



PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS



PARLIAMENT OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

Second Meeting of the 2021/2022 Session *Second Sitting*

Monday
29 November, 2021
(Pages 1- 65)

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, OBE, JP, MP,
Speaker

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PRESENT WERE:

MINISTERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. G Wayne Panton, JP, MP	<i>Premier</i> , Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency — “MSCR”
Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, MP	<i>Deputy Premier</i> , Minister for Finance and Economic Development <i>and</i> Border Control and Labour — “FEDBCL”
Hon. Juliana Y. O’Connor-Connolly, JP, MP	Minister for Education <i>and</i> District Administration and Lands — “EDAL”
Hon. Bernie A. Bush, MP	Minister for Home Affairs, Youth, Sports, Culture and Heritage — “HAYSCH”
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, MP	Minister for Tourism and Transport — “T and T”
Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP	Minister for Financial Services and Commerce — “FSC” <i>and</i> Investment, Innovation and Social Development — “IISD”
Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, MP	Minister for Health and Wellness — “MOH”
Hon. Johany S. “Jay” Ebanks, MP	Minister for Planning, Agriculture, Housing, and Infrastructure — “PAHI”

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. Franz I. Manderson, MBE, Cert Hon, JP	<i>Deputy Governor</i> , ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of the Civil Service
Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin, QC, JP	<i>Attorney General</i> , ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of Legal Affairs

ELECTED MEMBERS GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP	<i>Deputy Speaker</i> , Parliamentary Secretary to FSC and EDAL
Ms. Heather D. Bodden, JP, MP	Parliamentary Secretary to T&T and IISD, Elected Member for Savannah
Mr. Isaac D. Rankine, MP	Parliamentary Secretary to HAYSCH and PAHI, Elected Member for East End

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP	<i>Leader of the Opposition</i> , Elected Member for George Town East
Mr. Joseph X. Hew, MP	<i>Deputy Leader of the Opposition</i> , Elected Member for George Town North
Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MP	Elected Member for Red Bay
Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, JP, MP	Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, MP	Elected Member for George Town South
Mr. David C. Wight, JP, MP	Elected Member for George Town West

INDEPENDENT MEMBER

Mr. Dwayne S. Seymour, JP, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town East
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OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
SECOND MEETING 2021/22 SESSION
MONDAY
29 NOVEMBER 2021
10:38 AM
Second Sitting

[Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, Speaker, presiding]

The Speaker: Good morning.

I will call on the Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness to say prayers this morning.

PRAYERS

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, Minister of Health and Wellness, Elected Member for Prospect: Let us pray.

Almighty God, from whom all wisdom and power are derived: We beseech Thee so to direct and prosper the deliberations of the Parliament now assembled, that all things may be ordered upon the best and surest foundations for the glory of Thy Name and for the safety, honour and welfare of the people of these Islands.

Bless our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elizabeth II; Philip, Duke of Edinburgh; Charles, Prince of Wales; and all the Royal Family. Give grace to all who exercise authority in our Commonwealth, that peace and happiness, truth and justice, religion and piety may be established among us. Especially we pray for the Governor of our Islands, the Premier; the Speaker of the Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, Ministers of the Cabinet, ex-officio Members and Members of the Parliament; the Chief Justice and members of the Judiciary, that we may be enabled faithfully to perform the responsible duties of our high office. All this we ask for Thy great Name's sake.

Let us say The Lord's Prayer together: *Our Father, who art in Heaven, Hallowed be Thy Name. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the Kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up the light of His countenance upon us and give us peace, now and always.

Amen.

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Proceedings are resumed in this honourable Parliament.

**ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS
OR AFFIRMATIONS**

The Speaker: None.

**READING BY THE HONOURABLE
SPEAKER OF MESSAGES AND
ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Speaker: None.

**PRESENTATION OF
PETITIONS**

The Speaker: None.

**PRESENTATION OF PAPERS
AND OF REPORTS**

The Speaker: None.

**QUESTIONS TO HONOURABLE
MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE
CABINET**

The Speaker: None.

