believe . . . How did the Ministry get to a 2 per cent increase in insurance service tax? You, as a finance person yourself, and myself as an accountant . . . budgeting is, to some degree, as you take what we call a "conservative approach" when doing budgeting, unless you clearly know there is significant growth going to take place, or significant increase within a sector such as rate increases. So, if there's rate increases, then you expect a larger increase within a certain part of the budget. But if there's no rate increase in particular, then you use a conservative approach.

We took a 2 per cent conservative approach in this regard, because if you look at the 2024/25 actual, we had budgeted for \$6.7 million. We actually came in for 2025/26, original at \$6.2 [million]. And we just took a conservative approach in regard to actually budgeting. Madam Chairman, 10 per cent would have been probably more ridiculous. If we do see the growth, then of course we applaud. As you notice, sometimes we get growth within certain departments, whether it's payroll tax, because a lot more business come on board. I'm looking at the bigger ones, Customs in particular. People are buying more. So, we budget for it, and we pray that there is a larger increase. And so, we took a conservative approach in this regard to 2 per cent.

Why has foreign currency tax revenue increased? Well, I believe the Honourable Member pretty well answered that question himself. The foreign

currency tax is 1.25 per cent on whatever. So, you purchase some goods and services, 1.25 per cent. If you are sending your whatever overseas, then you pay 1.25 per cent. So that is where we come into being in that regard. So, we anticipate—

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Point of clarification, if the member will accept it?

The Chairman: Yes, Member.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: No, I understand what the Member is saying. But we just heard about the conservative 2 per cent for the insurance tax. So, I'm just trying to understand why 9 per cent was chosen for the FCPT [Foreign Currency Purchase Tax] tax. Thank you, Madam Chairman. And thank you. Member.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Well, one thing could be—

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —Trump's tariffs, which caused quite an impact in the growth or percentage of buying whatever, a car or whatever it is, could cause the increase in certain things, which would cause a 1.25 per cent. So, those types of things.

The insurance service tax is much more conservative because a lot of those things are dealt with within Bermuda itself. But the other thing, foreign currency purchase tax, we are impacted by other decisions made by other jurisdictions which could cause some things to increase. Hence, we get the increase could take effect. Hence, why we did a large number. It could come in smaller. It could come in larger.

We look at the number itself. We did \$32.3 budgeted for . . . sorry, \$32 million in original in 2025/26, but revised was \$35 million. We are only going up \$35,800. Hence, why. So, you look at what the original budget is. We look at the revised, and then we say, *okay. The revised went up to "X" amount, so let's budget for so much more.* You could not put it at 2 per cent or whatever because it would be much lower than what the actual amount came in at. So, we use that approach to when we are actually doing our budgeting.

Any further questions?

The Chairman: Junior Minister, you can continue.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: All right. Okay. Let's see. I think the other ones had the original companies. Do you recall any other ones that were impacted the C . . . the 11 . . . I have an answer, Member.

An Hon. Member: It has to do with—

The Chairman: Minister.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: I don't think there were many . . . Customs, Social Insurance, and also Tax Submissions anything that you can recall that . . .

The Chairman: Junior Minister, you are requesting that he just give you some—

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Yes, just clarification on other things,—

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: —because he didn't ask. What were the main questions on those topics itself?

The Chairman: There were some questions on Head 10 and . . . definitely Head 10, Gaming Commission.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: It comes under the Premier. Anything further on [Heads] 12, 28, and 38 I've missed?

The Chairman: Member from [constituency] 25, would you like to assist and just put forward any further questions on the Heads?

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Well, there were quite a few, but I mean, I'll just leave with a refresher or two. Are we going to get digital social insurance bills? And why do only one-third of the delinquent companies for social insurance end up getting judgments? Thank you.

Hon. Wayne L. Furbert: Well, that part . . . well, digital, we are still working on that, Honourable Member, and hopefully we can get the, particularly the social insurance part more up to date in this year's budget. More funds have been given, and so we hope to have that more in place.

Regarding the actual judgment, I'm not at . . . I don't know too much about that. If an answer comes forward before we close out, I will try to get that answer to you.

Hon. E. David Burt: May I, Madam Chairman?

The Chairman: I recognise the Premier and Minister of Finance.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

I'll try to deal with the questions. Can you confirm for me how much time we have, and when does this end?

The Chairman: We have approximately 35 minutes, and we will be completing at 8:42.

Hon. E. David Burt: It looks like a sugar tax on the whole table.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: It's like, how did I . . . mercy. I feel tempted. All right. Thank you, Madam Chairman. I will look to answer as many of the questions as possible.

I will commence with Head 10.

First question from the Honourable Member for constituency 25. We will soon be publishing public reports on CIT income, et cetera. CITA manages the collection and compliance process for CIT revenues. But these receipts are accounted for in the tax reserve fund. Accountability for this fund sits with the Accountant General, who is required under the tax reserve regulations within six months after the last day of each financial year to sign and deliver to the Minister and the Auditor General on audited accounts showing the true financial position of the fund. The Minister calls the funds together with the report of the Auditor General thereon to be laid before both Houses of the Legislature. This will include the aggregated data on tax receipts. We will collaborate with stakeholders and the Auditor General ahead of determining the income disclosures that the Government will make available in our audited accounts. Much of the detail on credits, et cetera, is not available at this point in advance of the audited numbers.

Taxpayers self-assess their contributions, and these are not validated until the October 2026 filings. This is why this Government has introduced fiscal rules to support prudent management of public finances in light of this uncertainty.

Next question from the Honourable Member for constituency 25, the Shadow Minister for Finance, on Head 10. Has there been stress testing of CIT revenue? I won't go into the whole question. Yes, the Government's model includes low, medium, and high. These scenarios include models that incorporate actual fiscal performance of constituent taxpayers during stress scenarios with the information available. For example, during 2020/23, significant damage was incurred during hurricane season, an example, through Hurricane Ian. The rules for the stabilisation fund debt management strategy will plan utilising these different scenarios.

Our risk management approach is subject to external oversight through the Financial Policy Council with BMA alignment facilitated through the Financial Policy Council Technical Committee, which is a sub-committee of the Financial Policy Council. And just as a note, I mean, the Shadow Minister can ask the questions. It's fine. But I think that it is . . . rich, I would say . . . because I want to use another word. (But I'm going to try to be polite. This is one of the things for the Speaker.)

After a government has introduced a corporate income tax that is a very difficult thing. And after we

have had significant amounts of funds spent on the best consultants in the world and with the best tax laws and everything else, that these are the types of questions of which we get from the Opposition. Have we done a stress test? Clearly, we have. That is just the basic level of what you do when you are estimating for certain things. And so, it's kind of like, *really?* Come on now.

POINT OF ORDER

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Madam Chairman, point of order.

Madam Chairman, the Premier is basically insulting us for asking straightforward questions that have not been answered in this House before. That's all. All he has to do is answer the question, Madam Chairman. That's it. This is our avenue on behalf of the people to [ask] these questions. So, I would ask the Premier just to answer the questions.

Thank you, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.
The Premier will continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: I will answer the questions as I wish, and I'll make comments as I do. And that is where it will be, because the thought that, you know, someone would say, you know, *Did you do a stress test?* Come on now.

Okay, let me move on. There's another one. I think it's Head 11. A question from the Honourable Member from constituency 25, the Shadow Minister of Finance, recipient of BHP guarantee payments, covered amounts of payments this year and covered next, guaranteed a health service, annual service payment of \$33 million, which is in the public domain; guaranteed estimate for a 30-year period between 2024 to . . . 2014 to 2024, financial statement guarantee as of 31st of March, \$663.9 million. And as we have covered in the past, that amount, due to a change in accounting standards, was not recorded as the outstanding payment, but a different thing. People can look back in the Hansard for that explanation. It was given multiple times when that change was made a couple of years ago.

Head 11, also from the Shadow Minister of Finance, detail of money spent out of the Sinking Fund between 2023/24, 2024/25. [For] 2023/24 bond maturity 50, GEHI shortfall \$30.7 million, Gaming Commission loan repayment 9.7, working capital 20, and the rest. The budget deficit 2024/25, health care support MRF/UHC/BHB \$30 million; GEHI shortfall \$31 million, working capital \$25 million.

Contingency plan if CIT falls short. [I am] not entirely certain what to say on that. I mean, we have massive budget surpluses, so I am not entirely certain what the Honourable Shadow Minister is getting at. But government fiscal [rules] have been developed to mitigate this risk. Rule one, participant annual operations

and plain term day-to-day budget must maintain a balance of surplus including next corporate income tax revenues, capital spending, and interest costs. This rule ensures that the ongoing cost of running government is sustainable and not dependent on corporate income tax revenue or borrowing.

Fiscal rule two will support the allocation of funds to reduce net debt and build on net financial assets. Part of this allocation will be through a stabilisation fund to support management of the volatility of the fund. Further flexibility over the short term as we build resilience through the above rules is available for slowing down a very ambitious capital programme.

Government has stressed these scenarios per question one. Details of CIT payments, amounts, gross and reserve fund, et cetera, I refer the Honourable Member to the question that I answered first.

Fairmount Southampton Guarantee, actual name, how long will be in place. Expires once funds are repaid. Key risks to government guarantee being exercised during development phase, Clarion Bank Limited, and FirstCaribbean International Limited are the lenders.

Head 28 was not me, but I will answer anyhow. There's a question related to CPF reform plans from the Shadow Minister of Finance. And I think I covered that in the Budget Debate, but if not, the matter is still in discussion and we will provide further information. The Government is committed to a policy paper, so I'm not entirely certain what further clarity is requested and required at this point in time from budget matters. I think we stated where we're going to be going forward on this.

Head 11, a question from the Shadow Minister of Finance, GEHI sustainability issues and plan for reforming. We await the 2026 Actuarial Report. After review, the Ministry of Finance will determine the next steps in the interim. GEHI rates have been increased for this year and 2026/27, which begin to mitigate sustainability. Also, there is the matter related to the unification administration between HID [Health Insurance Department] and GEHI and also the upcoming core benefits package for the universal health coverage, which is set to launch later this year, which will have impacts on GEHI, as GEHI, like all other plans, as it is currently now, is a supplemental insurance over the basic level of where we are.

Gaming Commission revenue to the Gaming Commission from companies and operations regulated, industry revenue in companies regulated by BSE. Gaming Commission to the Supervisory Authority for casino gaming, betting, and other game-related activities. Principal objects of the commission are to maintain and administer systems for licensing, supervision, and control of gaming in Bermuda pursuant to section 8 of the [Casino Gaming] Act 2014. There are five full-time employees currently there. We do not have the specifics of what has been asked for. Presently, BGC will receive revenues from entities in the form of fees

related to registration and licensing, 2026 estimate for cruise ships, casino, \$830,000, and for other sectors, \$5,000. Moving on.

The question, again, I think this is from the Honourable Member for constituency 23. Real expectations for banking being available in the gaming sector. That, again, deserves some private sector appetite. And the challenge is that there is not necessarily the private sector appetite to be there. The restricted bank framework was modified in 2024. Discussions are held with the US Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, held in 2025. Positive Bermuda Bank in New York Mellon. Positive Bermuda said that everything that is in place, but this is a matter related to the private sector.

This is something that we continue to leave with the Gaming Commission in and of itself, and the answer may have to be that, I mean, if we get to that point, maybe the Government has to form its own bank. I don't know what to say. But the reality is that there is not the appetite in the private sector. We know from the banks that are already there. There was one bank that was interested, but the challenge is that without a large volume of casinos the singular casino that is wanting these particular services is not providing the volume on the commercial side, which has already been answered in the private sector. So, from the perspective of where we look at, there is a question of the anticipation of the opening of Fairmount Southampton. They have a casino licence. Whether or not they get there, because that's the feedback from the private sector, there is not enough demand or business to make it viable from that particular angle.

FPC [Financial Policy Council] recommendations for the following year. Those matters are in the public domain, and a press release was sent out. There was a question on [page] C-11 capital acquisitions for miscellaneous furniture and equipment. Fundings utilised for Ministry of Finance (MOF) capital requests, ZBB website development, furniture, along with emergency minor capital acquisition requests for all government departments during the year.

We discussed matters related to Middle East consultants during the Cabinet Office. Cross Ministry transformation fund, what will the process be on submission for expenditure? Who gives approval? Why not put it in the Ministry to do the work? I think that was answered already, that we are putting provision in funds, so certain things may come up during the year. But the process is that all matters need to follow regular procurement processes and be approved by the Cabinet.

And I am quite certain that Ministers will be happy to share the matters of which they have been awarded too, and the process which we are doing. One of the main projects which we are trying to do, colleagues will recognise that there is not the speed and volume of legislation that would be wished and desired, and that is one of the main and primary projects that is

going to be looked at from the particular matters with the AI items.

The Cabinet has not finalised items regarding the on-chain economy. I think that food security is pretty self-explanatory, but we will be speaking more about those particular items. And as I said inside of the Budget Debate, these are for public sector as well as possibly for private sector grants that do go along with meeting on this. So, when people are talking about matters related to food security or related to things that can make sure that we process more food here on Island, deal with matters of supply chain, our resilience and security, those are those funds that are there. This is similar to what they have done in Canada, similar with the United Kingdom, et cetera, put those things there. So, the reason why it is not there is because not all of these may be inside of the government itself.

Sovereign Wealth Fund, no estimate assigned. The assessment, it was a question whether the first dollar to be deposited. The estimate assigned, the assessment will form part of the debt management strategy following advice from the Debt Management Committee. It is depending on future forecasts and Government rules put in place for the Sovereign Wealth Fund once we legislate.

There was a question regarding insurers being regulated, et cetera. The Government is on record, whether or not it's in our election manifesto, whether or not it's in the Throne Speeches, of the approach that it's taking in that aspect. So that answer is already in the public domain.

In regard to the question on tax credits, which was asked by the Shadow Minister of Finance. I refer him to the first [answer] that was given. If revised estimate for fiscal, 25 per cent of gross receipts confirm the math on gross. Yes, 25 [per cent], that level provided sufficient headroom against volatility in future revenue streams. Again, there was a question about allowance for tax credits. There was another, how much does the CIT relate to the 25 fiscal year, how much to the 2026 fiscal year? Refer the Honourable Member to the first [answer] that was given. How much is left in the tax reserve fund? Seventy-five percent of the funds received.

How much have companies paid to date? Refer to question number one. Are there plans for public accountability laying the reports of the CIT? We have already said that because the law states that those accounts need to be laid in the Legislature. I would have thought that the Shadow Minister of Finance would know that, as I am sure he would have read the law, as you know, he is a doctor. He studies these things.

Continuing on Head 10, net debt. Sorry? Did I miss something? No? Okay.

The Chairman: Continue.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

On Head 10, net debt to revenue. What is the best long-term target and numerical value prior long-

term targets for net debt to be 80 per cent of revenue? Targets will continue to be reviewed as we build our debt management Sovereign Wealth Fund and Stabilisation Fund Framework. Has the Government discussed the spending growth pool? The FRP were asked to consider fiscal rules during the latest report. The recommended tools, the ones the Government are implementing.

Auditing of the Pension Fund. Will these funds be brought up to date when the Consolidated Fund reporting roadmap begin? Both PSSF and CPF are currently being audited for 2021, so it's a brief. The Government is currently recruiting additional management accountants following the recent staff turnover and progress to the outstanding remaining audits in due course after hiring. This does require updated audit accounts of public authorities and the Accountant General continues to work with the Auditor General to determine a realistic timing when this took place.

I am guessing this question was from the Honourable Member for constituency 23, which says why has the NAMLC budget only increased by 5 per cent? Is this enough? Why are there no NAMLC performance measures? Who is involved in the AML or the NAMLC Cabinet Committee, not subcommittee? And there was a comment from the Honourable Member on matters related to high value goods. Performance measures, 5th Round effectiveness, the Office of NAMLC secretariat in support of effectiveness. The Office of NAMLC is the secretariat to support NAMLC's effectiveness and performance. So often when you talk about the effectiveness and performance, we found respected agencies and departments. So, I think it's important to note that the office of NAMLC and secretariat, not necessarily the work that is being done, which I think you kind of referenced in your comments. NAMLC activities. Additional NAMLC activities were funded from a grant from the Compensated Assets Fund, which does support the national initiative and further funding can be requested for these initiatives once the grant amount has been spent. NAMLC obligations are legislatively mandated pursuant to section 49 of the Proceeds of Crime legislation advancing Government's anti-money laundering, anti-terrorist financing policy initiatives.

The AML Cabinet Committee is chaired by myself, the Premier, and it consists of ministers who have NAMLC responsibilities and departments underneath their charge. In that case, it is the Minister of Justice, the Minister of National Security, the Minister of Economy and Labour, and the Minister of Youth, Social Development and Seniors. In addition, the permanent secretary sits as part of Cabinet committees as Cabinet committees also have membership of permanent secretaries.

There was a question about high-value goods. Dealers in high-value goods were not assessed as designated non-financial business professionals in Bermuda's 4th Round. The Recommendation 22 that tests the

technical compliance for designated non-financial business professions was rated compliant. An immediate outcome for that tests the effectiveness of DNFBPs, or casinos, real estate agents, dealers in precious metals, stones, and other independent legal advisors and trust company service providers.

When is the CFT risk assessment going to publish? The [INAUDIBLE] was at the Cabinet. The private sector was part of the risk assessment, and the presentation of findings was presented to both public and private stakeholders October 22 and 23, 2025. The public report is being worked on and will be released as soon as the matter is dealt with at Cabinet level.

When will the National Policy be released and tabled in the House? The National Policy was sent to Cabinet and will be tabled in the House. I don't know if there is any legislative requirement for [it to be] tabled in the House. It will be published. And as a note, those matters have been considered by the Cabinet, so they are probably finalising the items. They went to Cabinet a couple weeks ago.

I guess there was a question, What is the plan to get the people that the Accountant General needs? Of course, as Members know, we compete with the private sector for skill sets. With the introduction of the training programme, it is hoped to have qualified accountants on the training programme. Two trainees were recently recruited and there are plans to continue with that particular scheme. It is also important to note that for matters related to things in the private sector, we are going through, as mentioned, a full salary review to ensure that positions in the private sector are competitive with positions in the . . . sorry, in public sector are more competitive with positions in the private sector.

What future updates, amendments, to Financial Instructions? Updating to align with automation of the rental processes, more internal controls for fixed asset management, compliance payments processes. The last update was 2018. There is also an update for the use of credit cards as we consume a lot of our online services as well. Credit cards are not necessarily used for that. You have to have individual authorisation, so it is going to be setting up particular things there as well.

We did Trusted Trader . . . [Heads] 28, 29, 38. Head 39.

A question from the Shadow Minister of Finance. How does the Registrar of Companies supervisory work feed into AML/ATF risk assessment? The Registrar of Companies is a statutory member of the National Anti-Money Laundering Committee. In its capacity as a Registrar of Companies and Supervisor of Real Estate, the Registrar's responsibility is determined by the Proceeds of Crime framework as well as the Corporate Partnership framework. In this regard, the Supervisor of Real Estate also has responsibility for—

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: —high value dealers as well as dealers in precious metals and stones. There are a number of FATF standards applicable to Registrar of Companies. For example, legal persons are covered under [Recommendation] 24 while designated non-financial business professions are covered by a variety of FATF standards.

A question related to CSB. Oh, my goodness. Mediation issues are due to high expenditures. The issue is not one of CSB [INAUDIBLE]. FATF standard on beneficial ownership to be collected has changed to expand the number of data points. The BMA would not have had that data on transition to the ROC. Consequently, the ROC has required entities to file that additional data and has given them until June 30 to do so.

What is your plan this year to rectify the flaw in data which is going to have a high cost for me to aim? There is no flaw in the data or the system.

How many CSBs are affected by failed transfer? The requirement to file beneficial ownership information is placed on entities, not CSB's. This requirement to update beneficial ownership information into the new FATF standard impacts all entities. Next question.

I don't have a record of who it is from. Do we have enough people to oversee the quality in the sector? Why are staff numbers reduced by 50 per cent and how many people went through the licensing process? Why has there been a marginal increase in the training budget? Why are we seeing a significant increase in penalty revenue?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: I'll deal with it. It's just . . . no problem. You see it borders . . . All right. Responsibility for international tax compliance has been reassigned to the Corporate Income Tax Agency. That agency. The staff previously budgeted for the sector will no longer be recruited. The remaining seven positions will focus on domestic compliance.

Significant increase in penalty revenue. Significant training has been conducted in 2024, 2025, 2026 to provide support staff to all functionaries. Some staff members are currently seeking the Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist certification. The budget includes an increase of \$10,000 over the amount.

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Point of clarification?

Hon. E. David Burt: Sure.

The Chairman: I recognise the Member from constituency 23.

POINT OF CLARIFICATION

Mr. Jarion Richardson: Yes, just if I could, if the Honourable Premier could perhaps speak a little louder into

the microphone because I just can't capture everything he is saying. It sounds very quiet and I also go through these later on. So, thanks.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Premier, he is asking you to raise your voice up.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. E. David Burt: This is the first time that someone has said that I do not have a loud voice. My goodness, I must be really tired. That is the first. I have been called many things but "not loud" is one. Should I give you like some Florida Air Academy like, you know, commands? That's the voice you want?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: All right, no problem. I'll go back there. My sincere apologies. That's the first I've ever heard that, ever. I'll try it again.

Significant training has been conducted in fiscal year 2025/26. Provide support for staff in all functional areas. Some staff members are currently seeking the Certified Anti-Money Laundering Specialist, ACAM certification. Budget includes an increase of \$10,000 over the 2025/26 amount.

And then it says, while we are seeing a significant increase in penalty revenue, there's no increase in projected revenue from penalties over 2025/26. However, RoC has increased its enforcement activity and has issued significant fines for noncompliance. Part of demonstrating effectiveness, as you would know.

How is there going to be an increase in inspection of new investment technology? RoC is investing \$800,000 in new technology that facilitates better data analysis for the purpose of compliance.

Will the Registrar produce guidance like the BMA? The RoC is currently drafting guidance to be issued in the near term to address many of its expanded functions.

How many companies have been struck off the register? Approximately 1,500 companies struck off the register in the last year, including some backlog. This has been partially offset by adding 822 new company registrations.

In 2025, the projection is approximately 400 entities will be struck annually. Madam Chairman, \$90 million guarantee on BHC next year. This guarantee will be included, subject to the detailed due diligence that's underway and ahead of the finalisation of the plans. That is the reason why it would not be listed until it is executed. And as the Shadow Minister would know, as per the Government Loans Act, I must table a guarantee once one is actually executed. And so, when it's executed, it will be tabled here. And that is the process that must be followed as per law.