**STATEMENTS BY THE HONOURABLE
MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE
CABINET**

The Speaker: None.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: None.

OBITUARY AND OTHER CEREMONIAL SPEECHES

The Speaker: I recognise the Minister of Finance, the Member for Bodden Town West.

Lion Lloyd Roy Charlton

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier, Minister of Finance and Economic Development, and Border Control and Labour, Elected Member for Bodden Town West: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I want to rise on behalf of my colleagues on this side, and I'm pretty sure the entire House, to recognise the passing last night of Mr. Roy Charlton, who was well known in the community.

Most people may not have known but he was born in 1936 and actually first arrived in Cayman in 1945 at the age of nine. He is actually a cousin of the late Sir Vassel Johnson and was raised by Sir Vassel's mother.

He returned to Jamaica in 1951 and returned to the Cayman Islands in 1967 with his young son. I think everyone in this honourable House knows his young son, Ricardo Charlton, who is a Deputy Chief Fire Officer with the Cayman Islands Fire Service. His daughter Yvette is also well-known, she is a Member of the Business Staffing Plan Board.

Like most people back then, Mr. Speaker, when he returned to Cayman he went to sea and after his sea days, he made his name in insurance and helped many Caymanian families. I think it is safe to say that what his family represents is pretty much what we all strive for as a people in a country, which is integration with many different nationalities. He is preceded in death by his wife Joyce who departed, actually seven years ago, this month.

I spoke to his daughter this morning and I know she is really feeling it, as expected with any child. I haven't had a chance to speak to Ricardo as yet, but I think some of my colleagues may have spoken to them.

I just want to record his achievements as a stalwart in our community; a true nation builder and one who has definitely left his fingerprints on our Islands' development.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I would say it was the late 60s that I first recall seeing Roy, or Mr. Charlton, with his uncle the late Albert McDoom in Church Street, West Bay. I would have been 13 or 14, thereabout.

Later, in the early 70s, while I was employed at the Canadian Imperial Bank of Commerce, he was a client and often came into the bank; then I met the British American team and left CIBC to pursue a career in insurance. Roy, or Mr. Charlton, was the person that Harvey Stephenson put me to work with to train me. In fact, I took a large part of his business

area because Mr. Charlton became more of a supervisor in those early days—way before he had children I would think, but certainly, I knew his late wife and his children when they were small.

I worked with him, he taught me a lot about insurance and of course, working in insurance, I met many people in the Island. I started my own real estate business because I felt the two went together—insurance and real estate—and I had an opportunity, but Mr. Charlton did so much to encourage me in the insurance business. Of course I later left for other opportunities. I do want to extend condolences to his children and their families. I would hope that a note would be sent to the family.

The Member for Red Bay.

Hon. Alden McLaughlin, Elected Member for Red Bay: Mr. Speaker, I also wish to say a few words on the passing of Lion (member) Lloyd Roy Charlton.

I have known him since my earliest days in the Alliance Movement starting in 1989 when he was the chairman of what was then called the "Youth Development Committee" and, myself and former Member of this House, Osbourne Bodden, as we say in Cayman, *really took* to Lion Roy and became stalwart members of his committee, which he chaired for many, many years.

I have many fond memories and many stories that I could regale the House with this morning, about our activities in the Youth Development Committee, particularly our trips to Cayman Brac, but I won't. I just want to say that the Deputy Fire Chief, Ricardo, who is also a very close friend of mine, rang me, I think just minutes after his passing yesterday evening and I was able to convey to him, condolences on behalf of myself and Members of the Opposition.

Lion Roy was a stalwart in the Lions Club of Grand Cayman; one who worked assiduously to help people in the community. He was particularly concerned about youth development and opportunities for young people and he will be fondly remembered and sadly missed in the Alliance Movement as I believe, he will also be, right across this community in which he has lived for most of his life.

May his soul rest in peace and may light perpetual shine upon him.

The Speaker: As I said, we will see to it that a proper note is sent to the family.