Who is a beneficiary of the 600? We already answered that one. How long will the guarantee be enforced? We already answered that one. When will the Fairmont Southampton open? We'll get you an answer for that one. I don't have one here.

How will the debt management . . . I think they are planning for their soft opening this summer. So, I'm not . . . I don't think that's a change. If the Minister of Tourism has more updated information, he can certainly give me that.

How will the debt management panel be done? Work required . . . so let me just answer this because there's an answer here. We have had a Debt Management Committee before. Debt Management Committee is an ad hoc committee that just provides advice to the Minister of Finance. I can't remember the names of the people on it. It was Barclay [Simmons], Lothar Crofton, I believe, a few other persons. If the FS [financial secretary] can type the old names in this sheet, I would greatly appreciate it so I can share. Those are the old persons who are on the committee. We haven't had a need for that committee since around 2021 seeing that, unlike the former Government, when we raised money for multiple years, we didn't spend it all.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh-oh!

Hon. E. David Burt: And therefore, we were able to carry that on and do certain things with it. So, the Debt Management Committee has not necessarily been in existence. The last time they gave advice was on our refinancing strategy that led up to our 2018 refinancing and the refinances that were conducted during the pandemic in 2021.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: The names are here. You just deleted them. Oh, there they are. They are there again. Barclay Simmons, Lothar Crofton, Nathan Kolawski, and Brian Keats were the people who were on the Debt Advisory Committee before.

But as I said, it's informal advisory committee to the Minister of Finance that just basically states the management functions. Remember, all management functions in regard to debt and management under law are given to the Minister of Finance. The Minister of Finance exercises those responsibilities in exclusion to the Cabinet, though the process is you always seek your Cabinet colleagues' views on these particular matters, though those things reside under the Constitution and law in the hands of the Minister of Finance and not necessarily subjective to collective responsibility.

We have already answered matters related to the Sinking Fund. All right. I think that's it. Thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier.

We have approximately five minutes, actually six minutes left.

I recognise the Member from constituency 25.

Dr. Douglas DeCouto: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

I actually don't have any questions, but I did want to say thank you very much to the Premier for providing a nice balance for time for the brief and time for questions. And obviously, we would be remiss not to thank the Financial Secretary. We have heard several names mentioned by the Premier, Ms. Tucker and her team who prepared this beautiful Budget Book, which we have all been lugging around, and we have one more week of it. So, I would be grateful if the Financial Secretary would relay that to his team and our deepest appreciation for the work that they do through this process and supporting this debate that we have.

Thank you, Madam Chairman, and thank you.

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

I'm sure that the Ministry of Finance Members will appreciate these comments.

So, no further speaker at this time.
Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Madam Chairman, I move that Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39, and 58 be approved as printed.

The Chairman: It has been moved that Heads 10, 11, 12, 28, 38, 39, and 58 be approved.

Is there any objection to that motion?
No objection.

[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 2026/27.]

The Chairman: Premier, I believe we've come to the end of today's proceedings.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

Madam 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, report progress, and ask for leave to sit again on Monday, March 9.

Is there any objection to that motion?
No objection.
Thank you.

[Motion carried: The Committee of Supply rose and reported progress and asked for leave to sit again.]

House resumed at 8:38 pm

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

COMMITTEE OF SUPPLY

ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE FOR THE YEAR 2026/27

The Speaker: Good evening, Members. How is everyone this evening?

Are there any objections to the Estimates of Revenue [and Expenditure] for the year 2026/27 being reported to the House?

There are none. Thank you. They are now reported back to the House.

Members, there is one other item on the Order Paper that we are going to do tonight, and that is Order No. 3. It's the second reading for the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 in the name of the Minister of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport.

Minister.

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that the Bill entitled Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 be now read a second time.

The Speaker: Any objections? Any objections to that?

There are no objections.
Continue, Minister.

BILL

SECOND READING

MOTOR CAR (RIDESHARING) AMENDMENT ACT 2026

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

Mr. Speaker, the Bill before this Honourable House is the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026, which provides for the introduction and operation of a ridesharing service to augment the public transportation system to improve accessibility to all locations and to reduce passenger wait times.

Mr. Speaker, one of the 2022 Throne Speech initiatives was the modernisation and harmonisation of the public service vehicle industry, as the number one complaint of visitors to Bermuda is the inability of our transport system to effectively move people around the Island.

Mr. Speaker, ridesharing refers to a transportation service where individuals approved to provide ridesharing services use approved private vehicles to provide rides to others in exchange for cashless payment. Mr. Speaker, ridesharing service will fall under the oversight of the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board. The Board's enhanced responsibilities will include areas such as the determination of applications

for ridesharing permits and the granting of rideshare permits. The Board may also refuse to grant a rideshare permit where the applicant does not meet all of the necessary requirements. The Board will also have the power to suspend or revoke a ridesharing permit where the ridesharing permit holder or operator breaches the law.

Mr. Speaker, those approved to participate as ridesharing permit holders and ridesharing operators will be governed by new regulations and existing regulations related to public service vehicles. This involves using a mobile app with an approved dispatch service that will connect passengers with rideshare operators. This means there will be no hailing from the street or hires from a rank lined up at various locations as is the case for the taxi industry.

Mr. Speaker, safety is of paramount importance. Therefore, those applying for the rideshare permits will be subject to a criminal record check and a traffic offence record check. In addition, Mr. Speaker, those who pass both checks will be required to have their private vehicles go through an enhanced inspection by the Transport Control Department. Once the vehicle passes the inspection, the individual must evidence that they have purchased motor vehicle insurance that includes ridesharing.

Mr. Speaker, a person granted a ridesharing permit and an approved ridesharing operator must register with all approved dispatching services. Registration will be free of charge because the dispatch service will be required to adopt a fee-per-ride model. Under this structure, the dispatching service earns a fixed fee for a ridesharing service. This model ensures dispatching companies are compensated proportionally to the volume of rides facilitated, thereby promoting a model that avoids annual or quarterly membership fees in favour of the dispatching service resulting in more flexibility and equability. This approach not only mitigates financial barriers to entry but also incentivises dispatching companies to enhance their service offerings and infrastructure to attract and retain clients. The fee-per-ride model will be incorporated into every ride, becoming a component for the total cost borne by the passenger.

Mr. Speaker, this new transportation service option is one that has passenger safety as one of its underlying principles. Therefore, any person who provides ridesharing service without adhering to the legislation commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine not exceeding \$10,000.

Mr. Speaker, to provide clarity and transparency regarding the financial aspects of operating a rideshare business, a ridesharing permit will cost \$1,000 per vehicle per annum, and the payroll tax obligation to permit holders will be \$400 per annum. There will be no additional licence fee obligation for ridesharing.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry remains committed to protecting taxi owners' livelihood. Mr. Speaker, the

Ministry remains committed to protecting taxi operators' livelihood, and the new transportation service provides locals and visitors with another option should no taxis be available when needed.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this Bill, which is evidence of the Government's ongoing commitment to modernising transportation for locals and to ensure that there are more public service vehicles available to effectively transport people around the Island.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

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

MP Robinson, you have the floor.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you so much, Mr. Speaker, and good evening to the listening audience and good evening to colleagues.

I will make sure that my comments hold the weight of what we are discussing here, and that is people's livelihoods and the ability to make a living in Bermuda. So, I will not say anything lightly, as that is a huge weight for anyone who is in a leadership position. But this is a mix of livelihood and convenience. And as leaders we have to consider that.

Some lawyers will be able to . . . most lawyers will be able to represent one side of this. And in this Chamber we represent both—the taxi operators, the minibus drivers, and the customers who utilise it. And so, logically, just making high-level comments here, logically, in my mind, the Minister had two choices with this. The first choice would be to have leaned in to enforce and ensure that the regulation of our current industry was up to par and try to work from there. Or the second option would be to have just allowed rideshare to come in and let the industry take its natural course. As we know, in smaller jurisdictions, rideshare usually, or any Uber-*esk* App usually leads to the decimation of the taxi industry.

But what we have gotten in this legislation is a fusion of both, which will please nobody. In this case, you have the priority being taxi drivers, which we support, but we also have—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: I am, yes, absolutely, Minister. Thank you, Premier, appreciate it. I can't wait for your time to weigh in.

Here, we have a fusion where, yes, taxi drivers have priority. But also the rideshare drivers are restricted to certain times and only on a catch-all basis. So, presenting it to the public as another option is a technicality. It is more so still the same system of having to go through a dispatch and go for a taxi. And when the taxi cannot pick you up, that is when you have an option for rideshare. It is not an option where you can

go straight to the rideshare. So, I think that in that case, it presents—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: No, no, no.

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Let me finish, I'm getting there.

[Laughter]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: What I'm talking about here is the fact that it has been presented to the public as this Uber-esk service where they will be able to bypass or to get around taxi drivers. And this is—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: But that is what the public perception is. That is what the public perception is.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Well, I'll speak to you, Mr. Speaker. But that's what the public's perception is.

So, we know that the compensation . . . that that option there has not been explored because there's been no talk about how taxi drivers will be compensated or anyone who is now utilising a \$100,000 permit with that option of rideshare and Uber being brought in. So, we now know that we're getting a fusion of these two things where folks are going to be disappointed on both ends.

So, there were potential ways in which . . . and we have long supported the enforcement and the proper regulation of the current industry. So, we do not, as a party, have issues with rideshare as a concept. What we have issues with is the unintended consequences that this potential legislation will bring when utilised in a way that seems to hamstring both sides of the fence.

So, we . . . there are . . . if it was a method . . . if it was an issue with the number of people who are getting lifts or that there was an issue with volume, then why not temporary taxi permits? Like, why hasn't the Government shown the public that it was willing to work with the taxi industry first to fill a lot of these gaps? There has not been a case made for how rideshare—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of information, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Do you wish to take a point of information?

POINT OF INFORMATION

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Honourable Member from the other side has made a comment, *Why hasn't the Government shown the taxi industry that we are willing to work with them?* Mr. Speaker, I have the fortunate situation where I have been involved in this industry for a very long time. And history will show that there is a current taxi company that is currently owned and operated by taxi owners and operators because the Government back a few administrations ago took a very strong stance of working with the taxi industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, that's just a point of information that the Honourable Member may not know of, but the history shows that this Government has made many concessions, including the one that is in the Bill, in the best interest of the taxi industry.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Member.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and it's very interesting to hear that point of information. Why I allowed it was because we have heard from the Bermuda Taxi Owners and Operators Association [BTOA] that that is in fact not the case, that they have not been consulted or worked with. And that is something that the Minister can work out with them. He does not have to work it out with me.

But at the end of the day, there are—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

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

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Honourable Member from the other side is misleading the House.

In my point of information, Mr. Speaker, I never mentioned the current Bermuda Taxi Owners [and Operators] Association. Mr. Speaker, they were not around 25 years ago when I spoke of what the Government had done many administrations ago. So, while the Honourable Member is speaking of a current association, the point of information that I made, Mr. Speaker, was one that precedes and predates what we currently have.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: To be clear, you're referencing 25 years ago.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Yes.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that is truly a point of order. At the end of the day, we are in the present time, and we have to go with what is

happening in the present day, and we are debating present legislation. This amendment is happening today, and the taxi drivers have made themselves quite clear through the BTOA that they feel as though there has not been consultation.

And as I said, he can work that out with them. He does not need to work it out with me. I am not a member of the BTOA. So that's what it is.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And let me segue really quick, Mr. Speaker, because I hear a lot of chatter in this Chamber, and I want to be clear that these taxi drivers and the rideshare, all of us are part of this community at the end of the day. Right? And it's okay to make these comments on the floor of this House, but you have to face those folks at the end of it. And I am almost certain that we do not want to let this debate segue into that. So, let's just stick to what we are talking about, and that is the amendment tonight.

Taxi drivers continue to service 87 per cent of our visitors. So, this particular amendment is not addressing the core and systemic issues that are currently plaguing our transport system. So, you have an enforcement issue, and by dumping more cars and more rideshare drivers into this particular thing, it is going to bleed into any new layer of transport that we introduce. And I take point that do we know that all drivers are on the road 16 hours? Do we know how many taxi drivers are truly in operation on the road? And this is some of the same issues we will have with rideshare. Because if we are not proving to the public that we can properly police and manage what we have now, how can they have faith that we will be able to police and manage a new layer to this transport system?

And keep in mind that this is tied to the dispatchers. And at this time, there have not been any concrete solutions given to the dispatchers about unlicensed and unregulated dispatch. And that is happening now, where people are basically going around the licensed dispatchers. And so how is adding rideshare going to fix that issue?

And this is why we say you must prove first that you can enforce what you have, because at the end of the day, we can see rideshare drivers fall into the same habits of not servicing certain parts of the area. This is not about whether you are pro or for taxi drivers. This is about how are we going to ensure that this works best for the public. And it's not working now. And the same issues that are plaguing the taxi industry will be the same issues plaguing rideshare drivers, but for a cheaper cost.

And so how do we know that there is truly a supply and demand here when we do not even have our current system functioning optimally? So, if right now, if it was 600 taxis on the road running 16 hours a day, would we still be discussing rideshare? So, at the end of the day, are we truly addressing the systemic

issues that are coming forward from the industry who is asking Government to properly regulate? They are asking Government for more enforcement, and for some reason it seems like they refuse to comply and wish to go and add more layers to that without addressing that particular thing.

Right now, there are claims that the regulation of the current industry such as limos, minibuses, and taxis are not on par right now with each other. So now you add a fourth category. And this is something that I cannot find the logic in. And that's what I was hoping to hear from the Minister as to what statistics led us here. And I recall eight-year-old data that was cited in a previous debate. But that is not addressing the issues that have been brought forward now.

And there is also another layer to this. It's that a lot of folks believe, and this is something that has been prevalent in the community, that there is a special interest in getting this particular legislation passed. And again, we heard recently that there are now three dispatch companies, even though now the BTOA has one that has been given a licence, which is good to hear. But there is also folks who are high up in this Government that have interest in one of these dispatch companies that is set to, you know, create a degree—

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. E. David Burt: Because what I will not allow, Mr. Speaker, is for this debate to go—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, the debate, the interest is declared on the what's-it-called . . . and before we go further down this . . . before we go down this road, we all know, and it is a matter of public record, that I am a shareholder of Hitch Limited, which is a licensed dispatcher. It is on the Register of Public Interest. It is there. So, the Honourable Member does not have to allude and say anything else. Those are the facts.

And as I have said on this House before, I have no operational involvement with that company since I have been the Premier of this country. And I want that to be clear. Let's debate the policy and the law in front of us and not personalities, Mr. Speaker. And I sincerely know that you will make sure this debate goes on that good road.

The Speaker: And the fact that you have raised that, I hope that crosses the line for any debate going forward after our last issue addressing this before we broke for Christmas, that that type of debate of personalities and personal issues does not enter into any of our debates

going forward from either Member of this House, any Member of this House.

Member.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And I put it that way to avoid that, to be honest, Mr. Speaker. But it is the truth. And that is . . . I'm speaking about how it is perceived in the community and in the industry. And I ain't going to say that it's everybody because obviously we can't generalise, but this is a prevalent point.

And I do believe that it has not been enough to address that point to make people feel comfortable with it. But at the end of the day, it is what it is. I'll leave it right there.

So, there's no doubt that this particular amendment will devalue a taxi permit. You literally now will have folks paying \$1,000 per annum.

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 is saying that this will devalue the taxi permit. The taxi permit is not based off of the number of permits given. Its value is increased every year by cost of living, 2 per cent, which has been done since 1953.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And I would invite that Honourable Member to explain how a taxi driver would satisfy not wanting to become a rideshare driver and pay \$1,000 per annum and do the exact same thing. There is nothing.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: There is none.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Honourable Member is misleading the House again. A rideshare cannot do the exact same thing as a taxi. Taxis can ply for hire. rideshares cannot.

The Speaker: Continue, Member.

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I see this is going to be quite an excitable one. So, at the end of the day, right—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: At the end of the day, right, if the legislation and this amendment stands as long as there are taxi drivers to still give priority to, if that is not the case, what happens? And that is something that, you know, we need to think about here.

In the end, I want to make it very clear that the One Bermuda Alliance supports modernisation of the transport industry and providing a good service to our customers. But we do not support dodging systemic issues in favour of Band-Aid fixes such as this. And so, at the end of the day, that will be judged by history.

And I hope that we understand that what happens in this Chamber will matriculate outside. And we, on this side of the House, want to see systemic changes, such as proper enforcement in our current industry, to make way for this. And also to clarify that, as it was stated, this is not an option for people; it is a catch-all and it is dodging what is actually going on.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Good evening, Mr. Speaker. Good evening, colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, we know, and the one thing that I can say about this topic, and I think we can all say about this topic, is that there is no shortage of comments, commentaries, suggestions, solutions, and what everyone thinks is going wrong. But what we cannot deny, and I will speak especially to the Member who just took his seat, is that this has been going on for far too long.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as a collector of political memorabilia, I have in my hand some sketches or political cartoons that appeared in *The Royal Gazette* in the mid-80s. This one is a picture of the then Tourism Minister sitting on a briefcase with cobwebs, tourists coming out of the airport, and Sir George Somers saying "taxi." Underneath it says, *Save your breath, Sir George, there is no easier way of getting one here than in St. George's*. Speaking about the taxi industry, 40-plus years ago. I think the Member who sat down would know the history of this, being a little less than 40 right now.

Another one from the *Bermuda Sun*. We all remember the *Bermuda Sun*. It shows—

An Hon. Member: It was before he was born.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Yes, before he was born.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: It shows a man and a woman; the woman is holding a net, and he is saying, *Get ready, one comes now*. Meaning they are trying to snag a taxi.

[Laughter]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: This is what we are talking about, coming back from the 1980s. And I will pass it to . . . so you can see it.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Are you actually tabling them or just—

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I can table it.

[Inaudible interjections]

An Hon. Member: Yes.

The Speaker: You can table them but make sure they end up here.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Here you go.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I will table this [because] I have copies of it. Because you [will] find them quite interesting.

So, Mr. Speaker, what we are discussing here is multi-generational issues. We are not talking about something that just happened yesterday. The discussion about securing a taxi is one we have all heard stories about. All of us have probably experienced . . . I know I have myself personally. But, Mr. Speaker, one thing I did not hear [from] the speaker who just sat down, because he talked about we are straddling the fence, but he only talked about the taxi industry.

What about the people who are affected by this? This is a real human issue. What about the person who has missed their doctor's appointment because they cannot find a ride, because someone did not want to pick them up in Middletown to bring them to Hamilton?

What about the person who has not been able to pick up their child on time because a taxi did not show up? What about that family function you want to go to that you go to every year, but nobody shows up to get you? What about the time you just want to get home from town, nothing goes, nothing comes, and you have to walk?

And last but not least, what about that person who is wheelchair-bound? Or that senior who needs

that car so they can just get out of the house, and their taxi has been cancelled or doesn't show up?

Mr. Speaker, that is the human aspect of this that we need to take into account. So, as I said, Mr. Speaker, this is a historical issue that we are dealing with here. We have heard similar complaints before. And again, for the speaker who had just sat down, in 1992 we had the price-gouging issue at the airport. But the then Government stepped in with a solution.

You know what the taxi industry's response was? *Why don't you just enforce the rules?* Sound familiar?

In 1996, Government launched a commission to look into the taxi industry. The response from the taxi industry? *Boycott the survey*.

In the year 2000, GPS was introduced, Mr. Speaker. In 2004, the taxis went on a 10-day strike so they would not have to [install] GPS systems in their taxis. And again, *enforce the rules*.

In 2019, a Green Paper was established. And again, push back on some of the solutions with the ring-all, catch-all phrase, *enforce the rules*. And now we stand here today hearing the same excuses, Mr. Speaker. This is a recurring theme, Mr. Speaker, going back over four decades, to anything the Government has tried to bring forth has been *enforce the rules*.

But, Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat confused. And I am going to explain why I am confused, Mr. Speaker. In virtually every professional organisation here in Bermuda, it is the professionals who police their members. Why do they do that? Because they know if one of their members is out of line and doing things wrong or incorrectly, it reflects on all of them. So, what we have here is an admittance by the BTOA that their members are just electing to wilfully [disobey] the rules. But what they are saying is, *We will not encourage them to obey the rules. We want you to do it. And if you do not do it, things will just need to stay the way they are*. How does that even make sense, Mr. Speaker? How does that even make sense?

Well, Mr. Speaker, I am not here to bash the taxi industry. I am only here to point out the obvious. Mr. Speaker, for nearly eight years, my office was at 44 Church Street. For those who do not know, that is the BHC building right next to MarketPlace. For eight years, Mr. Speaker, I walked out of that building, and there was a lineup of what we call gypsy cabs waiting to take people home with their groceries.

After eight years, Mr. Speaker, you get to know these guys, and you talk to them. They had weekly and daily trips set up. Pick someone up, bring them to get their groceries, and take that person back. And I can, Mr. Speaker, probably count on one hand the number of times I saw a taxi pull up to actually help these people who just wanted to do their grocery shopping.

Now, if someone can do that for eight years, and I am assuming much longer than that, surely, they are making money from it, Mr. Speaker. *Surely, they*

are making money from it. And the fact that the industry will not even bother to come and help those people tells us what, Mr. Speaker? It tells us that there is no interest in self-regulation. It is only an interest when the Minister brings legislation that says we are going to provide additional services. That is the only time we really hear anybody make any noise about that, Mr. Speaker.

But, Mr. Speaker, we also hear about *Where is the data?* What is actually in place to make us do that, Mr. Speaker? But I will speak to some data, Mr. Speaker, if you allow me to read here.

The Speaker: Yes.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: The Gap Score. “The Gap Score for transportation reliability, which measures the difference between visitor importance and satisfaction, is at 26 per cent in 2004 and is around 25 per cent in 2005.”

The Speaker: Where does the data come from?

Hon. Owen Darrell: The data is coming from the Department of Transportation.

While taxis touch 90 per cent of visitors, satisfaction numbers show only 50 per cent, Mr. Speaker. And, Mr. Speaker, in 2025, there were 257,883 ride requests, and over 82,000 of them went unanswered. That is a staggering 32 per cent of all ride requests that went unanswered.

So, Mr. Speaker, this legislation before us is a measured response to the issue we are talking about today. It introduces a cashless ride-sharing system that the Minister has spoken about quite eloquently.

But, Mr. Speaker, what was omitted from the presentation by the speaker who spoke before me is that this rideshare is different from what you would find in other jurisdictions. It goes beyond what they are offering because it introduces protections for the taxi industry up front. Protections, Mr. Speaker. A taxi must not answer the call before a rideshare can be summoned. You do not get any more protection than that. You say there are enough taxis on the road that can service the people, then ridesharing will never be an issue because they will always show up when someone calls, Mr. Speaker.

There are licensing restrictions. Only those with PSV licences can be rideshare [drivers]. As the young Member who sat down before me [said], that is people who drive taxis. So they might just want to do this, if they wish.

It is only seasonal, Mr. Speaker. It is not going to be all year long, and it is on limited hours if you use rideshare. It is cashless and digital. You cannot hail a rideshare from the side of the road. As the Minister points out, you cannot line up and wait for someone to hop in your car. You have to be attached to the app. And the app will only call you once no taxis have answered that call, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I was waiting for this to happen, because the Member who sat [down] before [me] has said this numerous times in the public domain. And he talks about systematic versus Band-Aid solutions and the like, Mr. Speaker. He has publicly said the OBA does not support Band-Aid solutions, which he equates this to, Mr. Speaker.

Well, Mr. Speaker, that argument is extremely weak when you look at the history of the One Bermuda Alliance when it comes to legislation such as this. The legislative historical narrative is weak. Because all I heard were talking points from a letter that was received from the BTOA, which was sent to all of us. And when I look at the historical narrative of the One Bermuda Alliance, to me it comes across as just pandering, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in 2012, the One Bermuda Alliance promised the taxi drivers we will get rid of GPS. Why did they say that? They said that because the Progressive Labour Party Government had said that we will have a . . . some sort of gentleman's agreement where we will not mark your taxi as being . . . we would not take your taxi off the road if you do not have the GPS in it. They said, *Oh, you are pandering to the taxi drivers. We are going to change the law for taxi drivers.*

And I will quote, Mr. Speaker, a quote from *The Royal Gazette*, April 22, 2013. “The One Bermuda Alliance dismissed the PLP's pledge of electioneering and vowed it would make the system optional rather than compulsory should it ever become the Government.”

And of course, as the story goes on, “The driver has accused the One Bermuda Alliance Government of reneging on its election promises. Very disappointed as the people of this country have been lied to again by the OBA Government.”

Last night, the Transport Ministry—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm reading *The Royal Gazette*.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: A story. I am reading *The Royal Gazette*.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: I'm reading *The Royal Gazette*.

But anyway, Mr. Speaker, I am speaking of the One Bermuda Alliance and their insistence on making election promises, or making promises based on hearsay, based on things they think are going to get persons to like them, but not following through.

All we have to do is look back at 2025 with the [Electoral] Reform Bill, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.
Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member is, unfortunately, getting personal and misleading the public. No one is looking for anyone to *like* anyone. It is about good legislation. And I take offence to the fact that he would think that we are trying to put legislation in place for *likes!*

The Speaker: I think we made a comment earlier about keeping the personalities out of it. Any little [thing] like that slips you down the wrong road.

Hon. Diallo V. S. Rabain: Well, I do apologise for that, Mr. Speaker, and I will take your guidance. It was not personal to any one particular person. When you have a philosophy of thought, I was just speaking to the philosophy of thought, Mr. Speaker. I know we went through it in this House when we dealt with the [Electoral] Reform Bill. And despite offers to work [together] and draft a bipartisan Bill, it was still moved forward and eventually ruled inadmissible, Mr. Speaker.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I started what I said, inaction today has a human cost. And that human cost is what I said, the senior at home unable to get out of their house. The mother unable to pick up her child. The person who is unable to get to the grocery store to pick up groceries. The missed appointment. Having to walk home because a taxi did not show up, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, this Government has done the hard work for taxi drivers, despite what anyone says. We have cut payroll tax by 40 per cent. We have made vehicle parts duty-free, Mr. Speaker. We have done what needs to be done to ensure that taxi drivers are given the benefit of the doubt so they can do the work they do.

But Mr. Speaker, despite that hard work to make it easier to operate a taxi, we still find ourselves in the position we find ourselves which these cartoons from the 1980s depict. The simple narrative is that if you want to find a taxi, they are difficult to find. If you ask anyone, you'll hear a story about waiting hours for a taxi to show up. That is the data that we are going by, Mr. Speaker. We are responding to the needs of our visitors. We are responding to the needs of our residents. And we are responding to their needs as they are asking us to put things in place.

I believe what the Minister has brought today is practical. It hits the right mark. It balances between protecting the taxi industry and providing additional

services for our people. And that, Mr. Speaker, is what we are talking about today. And that, Mr. Speaker, is legislation that is worthy of approval in this House.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Fahy, you have the floor.

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

Mr. Speaker, the previous speaker made some comments with which I will agree right off the bat. The taxi industry is notoriously difficult to deal with.

I sat in the current Minister's seat for a year as Minister of Tourism and Transport. And we introduced, as a Government, some things that were not very popular with the taxi drivers. So, in the first instance, I do not think you can call us weak. We introduced minicar legislation, which in itself made the taxi drivers go on a strike for a day or two and blockade hotels and things. And I was a Minister in charge at that period of time. And it was not fun.

Now, there were Members of that other side who said to me that if they became the Government, they would not increase the number of minicars. And, of course, they came into Government, and now we have two-seater minicars. And there are more and more. My point is that people's minds can be changed based on the circumstances of an industry.

Now, here is what I looked at because I can tell you that I was not a friend of taxi drivers for a very long time here. I would be worried about getting a taxi. [They would say] *Well, you're the guy who brought in minicars.* So, it is not about pandering here in any way, shape, or form. It is looking and saying what is the time and when should you pass a certain piece of legislation?

We can all have stories, Mr. Speaker, of being unable to get a taxi here and abroad. It happens to all of us, anywhere you go. Now, what the Government did do was present a Green Paper in 2019. And it was the Deputy Premier who actually, I think, was the Minister of Transport and presented that paper. And the Statement that he read at the time, and I have it here. It's the 17th of May 2019. I am happy to send it around. And the Minister, and I'll quote what he said.

¹⁴[W]e will start by implementing many of the hundreds of recommendations offered by our stakeholders who included residents, students, managers within public authorities, business groups, and visitors regarding, for example, the following:

- supporting taxi and minibus solutions relating to rates, central dispatching, and credit card acceptance;"

¹ [Official Hansard Report](#), 17 May 2019, pages 1551-1552

(Credit card acceptance, I do not believe, is mandatory. And we do not have central dispatching. So, that never happened.)

- Issuing 20 new special taxi permits (of the 88 special permits allowed by legislation) for five years to see if this will help alleviate some of the demand problems experienced at peak times and late in the evenings.”

(Mm-mm. I am not sure what the outcome of that was. I just do not know because it has not been really talked about.)

- Implementing speed camera and stoplight initiatives.”

Well, we know that it is not there. And it goes on. There are lots of things here that have talked about ways in which we can improve transport in Bermuda. That is the first thing.

But the thing I think that is of most importance, and that is what my colleague, Mr. Robinson, has been talking about, is that we are putting the cart before the horse. I do not have an issue with the idea of rideshare. But there are so many other things that have been identified first that we should try with all haste before we take that next step.

Now, why do I say that, Mr. Speaker? Well, on pages 82 and 83 of the Transport Green Paper, it laid out stakeholder comments and thoughts. And they are extensive. None of them in that particular piece, and you can look it up again, pages 82 and 83 of the Green Paper from the Government, actually go into detail on rideshare. And, in fact, if you look at 4.8.4 in that same Green Paper, it actually says . . . it is a throwaway line. I only found it today. It said *the Government said that they had given instructions to TCD to enforce the 16-hour taxi rule for them to be on the road*. Now, we know that never happened. So, it is very strange to say, *Oh, efforts have been made*. They have not. So, it seems like what we are doing is just adding more problems to things that have already not happened. You cannot self-police.

So, the previous speaker said, *Well, the taxi industry is not self-policing*. That is not their job. It is the job of TCD enforcement officers to make sure that taxis are doing what they are supposed to be doing under the legislation.

It seems to me that if we do not want the 16-hour rule in place —

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Honourable Member from the other side is misleading the House, Mr. Speaker. He is saying that it is the job of TCD to enforce, and they are not doing so.

Mr. Speaker, every single day, the Transport Control Department has a team of traffic enforcement officers who go out throughout this Island to enforce the traffic laws of this country, including those of the taxi drivers. So, to say, Mr. Speaker, to say that TCD is not enforcing is incorrect, and he is misleading the House, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point taken.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay. Mr. Speaker, maybe they are enforcing certain regulations. I do not know, we have not seen the data, and that is part of the problem. Maybe the Minister can bring to the House the number of enforcements that have been brought against taxis for not doing 16 hours a day. That will not be coming because it is not being done.

How many taxi drivers have been [told], *You have got to go home and change?* Because there are regulations that say what they're supposed to wear. If these things are antiquated, change the legislation. Take it out of legislation. Say that it is broken. We just cannot do the job. Take it out. And then we can look, and we can say, *Look, that is really not working, folks. We are going to do it some other way*. And that has not been happening.

I am going to take the liberty, if I may, with your leave, because it is a bit of reading, but I think it is important to share with the House and remind colleagues of what the Government's own [Green Paper](#) said about the feedback they got and let's . . . We can do a poll: *How many have actually been done?* before we jump to rideshare.

The Speaker: That is out of the Green Paper?

Hon. Michael Fahy: That is from the Green Paper.

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Pages 82 and 83, Mr. Speaker.

“Establish a Central Dispatching Service to better regulate the taxi industry under one umbrella and require each taxi operator to have a binding contract for each licensed taxi.”

Hon. E. David Burt: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: I know the Honourable Member knows better as Learned Member, but the fact is that a Green Paper that is produced for transportation lists all the options that are given by persons. I do not believe he is representing what the Government policy is. And I think it is important that he distinguish, because Green

Papers collect options and are for discussion purposes. So, I just wanted to make sure that he is crystal clear on those things as he continues his debate.

The Speaker: Well, he is reading from the Green Paper, which were opinions or options that were presented.

An Hon. Member: Very good.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I certainly did not in any way say it was Government policy. I said I am reading from stakeholder comments and thoughts.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I said that right from the beginning.

And I also said what the previous Minister said, that *we will start by implementing many of the hundreds of recommendations by our stakeholders*. And I listed out the people who the Minister said gave that feedback. There was no White Paper, I do not believe, that actually laid out all the things that they would do. So, they are cherry-picking from these comments and thoughts, because that is the only place that they have been published.

There was no draft legislation that was published before, after all of this happened in that Green Paper. We know the data that was used was from prior to that because that is what the Minister said last week when he tabled the Bill.

So, this is the part . . . this is the problem. We are ignoring all of the other suggestions that could be done to solve the problem. The thing is this—

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker—

Hon. Michael Fahy: —that could be done.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member is misleading the House. Since 2019, there have been numerous advancements and things that have been done on the particular matters that were raised inside the Green Paper. He is picking the ones that were not done. It is not okay to say that, rather that the things that have been done by numerous Ministers of Transport in this Government, which have been passed in this thing, such as extending hours, such as increasing particular matters. So, we cannot say that nothing was done, Mr. Speaker. That is not correct.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: To prevent any up-and-downs like we are having right now, the Member was reading from the Green Paper's suggestions. He will read the Green Paper's suggestions and when other Members rise to make their contributions, they can say what was done or what was not done. They can highlight that. The Member is simply reading the Green Paper, and it is from the opinion of the stakeholders. That is what he is highlighting.

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

Second,

“● Introduce taxi flat zone [fares] instead of Rate 1/2/3 and surcharges, like the minibuses, then everyone knows how much it will cost to go from point A to point B.

“● Make provision for more taxis with motorised wheelchair accessibility.

“● Increase taxi rates by allowing Rate 3 to start at 10pm instead of midnight.

“● Reduce taxi rates as they are too expensive.

“● Enforce the taxi's 16-hour per day rule and amend legislation so that every taxi vehicle permit is required to have two drivers to fulfil the 16-hour rule.

“● Revoke the taxi permits of operators who do not have their vehicle on the road 16-hours a day.

“● Make it illegal for taxi drivers to be selective in routes and short distances.”

([That] solves part of the problem that the Minister made mention of when he tabled and said that a lot of taxis won't go that short distance to Glebe Road. It is the same as the previous speaker said. That taxis won't go some of those short distances.)

“● Require all taxi operators to accept credit cards.

“● Implement an on-line customer reporting process to bring issues relating to taxi operators before the Public Service Vehicles Licensing Board for appropriate action.

“● Utilise a Taxi App to [help] satisfy demand during periods when taxis are generally not on the road, after 5pm and on weekends and holidays.”

(Some of the very stuff that this legislation is apparently going to fix.)

“● Taxi drivers should be required to pass a test or be interviewed every few years to ensure their skills remain satisfactory in terms of service quality and general knowledge.

“● Amend taxi regulations for 'tours . . .'" (I don't think that is relevant for this debate.)

“● Amend taxi regulations to allow the maximum number of passengers to increase from seven (7) to eight (8) . . .

“● Implement an island-wide Taxi-[Ride]-Share programme, with per person fares booked on demand via an app.

“● Create a 'fee' for passengers to pay only if they vomit in a taxi.”

And then it goes on about different permits that can be done. So, I have read for the Premier's edification, every single one of those points. This House can determine which of those perhaps could have been considered in more detail prior to this legislation being brought. That is the concern that I certainly have, and that this side of the House has. That is the cart before the horse.

Some of the concerns, Mr. Speaker, I am hearing are that this is seasonal. And, again, another Minister, Minister Furbert at the time, had said this. And this is the 20th of March 2024. And, again, this is an article from *The Royal Gazette*. And I can hand that around as well. "Transport Minister expands on rideshare programme. Some highlights of ridesharing are as follows:

"Requiring a rideshare operator to secure a public vehicle licence means the public can be assured the operator has been vetted." (Some of what we have heard today.)

"This is a seasonal service." (I heard that. I did not see that in the legislation.)

"Operates daily from 1st of April to September 30th and only on weekends and holidays the rest of the year.

"Participating insurance companies have agreed to collaborate with the Ministry to establish a practical approach to coverage to also, ensure maximum safety for the travelling public."

Perhaps the Minister can expand on that when he has further remarks about that level of insurance. Have those programmes been put in place?

Presumably, the regulations are going to deal with the seasonality. What's the limit? Is it going to be 150, as a previous Minister said? Or will it be based on data? Which is lacking. Again, it is lacking data to make these types of decisions.

No one wants to be left waiting. We accept that. But the key here is that enforcement is not being done now. So, what faith does the public have that enforcement will be done on all of the rideshare vehicles? It just is not happening. I struggle to understand how, if this is so important . . . in 40 years none of us has done it. It is not just the other side. It was not just the OBA. It was not just UBP. None of us did it properly. And that's why we are here. Because we've just let it go, and we go *It's not our problem. I don't want to deal with the taxi drivers*. Maybe people didn't enforce because they wanted to be popular, and they didn't want protests from taxi drivers.

But this is the interesting thing. In the conversations that a number of us on this side of the House have had, Mr. Speaker, with representatives in the taxi industry . . . And, look, we all have them. We all have them. We are taking taxis and the drivers are chatting to us. They do say that they want enforcement. So, if the industry is begging for it and saying *Enforce it; do it. We will be behind you on it*. Then why wouldn't we do it?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of information, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I don't understand.

The Speaker: Do you want to take a point of information?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, I don't need to take a point of information. Thank you.

The Speaker: Member.

Hon. Michael Fahy: So that's the key. And I guess I am just not understanding at all on this. That we are just basically going to accept as legislators, the legislation says what has to happen now. And we all are kind of just saying, *That doesn't matter. It's all right. Let it happen. Leave that in there. And let's bring in these other drivers that don't have 16 hours*, presumably, because it's not on their legislation. They can pick up rides, do it when they wish. We don't have any draft regulations.

Now, before anyone jumps up and says that is normally how it happens. Yes, I accept that. But there are so many things that have to be decided in relation to this about how this is going to work.

Now, I went online today and I found this interesting ridesharing frequently-asked-questions from the government website about how this legislation is going to work. There's a wealth of information in there. And it talks about this Code of Practice, which is in the legislation. Okay. But I'd like to see the Code of Practice.

I think if we are going to pass this, let's have as much details as we want, because it is a fundamental change, fundamental for Bermuda. Whilst there have been different rideshare programmes globally, it has not yet happened here. So, let's make sure we get it right. We have had enough time. We have seen comic strips from the 1980s. So, another month, another six months is not going to kill this off.

But at least tell us, do the enforcement, get those enforcement officers.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of information, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I'm not going to take it, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of information. Would you like to take a point of information?

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, thank you. I'm sure the Minister can wrap up in whatever which way he pleases.

The Speaker: Keep noting your point of information and you can put it in your wrap-up address.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: So, this is not a popularity contest. Believe me, the public, I am sure, is going to be happy to have this. But it's about doing the right thing as legislators to say we have these pieces that are not being done now. So, what are we doing to make sure that this programme is going to work? Because I do not have the faith that it will.

Now, I would invite the Government, if this goes forward, to bring back some amendments and remove some of the requirements so that we are not having to think about this anymore. We can't beat them with that stick and say, *Oh, those 16 hours. It just won't be there.* But fix the industry. Don't be afraid to make those decisions.

Instead, what we are doing is we are taking the easy route here, in my view. We are not going to do the hard work to make the industry work well. Especially, we know it, the numbers that are for transfer of taxi permits, the livelihoods of the taxi drivers that have invested in their vehicles, all of these things. These are businesspeople who have invested, generations of founding members, people doing it as a second job. Right? This is what we are taking away, potentially, from people.

And I struggle with that. We have lots of stories about how taxi drivers have put their whole family through college and the like. I think that is amazing. So why are we, again, going to take that from them? I don't get it.

And believe me, I am not the friend of the taxi industry. I'm just not.

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. He cannot come here and speak to a Bill that gives taxi drivers first preference and say that livelihoods are being taken away from people. He must be honest in the policy that we are actually debating and not what he thinks it is.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

The Speaker: Member.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, in every industry, in every market, rideshare has decimated the taxi industry, whichever way you say it. Here's the thing.

An Hon. Member: *No, no, no, no, no—*

Hon. Michael Fahy: No, here's the thing.

Hon. E. David Burt: Non-regulated.

Hon. Michael Fahy: How do we enforce? We are not going to enforce. We don't enforce now. What gives anyone in this House the confidence it is going to be enforced properly?

So, the Premier himself has to be thinking about this because, at the moment I am not seeing it. I'm just not. No.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, point of information, please.

Hon. Michael Fahy: I would like to know about the enforcement. It's as simple as that.

The Speaker: The Member—

Hon. Michael Fahy: Okay?

The Speaker: The Member has got—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Sorry, point of order. I'm sorry. I said it wrong. I said it wrong.

Point of order. Please, Mr. Speaker. I apologise.

The Speaker: All right.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of order. The Honourable Member from the other side is misleading the House.

In one moment, in one breath, he is accusing us of taking it from them, meaning taxi drivers' business. And in the other sentence, Mr. Speaker, he is hammering on enforcement, which means taking drivers' permits from them. He cannot have it both ways, and that is misleading the House, Mr. Speaker.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Continue. Come on.

Hon. Michael Fahy: Thank you.

The taxi industry itself is asking for enforcement. They want to protect their own industry as well from the people that aren't doing the things that they are supposed to be doing. That's the point. That is where we are with this legislation, Mr. Speaker.

I think I have made my points absolutely clear. We have cherry-picked . . . I think the Government has cherry-picked from the Green Paper. Ironically, it doesn't talk about rideshare on those points.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Member . . . Minister Furbert.

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

Here we are today, Mr. Speaker. Some other Members have spoken about some 40 years later, providing for a solution to a problem that we have, Mr. Speaker. And we have known about this problem for many, many, many years. And we are taking some steps to do something about it.

Mr. Speaker, for a time such as this, our very own Minister, having experience in the taxi industry himself, who knows all about enforcement, he knows all about the options in the White Paper [sic].

An Hon. Member: Green Paper.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: Sorry, the Green Paper. The Green Paper. But we are making a step today to do something about a transportation service that has not served . . . sorry, that has not been 100 per cent reliable to its customer base.

We want a transportation service to be able to get people from [point] A to B. And I just want to take the opportunity to just speak about reliability. Because part of the problem, Mr. Speaker, is that transportation reliability remains Bermuda's single largest visitor service gap. In the 2019 Transport Green Paper it identifies transportation availability and reliability as being a problem.

If you allow me, Mr. Speaker, to break down what "reliability" means. Mr. Speaker, "rely" means to depend on or to trust someone or something. The "able" in reliability means capable of or able to be. The "ity" in reliability means the state or the quality of—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: The ability to be trusted, consistent, and dependable. And to put it in a sentence, Mr. Speaker, customers value the reliability of a service that consistently delivers quality service.

Mr. Speaker, the frequency with which we call on something or a service is because it is reliable. You call on your plumber time after time because (I hope) they are reliable, the plumber of your choosing. You call on the electrician because they are reliable, Mr. Speaker. You call on the salesperson, the painter, the doctor, the lawyer, the cleaner, and event planner over and over again because they are reliable.

You will keep calling the same service provider back if the service is good. If it is not good, Mr. Speaker, you won't keep calling them back. And our loyalty really only lasts, Mr. Speaker, so long [as] that service is reliable.

Mr. Speaker, whenever we are going somewhere we are making time. We need proper options of mobility, Mr. Speaker. And it creates many times for an urgent situation because we need to get [from] one place to the next. If we are unable to get to the next destination, it delays progress in whatever it is that we are choosing to do next. If the taxi service or any service, Mr. Speaker, is not reliable, the use of it reduces.

Right? So, if you have a friend and you keep asking them to go out all the time, they keep telling you no, what do you do? You stop asking them. If you use a drug, Mr. Speaker, and it does not have the same effect, Mr. Speaker, you stop using it.

The issue, Mr. Speaker, I don't think it is really with the presence of the taxi. The issue is the access to the taxi; the access to a taxi in a timely manner. Reliable transportation, Mr. Speaker, is important. It's important to a mother and a father who are trying to get their child to school. It is important to a daughter who is trying to get her mother to a doctor's visit.

It is important, Mr. Speaker, for someone who may be out on the streets late at night, who may have had too many toddies or Tito's that night, to be able to get home safely, Mr. Speaker, so that they are not putting themselves or others at harm. It is important to have a reliable transportation service, Mr. Speaker.