RAISING OF MATTERS OF PRIVILEGE

The Speaker: None.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

BILLS

SECOND READING

APPROPRIATION (FINANCIAL YEARS 2022 AND 2023) BILL, 2021 (Continuation of debate thereon)

The Speaker: The matter is open for debate.

Does anyone wish to speak? *(Pause)* Does anyone wish to speak? *(Pause)*

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

(Pause)

The Speaker: I think both the Page and the Deputy had to step out a minute. I presume you're looking for the podium?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town East: Yes, sir. If I could find it we would just get it.

The Speaker: The clerk will get it. Oh, she really went and got it; she got the heavy one.

Do you prefer that one or the taller one?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I will always prefer this one sir, but I am happy to take whatever they give me.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and good morning colleagues.

Mr. Speaker, as I rise this morning to deliver the Opposition's response to the Budget Policy Statement that was delivered last Friday, I must thank His Excellency the Governor for his Throne Speech. We on the Opposition Bench understand the vital importance of the Governor's support in ensuring that the elected Government can effectively carry out the people's business.

The Throne Speech is an important public statement of that support and stands as an important symbol of the ongoing partnership between the Cayman Islands and the United Kingdom. The experience through these last 18 months has underlined for us all, how essential that partnership can be to the wellbeing of the people of these Islands. I [therefore] take this opportunity to thank the Governor, and through him the UK, for the ongoing support that they have given

to the Cayman Islands in and through the current crisis.

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, I join with the Governor in acknowledging the work of all the uniformed services for the important job that they do in keeping us safe, on land and at sea. I also join him with well wishes to Chief Medical Officer Dr. John Lee; Prison Director Steve Barrett; and Ombudsman Sandy Hermiston—all have made valuable contributions to our society and to our country. It is of note that these are fairly high senior civil servants who will be leaving us within the next few months.

Of course I agree, Mr. Speaker, with the Governor's sentiments when he noted that the pandemic is not over and that prudence and caution are very sensible; I will return to this theme later in my debate.

I thank the Governor for helping remind this House of two of the contributions that we on this side made towards protecting the environment. As he noted, it was a Progressives-led Administration that expanded the Marine PACT s to just under 50 per cent of our coastal waters. It was the same Progressives Administration that advanced the work on the Commonwealth Climate Growth Fund over 2019 and 2020 that the Governor mentioned.

The Governor also spoke of the concern regarding the new Omicron variant of the COVID virus and that the UK had introduced temporary travel bans from affected countries. I was preparing my speaking notes on Friday evening and that earlier draft noted my concern that despite the UK, USA and Canada and other countries, instituting restrictions on impacted countries, Cayman seemingly was not following suit; but happily Mr. Speaker, I received a message advising that the appropriate travel restrictions had been instituted by Cabinet late Friday evening, so this is one less concern that I have to deal with here today.

The Opposition supports the Government's action to reduce the risk from this potential new threat and hope that it can be reversed as soon as we better understand the risks, but with confirmation that the variant is now in the UK, Canada and potentially the US, we should carefully consider what other actions may be needed. Indeed, I read this morning Mr. Speaker, that there is speculation the virus may already be in Florida.

Before I get to talking about the budget, I hope you will allow me Mr. Speaker to tackle just one procedural issue. It is an issue related not to the procedures of this House, but to the way Government operates; however, it is very relevant in the context of the way the House goes about its consideration of the budget, so I hope you and other Members will indulge me as I raise it.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps it's my professional background, but when I get involved in discussions and debates about figures, I like to do my homework

so that I fully understand the numbers before I make any judgement on them.

In any case, I am sure the country would expect the Opposition, especially one headed by a former Finance Minister, to prepare as fully as it could for a debate about something as important to our collective future as the Government's two year budget. Accordingly, Mr. Speaker, we in the Opposition began work using the information provided in the Strategic Policy Statement almost immediately following the July session of the House. As we did our work, it became clear that to understand the Government's plans and how their budget changed from previous budget allocations, we would need more information.

Mr. Speaker, when I was Minister of Finance, I recall routinely providing information to the Opposition Members who requested it, including the current Finance Minister. However, access to information for Members should be a matter of good governance and should not be reliant upon individual responses by Ministers.