What's not reliable, Mr. Speaker, are the 161,000 cancellations that have been reported by dispatch in 2024. What is not reliable, Mr. Speaker, is having to wait for a taxi more than 30 minutes. Mr. Speaker, what is not reliable, as Minister Rabain spoke about, is the 130,000 unanswered ride requests.

Mr. Speaker, mobility creates stability for a country. We know that the number-one pillar here of our economy is international business. Our second pillar, Mr. Speaker, is tourism. If you go to any other country, Mr. Speaker, transportation is not a problem because of access. And we need to improve upon our access. We need to improve upon our tourism product as it relates to transportation for people to get around, to get about our Islands. If we are really serious about tourism, Mr. Speaker, we will want to get this transportation issue right.

Now, I'm not saying that this will be perfect because I am sure once this legislation is enacted, we will learn some things, Mr. Speaker. And all the data, and I just shared data, but all the data that we are talking about, because we have not been able to fully collect because this system is not whole, we will be able to collect more data, Mr. Speaker, to make changes, to make amendments, to make things better for transportation for our people who are trying to get about Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, today I wear a pin that says, *Accessibility should not be complicated*.

I really stand on my feet today, Mr. Speaker, because I represent persons with disabilities who have limited accessibility transportation options. The amendments to this Motor Car Act, Mr. Speaker, will provide accessibility options for persons with disabilities.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We have gone too long, Mr. Speaker, without providing solutions for persons in our community and our visitors to not having access to accessible vehicles.

One day, Mr. Speaker, I was on Front Street, just outside of where the Birdcage was. And there was a taxi driver. He was very willing to help this user, the person in a wheelchair, a person who was wheelchair-bound. He was very willing to help this person to get into their taxi. And I watched how they struggled, Mr. Speaker. They struggled. It was for a good 15 minutes trying to get this person in this taxi. They eventually succeeded. The person actually had to crawl into the taxi and then they lifted their wheelchair and put it in the back.

But that is not how persons should have access to vehicles, Mr. Speaker. It's not humane, Mr. Speaker. So, what this does, is provide an option for wheelchair users. Because we have fallen short in the transportation industry, particularly taxis, as it relates to accessibility.

And I believe, reading in the Green Paper, back in 2018 there were three taxis, Mr. Speaker. Three taxis in 2018. I'm not sure what the number is today, but I know it's a very small number as well, that provide accessibility options for persons in our community. Now a private car (PC) which is an accessible vehicle can make themselves available for transportation services. And what's good about this, Mr. Speaker, PC drivers already have experience transporting persons in wheelchairs. They have the practical experience and the comfort levels.

I am sure the reason why persons have not gone into accessibility is because they have not been comfortable with transporting persons with disabilities. But Houston, now we have a solution.

[Laughter]

Hon. Tinee Furbert: We finally have a solution.

Today, Mr. Speaker, International Women's Day, the Woman of the Year, Dr. Latisha Lister[-Burgess], had asked those in the audience at Pier Six today, she asked, Mr. Speaker, *Who's taking care of each generation? The young, the old, and the in-between*, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, today, we are making sure we are taking care of the young, the old, the in-between, and most of all, those with disabilities who will now have access to a ride.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

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

MP Scott.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Yes, good evening, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Oh, there's trouble now.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Mr. Speaker, are you aware or are you familiar with the Baader–Meinhof effect? Now, the Baader–Meinhof effect dates back basically to the 1990s.

There was a gentleman named Terry Mullen, and he was reading a newspaper, and he came across this unusual term, which was the Baader–Meinhof group. And he did some research and he found out that the Baader–Meinhof group was a German terrorist organisation from the 1970s. And he had never heard of them before. And something strange happened right after that. The next day, he read about Baader–Meinhof in another news article. The following week, he saw it in another news article. He saw it on TV. And over the course of the month, Baader–Meinhof was seemingly everywhere.

And so, Terry thought that this was too big of a coincidence and wrote about it to one of his local newspapers and put it in a newspaper column. And the phenomenon exploded after that. Everyone was saying they had experienced the exact same thing, even persons in this Honourable House.

You learn a new word, and then suddenly it's in every conversation you have. You buy a red car, and all of a sudden you see a bunch of red cars all on the road. You get engaged, and it seems like everybody around you is also getting engaged. And so, what happens is that there are people that feel as though that the universe is messing with them.

An Hon. Member: How about divorce?

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: That too. Right?

They feel like the universe is messing with them. But psychologists have identified exactly what is going on. It's two things that are happening: selective attention and confirmation bias.

And so, what happens is that your brain is now primed to notice something that was always there before, and you tend to see the things again and again, but you then don't realise how many times you had ignored it in the past.

And so, an example, when we come to this Bill, an example of the Baader–Meinhof effect is that a lot of people won't remember that former Minister [of Tourism and Transport] Zane DeSilva—

An Hon. Member: Hmmm.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: —proposed this very thing. And the taxi industry basically crucified him for doing so.

However, when I became Minister, I went through, and I proposed a totally different way of modernising the transportation system. And do you know what the taxi industry did? They came back to me and proposed this very thing.

So, the same thing that they had crucified the previous Minister before me, they then came and told me that this is what we should actually be doing.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: The Baader–Meinhof effect.

An Hon. Member: Go, Lawrence!

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, Mr. Speaker, what happens is that the issue we have . . . and I understand this issue. And I declare my interest that I am a manager at Rosewood Bermuda. And you try getting a taxi from Rosewood to The Loren, [from the] Rosewood to even town, any time after ten o'clock.

An Hon. Member: Or St. George's.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: St. George's is even worse, right? Any time after ten o'clock, between 10:00 pm even up to 6:00 am, you are having significant troubles.

I have had to take passengers . . . I have had to take guests in my own personal car—

An Hon. Member: Amen.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: —because we can't get the taxis. And so, the rideshare policy legislation is attacking that issue right then and there.

And so, Mr. Speaker, another example of the Baader–Meinhof effect is that people are quick to say there's no data being shared, that this is not a data-driven policy, this is not a data-driven piece of legislation.

But, Mr. Speaker, those people would be ignoring that the Motor Taxi ([Taxi] Dispatching Service) Regulations 1987 requires dispatchers to share the data with TCD on a regular basis.

An Hon. Member: What happens?

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, therefore, if there are people out there who are part of a dispatching company saying that TCD is not operating user data, that would suggest that they are not following the legislation as printed.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Enforce it!

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, the Honourable Member says, enforce it.

Very interesting that the Honourable Member says enforce it. Right? Because I'm going to get to that. Stick a pin in that, Honourable Member Fahy.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, then another example of the Baader–Meinhof effect is that people will be quick to say that there was no consultation with them, that the Government did not consult with them.

Mr. Speaker, I can't speak to a specific number, but I can tell you that former Minister [of Tourism and Transport] Zane De Silva (before myself) had countless meetings with the taxi industry, some that were very animated in discussions up at Warrick Workman's [Club]. I had countless meetings with the taxi industry. I understand that former Minister [of Transport] Wayne Furbert had meetings with the taxi industry. So, Dr. Brown had countless meetings with the taxi industry. So, those people that are telling you that there was no consultation are just victims of the Baader–Meinhof effect.

An Hon. Member: Johnny-come-lately.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Nice.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: And so, Mr. Speaker, I am going to speak to just one, there are two numbers, but it's one main piece of data. The data that TCD has suggests or shows that when a fare comes in or a request for fare comes in, how long do you think it takes for a taxi operator to accept that fare? A minute? Two minutes? Five minutes? Mr. Speaker, 8.2 seconds. The average time for accepting a fare is 8.2 seconds.

Now, what do you think the average wait time is for a passenger?

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Another Hon. Member: Twenty minutes.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: No, somebody . . . The Honourable Member says 20 minutes. No, higher.

An Hon. Member: Forty minutes.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: A little lower than 40 minutes—37 minutes.

You could watch *The Cosby Show*, well, maybe not *The Cosby Show*—

[Laughter and inaudible interjections]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: —but you could watch a half-hour sitcom, get a soda, a Coke and a smile, and still be waiting for your taxi, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: All right? And so, therefore, this is supposed to help to reduce the time that we have passengers waiting.

Now, I will admit, I believe the Minister. I don't want to speak for the Minister, but I believe the Minister would admit that this is not going to be the silver bullet. This is not the panacea; this is not going to solve all of our transportation issues. But it is a step in the right direction.

An Hon. Member: Modernisation.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: It is a step towards modernisation.

And, Mr. Speaker, we even heard in this Honourable House earlier today, an Honourable Member be a victim of the Baader–Meinhof effect by talking about the Hitch narrative, that this only benefiting one online dispatcher, which is incorrect—

An Hon. Member: Oh-oh!

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: —because the BTOA also have an approved—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Member is misleading the House. I never said one company. I said one company was better suited to make a profit off of this. Not only one company, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Member just proved my point about the Baader–Meinhof effect.

[Laughter]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Right? He is ignoring the thousands of times that we have said that this is not about any one individual or giving one more of an advantage than the other, because the BTOA have their own app, which will be allowed to and will be able to process all of these rideshares.

And the thing is . . . one thing I like about the BTOA app is that a percentage of every dollar spent or made on the BTOA app goes back into the taxi industry. It goes towards the taxi drivers that need maintenance on their cars, need to probably get some insurance or anything like that. That's the thing I like about the BTOA app, and I will move forward from there.

And so, Mr. Speaker, another key victim of the Baader–Meinhof effect is when persons talk about . . . and I am going to pick that pin back up when I said stick a pin in it for Honourable Michael Fahy, when he says about enforcement of legislation.

Now, I understand that when I was Minister [of Transport], Mr. Speaker, I had to enforce the legislation with the taxi industry. And you know what happened, Mr. Speaker, when I enforced it?

An Hon. Member: Talk about it!

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: They said, *Hey, come on, man. Why you got to come and pick on us, man? Why you got to pick on the young Black guys that are out here? I thought you were one of us.*

[I said] *No, I'm enforcing the legislation, the same legislation that you said you wanted me to enforce.*

So, let's not be victims of the Baader–Meinhof effect when we talk about enforcement.

I'm not saying that we don't need to do it. I'm saying, and I agree that enforcement is key to success. But just because it sounds good now when [it's] not being enforced, that, *Oh yeah, that's what we want. We want enforcement. We want enforcement. We want it enforced on others, but we don't necessarily want it enforced on ourselves.* And so, therefore, when the Government enforces the legislation, it is quick to be turned around or put in the context of attacking the industry. That is not what the Government is doing.

And, Mr. Speaker, I believe that this legislation is a step in the right direction. Having been a person, an individual, who has struggled with getting taxis between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am, keeping in mind that the taxi drivers are the ones that are going to get the right of first refusal, and it only goes down to the rideshare if taxi drivers do not pick up the fare or they reject it.

And so, Mr. Speaker, the fact that I said that this is a step in the right direction, I am going to just take the liberty while I am on my feet to expand on what I feel we should also be looking at. And I would propose and suggest what the Minister start looking at in moving forward is that maybe we should be doing an evaluation of the industry. And when I say an evaluation of the industry, I am actually talking about the price of permits.

I believe that the price of permits may be undervalued right now because the only thing that is driving the value of the permits is the internal market, the ability for taxi drivers to buy and share . . . or to sell and buy permits. I think we should have an independent contractor come in, take a look at the industry, evaluate the industry, so we know exactly what the permits would be worth, not just based off of the market rate.

And I think, Mr. Speaker, this might be seen as a little radical, but I think we need to treat taxi drivers the same way as we treat all of the other public service vehicle operators, and I say bus drivers and ferry drivers. We should be able to find a way, which is going to take some creative thinking, to be able to provide them with standardised health insurance, Mr. Speaker.

I have heard many a time and I've heard many a situation where taxi drivers have given their life to the industry and they have ended up on their sickbed but do not have the revenue or the finances available to cover their medical insurance. They are public service vehicle operators. A public service vehicle includes buses and ferries, and I believe we should find a way to provide them with standardised health care.

[Inaudible interjection]

An Hon. Member: Standardised health care.

[Crosstalk]

Mr. W. Lawrence Scott: Mr. Speaker, what this Government is in the process of doing is creating an environment where our public service vehicle operators can not only sustain the quality of life they believe that they deserve but should be able to thrive well amongst that and also, as a Government, we need to create an environment where this is sustainable and we have succession planning for such. So that as generations hand the baton from one generation to the other, there is always a generation of public service vehicle owners and operators ready to take the torch moving forward and to be able to continue to move our passengers, our tourists, our visitors, our locals alike all around the Island because they are the lifeblood of our economy.

Thank you very much Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP Scott.

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

Minister Wilson.

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

I rise this evening to address the concern of many parents across Bermuda that we all share and that's the ability to get our young adult children home safely after a night out, whether they are home from school as my children sometimes do come home and they meet their friends in Hamilton for dinner, for a gathering, an event, et cetera, and then they have to make their way home to Somerset.

On one specific occasion, early when my daughter had returned home, she was stranded. And that has never happened again because my husband will leave home from Somerset to meet her to bring her home. And that particular concern I know is shared across the board. And the statistics from the Gap Statistics speak for themselves. On a typical Friday night, a dispatcher is available normally only approximately 61 per cent of the time. And in 2025, the average taxi pickup time was 37 minutes. And for a young person standing outside at night alone that is not a minor inconvenience.

The Speaker: Just reference where you get your statistics from.

Hon. Kim N. Wilson: From the Gap Statistics that other people have been referring to. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

And that's not simply a minor inconvenience. It could be a safety concern.

And our goal this evening with respect to the introduction of this legislation is not to undermine the

taxi industry but in fact this framework deliberately protects it. We have already heard from the Honourable Member that's presenting this Bill some further statistics insofar as how this will continue to protect the taxi industry insofar as the rideshare permits will remain limited to 150.

Street hailing by rideshare drivers will not be permitted. Taxis will continue to be able to collect fares on the street as well as in the ramps that they traditionally serve. And more importantly, taxi operators will receive the first preference from the approved dispatch platform. And a rideshare driver will only be able to receive a request if that taxi does not accept the trip within a designated framework.

Therein lies a particular benefit for the taxi drivers. In other words, this system, Mr. Speaker, I submit, prioritises taxis first while ensuring that the passengers, especially our young adults who are home from school trying to get home, are not left stranded where service is unavailable.

At the same time, Mr. Speaker, we have already built in some safeguards to help to protect the passengers. Every trip will be digitally recorded through the platform which will create accountability and traceability. Only public service vehicle licenced operators will be permitted to provide the rides. The vehicles will be subjected to enhanced inspections as well as the operators must display clear identification.

In addition, all drivers will undergo criminal record checks as well as traffic offence record checks. And they must carry motor vehicle insurance that specifically includes the coverage for rideshare. And let us be clear, enforcement is important. And with respect to any breaches of this legislation, they could be subjected to a penalty of \$10,000 upon summary conviction.

This is about balance, Mr. Speaker. It is about protecting an important industry while also responding to the transportation reality that our community is facing today, particularly as it relates to our young people.

Most importantly, Mr. Speaker, it is about safety. When our young people cannot get home in a reasonable time, we create unnecessary risk. And a modern, regulated ridesharing framework helps to ensure that when someone needs a ride, especially late at night, they are not left stranded and that they are safe and accountable and legal options are available. And for parents like me, this provides me with peace of mind.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

[Does] any other Member wish to make a contribution?

MP Simmons was up before you there, Minister.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the meat of my remarks, I would like to take an opportunity to make sure that our taxi industry is given the appreciation that it is due. And I think that I have been very, very . . . beneficial for my family. My father drove a taxi in the 1970s to help build our house. And so many of my generation's fathers did that. And they contributed to the industry because the love Bermudians have for the industry.

And when we have our best drivers, I will say, Bermudians in general, when we have the best drivers, the best waiters, the best whatever, they are the best. Not just Bermuda good, internationally good. And so, I want to take a moment to commend the drivers who continue to carry the standard forward that we set the standard for the world so many decades ago.

Now, Mr. Speaker, as many people are aware, I occasionally . . . I have reason to spend my nights once in a while in St. George's. And on those oft occasions I would spend my nights in St. George's, there would be for many years, people from the hotels stranded at the bus stop. And I would often have to take people to Grotto Bay, to Tucker's Point, to wherever, because they could not get a ride after coming out and having a wonderful evening in St. George's. They could not get back to where they were.

When I became Tourism Minister and spent a lot more of my nights in Somerset, I became very acquainted with the Cambridge Beaches issues that their guests were having there, the Pompano Beach, the issues their guests were having there, and the Southampton Princess, the issues their guests were having in travelling to Dockyard and being unable to get home.

And so, when I became the Tourism Minister, while Transport did not fall under my remit, I came into contact frequently with taxi drivers who would be lobbying for this and lobbying for that. And I would say to them, *Fellas, as Tourism Minister, this is a problem I'm facing, and people are putting pressure on me to put pressure on the Transport Minister to do something. Could you give me a solution? Give me anything that I can bring forward so that we can make this work.* I mean, I even talked about, *Look, pick four guys, two ends of the Island, have them be the on-call guy, and just cover those parts.* But we never could get to a solution.

And it was interesting because when there were those who said, *Well, you guys just need to enforce the regulations,* I did a deep dive into it, and I looked at the regulations, and I have never driven a taxi, I have never owned a taxi. A lot of the regulations to me in 21st century Bermuda didn't make sense.

So, I started asking some of our best drivers, the ones I viewed as responsible, not, you know, all you want to say positive things about them, and I asked them, *Why aren't you guys following these?* And then they explained to me the reasons. And the reasons made sense. I'm not going to quote them because they are anecdotal, but the reasons they gave made sense.

And what really stuck in my mind is that how can we look at the regulations governing the taxi industry, where a lot of the things are perceived, if not in reality, no longer applicable? So, if you look at the situation of a driver being required to be on the road 16 hours, I would not trust myself to drive anybody after 16 hours on the road. Is this still applicable when you have a scenario now where lending out your car to cover the hours that you are not on the road or not able, is maybe more of a riskier proposition when you can't get the parts as quickly as you [want] if something gets damaged.

And so, there are things that are considerations that have arisen that have made some of these things that I think need to be re-examined. But in the interim, I can speak for a friend of mine who works evenings and she missed a bus and she went on Hitch and she could see all the cabs, all the cabs, all the cabs, but nobody would come. And she end up having to catch the first bus in the morning.

So, [it is] clear there is a problem here that it's all right to say *delay, delay, delay, let's do this, let's do that.* But I believe we should take two streams. I appreciate and I . . . one of the things that enabled me to be able to be comfortable supporting this is that taxis come first, rideshare when needed.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Mr. Jamahl S. Simmons: Taxis come first, rideshare when needed. And that is the thing that is . . . because in the gap . . . we can come up with any theories to why there are gaps. But in the gap it must be filled. Not just for our tourists who will then be able to say that they had a great experience in St. George's or in Dockyard and then were able to get home safely, but for our workers who work unsociable hours, for people who rely on being able to get home and sometimes just are not in a position to have to sleep at a bus stop all night because they couldn't get home or couldn't get a ride from family.

So, the whole proposition of taxis first, rideshare as needed, I can't stress that enough.

And I think that as we . . . with most legislation, there is always the power in the future to amend, to expand, to contract. But I think that we also should seriously look at before we start enforcing laws from decades ago or regulations from decades ago, examining and working with our industry partners to make them relevant for today and enforceable for today's reality.

Mr. Speaker, I will finish up with this point that, as we have seen over the years, the Bermudian spirit around tourism . . . there are less of us going into the industry. What I know from my time in working in the industry is the ones who are there, who have a passion for it, continue to represent Bermudians well.

So, I encourage all of us to encourage our industry partners in the taxi industry and hospitality to continue to carry the Bermuda flag high and represent us well. And I look forward to seeing the results of this

legislation enabling people to be able to support the taxi industry when they are stretched to the limit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, MP.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister Lightbourne.

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

I rise this evening and I wanted to begin by sharing a quote, Mr. Speaker, if you would permit me to—

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Alexa Lightbourne: —which is found in [the daily](#). And it says, *We arrived on Monday evening on a flight from Westchester County. It was 9:00 p.m. on time, which wasn't a problem. But at the same time, there was another flight that arrived just a bit late. When we got out to pick up a taxi, there were no taxis and about 50 people waiting to get a ride.*

I called a local taxi operator, but they were in bed. And then I called the main line, and they did not know that taxis were needed. Fortunately, a very nice Bermudian took pity on us and drove us to our house. But [I] felt terrible for the others because they were mainly tourists with some with children who were stranded for God knows how long.

Mr. Speaker, I thank you for allowing me to share that quote, but I think it provides a foundation for the problem that we are seeking to solve. We recognise that there have been years of challenges with persons seeking transportation and they cannot. Everything has evolved and we know that we are number one in some other areas of our economy, but this is an area which we are seeking to address and also evolve. And we are trying to do so through systematically implementing this legislation, which will be able to provide greater data, greater information to make better informed decisions.

We heard tonight about some of the data points and, Mr. Speaker, if you allow me to re-share some of them, but they begin by telling us that 130,000 unanswered rides requested in 2024; 80,000 unanswered rides again in 2025; a 37 minute average estimated wait time and pickup time, 49 per cent visitor satisfaction with taxis.

These numbers and the data, Mr. Speaker, present a compelling framework and foundation for a solution to be crafted. And I am grateful for the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport and the team for advancing a framework to be able to assist in evolving this challenge. We know of tourists who arrive on Island who are waiting for hours or waiting to receive access to transport, but yet we want to be able to advocate for and say that we have a tourist economy. We want to be able to say that we have a tourism product,

and we know that transportation is a critical component of that tourism product.

And so, Mr. Speaker, when we think about what this legislation is seeking to advance, it is solving a problem that we know has existed for a while. There have been previous administrations who have not sought to advance solutions, and they likewise have not sought to advance the enforcement that they are suggesting that we should do. But this is progress and it is aligned to the record that this administration has successfully advanced. Shorelink is another reference, two new ferries, for example.

And so, we are continuing on, Mr. Speaker, in our record of delivering and providing solutions, Mr. Speaker, to the problems that we have and we have heard from our community are needing to be addressed.

One of my colleagues this evening, Mr. Speaker, shared about how it is not a silver bullet and I want to echo in that sentiment because it is not. But it does provide a baseline for the challenge of access to rides to be addressed. We have mothers who have to use transportation, particularly outside of their homes or don't have transportation to get and drop their children off to school. I know when I am dropping my child off to school, particularly last year, there was a parent who dropped her child in a taxi every single day. And they did so because of the inability to access reliable transportation. It was off the bus route. But her need for access to rides was conditional on the availability of taxis because that was her preference.

And so, I think there is no one on this side that is seeking to disparage or create an undermining of the taxi industry, which is correctly what we are advancing today through the rideshare prioritises the taxi licence holders first.

I likewise seek to support and also share what some of my constituents have shared with me about their views on this rideshare app and legislation. Many of them said, *Long overdue*. Many of them said, *It's about time that the Government or that someone addressed this long outstanding challenge* because they, too, would like to see these changes addressed.

I likewise did have a call from a constituent who had some questions. And the questions were around how to be able to ensure that their licence was to be able to be prioritised. How would they ensure that their taxi licence and the . . . what they have worked for by way of their industry and their main way of providing additional revenue for their, additional funds for their family would be supported. And they were comforted by the fact that this would be after the fact that licence holders would not be available. And they were comforted by the fact that the rideshare was providing a level of redundancy for access. And it was not seeking to compete directly with the licence holders at present.

We know also, Mr. Speaker, that we have an industry of unregulated drivers. My colleague spoke about that this evening, about how he witnessed, you

know, outside of one of the major grocers, unlicensed, unregulated transportation providing access to fill the gap, Mr. Speaker. But this is a framework that would allow for us to not only get greater data but also be able to regulate those currently unregulated transportation methods.

Mr. Speaker, I think that what is also clear is that through the 150 permits that this legislation is seeking to have uncapped, it is allowing for the taxi licence holders to be prioritised. It is also advocating for the seasonal hours to be able to address the peaks in our tourism schedules. It also is advancing for digital and cashless services, which we know in these times it can be challenging to have cash on hand. Taxi drivers have been the subject of robberies and the like. And so, it is actually seeking to take us into the future. It is seeking to evolve an industry that has long not been evolved and also provide a level of clarity and the very data that members in this House have requested.

Mr. Speaker, I also was comforted knowing that the Minister and the Ministry responsible for Tourism and Transport, Culture and Sport had conducted a series of consultation. They had engaged with the Chamber of Commerce. They had engaged with the BTOA. They had engaged with the Hotel Association. They had engaged with the Tourism Authority to ensure that the plans that they were seeking to advance were aligned to the very stakeholders that this industry has as representatives.

And so, who best to advise and inform legislation than the very stakeholders who day-in and day-out are engaging with both the need and the demand of those who need transportation in this country?

As the Minister responsible for Home Affairs, I also see it relevant to include the link to affordability. If a mother who needs transportation to get to her job, which she no longer can get her funds from, she cannot receive a tip, she cannot receive her earnings to be able to provide for her family, then that is a problem.

We know that every dollar matters right now in this economy. And so, for a family or a mother or a father who cannot have access to transportation to provide for their family, that becomes a problem, Mr. Speaker. And so, this evening I am grateful and I am in support of the legislation that is before us this evening because of the collective and also economic benefits that it brings to our country.

Those who are also seeking a little bit more funds now have access and opportunity to have a rideshare permit, which could allow for them to earn a little bit more. Again, prioritising the taxi licence holders, but allowing for those who wish to enter the market an opportunity.

So, Mr. Speaker, I wish to stand in support recognising the value and the importance of change, the importance of evolution and what it will do in particular for our tourism sector.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member wish to make a contribution?

Minister De Silva.

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

Mr. Speaker, they say—

An Hon. Member: They say.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —that the worst decision you can make is not making one.

Hon. Michael Fahy: You can make a decision not to do it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And we've heard, we've heard, and we just heard it again chirping across the floor is—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —see? Is a decision not to do it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, Mr. Speaker, and you heard the Honourable Member Fahy, who continues to chirp—

The Speaker: Let's not have personal conversations tonight.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —saying that we are putting the cart before the horse.

Well, guess what, Mr. Speaker, you can call it what you like. What we are doing is we are making a decision. And as a former Tourism and Transport Minister that met with 400 taxi drivers at Warwick Workmen's Club.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And, Mr. Speaker, just let me remind everyone that I opened up that meeting like this. And I said, *Listen, I know you'll come out tonight because I said I'm going to issue 150 taxi permits.* That's what got their attention.

An Hon. Member: Rideshare permits.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: And what I told him, I said, *Listen, I'm the Minister. You guys are the taxi drivers. I want you to help me to help the people of this country and the visitors that come to this country to get around*

seamlessly as possible. That's what I want you to do. And, Mr. Speaker, we were there for about an hour and a half, and I didn't say too much. It was all of them having the conversation between themselves.

And where did we end up? Right back at the starting block.

And you will know, Mr. Speaker, that I produced a Green Paper. Now, let's just be clear, because the Honourable Member Fahy, pointed out many things in that document. Well, for the listening public, I want to make it clear that a Green Paper is a government document that outlines problems and possible solutions, but does not set a policy.

An Hon. Member: It's a White Paper which you have not published.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It is an invite for feedback from citizens, organisations, and experts. That is what the Green Paper is, Mr. Speaker. That's what it was.

And I think if everybody in this House is honest—

An Hon. Member: Whoa, whoa, whoa, whoa—

Another Hon. Member: Careful.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —they will know that that's exactly what a Green Paper attempts to do, whether it be in this industry or any other industry.

Now, Mr. Speaker, we have to stop the nonsense when it comes to taxi driving. We really do. We have all heard the stories from our tourists and our family members and friends. We have all heard those stories, whether it's coming out of restaurants, whether it's leaving the office, whether it's leaving town or St. George's late at night, or even after dinner.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: The hotels, you get the complaints every summer. You get it . . . the airport. We all know we have had family members and tourists who come in at the airport, and there are no taxis there to take them. None.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: So, what we are doing, Mr. Speaker, is . . . and I'll get around to enforcement in a minute. But when you have our tourists who give us feedback, and over 50 per cent of our tourists are dissatisfied with the transportation in this country, we have a problem.

Now, the Honourable Member can talk about putting the cart before the horse. But we are on the cusp of another tourist season. And the Honourable Member said, *Why couldn't you take another six months?*

Well, in six months' time, summer's over. We do not . . . this Minister of Transport, Minister Darrell, has said we are not going to put our tourists through another season of dissatisfaction. So, I take my hat off to him for being the first Tourism Minister to be able to get this across the line, that's going to help our transportation industry.

Now, let me say something, Mr. Speaker. Now, we heard the talk about 16 hours and taxi drivers, you know, operating more than what they do. We have heard the complaints about the rideshare from the other side. Well, you know what, Mr. Speaker? All the taxi drivers have to do is do their job. Because if they do their job, you know what's going to happen? The rideshare is going to go away. Because who's going to pay \$1,000 for a fee and pay \$400 in payroll tax if they don't get any business? That means that the taxi drivers have done their job. And guess what we have done by implementing this? We are going to take care of our tourists because we are doing our job.

See, Mr. Speaker? Now, the other side talked about enforcement. You might recall, Mr. Speaker, they were in Government for about four and a half years. Couldn't make the five.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But they were in Government for four and a half years. And the Honourable Member Fahy even said he was the Minister for a year.

Well, what happened? I can't remember anything significant—if anything at all—happening during that four and a half years. So, we remain the same.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: It's a tough knot.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I heard Honourable Members on that side speaking with a forked tongue tonight.

An Hon. Member: Oh!

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Forked tongue.

And if you look up the word forked tongue—

The Speaker: Now, be careful . . . be careful on how far you go down that road.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Well, Mr. Speaker, I can give you a couple of definitions of forked tongue, if you like, just to be clear.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, this is . . . I am reading this. I'm not saying this, Mr. Speaker.

An Hon. Member: Oh, boy.

[Laughter]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: *Forked tongue meaning could be lying or deceiving. Someone who speaks with a forked tongue could not be telling the truth. They could be saying conflicting things depending on the situation.*

Now, let's talk about that for a minute.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Now, the Honourable Member Fahy said, and I will quote—

The Speaker: Now, I am going to caution you because how you used your description on the first few words—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes.

The Speaker: —to describe it, you don't want to direct that to any Member. This is not how we are conducting business—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Oh, no, I'm not doing that at all. Not doing that at all, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Not doing that at all.

An Hon. Member: We don't need personalities.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: But this is what the Honourable Member Fahy said, and I will quote, *We are taking the livelihood away from the taxi drivers*. But then in the very next breath, he said, *We need to be strong with enforcement. Take the taxi permits away*.

One minute he says, *don't take their living away from them*. Then the next minute he says, *you need to enforce the laws*.

So, what do we do? We take away 10 taxi permits, 20, 50, 100? How many permits would that Honourable Member like us to take away?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That will definitely affect their living.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Their right to earn a living.

See, Mr. Speaker, we all know . . . that's why we need to stop the nonsense in this House.

An Hon. Member: Come on.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: We all know. We've all had opportunities—

An Hon. Member: Come on.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: —to make changes in the taxi industry, and we all know why we haven't done it.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Okay, we have to be honest and stop the nonsense.

An Hon. Member: Oh, now we go.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That's right. All of us.

POINT OF ORDER

[Unparliamentary language]

Hon. Michael Fahy: Mr. Speaker, point of order. The Member has been given a massive amount of latitude here. There are definitely more than just insinuations now. Speaking of forked tongues and lying . . . that is absolutely unparliamentary. And the Member should cease immediately. It's outrageous.

The Speaker: I got you. I got you.
I did caution you, Member, when you got out.

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: Yes, you did.

The Speaker: Because of the fact that—

Hon. Zane J. S. De Silva: That was 10 minutes ago. You did, Mr. Speaker. I am way past that.

The Speaker: Don't challenge me now, because you will find yourself out the door. Okay?

Sit down while I'm talking, please.

Okay, let's not let this tone get out of hand because I will deal with it immediately. We don't want that tonight. When you get on your feet again, just make sure you take a different tack on how you present the rest of your debate tonight.

Thank you.

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

As I said, this change in legislation will not take away the livelihood of taxi drivers, as the Honourable Member said. And what we will not do is bring about enforcement so that we take away 10, 20, 30, 40, 50, 100 permits from taxi drivers.

One thing this Minister will do, just as he has brought this legislation change here tonight . . . I know that Minister. Enforcement is on his radar. And I can assure you, Minister Owen Darrell will bring it. And you talk about cart before the horse. What he's doing, Mr. Speaker, with this legislation, we are on the verge of another tourist season.

And the statistics . . . and I hope now that enough data has been put out on the floor tonight by Members on this side, so that Members on that side can understand and agree and support why this change is needed and on behalf of our people and our tourists.

Not easy, Mr. Speaker. You have been around a long time. Longer than any one of us here. So, you have heard all the debates on taxis and transportation for our people and our tourists.

And I will finish where I started, Mr. Speaker, and the worst decision that we can make is not making one. And we are going to make one tonight.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Minister.

Does any other Member . . . MP, Opposition Leader, MP Smith.

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

So, Mr. Speaker, we have heard several people tonight talk about what people personally are going through when they are dealing with taxis, what tourists are dealing with. I think we can all identify with that problem, that there is seeming to be a lack of taxis available for certain times of the day at the airport.

But, Mr. Speaker, this is not a rideshare problem. This is not the Opposition being against progress, technology. This is about accountability and enforcement. Because we have heard Members act as if they are not the ones who are responsible for making sure that the enforcement is going to happen.

Mr. Speaker, we have problems on our roads right now. There are laws in place, but the behaviour is out of control.

So, Mr. Speaker, we have an issue where there is supposed to be a certain number of taxis that are on the road. Those taxis are supposed to be on the road for a certain amount of time. Regardless of whether that has to be changed, it hasn't been changed. So, you have to enforce the rules that are there, which means you are going to have to have enough officers to be able to do that.

And the Deputy Premier just made mention that they would not want to get rid of anybody's licence.

But, Mr. Speaker, if members within the taxi industry are not behaving in the way that they should be, because in Bermuda, taxis were known as ambassadors of our country. That's the behaviour that we should have an expectation of. We are talking about the tourism industry. If we had 600 taxis operating the way they are supposed to be operating, with ambassadors driving them, and at that point, we saw a gap, rideshare makes sense.

But, Mr. Speaker, we don't know whether all of those taxis are operating the way they are supposed to. Because, Mr. Speaker, there is legislation that says the dispatchers are supposed to give data to TCD.

My first question is, Are they providing that data? If they are not providing that data, what does the legislation say should happen to the dispatcher who's not providing the data? Enforcement. See where the weakness comes?

So, when you add more, and you haven't actually enforced the rules that you have in place today, how are you going to expect to have to enforce on the extra that you've added? Because if you don't fix the original problem, nothing changes.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard people talk about what happens at the airport. So, the taxis are not there at the airport, but rideshare can't sit in a queue. So how do we actually solve that problem?

An Hon. Member: Mm-hmm.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: Mr. Speaker, we also heard a story that somebody accepted a call, a taxi accepted a call, but it's taken 37 minutes for that taxi to get there. Well, that means that they accepted it. Well, if a taxi accepted it under rideshare, rideshare can't pick that call up because it's already been picked up by a taxi. We have to fix the problem. We can't duck it. If the problem is that the taxi industry is not behaving the way they are supposed to—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

I believe that the Honourable Opposition Leader is unintentionally, maybe, misleading the House.

This stat and the data about the 37 minutes means that when a person first initiated a call for a taxi, they may have had to call multiple times, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Let the, let the—

Hon. Owen Darrell: I believe—

The Speaker: Let the Minister—

Hon. Owen Darrell: I believe that the Honourable Opposition Leader is unintentionally misleading the House. It is from the time, from whatever happens, to put it into context, whether they had to call . . . that's how you get the stat of 80,000 unanswered calls

because the individual may stand there and call multiple times in a 10-minute span. So, the 37 minutes is from the time that I first initiate and say, *I need a taxi*. It doesn't mean that the taxi that picked up took 37 minutes to get there.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, I hear the explanation that just came from the Minister, but I will use personal because I was actually repeating based off of what came from another Member. But I am going to say that there are times that I may have called for a taxi with an expectation that the taxi was going to be there at six o'clock. That means I have already booked it. Six o'clock comes. They are not there. Then you make that second call that the Minister is referring to.

The problem is we have to have a way to enforce the behaviour of the taxi industry. We can't ignore it because, Mr. Speaker, we vet the taxi drivers. We are talking about vetting the people that are going to be in rideshare. But we all have also heard members of our public talk about taxi drivers driving intoxicated, behaviour of taxi drivers, complaints coming because of the taxi industry.

These are things that are happening today before we add this. And the issue is when we are talking about how taxi members who have paid hard-earned money to get that taxi licence are going to be impacted. Remember, there are lots of taxi drivers who work really hard, who continue to be that ambassador for the country, who paid \$100,000 for that licence. And now they are competing against somebody [who will pay] \$1,000.

See, this is where the difference comes. Because if they're \$600, I'm saying there's some—

Hon. Owen Darrell: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. Owen Darrell: The Honourable Member is, again, misleading the House. The numbers of which he may speak of may be of a friend that he knows who may have paid over \$100,000 for a taxi medallion. There are individuals who have taxi permits, Mr. Speaker, that have had them for over 50 years that didn't pay anything close to \$100,000.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, the last time that TCD actually sold taxi permits, the last price that was on a taxi permit from TCD was actually \$50,000.

So, Mr. Speaker, while the Honourable Opposition Leader may talk about \$100,000, that is what the market has set, not what it was.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, Mr. Speaker, thank you for the Minister, because if it's \$50,000 compared to \$1,000, I'm pretty sure that's still a problem.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Still a problem.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, it doesn't change what I was saying.

An Hon. Member: No.

Hon. Ben Smith: The issue is accountability within the industry.

This is not being against progress and technology, because the truth is that same progress in technology should be happening in the taxi industry. The same concept of the cashless payments and credit cards should be happening in the taxi industry. Knowing where all these taxis are at all times, so that we know whether people are not picking up a certain ride, we should have that ability today.

And the truth is, if that is what you were doing first, and then you were able to identify this is where this problem is, and now the rideshare will fix that particular problem, then it makes sense.

An Hon. Member: We had that—

Hon. Ben Smith: But to add the rideshare, when you actually are not holding the industry accountable, just adds more complication to the problem.

So, this idea that not enforcing is okay doesn't work. We see the results of it. And we all have not only heard the stories, we live the stories. We have all been to a restaurant and tried to get a taxi, and were not able to get a taxi, and the frustration. Many of us have also taken tourists to a hotel, because no taxi was coming.

An Hon. Member: So, what does enforcement look like to you?

Another Hon. Member: The law says—

Hon. Ben Smith: The law already tells you what you are supposed to have, and this is the problem.

[Inaudible interjections]

The Speaker: Members. Members.

Hon. Ben Smith: So, do you have 600 working taxis available?

[Inaudible interjections]

[Gavel]

Hon. Ben Smith: Can the Minister tell us that?

The Speaker: One Member speaking.

Hon. Ben Smith: Can the Minister tell us that we actually have the 600 operating the way they are supposed to be operating, and if they are supposed to be on the road for 16 hours, that's happening? Because the feedback that you also receive from the taxi industry is so many of them are afraid of giving their car to somebody else to meet the 16 hours, because they can't trust the behaviour of the driver they are going to hand it off to.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Ben Smith: Mr. Speaker, the reason I make that point is because moving to rideshare is part of the gig economy. Right? Those are the changes that happen. But I'm going to mention the gig economy that happens now with people picking up and delivering food, and we have seen the behaviour of those riders on our roads.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. Ben Smith: Everybody here has seen it. And just remember, if we are not policing the taxi industry the way we should, the ambassadors, you are now giving this to somebody who's just making a hustle from one spot to the other.

We've had Ministers stand up here and talk about the fact that we have people that are already working illegally outside of the supermarket and all other areas. You don't think those people actually want to get regulated to pay the \$1,000 because they are actually making hustle money now. They are not paying the \$1,000. They are not getting insurance. They are not going to do any of those things. That's not changing anything.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Ben Smith: So, why would they want to pay the \$1,000, the insurance, and all the rest of it? Because trust me—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Ben Smith: —this has to be about when we stand here and we put policies and legislation in place; we also have to make sure that it's being enforced. Otherwise, we are wasting the time here.

Why spend the time to put in a policy that says that if the dispatcher doesn't give the data, "x" happens, and then you never do it, and then you don't have the data, and now you are making a decision based off of the fact that you don't have the data, and now you are going to be able to collect data because you have got

a rideshare that's going to give you the data. That's what we're hearing today. It doesn't even make sense.

Do the job that you already have. Collect the data you should already be collecting. That gives you the ability to make proper decisions when you come to this House. That's where we need to be.

Mr. Speaker, this can't just be words about what we are doing in our community. If we really want to make this work, we have to enforce the rules. And if that means that certain taxi drivers should no longer be in the position to be a taxi driver, that has to happen. And if that means that we need to find new people who want to have a licence, to our entrepreneurs who want to be ambassadors of our country to pick up our tourists when they need to be picked up, to pick up our seniors when they need to be picked up, then that's what should happen.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Ben Smith: You hear them? Fired and unemployed.

Mr. Speaker, if people are breaking the laws, there are consequences for it.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Ben Smith: When I say enforcement, why have the rule if you're not going to enforce it? Get rid of the rule.

[Inaudible interjections]

[Gavel]

Hon. Ben Smith: Not only are people needing to get taken from place to place, they need to know that it's happening safely. They need to know that this system is working for them.

So don't stand here and talk about policies that you are not going to enforce. This has to be about putting legislation forward and then seeing the regulations that you are going to back up with enforcement. And if that means that you actually have to hire more people to go out and do the work to enforce it, then that's what you have to do.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.
Does any other . . . MP Simmons.

An Hon. Member: Here we go.

The Speaker: MP Simmons, you have your time on the floor.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Good evening, Mr. Speaker, and good evening, colleagues. The hour is late.

The Speaker: Yes, it is.

Mr. Scott Simmons: Mr. Speaker, I have listened to colleagues on this matter. I have spent, and I think colleagues have spent an enormous amount of time, looking into the rideshare and discussing the way forward and what we should do. And I admit, Mr. Speaker, that up until as early as yesterday, I somewhat struggled with this particular amendment . . . I am sorry, I apologise, this particular Bill and moving forward therein.

Mr. Speaker, it is quite evident by what has been said tonight by colleagues that the Minister, the department, and the Ministry are now aware very clearly on what has to be done once this Bill is passed and moved forward, what has to be done in the particular . . . as it relates to taxis, as it relates to the industry, and how we need to move this forward to make sure that there is both enforcement and that we do justice to what the discussion has been here on the floor of this House.

Mr. Speaker, we can't ignore the elephant in the room, and that is that our industry, as it relates to the taxi industry, has elements that are broken. Those elements need to be fixed. Those elements need to be addressed. And the sooner we do so, the better.

But that does not necessarily mean that this particular Bill should be set aside tonight for further review and investigation, Mr. Speaker. Primarily because let's say the Minister decides tonight and says, *I'm going to withdraw the Bill*. What happens then?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Simmons: No, no, no. What happens then?

The industry that we speak about in 2026 that needs [to be] addressed as it relates . . . And I'll tell you the reason why this is close to me. What needs an address specifically is the hour which this particular Bill addresses.

I realise that it is in its impurity of the industry, individuals within this House and throughout Bermuda are dissatisfied with the taxi industry. In my capacity in hospitality, I have had to reach into my core centre, Mr. Speaker, and create opportunity for my guests to be able to make their appointments, to be able to be on time for dinner, on time for the airport, on time for the things that they need to do, because there was a problem and there was a gap in service in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, I have had to do that. But I realise and I recognise that there is a problem in the industry, but that our Government is moving to at the very least solve that particular problem.

Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the hour that this new Bill speaks to, that particular time frame we have spoken in this House tonight is where the problems occur.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Mr. Scott Simmons: That is the one that is being addressed. That is where we sit today in this House. And so, therefore, Mr. Speaker, I moved closer to agreeing with colleagues and saying, because I was leading up to it, I must say, I was struggling. Because I realised that it is easy for us to overlook.

And I listened to the Opposition Leader just now. And I think he speaks, as it relates to the taxi drivers and as it relates to the number of drivers in the industry who are not, who are absent in the full 16 [hours], I recognise that there has to be an adjustment made. And I think the Minister and the Ministry heard that. I think they also heard tonight that enforcement of the regulations that we do feel apply must be done in the industry for it to improve.

Therefore, Mr. Speaker, I strongly believe that this Government is moving in the right direction as it relates to addressing those times—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Simmons: —and addressing the issues of the day. I believe that the government is achieving just that. However, I will repeat it. I believe that the Government recognises what's been said tonight, what's been said throughout Bermuda, and will make the necessary adjustment.