To compound the issue, Mr. Speaker, I found myself in the unusual position of having to write to your good self and the Honourable Premier over the weekend, to ask you to intercede and to have the Minister of Finance provide the Opposition with a copy of his Budget Address. I say "intercede" because despite my asking for it several times on Friday, it was not provided. Indeed, I understand that the Minister also would not provide it to the Clerk of this House when he was asked.

That, Mr. Speaker, in my mind, is totally unnecessary.

Point Of Order

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, Point of Order.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Finance.

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition seems to be misleading this House and the Parliament.

First of all, this is a budget debate. There is no requirement under any Standing Order for any Member of this side to provide their speaking notes or their address to any Member of this House. I mean, this is a debate. I know we all use copious notes...Now, if this is the situation, where going forward they want the speaking notes of every Member on the Government side for every time we bring a Bill then that is fine, but they need to do their job, Mr. Speaker.

I don't remember asking him for anything in the past when he was Minister of Finance, with regard to his address. If he provided it, he provided it. I went home and did my homework like everybody else. I

don't trust anybody to give me any information, Mr. Speaker.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: It is a debate. I brought a Bill.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: Please continue.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I don't think I am wrong here. I want to go back and quote him on what he said on Friday because an intercession was made, and Mr. Speaker, I could be wrong, but his response was directed to you, so I think it was you, sir, who asked about copies of the speech.

I know those copies were prepared, I know they exist. The Minister for Finance responded: "**No, Mr. Speaker. Well, we originally had copies made, Mr. Speaker but overnight, I made some material changes, so my team will be circulating them afterwards.**" Well again I ask this morning, how long afterwards; three days? "**We will be emailing it to other Members, at least they can have it.**" I mean, clearly the intent was for it to be provided. That is an important element of the whole budget process, Mr. Speaker. It has been provided every single year and every budget session.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Tourism.

Point of Order

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Minister of Tourism and Transport, Elected Member for George Town Central: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Are you rising on a Point of Order?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Correct, Mr. Speaker, a Point of Order in respect to the Member misleading this House.

The Honourable Deputy Premier has made it clear, as per the Standing Orders, that he is not obligated to do so. Now, we do have conventions in this honourable House, but they are not a part of the protocols in respect of the Standing Orders. Now, what I think is happening is the Members of Opposition are starting to get a little taste of their own medicine in respect to that.

Now, the Elected Member and Deputy Premier, could have been gracious and given you the contributions he made, but he is not obligated to.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: So, even if he had the statements made and decided he was not going to give them to you, you have to do your work just like we did when we were over there; so please do not mislead this House by saying that he did not provide something [that] he didn't have to. He did not.

The Speaker: I think that...

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I don't understand the Point of Order.

The Speaker: Well, I think it went a long way to explain where we stand with the matter, and I would say to Members that we have passed that point. The Leader of the Opposition has risen to make his speech. Obviously he has made his notes and the fact is that, while conventions exist, the Standing Orders do not force the Minister of Finance to distribute his speech. Many new paradigms are taking place and I would think that is one of them.

Please continue, Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, thank you sir.

I fully understand that he is not required to do so, but Mr. Speaker conventions have their weight, I would only raise the whole issue and ask them because to me, Mr. Speaker, this flies in the face of transparency and accountability.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: You will understand, Honourable Leader of the Opposition...

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: The Minister of Tourism seeks a different...

The Speaker: Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Yes, sir?

The Speaker: Please take a seat. Please take a seat.

You will understand that the Chair has no powers to force the Leader of the Opposition or any Member unless it is a Cabinet Paper that has been agreed to be released, a government document as such, that can be released and the Member is reading from that, then, in certain circumstances, that can be given to the House; but on a speech, there is no Standing Order for me to order that it be given, as such.

As I said, as we can all see, it is a new Government, paradigms are shifting; we pay close attention to what is happening around us.

The Honourable Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Just a point of clarity for a procedural matter and not to belabour—you have made a decision in respect to this matter; but since the issue of conventions have come to the forefront this morning, we know the Standing Orders say, in respect of debates, that no Member should be reading from papers. Now, convention allows, particularly on this serious matter of a budget, that we look aside to that.

Now, I want your orders and your direction, Mr. Speaker, which I support and I think the Government supports, that on a budget debate, persons may make their notes and make their deliveries; but, if we are going to get technical this morning, the question could be asked: Is the Leader of Opposition reading from a prepared speech? So I want to say: can we put aside the petty stuff and focus in respect to that.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: I think that we should stop and pay no attention to some of those nuances. If you go back into the history of this House, in my very first budget speech in 1985, Members of the Opposition wore me down because I had notes. The Presiding Officer said, *the Member has copious notes, therefore I allow him to use his copious notes.*

Every Speaker since that time, and before that too, because that stunt was not pulled just on me by the then Leader of the Opposition; it was pulled on many Members when I was not a Member of this House, but it has been allowed and I would dare say—let's be honest amongst ourselves—it would be very few who would get up and make a full speech without having a written one.

If you look at the Commons, Ministers have their notes, if we just take the Commons, but mostly every Parliament that I know of allows it. Let us not get too technical and let us not pay attention to some of these nuances.

I know this: that the Standing Orders, and I am making a statement later, whenever the House rises; not today but maybe tomorrow and if not, then Wednesday, about Standing Orders and the need for us to modernise our Standing Orders.

Honourable Leader of the Opposition, please continue.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker and I appreciate what you said, sir.

The only other thing I want to say and I'm moving on from it because it is passed... We were told to expect it on Friday, it is Monday and it was not provided, but Mr. Speaker I also want to put it on record.

Point of Order

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, Point of Order.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Finance.

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, from being copied on the email, it was actually sent to the Honourable Leader. Once you reached out to me on Saturday, I reached out to my Finance team and asked them to provide to the Leader of the Opposition, the part that the Ministry of Finance normally prepares, which I used as a basis—the non-political part—which was provided to him on Saturday.

As far as I know, I was copied on the email where it was sent to him. If he did not receive it, then that is a different story, but it was sent him on Saturday. Friday we were here until late getting the Regs done to keep this Island safe.

It was sent to him on Saturday; if he didn't get it, then that's a different story, but I was copied on the email sent to him by a senior member of the Ministry of Finance.

The Speaker: The Leader of the Opposition

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I intend to move on from this; all I can say, sir...

The Speaker: Just to clear the matter, did you receive an email?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I have not seen one sir; I have not seen one.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: It was forwarded to me and I was just wondering when Members were going to be open with it and say *look, certain matters have been emailed by a senior of the Finance staff*.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I saw that early or late yesterday morning.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: What I am proceeding to do, Mr. Speaker, is to record my thanks and gratefulness to the Clerk and her staff, who worked on the weekend to provide us with a copy of the Hansards with the text of the Minister's budget address, on Sunday afternoon.

I didn't think it was necessary that they should have to do that, but they were diligent and committed

in getting the information to the Opposition and so I want to record my sincere thanks and appreciation to them; however, what I really want to do, Mr. Speaker, is to propose a solution, so that in the future Opposition Members can access the information we need to properly fulfil our constitutional responsibilities including, when needed, to hold Government to account.

This is important whether for financial information or public health information and I want to invite the Premier to work with me—perhaps with the assistance of the Cabinet Office—to agree on what I would call an "Information Accessibility Protocol", that would establish the kind of information Members of the House should be entitled to, the processes for accessing that information, and the timescales for compliance. I hope that I will get a positive response.

Mr. Speaker, the Government's budget, by definition, looks to the future. The key test for the proposals it contains is the extent to which it rises to the challenges that our country and our people will face in the future, however, while looking towards tomorrow, the budget must also be grounded in the reality of where we are today.

Like many Caymanians, I am sure that I found myself listening to the Premier on Friday and recognising much of the portrait of our country that he painted. I recognised it, because on this side we campaigned with the ambition of addressing many, if not all of the concerns expressed. Proof of this can be found in our election manifesto, and I will speak to some of them as I debate.