Mr. Speaker, we have to understand, and it will be an easy fix for us to say that all taxi drivers must do the 16 [hours]. We know the nuances of taxi drivers who say they don't wish to have their taxi, they have done their shift already, and they don't particularly want their taxis to be used. We have got all that, and we have said that tonight. That particular part of the industry is understood. That particular one, I think we've got.

But as it relates to the number of taxis, I do believe that this rideshare will solve that as it relates to where the actual regulations and where the actual Bill is centred.

Mr. Speaker, I believe that we need to see the industry for just what it is.

For quite some time in Bermuda and over time, those taxi drivers were the very staple of their families. They provided income that made those families survive. They worked when they had to work, and then they were off. I believe that we have to understand the value that they have brought, the respect that they have in the community, and also understand that we have to work with them going forward. And I don't believe that this particular Bill removes the opportunity for them to continue to exist.

And so, I don't agree with the Opposition on the fact that this could bring about the extinction of the taxi industry. I don't think so, in my humble opinion.

I do believe that the Ministry, I would think, and the department will make some adjustments going forward that will benefit the industry, but it will also bring

about the coverage as the lapses in coverage are identified.

And so, I believe that, and I beg to differ from the Honourable Member, I do believe there was a feeling that—

An Hon. Member: A feeling—

Mr. Scott Simmons: No, no, no, it was stated earlier that there was—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Simmons: It was stated earlier on it would bring about the extinction—

The Speaker: Speak to the Chair.

Mr. Scott Simmons: —of the taxi industry. And I don't think that that is a fair assessment of what this brings.

On the other point, the other point I wish to make tonight, Mr. Speaker, is that as a Government we must begin the process of developing more of a relationship with our stakeholders. I recognise that the Minister has stated on the floor of this House, and to us as a caucus, he has made it clear that I've gone out, I've chatted, I've talked, we have had the discussions. But, Mr. Speaker, we must never grow tired of meeting with the industry, of talking with the industry, and getting the information that we require to get the job done.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Simmons: And so, I believe that we should continue to have that relationship, to develop that relationship, and to make that relationship work.

I think that there are industries throughout Bermuda, Mr. Speaker, if I may, that are not happy at all. And what I heard tonight on the floor of the House is a whole lot of what we believe and feelings of what we think are taking place. But the facts don't bear out quite like that. Because if I had taken what I felt this week and the week before that, I would not have voted for this Bill in the affirmative. I would not have wanted to vote for this Bill in the affirmative.

But after talking, after listening, and after hearing what this is all about, reading through the Bill for myself, I recognise, as a Member of this House, that my responsibilities lie in making sure that we begin the process of moving the country forward by producing Bills like this, and moving things in the proper way and in the right fashion.

Mr. Speaker, I think we need to steer away from misleading the public and allowing the public to be out there with all kinds of things that are said that are not necessarily true. I know that we are governed many times by what people say, and I think that this is the case and that's the case, and we need to remove personalities out of it.

Sometimes, and I repeat, Mr. Speaker, or I'll state this: What I had to determine was whether or not this was good law, whether or not this made sense. And once I went through the law, once I went through it in its writing, I realised that it had value, and that it could improve my circumstances in the hospitality where I serve, and that it would help me in those hours to be able to have coverage for my guests and to make sure that I am covered. So, it has satisfied that.

I'm encouraged that I do believe that the Minister has heard, his department and his staff have heard the discord and the displeasure in this House, as it relates to the way that enforcement has been done and the way that we conduct our business. But I want to make sure that we are clear on a lot of things.

We are politicians. We represent constituencies. We represent voters in this in this House and so we have a responsibility to address their issues and to understand the situations that they are in, and that there are times when they cannot be blamed entirely for the situations for which they have been allowed to be in.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I wish to conclude on this note that, as far as I'm concerned, I do believe that the concerns that I had and the concerns of those I have spoken to surrounding this matter have been met but I also believe, and I must caution our Government and must encourage caution first on ignoring the public and ignoring what the people feel, which I don't think we are doing in this case, but making sure that we are doing the things, saying the things and being the things that are assigned and allowed to them.

Then from there, Mr. Speaker, it is my hope that we take the advice and that we do make further amendments and that we move it along in the way that it should be. I think that this is good, a good Bill. It isn't everything for everyone. It does not satisfy everything, and it certainly doesn't satisfy the concerns that individuals have raised in this House which are outside of the remit of the Bill. But I don't necessarily feel that the Bill should be completely thrown out or rewritten.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Member.

MP Tyrrell, would you like your time on the floor?

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak on the Motor Car (Ridesharing Amendment) Act 2026.

Mr. Speaker, I am going to be very brief in my weigh-in because most of the speakers ahead of me have said everything that I probably would have liked to have said. But I have four bullet points that I want to . . . so you can count as I go along. I have four bullet points.

The first thing I want to do is declare my interest. I am the Chairman of the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board. So I am putting that out there right

now. So, I am certainly supporting the Minister on this Bill because I think it is a step in the right direction, and I say a *step* in the right direction. And the four bullet points that I certainly want to leave is that *we are protecting the livelihood of taxi drivers*. We are not doing anything to do away with the taxi drivers. I do not think that this is going to kill the business of the taxi drivers.

My second bullet point, it is *to enhance the service to the customer*, the important person in this equation that we are talking about. We have heard the stories of people saying how they have been left and that sort of thing, so I don't need to go into that. So, this Bill in my opinion certainly is enhancing the service to the customer.

My third point, *it is seasonal and limited hours that we're offering ride sharing*. I think that is an important point. That's the point that I certainly want to get over. I'm not going to speak to it much more than that.

And my fourth point I will say is that, yes, we have fallen short. Previous Governments have fallen short as well. Here we are . . . and no disrespect to any previous Minister because some of you may not remember that I spent three months as Minister of Transport.

An Hon. Member: We remember.

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: So, I just want to put that out there. So, there's no disrespect.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Neville S. Tyrrell: There's no disrespect to anyone.

But what I want to say, Mr. Speaker, is that *this Minister is certainly going to lead the charge in improving the transport industry publicly*.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

MP Swan, would you like a time on the floor?

An Hon. Member: Showtime now.

[Inaudible interjection]

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

No, just ever so briefly, Mr. Speaker, and I declare my interest. I have spent 55 years in the hospitality industry and I do remember . . . I was not around in 1951 when this Motor Car Act was introduced. But I do remember in the 1960s when my Uncle Dally Hall had several taxis in the yard up in Rose Hill and he used to repair them. And he owned a few.

And I do remember when there were certain persons when the Motor Car Act was in its early years. There were persons who had multiple ownerships of cars. And so, maintaining the 16 hours was operated from a business standpoint of view. Because you had drivers who worked for persons who owned multiple

cars. Just like some people own multiple houses. Some people owned multiple cars.

And time has evolved. Where has it evolved? Where persons . . . and I declare another [interest]. My late father after he retired from the Bermuda Police Service for many years was a taxi owner. And like many other taxi owners, they cut their cloth according to their personal likes and dislikes. And taxi ownership has changed from those early days of the Cheese Ray and the Benny Sousa's and the Dally Hall's and the others around this around this country.

And you know one thing about this Rideshare Amendment Act that that speaks to digital . . . somebody help me. Digitalisation. Just break it down a little bit. Is that . . . you know, and I just went to my app and I went to Uber. And I said, *Listen I've got to go. Hopefully I can catch that that private jet going out tonight and I can go to go to Newark*. And maybe I can get a taxi. Well, I go to my Uber and I tell them I want to I want to get there early to the golf course. And I'm going to sleep in the parking lot. And there it goes. It's 30 . . . it's \$30. It's there.

You know during COVID-19—

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: During COVID-19, you had to pre-register to come into Bermuda. And persons did that.

I always say that that might be an option for people to pre-book prior to getting in Bermuda to save themselves from having any disappointments on the other end. I spend a lot of time around the taxi industry myself. Walking around areas where they are and being in hotels. And know the experience that some of our Members who also work in the hotel, two sitting right in front of me. Member Scott and Member Scott Simons. Both of them work in the hotel industry. And like myself know what it's like to have guests coming out of restaurants after a wonderful night and can't get home. And can't get back to their place. It's very frustrating.

And like many of us, many of us have taken people home. I have made some my best friends drive them from St. George's to Sonesta Beach [Hotel] many years ago and making friends and chatting them up. But it's a very, very inconvenient situation.

I know that the Minister of Tourism gets up and down this country and sees any number of people. And he, like any of us, gets confronted by persons. But I'm going to tell you this, right? [Do] you know what's going to happen in 2026? There are persons on the other side who are making hay on stuff that didn't really want Princess. The way we were able to make sure that there is a Princess opening in 2026. There's going to be a need for a lot more taxes. And we don't have the time to sit on our hands.

The Minister's come up with something that's going to address the immediate needs of this country. Come April, [do] you know what's going to happen?

We're going to have cruise ships. Hopefully, I pray there are not any hurricanes this year. And it's right along through the season. We are going to have a lot of people going to the beaches and around the country. Going to the golf courses and the like.

The demand for transportation around this Island is going to increase exponentially within a few weeks. Within a few weeks' time. Because we're in March now. And by the end of this month when the cruise ships start rolling in, the rubber will hit the road in real time.

And do you know what? When cruise ships come and do surveys on communities, they look at things such as transportation as to whether or not they rate, whether or not they're going to bring a ship back to an area. We certainly would like to have more visitations to St. George's. But if we wouldn't get looked at favourably.

You heard someone make a disparaging remark when they said . . . and they're in the hospitality industry. It's even tougher when persons are trying to find transportation in St. George's. And we've seen hotels have to move towards doing what? Getting their own transportation and having them parked outside of restaurants and the like sometimes.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Hubert (Kim) E. Swan: Right? I don't hear anybody complaining about that because it's necessary given the circumstances.

And you know Member Tyrrell, who spoke before me, the Chairman of the Public Service Licensing Board said something very important: *It's seasonal*. And it could only be seasonal for this year. If it's deemed that someone comes along and says, *Listen I'm going to be the Cheese Ray and the Benny Sousa of 2027 and I'm going to buy up about 10 or 12 and I'm going to start running them myself. I'm going to make sure that when Zane stops his ship at 8:00 pm, that Swan is coming on at 8:15 pm and he's running. And then Swanny puts down that cab and then he takes it to so and so*. And every week it goes in and gets serviced and the like. We don't have people running taxis like that in Bermuda anymore. But they used to.

And let's be honest. We have PSVs—private service vehicles doing public service. Persons who will have a cab and it's also [a] private situation. Let's be real.

But let me tell you something. We care [for] and protect the working-class persons, the tradesmen of this country. That's the backs that . . . those are the shoulders we stand on. But we do have to make sure that we are not doing a disservice to the country by not having the service that's required in five weeks' time, well three, four weeks' time when the cruise ships start coming in earnest up in Dockyard and around. And we've got to get these people around the Island.

So, I'm prepared to support the Minister because I know the Minister is very much in tune that this country needs to be ticking in transportation with immediate effect.

And I hear the punitive tone in a person's voice. I hear the punitive tone. *Take that nut and crack it*. Not doing that. This particular legislation is allowing persons who want to get into this rideshare to have a piece of pie only if taxis are not available. And I think that does a good service for the customer of this country, whether or not it be a local or a visitor.

And if we are really and truly in the hospitality business for both locals and businesses and providing service, we have got to do it with immediate effect and put them first. And let me invite anybody over there. Go and ask the hotel owners and the operators and the managers of different departments that deal with people what they are saying. What are they saying? What are people saying to them?

They're not up in arms about this because they know that they've tasked the Minister, and as a consequence, the Minister is responding accordingly. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Member.

Does any other . . . MP Cannonier.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I'm just going to ask some questions, Mr. Speaker. That's all.

The Speaker: Ask some questions. Go ahead.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: No need for me to move any needle here tonight. I think that our Leader has put our position well in how we feel about this particular Bill. I don't envy the Minister's position that he is in after hearing 80,000 unanswered calls. And I will repeat what everyone has said. We do have a challenge.

What has been made very clear tonight is that for us as the OBA, it is important that some form of policing happens. We have minibuses. We've got limos. We've got busses. We've got ferries. We've got the rideshare coming up now. We've got Hitch and other organisations that were just mentioned. We've got taxis. We've got gypsy taxis. And the list is getting longer and longer to resolve the challenge of meeting the needs of not just our people, but also the needs of our tourist industry.

So, my questions are, and I am hoping that we can get some answers here. Is this going to be a seasonal thing, after listening to the last speaker from constituency 2 speak, the Honourable [Member] Swan? Are we looking at this to be a seasonal thing? I kind of read through the Bill in an understanding that hopefully this was going to help out the local market in some way or some form.

And what is the rate? I don't know, is the rate going to be the same as the taxi rate fares?

[Inaudible interjection]

An Hon. Member: It is in the Bill.

Another Hon. Member: It is not in the Bill.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Well, it's not in the Bill. We have been going through it. Show me where it is. Find it for me. Yes.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. find it for me Yes, yes, find it for me. Find it for me, what the rate is.

And then, of course, I am trying to understand the logistics of this. So if, in fact, we only have five taxis at the airport, are they allowed to queue up as well, the rideshare drivers? Will they be able to? And at Dockyard?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And at Dockyard, if we have challenges there, will they be able to queue at the . . . so I am hearing a lot of talk about helping out the tourists at these different places, but if they can't queue up, what are we doing here with this?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, there are so many . . . there are more unanswered questions to this here. If they can't queue up at Dockyard to help out the thousands of people who are out there, and if they can't queue up at the airport, then we are not resolving some of the issues that I have heard from the Government speakers saying that we are going to resolve this issue.

So, I'm hoping to hear more about how that. I want to hear more about how that's going to work, right?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, you know—

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, yes, yes, yes—

The Speaker: Members, let him talk. Let the Member talk to me.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I haven't said anything controversial, but, of course, the suggestion that we're not talking about Mr. and Mrs. Jones—

An Hon. Member: There we go!

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —or Mr. Smith as if some of us don't identify with certain communities—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Is that what we're suggesting here?

An Hon. Member: No.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I hope that the Government is not suggesting that.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I hope that they are not suggesting that, because I do have a peace of mind to give them if they think that.

The Speaker: No, just talk to me—

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: And maybe I'll use up all of my 30 minutes to—

The Speaker: Just talk to me.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: —just get that point across.

The Speaker: We don't need all your 30 minutes tonight.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: That they are not the only ones who represent Bermuda and all sectors of Bermuda.

An Hon. Member: Where are you going?

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: So, where am I going? I'm going where your Minister just tried to go. That's where I'm going. But I won't go there, because it's not necessary. I want some answers to the questions I asked.

And it doesn't sound as if we are resolving the line or the lack of taxis at the airport. It doesn't sound like we are resolving the issues that Dockyard is having, when all of the wonderful cruise ships come in. And maybe what we should be looking at is if we know that . . . we are saying we have 600-plus taxis licensed. Maybe we should be looking at how we can vary the licence to ensure that these taxis are on the road more.

So maybe if they're driving at night, there's a better licence for taxi drivers than what they have now, a reduction of it, to get more taxis on the road overnight, so we don't have the atrocities that some of us have talked about, where we can't get a taxi. I'm in the position of that right now. The engine blew in my car. So I'm like, *Oh man, okay, I gotta at least get my wife to work on time.* And I had to plan. So, I had to call a service and say, *Listen, can you pick us up at eight o'clock every morning?* Planning ahead of time.

Now, what does concern me is that you can plan ahead of time. But again, as we have heard, 80,000 calls. Something has to happen. I'm admitting something does have to happen. But I'm feeling like there's other unanswered questions.

With all of these services that we already have, including gypsy cabs that are out there, they are eating away at the taxi service as well, and maybe they're upset about that. So, we should be policing this thing. It would be nice to have some admittance that, listen, we need to be enforcing some of the rules and regulations, the laws that we have in place to ensure that we're protecting the taxi industry in and of itself.

Because if we are not addressing that—and I have heard nothing to suggest that we are going to be addressing this in any formative way—then we continue to kick the can down the road and we'll add something else, and we'll add something else, to try and fill the gap when what we need to be doing is ensuring that our roads have the services available for our people and for our tourists alike.

So, is this seasonal? Is the rate going to be exactly the same?

Now, I know for locals, I will say this, one of the challenges and it's not just gypsy cabs out there as well, there are other services out in town, and some of the other areas Back o' Town, if you are wanting me to call it that, that have a well-established service. You make one call and I'm probably ratting them out, but they are well organised. You ain't gotta get a gypsy cab, they'll come and pick you up and bring you right home to your house.

So, there's a lot of that going on right now. So yes, I know what's going on out there with it. And having owned a taxi myself, I know the challenges with having it. I sold it because it's too challenging out there to get people on the road for 16 hours, so I know there are challenges.

So maybe we need to start looking at, we can get more taxi licences, give them out and vary the taxi licence so that we can cover certain times. That might help. I don't know if that's a solution or not, but it is a creative way of looking at it, because we can't get the taxis out there for 16 hours. We know that.

So maybe we need to incentivise the industry. We have already tried to incentivise it by giving them lower taxes. It hasn't worked; it's just not working. And we need to face up to the fact, all of us, all 36 of us, it's not working.

And the taxi industry wants to survive. They are telling us to police them, then let's do it. You say you want it done? Did they say it to you, Minister? I don't know, that they want to be policed? We certainly heard it in the several meetings that we've heard, so let's do it.

Let's tighten up the reins. If you want to go ahead, like most of us have said we agree with ridesharing that maybe this is a way forward, but it certainly is not going to resolve the issues that I heard from both

sides of the House. Most of the issues that I heard from both sides of the House, I'm not sure, since we can't even police the industry that we have now, adding rideshare, how are we going to police that? Because there are going to be some unintended consequences by adding this to it.

I hope we all understand things unforeseen that we probably didn't even think of that are going to take place, so let's tighten up the reins and I hope we can get some answers to those questions.

And that's all, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any other Honourable Member wish to make a contribution? None?

Premier.

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

Are you going to start a clock for me? I'll do my best not to take 30 minutes.

The Speaker: I know you aren't going to use your 30 minutes.

Hon. E. David Burt: Oh, we'll see, but I got . . . yes, it's too late. All right.

So, Mr. Speaker, as I started during my intervention, it is clear to, I think, everyone in the country that I have a declarable interest on this particular matter. As my Register of Interests says, I am a shareholder of Hitch Limited. And as I have said since I have been in office, I have not taken an active role. I resigned my director positions, and I'm not involved with the day-to-day activities or anything else regarding that.

Now, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Sorry? The sad reality of the public debate around this is that this debate is more about what has taken place or what I did as a private citizen before I came to office, and not about the policy or the problem that we are trying to solve.

An Hon. Member: What?

Hon. E. David Burt: I will say it again. The sad reality of the public debate around this particular issue is more around the interests of which I just declared than the policy of which we are trying to debate. The public debate, not the one in here.

The Speaker: Let me just make it clear from here. You stressed the public debate, not the debate here tonight.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes. Not the one in here, no.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: The public debate.

The Speaker: As long as we clear that.

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, not the one in here.

The Speaker: All right.

Hon. E. David Burt: Thank you.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. E. David Burt: It has not been about the stranded residents and tourists. It has not been about the fact that we have an issue in this country providing transportation to tourists and residents during peak times in our holiday season. That is a reality and a fact.

And with the greatest of respect to the Opposition, none of the solutions of which they proposed will work to fix that problem.

We all know the difficulty—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: I will get to your points later.

We all know the difficulty of trying to tell someone who owns a vehicle that you must hire someone else. You know, the Honourable Member who just took his seat said he sold his taxi because he can't find people, to find someone else to drive something. And then when they get in an accident, then the taxi is off road and all the rest. We know the difficulties there.

So, let's just park that to the side because the reality is that the job of a government is to solve problems. I remember an interview that I did a few years ago and I said that if I didn't (with my friends) decide to launch an app in 2015, this rideshare problem would have been long fixed.

Again, the public debate focuses on the wrong issues. It doesn't focus on the policy and the problem that we are trying to solve. As a tourism destination, we cannot be a place where people cannot get from A to B.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: We cannot be a jurisdiction where we have persons who we invite into our country to work and all the rest, expect certain things and can't get to dinner and all the rest. We have all heard the stories. I have told the stories where I will go to an event. I will see someone and I will see people with that look on their face at the hotel door. And I know exactly what that look is. That look is they had dinner reservations they can't get there.

I remember one time I went to a hotel and I told my driver, take them to where they are going, please, so they can get to their dinner.

The reason why I made that decision in 2015, Mr. Speaker—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: When I made that decision in 2015, Mr. Speaker, is I remember I was staying in the constituency 32, the Honourable Member Scott Simmons. I was having a honeymoon weekend . . . not a honeymoon weekend, an anniversary weekend with my wife at Greene's Guest House. We went to Cambridge Beaches. Guess what? We couldn't get back for our post honeymoon or post dinner anniversary activities. Couldn't get back.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes, couldn't get back. Stuck and stranded. Ruined my plans.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: But this is the reality, Mr. Speaker. This is faced by people throughout this country.

And the question is, what are you going to do about it? Now, I understand that there's politics at play here. I understand that it is a safe move to say, let's say oppose, oppose, oppose. But what is the plan to fix? And I'm sorry, Leader of the Opposition, trying to —

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Honourable Member is misleading the House. He's saying that oppose, oppose, oppose, oppose. This is not about opposing. This, as I've already said, is about putting good legislation forward.

If we cannot get on our feet, and we have made suggestions . . . I just said . . . I just stood up and made some suggestions. And for the Premier to get on his feet to say that we haven't made any suggestions, is foolhardy at best.

The Speaker: Point taken.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: It's foolhardy.

The Speaker: Point taken.

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, with the greatest respect to the Honourable former Premier, that's not what I said. I was addressing the Opposition Leader. I said, I'll get to your questions in a little bit. Just calm down. And I'm sure the Minister will do that. Just listen for a bit, Craig.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: So here we go. No, no, no. There's a political dimension to this. We're all politicians here. We get it. We recognise. We understand it.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: The Premier is suggesting that we are playing politics with a Bill.

[Laughter]

Hon. E. David Burt: I absolutely am.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes. And he is exercising the very delusion that his Honourable Member spoke of earlier. We are here for good legislation. So, let's stay on that line and length.

Hon. E. David Burt: I haven't even started talking about the legislation yet, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Just continue on—

Hon. E. David Burt: I'm good. I'm good, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: —before you went down that avenue.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: So here we go, Mr. Speaker. So here we go, Mr. Speaker.