I disagree, however, with some of the historical analysis and I would argue that in his rhetorical flights he was sometimes guilty of overstating his case about the issues we face. In my view, Mr. Speaker, COVID did not simply reveal existing fault lines. It widened and exacerbated the issues we faced, creating new problems and considerably worsening others.

However, it does not serve the country for us to pick fights over these details. I think we agree that Cayman faces a series of challenges that potentially threaten its future viability. The path by which we got to this point is less important now, than understanding collectively [both] the reality facing us and how do we address the actions needed to move Cayman forward. Future aspirations then, must begin from a sound understanding of the current reality. I agree with the Premier, that this must be an understanding of our social, environmental and economic realities. These things are not separate, Mr. Speaker, but rather, inextricably linked.

The Premier went on to remark that economic growth alone is not the solution. Again I agree, but conversely, without economic growth Government cannot achieve its ambitions, as it will not have the resources it needs. I repeat that Mr. Speaker: conversely, without economic growth Government cannot achieve its ambitions, as it will not have the resources it needs. To have the resources to tackle social

needs, including income equality, the country must have a strong economy.

Mr. Speaker, the only reason that governments concern themselves with growing an economy and providing a strong atmosphere for business to succeed, is so that its people can benefit. That is what we on this side did, when we were in Government and I dare say, Mr. Speaker, that you understand this principle very well. I recall your advice to this House many times, that *'if Cayman does not embrace wealth, then we will reap poverty.'* If I have that quote wrong, Mr. Speaker, please let me know so I can get it right.

The Speaker: You have it right.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, sir.

Yet, throughout his long speech, the Premier did little to reassure anyone that this Government has a clear path for supporting economic growth. That is another theme, Mr. Speaker, to which I will return later.

As he began to wind down his presentation the Premier noted correctly, that the road ahead will be challenging—I agree. [Both] the country and the Government will face many challenges, and so the Government's objective with this budget should be to return to a strong Cayman today, so that we can be ready to meet tomorrow's challenges; then, Mr. Speaker, as I address the future and the budget proposals, I must also reflect upon today. In my view, one of the key risks to the delivery of any future budget is the current weakened position that our country finds itself in. We need to address that weakness as a matter of urgency, if we are to have a sure foundation upon which to build.

You may recall Mr. Speaker, that back in July the Premier and Finance Minister presented the Strategic Policy Statement to the House. You may also recall that the Government was unhappy that the Opposition challenged and criticised their plans, including the lack of a meaningful action and its lack of a coherent policy direction. Well, things have moved on, Mr. Speaker. I accept that we have now seen several welcome actions coming from the Government.

For example, we have seen the Minister of Financial Services and Commerce launch a new Sustainable Investment Fund, as referenced earlier, with guaranteed future investment streams into Caymanian projects.

We have seen new laptops delivered to every student in our public schools and, according to the Government's 100-day achievement report, we have seen some 80 students enter the Health Services Authority's annual summer internship programme, four former offenders on the Second Chance programme, and 200 Caymanian families [were] offered the opportunity to own a home via the Government-Guaranteed Home Assistance Mortgage.

We have seen an agreement signed with the UK Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science to help Cayman consider the potential implications of climate change and determine the most effective adaptation strategies.

The issue is this: all these achievements and several others are things that began under the previous Progressives-led Government. With the exception of initiatives taken by the Education Minister, a former Progressives Member still imposed as the Minister of Education, it is hard to discern what new initiatives have been taken and what positive difference the PACT-Government has made during its first six months in Office.

Also Mr. Speaker, I noted that the Honourable Finance Minister was at pains to claim the good financial position of this country since the election, as a credit of his Government. Yes, Mr. Speaker, he also rightly credited your good-self and all subsequent Finance Ministers for making contributions to our financial position. There is truth in the Minister's mantra that *we build on the work of those who went before;* but it is the decisions and direction that each Government takes, that makes a difference in the final outcome.

As I will address shortly, it was the decisions that we took over two terms to foster and support economic growth, that allowed us to halve unemployment, substantially increase assistance to those in need, greatly reduce debt, ensure no borrowing; to greatly rebuild our reserves, and to live within our means. Most importantly, that is the strategy that not only helped our people over some eight years, but has so far greatly lessened the impact of the pandemic on our people, and allowed us to avoid the severe economic problems so many other countries [face] through this current crisis.

The PACT-Government has chosen a path that is, the Premier declared, *'a new day and a new way forward'*; and so, the Government does recognise its ability to put its own stamp on the budget—and they should—and over time we will see whether the *'new way'* is successful or not.

The Premier in his speech rightly pointed to the shared ambition that every Member of this House has for our country. We in the Opposition want to see all three Cayman Islands thrive; we want to see a Government ready to take on the challenges of tomorrow, that understands what is needed to help the country regain its strength. We want to see every person in all three Cayman Islands fulfil their potential and to live and thrive in this land that we love.

Yes, Premier, I concur that every one of us in these Halls are here because we love our Islands and our people; and yes, we do share a common burden to make the lives of our people better. Whilst we on this side may differ with you on how we achieve our goal, we do not differ on the belief that the goal for all in this House must be to help improve the lives of eve-

ryone in our Islands. Therefore, when we criticise the Government and its plans, we do so not because we are playing politics, but because we believe that what the Government is doing is taking us further away from, not closer, to that shared ambition.

We understand very well that the country is continuing to face a number of crises: a health crisis, an economic crisis and a social crisis.

With their *'new day, new way budget'*, the PACT-Government is free to set its own priorities and to allocate the resources necessary to achieve them. Now there can be no more hiding behind claims that the Government has found it difficult to act because they were constrained by the previous Administration's budget.

This is the time for the Government to pin their colours to the mast and make clear what can be achieved. The test, however, is not what the Premier says about the budget in this Parliament, but what impact the budget has in the real world and on the lives of real people, not just tomorrow, but in the months and years ahead.

Mr. Speaker, if this Government is going to achieve anything of significance during its term of Office, this two-year budget covers the period when resources would be put into the delivery of key priorities. Of course, we are yet to scrutinise all the details of the budget, and no doubt we will understand more of exactly what is planned, once we move into Finance Committee. From the outset, I should be clear that we in the Opposition broadly support many of the objectives that the PACT-Government set out in this first budget. We were pleased to see that much of it reflected commitments we had made during the election campaign and actions we would have taken had we formed the government.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, despite the constant repetition about change, there is an awful lot of continuity between this Government's approach and our own. I welcome that of course, but we should not let the rhetoric of the Premier mask the reality. How much new ground is a PACT Government actually breaking? Its language may be different but how different are its stated plans? It would be interesting to hear the Premier or his Ministers highlight in their contributions, exactly which of their new initiatives are genuinely new and not just continuation of things that we started or we promised. I look forward with anticipation to hearing whether those opposite us will rise to that challenge.

The initiative to reduce the use of single use plastics, for example, was begun during our last term, but delivery was hampered by COVID. It was also one of our manifesto promises, and so I am pleased that the Government would carry forward the work already started. We will wait to see how this progresses, but will also commit to work with the Government on this.

One other initiative I want to commend the Premier on, is his apparent willingness to face up to

the problems in both our health insurance and pension schemes; both were beginning to creak before the pandemic, but COVID has stretched both systems beyond breaking point.

During the pandemic we rightly allowed thousands of Caymanians and residents to access the resources in their pension plans. We also paused, as has the PACT-Government, the requirement for people and businesses to pay into individual pension schemes. These were necessary yet expedient in the short term, but the real reality is that it has left the whole pension system unable to meet the future needs of our people. If before the pandemic, pensions were an issue that would need to be addressed at some point soon, it has now become a pressing problem that demands immediate action.