Let's be clear what we are talking about. Because the Honourable Members on that side kept making references to Uber and the first two speakers on that side. We are not talking about Uber, which is—

An Hon. Member: Who is talking about Uber?

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Honourable Premier is misleading the House. No one all evening has mentioned U-B-E-R.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Mr. Speaker, it is clear they are not listening to their own Members when their own Members speak. And it is clear that I have struck a nerve.

So let me be clear, Mr. Speaker, as I am going to talk about this. No one . . . we are not talking about Uber, which is unregulated, as some people have said, a key point and a key difference.

We are talking about supplementing the existing taxi service to assist in providing additional lift during peak times.

An Hon. Member: Not regulated.

Hon. E. David Burt: That is what we are talking about.

An Hon. Member: Unregulated.

Hon. E. David Burt: We have unregulated situations and we have regulated situations. And that is what we are talking about with this particular piece of legislation.

Mr. Speaker, it is important to make the distinction because the public debate will focus on things like Uber, like what's it called, and the impacts of what it has had in other jurisdictions, which is the exact opposite of what we are trying to have happen here.

The thought that a government would bring forward legislation to decimate an industry that so many of our constituents and so many of our families and so many people rely on is a nonsense. It is a nonsense.

An Hon. Member: That's right.

Hon. E. David Burt: But it is easy for headlines, for those who may want to rally persons and feelings around this.

We all know what happened in the run-up to the bye-election before the Honourable Opposition Leader won his sit back. You know, we were talking about ridesharing. They got everyone out all ready and ready to go. We get it. It is politics. It is the same thing that we did when we were in Opposition and the Honourable Member, who was the Minister of Transport, bought a minicar Bill. We got it.

But let's talk about how we fix the problem. And the problem is that there is not enough transportation during peak times during our summer season. We all know that, and we can all accept that.

And so, Mr. Speaker, that is why I have said the statements that I have said about the industry's decimation ring hollow. And that is why the statement also about lack of consultation rings hollow, because this has been going on since this Honourable Member was a Minister, since the Whip was the Minister, since the Minister . . . it has been going on for a while.

There have been numerous statements on this, and it has continued to evolve to try to strike the right balance, to try to get there.

When this was first announced, the criticism and complaints were correct, because it was never the policy of the Government to ensure that taxis were given first preference and rideshare was only given if an opportunity, if taxis did not respond.

That was not what happened when it was first announced. So, it is important to recognise that through the consultative process and the meetings, we have come up with something that we think strikes that balance, Mr. Speaker, and that in and of itself is important. So, MP Jamahl Simmons said it best when he said *taxi first, rideshare when needed*. And others have made the point, such as the Deputy Premier and the Minister. If taxis are there, [ready] and willing to pick people up, then rideshare will never take off.

An Hon. Member: Yes.

Hon. E. David Burt: It will never take off. But this, Mr. Speaker, is the challenge that we have. We know it is the case. And so, we want to support our existing industries, but we want to fix those problems.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I am going to give you a little bit of history, because there is no worse feeling, at least for me. It was pretty bad. And I will share . . . some people may have heard if they listen on the radio, and I will take a little bit of time. I will share, Mr. Speaker, what happened the first time I used Uber. It's a story. Because for people who went to school in Washington, DC or other places like New York, they will know how hard it was for a Black man to get a taxi. And I remember the indignity of myself in university, having to find the nearest White person to ask them to hail a taxi for me because I needed to get to where I was going.

And that is a reality of many stories of persons. Now, this does not have much to do with this debate, but I am setting a context here, Mr. Speaker, because I remember in 2010 when I had gone to DC on a trip, and I was trying to get to a meeting. I messaged the person who I was going to a meeting with, and I said, *I'm sorry, I'm late, I forgot what it was like being back in DC, I'm on the side of the road, I can't get a taxi*, because the Black man will have the taxis drive by them.

It's the same thing, same thing in New York, we know the stories. That's not what this debate is about. And I remember that this person wrote back to me. And back then I had a Blackberry, I didn't have an iPhone, and all the rest.

An Hon. Member: Blackberry!

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes—Blackberry.

And he said, *Oh, why are you waiting for a taxi? Just text this message and it's this service called Uber, and a taxi will come*. And I'm like, *What do you mean?*

And I remember texting that message. And then all of a sudden, I got this text message back that says, *Oh, your taxi will be there in X, Y, and Z*. I was like, I was saying unparliamentary language, Mr. Speaker, because I was flabbergasted. I was like, this is incredible. So, you mean to tell me that I no longer have to go through indignity of doing this thing, trying to find the closest White person to me to hail a taxi so I don't miss my meeting?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: That's it. Hold on a second. This is the reality. I am explaining to you what many people had to live through. But here's the thing, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Here is the thing, Mr. Speaker. I give you that point because I am making the point around what happens when markets don't function. When markets don't function. Okay?

So, innovation happens, Mr. Speaker, when markets don't function, when things are not supposed to work the way that they are.

The reason why medallions in Washington, DC and in New York City are worthless is because an unregulated mousetrap came in that did it better than what was happening, undercut them and took their business and they weren't working well, Mr. Speaker. That's the fact.

When I have to find a White person to hail a taxi for me, it means the market is not working well. And trust and believe, there are many other persons like that who had that indignity and said, *You know what, they've built something, we're going to do this and all the rest*. And that is the reason why we are here.

But here's what I'm saying, Mr. Speaker. It existed because it fixed the problem. And here is reality. The taxi industry in this country, Mr. Speaker, is lucky that we are so small.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. E. David Burt: No, I'm being real. Let's say . . . if we're going to have a debate, then let's have a debate. Because I see the Honourable Members out there trying to be churlish. But I'm having a debate about an issue that I know about.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Yes, I know about it too.

Hon. E. David Burt: The reality is, Mr. Speaker, we are lucky that we are so small. Because if we were a larger jurisdiction, a tourist jurisdiction, Uber would have been here a long time undercutting this market. And we would have a very difficult time trying to regulate it out, as happened in many different places.

And so, here's the thing, Mr. Speaker, and this is important. It may not be that way forever. It may not be that way forever. The way that technology is going and AI is going, different things like that, people may be able to deploy these solutions in various countries and various things much faster than the regular things of which we try to do to keep up with people will matter.

And that's why, Mr. Speaker, it is important that we deal with this from a regulated standpoint. There is no undercutting the market here, because to answer the question the Honourable Member raised, it is the

same rates. So, we are not dealing with persons undercutting the market. An important point. It is ours. And yes, it is seasonal, as has been announced and stated multiple times in the papers that have been put forward.

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER
[Misleading]

Hon. L. Craig Cannonier: I believe the Honourable Member is misleading Bermuda as a whole and this House. He is speaking as if the industry is going to be regulated with this ridesharing. We are not regulating the industry at all right now. That's why we're in this position. We are not doing anything with taxi drivers not being on the road for 16 hours and the likes.

We're not regulating. We got gypsy cabs up and down Bermuda. We're not regulating anything. That's why we are in the position that we are in. We need real regulation, enforcement. And it's not happening. And it's not going to happen on the rideshare if we are not already doing it.

The Speaker: Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: I see the Honourable Member is excited. And clearly not a point of order, but that's all right.

Now, Mr. Speaker, let me continue. Because the Honourable Member is making a difference in distinction between regulation and enforcement of existing regulation. He points to one particular issue that may not be being enforced. But there are many taxi drivers who will tell you that there is enforcement that takes place on many of the various matters that are very on significant things, the minibuses and all the rest.

But he can have his opinion. That is fine. And I think that we have heard from Members and we have also heard from myself on the issue of the 16 hours. Because there are some points that are made from the Opposition, that if the thing cannot be on the books, then you should take it off the books, because it is a very difficult thing to do.

But let's not talk about the 16 hours and get stuck there, Mr. Speaker, because on the matter related to regulation, that means that there is a regulated market. And what the legislation sets out is a regulated market. Our taxi industry is a regulated market, we can talk about enforcement, but it is a regulated market.

When you don't have regulation, it is unregulated, which is what you have in many jurisdictions with Uber or Lyft or other particular services, Mr. Speaker.

Now, let me continue. As I said, Mr. Speaker, I guess I can say I'm probably the only person in this Honourable House who has built a ride-hailing app.

And so, I can speak to this in a matter of which makes sense.

I think it is important to address the Honourable Member's concerns and other concerns from persons. Mr. Speaker, tech can enforce, code can enforce rules. You can audit code. It is built in via code, as the Minister has said. When I talk about code, I am talking about the code that is built into ridesharing platforms, whichever it is. The legislation as set out or the regulations which are coming forward, of which the Minister has spoken about, or if he has not, he will speak inside of his closing, speak about the fact that, as has been said widely, taxis get dispatched first. The only place where rideshare is used is via an app. And if the taxis on those particular platforms do not answer, then a ridesharing vehicle is done.

Whether it is what we do, Mr. Speaker, or whether it is what anyone else does, the reality is that it is via an app. I want us to understand that you can audit code, Mr. Speaker, the TCD can see whether or not the people are actually following the regulation. And it does not require manual human intervention to do that. That is technology. That is what we are trying to do, Mr. Speaker, deal with matters related to technology.

So yes, Mr. Speaker, it is clear that I support this, because we need to advance. And what I want to do before I close is to thank all of the Members of this Government who have worked with, who have spoken, who have contributed, because this has gone through a lot of iterations and caucus, Mr. Speaker.

It has not been an easy ride to get it to this place, Mr. Speaker, because it's a difficult issue. But we are trying to advance in a limited fashion, in a balanced form, where we believe that we can protect the interests of the taxi industry, while also providing additional economic options and additional options for our visitors in a busy tourism season that we are expecting, and in the future to go ahead and make it happen. When markets happen, when markets work, we can do better. And what we are trying to do here through this is to make sure that there are more and better options for tourists and residents during peak time.

And of course, Mr. Speaker, I am proud to support this legislation. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Premier.

[Does] any other Member wish to speak?

None other?

Minister.

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

Mr. Speaker, I know as the hour is late, I want to start by thanking all Members of this Honourable House for the very robust debate that we have had over a very, very important issue, and that is transportation in this country.

And Mr. Speaker, what I have heard, before I get into my closing remarks, are three key points that

have gone throughout this debate. And the first one, which started at the beginning, was the Honourable Members from the other side continuously asking about data. And the way that the legislation is currently set up with dispatch companies is they are required to submit data to the Transport Control Department. And they are required to report it accurately.

And as I was going through that data, Mr. Speaker, some of my colleagues have quoted some of this data. And I know, Mr. Speaker, you asked where did that data come from? It comes directly from the active dispatch companies that are reporting to the Transport Control Department. And I want to put some of these stats in context, that the data that comes is that there are fluctuations through operator availability throughout the week. And the data, the dispatch data that has been given to TCD shows that the highest percentage throughout the week of taxis on the road is 68 per cent . . . 68 per cent on Tuesday. Sorry, let me start at Monday, 64 per cent; Wednesdays, 64 per cent; Thursdays, 62 per cent; 61 per cent on Fridays; 55 per cent on Saturdays and 58 [per cent] on Sundays.

At 7:00 am, Mr. Speaker, some of the data shows that only 24 per cent availability of taxis on the road. We heard earlier, the average wait time for pickup is 37 minutes. And that was data from 2025. And the most shocking stat that you have heard this evening, and I will reiterate it, Mr. Speaker, is that there are at times in 2025, 80,000—to be exact it was 82,284 unanswered ride requests. And you may say, *Well, that sounds ridiculous.*

I'm not saying that's people. But I have an example of a time it was Cup Match and I was at a barbecue. I had a good time all of Cup Match Day. And I cannot tell you the number of times that my group called over and over and over to try to get a vehicle.

So, Mr. Speaker, while the Honourable Members from the other side will say that there is no data, it does exist and we can pour through it. And I am sure as the chairman of the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board has said, his committee will be looking at that data even further.

The second topic that we have heard quite a bit about this evening, Mr. Speaker, is enforcement. And while I'm not going to try to gaslight anyone in this House this evening, I must, if I may—

The Speaker: Go ahead.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —speak of an email that I got on April 8, 2025, Mr. Speaker. It was from a One Bermuda Alliance Senator at the time.

The email came in to the acting director of Transport Control Department. And I won't bore you with the full details of this. But essentially, this One Bermuda Alliance Senator was questioning why would TCD disrupt the flow of traffic in Dockyard to enforce taxi regulations? Why would we do such a thing?

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. E. David Burt: Say it again!

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, an email which included, it was sent to the Honourable Member who sits across the aisle, was included in this correspondence—

An Hon. Member: The Shadow?

Hon. Owen Darrell: —questioning the Transport Control Department enforcement officers, who Mr. Speaker, were doing their job. And what better time to enforce the transport—

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister is probably intentionally misleading the House. This was not a question from that Honourable Senator about the enforcement being an issue. The issue was that the enforcement was planned at a time that inconvenienced tourists. It was not an email complaining about enforcement.

[Inaudible interjections]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: And I have to speak up, Mr. Speaker, because it's being framed as though it was a complaint about enforcement, when it was simply a complaint about timing. And [there were] also some offers made about how that could be done better.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjections]

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, I think the point remains. We just went through about a . . . we are in the midst of a four-hour debate, Mr. Speaker, where the word “enforcement” has come up so often, no context—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Owen Darrell: No, no context was put around it.

But I just bring this up, Mr. Speaker, that when enforcement is attempted to be made, there is no right time for enforcement. I guess he wants me . . . sorry, not he, the Honourable Member would prefer that we do enforcement in February in Dockyard when there are no taxi drivers there.

[Inaudible interjections and laughter]

An Hon. Member: Or no cruise ships.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Or no cruise ships. So, Mr. Speaker, I don't want to belabour that point. But I make it to say that enforcement is happening, it will continue to happen.

I cannot tell you to look at the faces of public officers who have to take the abuse—

Hon. E. David Burt: Yes.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —when they try to enforce traffic laws in this country. There are stories that people march to Transport Control Department, threatening enforcement officers, because they are simply trying to enforce the laws of this country.

They asked a question . . . sorry, the Honourable Members from the other side. Have we ever taken anyone's permit? On September 16, 2025, the Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board cancelled a permit for 12 months, ending on September 30, 2026, following a number of written complaints. Mr. Speaker, I would say that that is enforcement.

Mr. Speaker, on July 15, 2025, under this Minister's watch, the initial public service vehicle licence application of an individual was denied due to criminal convictions under sections 82(1)(a) and 82(2) [of the Motor Car Act 1951]. That is enforcement on the front end, Mr. Speaker.

Two more. On August 3, and this was not under my watch, but it has been happening for a while [since] 2021. The Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board cancelled a taxi permit following several written complaints. And another one where taxi drivers were given warnings. I'm not going to go through all these. But from 2019 to present, I have a list, Mr. Speaker.

Four taxis were ticketed for operating without a valid licence. One was ticketed for being uninsured. Twenty-five tickets were issued for no driver's licence. Twelve tickets for failing to ensure a badge, so on and so on the list goes, Mr. Speaker, so I reject the [assertion] from the Honourable Members from the other side, that there is little to no enforcement.

And, Mr. Speaker, the third point that I've heard throughout this debate, from the other side is, *Were the stakeholders consulted?* And, Mr. Speaker, while it's a cute argument to make from the other side that their friends, or the individuals that like to email them regularly, will say, *Oh, the Minister hasn't consulted or he doesn't*, Mr. Speaker, I go to work every single day to serve the people of this country, not just to serve one segment of this country.

An Hon. Member: There you go.

Hon. Owen Darrell: So, while Mr. Speaker, we have all seen the emails. And that's what people do when they are trying to lobby to get your attention. But, Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that these wonderful public

officers, some of whom are here this evening, have taken the direction of myself, the direction of my Cabinet colleagues, the direction of this Progressive Labour Party Government, who puts service first, Mr. Speaker. And I have seen it.

The stakeholders that they have met with the Bermuda Hotel Association, the Bermuda Chamber of Commerce, I personally met with them again, as recently as yesterday morning. The Bermuda Tourism Authority, the Bermuda Police Service, the Bermuda Public Service Vehicle Licensing Board, insurance companies, dispatch companies, one of which was actually their own, that was recently approved as a dispatch company. Skyport Limited, Mr. Speaker, WEDCO, the municipal corporations, cruise line representatives, the Road Safety Council, and CADA.

Now, Mr. Speaker, this is an extensive list of stakeholders. Now, while my Honourable Members from the other side may like to make a meal of one particular organisation that has, I am told, 160 members, the biggest outreach that this Ministry has made was sending direct mailers to the nearly 3,000 holders of a public service vehicle licence, and explaining to them exactly what this legislation was trying to solve.

And at the very top, it said, taxis first. And then it went down, Mr. Speaker, step by step, as to the problem that we are trying to solve, and how this would benefit Bermudians, and how it would not disenfranchise the taxi industry.

So, Mr. Speaker, while my Honourable Members from the other side would like to say that there has been no consultation, that is absolutely false. Last thing when I get to stakeholders, Mr. Speaker—

POINT OF ORDER

[Misleading]

Mr. Dwayne Robinson: Point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister is misleading the House. There was never a statement that there was no consultation. The statement was that the taxi drivers stated there was no consultation with them, and he can solve that with them. So, he needs to be accurate in what he's saying. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Mm-hmm.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, and I will bring this to a close, because the importance here is that where I was going with that, there are more stakeholders and more drivers than just one particular organisation.

My history with the taxi industry goes back many years, family history and the like. The beauty of getting up and down this country, the beauty of the ministries that I have, forces me, it requires me to go up and down this community, into community clubs, sporting events, cultural events, tourism events, is that you get to speak to people organically.

Mr. Frost, I'll call his name, been in the industry for a long time. I saw him today and said, *Mr. Frost, I'm sure I'm not your favourite person right now. He said, Young man, you are doing an excellent job. And keep on keeping on. Younger drivers, I wake up in the morning, saying Darrell, I need to talk to you. Are you doing the right thing?*

I got up very early this morning to speak directly to the people, Mr. Speaker. That is consultation and that is stakeholders.

But, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to finish here and talk about a group of individuals that I haven't heard being discussed much this evening. And that is the Ms. Jones and Ms. Smith who we did hear [about] in a previous debate from the Opposition. These are the individuals whom we all represent, Mr. Speaker. Some of my colleagues have mentioned them. These are the individuals who may live up on Glebe Road and struggle, Mr. Speaker, to get down the hill to Parsons Road to wash their laundry. These are the individuals, Mr. Speaker, who live on Palmetto Road, who struggle to get to Hamilton Princess at 6:00 am to work in the hospitality industry to service our guests, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, what we haven't heard about is Ms. Jones, who leaves St. George's on a Friday night to go into Hamilton to have a party with her friend. It is pouring rain, Mr. Speaker. The car unfortunately breaks down on Victoria Street. You might think, well, they're in town. That's easy.

Mr. Speaker, in the pouring rain, you would think you pull out your phone, you call for a taxi. When Ms. Jones and her friends cannot get to their party on Front Street because they cannot get a taxi to pick them up on Victoria Street, Mr. Speaker, we have a problem.

And, Mr. Speaker, this rideshare legislation that we are bringing this morning, while it may not fix every single issue of which the Opposition has raised tonight, I think everyone is in broad agreement that transportation availability in this country is a massive problem. We have heard examples of long wait times. We have heard of challenges in the airport. And we have heard of gaps in this system that we are addressing with this legislation.

Enforcement, as I said, is very important. And we will continue to enforce transportation.

You heard earlier from the chair of the Public Service Licensing Board. I have been very stern with where we are going and what the expectations are. And this framework will introduce stronger accountability.

Questions from the other side talked about credit cards. You can only use credit cards through the app for this legislation. We will continue to strengthen our relationship with the taxi industry. We will continue to engage with taxi operators, dispatchers, and all members of the sector.

And ultimately, Mr. Speaker, this legislation seeks to address a real and long-standing issue. And we are ensuring that when it's all said and done, the residents and the visitor needs regarding transportation

in Bermuda will improve. And this rideshare app is a reliable way of which to do so.

With that, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Take it to Committee.

[Laughter]

Hon. Owen Darrell: I move that the Bill be committed.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Deputy [Speaker].

House in Committee at 12:01 am

[Ms. Lovitta F. Foggo, Chairman]

COMMITTEE ON BILL

MOTOR CAR (RIDESHARING) AMENDMENT ACT 2026

The Chairman: Good evening, Members. We are now in Committee of the Whole [House] on the Bill entitled [Motor Car \(Ridesharing\) Amendment Act 2026](#). I call on the Minister responsible.

Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam [Chairman].
I would like to move all of the clauses all at once—

An Hon. Member: There we go.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Clauses 1 through 8.

The Chairman: It has been moved that we consider all clauses 1 through 8.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Clause 1 provides the citation for the Bill.

Clause 2 amends section 2 of the Act (Interpretation, construction and saving) to amend the definition of “public service vehicle” and insert new definitions.

Clause 3 amends section 28 of the Act (Establishment of the Public Service Vehicles Licensing Board) to expand the powers and duties to be discharged by the Public Service Vehicles Licensing Board to include the determination of applications for ridesharing permits, the inspection of vehicles proposed for use and used as ridesharing vehicles, the granting, refusing, suspending and revoking of ridesharing permits.

Clause 4 inserts the following new sections into the Act: section 35C (Application for a ridesharing permit); section 35D (Grant of ridesharing permit, refusal

or request for further information); section 35E (Inspection of a ridesharing vehicle); section 35F (Persons prohibited from holding a ridesharing permit); section 35G (Suspension or revocation of ridesharing permit); section 35H (Registration with despatching service); section 35I (Prohibition on providing a ridesharing service); and section 35J (Appeal of a decision of the Board).

Clause 5 amends section 37 of the Act (Regulations; use of public service vehicles) to provide for the imposition of a fine not exceeding \$10,000 where a person commits an offence against regulations made under the Act.

Clause 6 amends section 37A of the Act (Despatching Services) in subsection (1C) by inserting new paragraphs to include a digital network and any other system approved by the Board as “approved equipment” under that section.

Clause 7 amends Schedule 1B of the Act to prescribe the fee for the issuance of a ridesharing permit.

Clause 8 provides for the commencement of the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Bill 2026.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Chairman. And thank you to the Honourable Minister for his presentation of this Bill in Committee.

My first questions are in clause 2 over at the second page of the Bill. Clause 2 at the second page provides for a series of definitions. And we see definitions for “ridesharing permit” and “ridesharing operator” in the middle of the page. “Ridesharing operator” is a person granted a licence. “Ridesharing permit” is the permit granted by the Board.

My question to the Honourable Minister is, How many are anticipated to be granted? Is it 200? Is it 2,000? I know that Minister Lightbourne said in the general debate it would be 150 permits, but I can't find that anywhere in the Bill. So, I'd be grateful to hear on that point.

While I'm still in clause 2, Madam Chairman, I'm happy to put my second question on clause 2 with your leave. And that is under the definition of “ridesharing service.” That provides that the ridesharing service begins when the rideshare operator accepts a request from a person via dispatching service and continues while the ridesharing operator transports the passenger and ends when the last passenger of each journey exits the ridesharing vehicle.

So, my second question is this. So, when the ridesharing vehicle is not providing what we just described with the passenger, how is that going to work? If it's driving around between jobs with the decals that are required elsewhere in the Bill, is it still a rideshare

operator at those points in time? Or is it not because it's not providing a ridesharing service?

Those are my two questions in relation to clause 2. I do have other questions. Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Are there any other [Members] who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8? Not at this time.

Minister, would you like to answer the questions? Or Member, do you wish to ask further questions?

I recognise—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I am happy to proceed through.

The Chairman: —the Member—

Mr. Scott Pearman: I thought it might be of more assistance if he answered, but it's entirely in your hands, Madam [Chairman].

The Chairman: Yes, you may ask your questions.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you very much.

Moving then to clause 3 of the Bill, I understand from the general debate that the Chairman of the Board identified in this Bill, if I understood it correctly, to be the Public Service Vehicles Licensing Board under constitute under the 1951 primary Act was, in fact, MP Tyrrell. I may have misheard that.

But if that is the case, that MP Tyrrell chairs the Board, could the Minister kindly share with us whether or not the Code of Practice referred to in clause 3 has been commenced, and whether or not the Minister has seen a draft of the Code of Practice that the Board is supposed to produce?

Over the page at page three of the Bill, I then have a question in relation to clause 4, if you'd like me to continue on to clause 4.

The Chairman: Yes, continue.

Mr. Scott Pearman: In clause 4, we see in relation to applications for ridesharing permits, reference to terms and conditions specified by the Board. Again, just as I had a question posed in relation to the Code of Practice, the same question applies to the terms and conditions. Have these been commenced by the Board? And has the Minister seen a draft of those?

Further down, we see in relation to clause, still at clause 4, but at the bottom at subsection (4) . . . so, this is the inserted language for application. [New section] 35C, we see (1), we see (2), we see (3), and (4). It says this: “A person making an application under subsection (2) is subject to (a), a criminal record check; and (b), a traffic offence record check.”

And so, what I am wondering here in relation to that bit of the Bill, if you have an outstanding traffic offence, are you therefore ineligible for rideshare? And if

that is not the case, why do we do the check if you are not ineligible owing to the traffic offence?

Still at page three of the Bill at the bottom, there is a [new] section 35D that is inserted by clause 4, and we see [new section]35D(2)(a). The Board may after considering an application under subsection (1), [(a)] approve the application and grant a ridesharing permit subject to such conditions as are specified by the Board."

My question in relation to those conditions is, Who is the responsible entity for enforcing those conditions? And if it is not . . . if it is the people at TCD that the Minister talked about earlier, how are they to know about the conditions imposed by the Board?

Madam Chairman, I am happy to go on if you wish, or we can get a couple answers before I move on to page four.

The Chairman: Yes, I will see if the Minister wishes to begin answering some of your questions.

Minister, or would you prefer he . . . okay.
He prefers you continue. Yes.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. I am then moving on to page four of the Bill.

And then we see . . . this is still continuing with the insertion of [new section] 35D, which started at page three of the Bill and now turns over the page to page four. And here we are talking about the rideshare permit being granted under [subsection] (2)(a), if you see that at (3) towards the top of the page. And then we see [paragraphs] (a), (b), (c), and (d).

Under [paragraph] (d), it says that the permit, if granted, is, "non-transferable from a person to another person or from a private motor vehicle to another private motor vehicle."

I would invite the Honourable Minister just to clarify my understanding. And I will use Ms. Jones since we talked about her earlier. Does that mean if Ms. Jones has a licence and Ms. Jones' Fiat has a licence that only Ms. Jones may drive the Fiat and the Fiat may only be driven by Ms. Jones? I think it does mean that, but I would invite clarification.

Moving then, Madam Chairman, to [subsection] (4), it says "A ridesharing permit shall be granted for a period as specified by the Board." So, in relation to the reference to "period," is the Minister able to suggest to us or share with this House how often that will be renewed? What is the period intended?

Again, we heard during the debate, I believe it was Minister Rabain said that this was to be seasonal. I think some of the other speakers from across the aisle said that this would be seasonal. I can find nowhere in this Bill a reference to it being seasonal. And so, I would be grateful if the Minister could clarify where that seasonality arises in relation to that period.

The next question still on this page is in relation to under [subsection] (6), still on the same page below [subsection] (4) where I just posed the question. "After

consultation with the Board, the Minister may, by order subject to the negative resolution procedure, prescribe the number of ridesharing permits to be issued."

Now, I have already asked the Minister an earlier question, I think it was my first question, as to how many are envisaged, 200, 2,000? Is it the 150 mentioned by one of the Honourable Members across the aisle? The question here though, is if it's to be determined by the Minister, if the Board per this Bill is preparing the terms and conditions, and the Board per this Bill is preparing the Code of Practice, why is it that the number is going to be determined by the Minister? That seems a bit illogical that the experts who are dealing with all of this aren't the ones who would then determine what is needed by the market that the Premier so eloquently spoken about earlier.

Over the page on page five of the Bill—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: Well, I mean, if it's market driven, let's let the people who are actually on the ground level decide, one would think. But no doubt, the Minister will explain the thinking behind that.

The next question is on page five of the Bill. And, if you recall, Madam Chairman, I earlier pointed out the point about if you have a traffic violation, that there would be a traffic offence record check under clause 4. So, in order to get the application, you have to have a traffic offence check. However, if you are then refused a request, that doesn't provide . . . I am sorry, I'm on page five at the top.

So, it's in relation to persons prohibited. So, in order to get it, you get to have the background check of your traffic offences. But you could not . . . you can be prohibited simply because of being convicted of a criminal offence. There is no reference to under [new section] 35F, there's (a) and there's (b), but there's no (c), which one would expect to see, that if you have a traffic offence record, having had it checked by the Board, and if it actually exists, one would have thought that that would in fact then prohibit you. But it does not seem to be the case.

Again, if you look down to the next section that's inserted at page five, Madam Chairman, [new section] 35G, we see again that under [subparagraph] (iii), that if you are convicted of any traffic law or regulations, you can be suspended. So, it doesn't really make sense that you can ban from applying, you can be suspended or revoked, but you can't actually be prohibited at the top of page five of the Bill.

The next question is still at [new section] 35G in the middle of page five, down at [subparagraph] (vi). Here we are talking about suspension or revocation. And at the top there, you see "The Board may suspend a ridesharing permit where—", and it's [subparagraph] (vi), "breaches of any other condition specified by the Board."

Now, again, how do we know who is checking this? Is it the Board? Is it some other party? And if it's some other party, how do they know the conditions that have been specified by the Board?

Just above that, at [subparagraph] (v), we see that you can have a suspension or revocation if you are the subject of a written complaint made by a senior traffic officer. And I'm just curious where that is defined or what that's supposed to mean. What is a "senior traffic officer" as opposed to just a "traffic officer"? Why is there a distinction being made there in relation to the seniority of that person and whether a junior traffic officer should also be able to issue something that would cause suspension or revocation? It would seem logical.

Further down, we see then what's going to happen if you are suspended, right? So, here is someone possibly with a criminal offence or with a traffic violation or is subject to a written complaint. Before we have suspension under this Bill, at [new section] 35G, under [subsection] (2), we have prior to suspending and there are a whole host of things that are going to have to happen before you can be suspended. Under [paragraph] (a), you have to give notice in writing to the ridesharing permit holder that includes, [subparagraph] (i), a statement of the alleged breach, and [subparagraph] (ii), actions required to remedy the alleged breach where remediable.

And then you have under [paragraph] (b), where a breach is not remedied, under [subsection] (2)(a)(ii), allow the ridesharing permit holder the opportunity to make representations before the Board at the hearing. Right? So, first of all, you have to write to them and tell them what they are doing wrong. Then you have to show what the breach is. Then you have to give them time to remedy. And then you have to give the opportunity that they can come and make representations before the Board at a hearing, all prior to suspending.

So, I'm just wondering whether or not that's an overly laborious approach to be taking to people who you might want to suspend or revoke for criminal activity or traffic law violations. It just does seem a little bit onerous.

In terms of [paragraph] (b), under [new section] 35G, this is [subsection] (1)(b), again, a motor car used to provide ridesharing services fails a vehicle inspection conducted by the department. That's another criterion for suspension or revocation. How often does the Minister envisage that these vehicles will be inspected? I note that it says it's only when it's directed under [new] section 35E. So, are those the only times there are going to be inspections, or will there be other times when there will be inspections?

Next page is over to page 6. In the middle of page 6 we talk about the operation of a ridesharing service in an efficient manner shall include, and we see [paragraph] (a), maintaining the rideshare vehicle in a decent and comfortable condition, et cetera, and [paragraph] (b), in relation to the ridesharing operator

complying with the Code of Practice for ridesharing operators. So again, a question as to how that's going to be checked. Considering those are requirements for people to both be a ridesharing person who's licenced and have a vehicle that is licenced, how is that in fact going to be checked? And I see the Minister nodding his head. He's obviously contemplated these issues.

Then we have at [new section] 35H(1), where we see registration with the dispatching service. Right? So, it says this, [new section] 35H(1), a person granted a ridesharing permit under [new] section 35D and a ridesharing operator shall register, it's free of charge, but they shall register, it's mandatory, with every dispatching service. So, if you want to be a ridesharing operator in Bermuda, you have got to register with everybody. That's how I understand that. It's now a mandatory obligation to register with everyone, including the one that our Honourable Premier has declared his interest in. So, everyone's going to have to register with all of them.

Is that my correct understanding?

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: That's my correct . . . I just, you know, it's going to boost the numbers of registrations, one might think.

And, Madam Chairman, I realise the hour is late. So, I'll try and be quick on my last two questions. This is at page seven of the Bill.

And it's in relation to [new section] 35I (I for India). And it's one, a person shall not offer a ridesharing service unless he, and there's a number of restrictions. And at the top of page seven under [paragraph] (d) (D for David), one of the restrictions is that he's registered with every dispatching service.

So I'm wondering, in relation to the point that was raised quite a lot, but not addressed, with respect, by the Honourable Minister during the general debate, if you are registering with every dispatch service, how is that going to work in terms of airport pickups and the inability to queue, which we heard mentioned in the general debate?

My final question, Madam Chairman, on the last page, page eight—

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: I just heard from the Honourable Premier, *What's that got to do with anything?* I think a number of speakers, both on this side and on his side, identified one of the biggest problems is the fact the people aren't getting picked up at the airport. So, what has it got to do with it? It's actually got a very major thing to do.

[Inaudible interjection]

Mr. Scott Pearman: My next question, and if, and if the Honourable Premier has questions on his own Bill, he can certainly pose them.

My last question is page eight. And this was at the ridesharing permit amount, which we heard was \$1,000. During the debate, we also heard reference to a \$400 per annum fee. And I just would welcome clarity for that because it doesn't appear in the Bill.

And during the debate, it was also suggested, Madam Chairman.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Your point of order, Minister.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Jason Hayward: The Member is asking a litany of questions in Committee, which is not uncommon. But the purpose of us going to Committee is to do a number of things. Number one, make amendments to the Bill, propose new clauses, or ask that clauses be removed.

If this question is not leading to any of that, I ask your guidance as it pertains to whether or not we are seeing an abuse of procedure.

The Chairman: The Member is allowed to ask any questions on the line items.

Continue.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

My last and final question. And I was just asking about the \$400 per annum that was mentioned in the general debate. And finally, it was suggested by one of the debate people that there was a suggested fee.

Hon. Jason Hayward: Point of order, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Your point of order.

POINT OF ORDER

Hon. Jason Hayward: To what provision in the Standing Order are you . . . is your ruling pertaining to?

The Chairman: I don't have the Standing Order, but our custom and practice when we are in Committee, as it pertains to the objectives in the Committee, a Member is able to deal with the line items of the, related to the objectives, must state that line item and base his questions specifically to those line items.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

Again, my line item was in relation to the ridesharing permit cost of \$1,000 at clause 7. And I was asking two further and indeed final points. I will say to the

Minister, these are my final questions. So perhaps we can get the answers. One was the \$400 per annum. And then there was a suggestion that the actual . . . the fee was the same as the taxis. And I don't doubt that if that is the case. But it was suggested that that was said in this Bill somewhere. And I haven't seen it anywhere. And if the Honourable Minister could perhaps confirm on that.

Thank you very much, Madam Chairman.

The Chairman: Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8?

There are no other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8.

I call on the Minister. Minister, you have the floor.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you. Madam Chairman. I will go through these.

I think my colleague said was it 140, 120 questions. All right. So, I'm going to go through them.

So, the first one. First one, Madam Chairman, asked how many permits will be provided. The answer is 150 permits. And the Minister has the right to amend based on data.

Question two was when the ridesharing vehicle is not in service. What is it? When not providing a service, the rideshare vehicle, Madam Chairman, reverts to a private motor car.

Madam Chairman, the question was, has the Code of Practice commenced and has the Minister seen a copy? The Code of Practice has not commenced as it is in the Regulations. However, I can say that I have seen a draft.

Next question is [new section] 35C(1) through (4) speaks to which the applicant is subject to. Are you ineligible for rideshare if there is a traffic offence? Depending on the traffic offence, Madam Chairman, the Board may review and determine if the applicant has violated their public service vehicle licence.

Madam Chairman, who is the responsible entity for enforcing the conditions imposed by the Board? That would be the Transport Control Department, Madam Chairman.

Question regarding [new section] 35D and the rideshare permit being granted or non-transferable. Does it mean that, and we are using this as an example, Ms. Jones is the only one who can drive their car. A permit is nontransferable, Madam Chairman. However, like a taxi, they can assign another public service vehicle licence holder to drive their permitted rideshare car.

Question, what period and how often will the permits be renewed? The permit is intended to be an annual permit with seasonal segments.

Where does the seasonality appear? The seasonality is prescribed in the Regulations, the hours of operation for rideshare will be as follows. From the 1st

of October to the 31st of March, it will be only from 10:00 pm until 6:00 am; Saturdays, Sundays and public holidays all times; from April 1st to 30th, it will be at all times. And the Minister at the discretion by order published in *The Official Gazette* may vary the dates and times. And an example that I will give was if there is a particular rideshare vehicle that is accessible, an accessible vehicle, and we need that vehicle to be on the road at all times, then the Minister can make that discretion by order and public gazette.

Question, why is the number being determined by the Minister and not the Public Service Vehicles Licensing Board? Because procedurally, Madam Chairman, orders are the responsibility of the Minister and not the Board.

Question regarding [new section] 35G(6), who determines breaches? And is it the Board or is it some other party? The answer for that would be the Board.

[Question regarding new section] 35G(5), what is a senior traffic officer? The senior traffic officer has the role of reporting to the Board. The senior traffic officer reports to the Board, but the other traffic officers report to the senior traffic officer.

So, the question around [new section] 35G(2), there was . . . I'm not sure if this was a question or rather a comment that the Honourable Member from the other side feels that this seems to be overly cumbersome. And the response that I have here is that it's natural justice.

Question [new section] 35G(1)(b), will there be other times where there will be inspections? The annual renewal of the permit will see, Madam Chairman, a time and there will be inspections.

How will that be checked with the Code? The Code is a document that helps and guides the operations to be in compliance with the legislation. The traffic offences will address legislation or any such non-compliance.

Question, was that registration must be with every dispatch. Is that correct? The answer is yes. Must register with every ridesharing service so there is maximum reach.

Question, how will airport pickups work and the ability to queue. They will not queue as this is a rideshare service. If someone is at the location of the airport, there will be a section, a place at the airport where rideshares go and pick up. I mean, you have seen that in most places where at the end of the airport, you may say ridesharing pickups this way. They won't be waiting there, but you can go and pick up there.

There's a . . . talked about fees. The fee is not \$400 for the annual fee. The annual fee is \$1,000 annual permit fee. However, \$400 is for the payroll tax. And that will not be in this Bill.

Are the fees the same as the taxi? They are the same, meaning the fares, I think, not fees, fares, and that will be outlined in the regulations.

Madam Chairman, I believe that I have answered all questions from the Honourable Member.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. I am grateful to the Honourable Minister who indeed did answer most of my questions.

The one that I don't think I had an answer to, although it's possible that I missed it because someone was speaking to me from behind, perhaps, perhaps, thank you, Minister Hayward, perhaps I missed it, was just the point about the traffic violations and how the traffic violations prohibit an application, and they allow for suspension or revocation, but they don't prohibit the holding of the permit under [new section] 35F, the bottom of [page] four and the top of [page] five. So that's my last question.

Shouldn't that, in fact, also be included there in that section?

The Chairman: Thank you, Member.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8?

There being none at this time, I call on the Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

If you would please just allow me just a few moments to just get the—

The Chairman: Certainly.

Hon. Owen Darrell: —correct [answer] for that.

The Chairman: Yes, of course.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: We definitely deal with facts in the House of Assembly. So, I would rather you take your time and make sure you have the correct answer.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you.

The Chairman: I recognise the Member from constituency 18, the Premier.

Hon. E. David Burt: You know my number! Madam Chairman, while the honourable team is providing the answer to the Minister, I just want to go back to a particular question that the Honourable Member had raised and just provide additional clarity as per the Bill, because the Honourable Member . . . and this was on [new] section 35G(2), where he said prior to suspending a ridesharing permit under . . . and he gave us the whole thing and he was basically saying that it was a lawyer's process.

Yes, that is natural justice. But it is also important to note that the very next clause says notwithstanding subsection (2), the Board may suspend a ridesharing permit with immediate effect upon receipt of report in writing from the senior traffic officer where it is expedient to do so in the interest of safety or security and of person. So, there is the ability to do it immediately. So, I don't want the impression to be left in the public space that for any suspension, you have to go through that process. There is another provision that solves to be immediate, if a report is given from a senior traffic officer.

The Chairman: Thank you, Premier. Thank you for that clarification. Thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8?

There being none, when the Minister is ready, he can take the floor.

And I will remind the listening public that at this late hour, we are debating the Bill entitled the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026.

And this topic is very current on many minds. And I have no doubt there are quite a few out there in the listening public. Yes.

So, Minister, whenever you are ready.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman, and we are getting late.

It may have been difficult to capture the question. So, for this one, I'm not going to repeat the question, but I believe I have the answer that traffic violations are an application checking process for the Board that allows the Board to determine if there's a violation that impacts the holders of the PSVLB . . . I'm sorry of the Public Service Vehicle Licence.

The Chairman: Thank you, Minister.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8?

I recognise the Member from constituency 22. Member, you have the floor.

Mr. Scott Pearman: Thank you. It is late, Madam Chairman. And I'll just make the point and then the Minister can take it under advisement.

What I'm saying is that [new section] 35C has a prohibition where there's a requirement for a traffic offence record check. Yes? Likewise, in relation to suspension and revocation in [new section] 35G, there is the ability to suspend in relation to the traffic check.

What I'm saying is, what is missing is that same provision in relation to [new section] 35F. One would expect the same provision to appear in [new section] 35F. And if the Minister would kindly just take that under advisement, I don't need to trouble us further.

Thank you.

The Chairman: Okay, thank you.

Are there any other Members who wish to speak to clauses 1 through 8?

There being none, I call on the Minister.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Thank you, Madam Chairman.

And I do thank the Honourable Member for giving us that grace and I will take it under advisement and be sure to get back to him at the appropriate time.

So, Madam Chairman, I now move that clauses 1 through 8 be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that clauses 1 through 8 be approved.

Are there any objections?

There are none.

[Motion carried: Clauses 1 through 8 passed.]

The Chairman: Continue, Minister. The preamble.

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, I move that the preamble be approved.

The Chairman: It has been moved that the preamble be approved.

Are there any objections?

Hon. Owen Darrell: Madam Chairman, I move that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

The Chairman: It has also been moved that the Bill be reported to the House as printed.

Are there any objections to that? There are none.

So . . . I recognise the Member from constituency 30. Member you have—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Chairman: Okay, there are none.

[Gavel]

The Chairman: So, if you had any, it's too late. Just letting you know.

[Laughter]

[Motion carried: The Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 was considered by a Committee of the whole House and passed without amendment.]

House resumed at 12:35 am

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

REPORT OF COMMITTEE

**MOTOR CAR (RIDESHARING)
AMENDMENT ACT 2026**

The Speaker: Members, are there any objections to the Bill entitled the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 being reported to the House?

Some Hon. Members: Nay.

The Speaker: No objections. It has been reported. Thank you.

Member, before I do that third reading, do you have a seeking of indulgence right now?

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 14

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

Mr. Speaker, I move that Standing Order 14 be suspended to enable me to introduce a Bill to this Honourable House.

The Speaker: Any objections?
Go ahead.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 14 suspended.]

BILL

FIRST READING

**PAYROLL TAX AMENDMENT
AND VALIDATION ACT 2026**

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

Mr. Speaker, I am introducing the following Bill for its first reading so it may be placed on the Order Paper for the next day of meeting, and it is the Payroll Tax Amendment and Validation Act 2026.

The Speaker: Thank you.
Minister, do your third reading.

SUSPENSION OF STANDING ORDER 21

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

I move that Standing Order 21 be suspended to enable me to move the Bill entitled the Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 to be now read a third time by its title only.

The Speaker: Any objections?
No objections being recorded.
Minister, go ahead.

[Motion carried: Standing Order 21 suspended.]

BILL

THIRD READING

**MOTOR CAR (RIDESHARING)
AMENDMENT ACT 2026**

Hon. Owen Darrell: Mr. Speaker, 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 title only and is now passed.

[Motion carried: The Motor Car (Ridesharing) Amendment Act 2026 was read a third time and passed.]

The Speaker: Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. E. David Burt: What's the date, Mr. Speaker?

Mr. Speaker, I move that this Honourable House now adjourn until Monday, 9 March 2026 at 10:00 am.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Does any Member wish to speak to that?
There are no Members wishing to speak to that.

We stand—

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Members, the House now stands adjourned until Monday at 10:00 am.

Have a good weekend and we will see you on Monday morning.

[Gavel]

[At 12:36 am [Saturday, 7 March 2026] the House stood adjourned until 10:00 am, Monday, 9 March 2026]