In my view—and I spoke to this during the SPS debate—the pension system we have, based on schemes into which both employee and employer contribute, is right in principle; however, we know that the operation of that system is problematic and will become even more so post-pandemic. We need to rethink the details of the current system and address issues such as the contribution rates, the contribution cap and investment guidelines. At the very least, Mr. Speaker, our pension system needs to be updated, if not overhauled, and so I am pleased to see that Government intends to review the system. I offer them our full support in bringing forward appropriate changes.

On the other hand, I fear the health insurance system is no longer fit for purpose. The number of people, especially the elderly, having to declare themselves medically indigent and the resulting spiralling costs to the public purse alone, are enough to demonstrate the failings in the current system.

In this case, it appears the Government believes it has a ready-made solution to expanding the role of CINICO. Indeed, we started to look at this ourselves and Members may recall my stating such. CINICO may be part of the answer, but we came to realise that it would need to be part of a well thought-out reform of the system and not a knee-jerk reaction. It is ironic that elsewhere in his speech the Premier quoted the World Bank's research on the consequences of market imperfections, yet seems willing to ignore the fact, that simply giving CINICO a bigger role could serve to further distort, and destabilise, what is already a poorly functioning health insurance market.

Indeed, our election manifesto committed a future Progressives Government to a root-and-branch review, looking again at the potential for a national health insurance option alongside the market-based system; that review is what we need, to help inform what changes are needed.

I hope the Government will listen to what I have said and move forward on both pensions and health insurance reviews, as a matter of urgency. In taking forward the work that is needed, I also urge them not to carry out the reviews behind closed doors.

They must involve the business community and I know the Chamber of Commerce, for example, is already doing work looking at future pension requirements. The Government should also find ways to involve the wider community, whose lives will be profoundly affected by any reforms the Government finally does bring forward, and of course, I trust that they will involve the Opposition Members of this House.

One other point I must also make in support of the Premier, Mr. Speaker, is to commend the line he took in his speech on improving and safeguarding our children and young people. Sadly, this is an issue which the last Administration felt compelled to act on and it was our initiative to set up the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) to which the Premier referred. I promise him the full support of the Opposition if further legislation is required to improve Cayman's approach on the issue.

During my contribution to the Strategic Policy Statement debate, I implored the Government to complete a review of the Customs Tariff Act and to seek to remove import duties from essential products such as medications, disposable diapers, processed baby foods, feminine and birth control products, and to look more broadly at reducing import duties, where possible, on essential items.

Again, this was another of our promises, Mr. Speaker. I filed a Private Member's Motion, seconded by the Member for George Town South and scheduled for debate on Thursday, asking the Government to consider removing duties from those essential products, so I am pleased to see that Government has listened to the Opposition on this and on so many other things where it is now seeking to take forward our policies.

It is smart politics, Mr. Speaker, for Government to claim the other side's priorities as its own and seek to remove a benefit from the Opposition, but we on this side are fine with that. The important point is that the Government listened and the people will benefit. As I said, we want to see the Government achieve positive results for our people. If they are willing to take up our ideas to do that, then so much the better.

The Government's approach on infrastructure investment is another area we broadly support and we are looking to this Government to continue the significant investment in upgrading the country's infrastructure that was the hallmark of the last two Progressives-led Governments.

Several infrastructure projects were started under the last government. These included:

- the roadworks
- school improvements
- the development of an undersea communication cable
- ongoing remediation of the landfill
- the new National Weather Station
- Prison rebuilding and more.

As a nation develops and grows, its infrastructure must keep pace with that growth. Infrastructure benefits not only the citizens, but also helps to support the businesses that provide jobs and economic growth.

Among other things, we also support the ambitions to continue to raise standards in education and to increase the opportunities available to young Caymanians. The last Progressives-led Administration oversaw significant reforms in our private education system, notably, the implementation of a new curriculum, but we also invested significantly in supporting teachers to make improvements in their teaching practice and access to better facilities and new technologies. Those changes, Mr. Speaker, were yielding results. Schools inspectorate reports continue to note that the quality of teaching is improving and that young people are being engaged in education. The result is improving inspection ratings for schools and improved examination results for young people.

I was pleased, Mr. Speaker, to hear the Premier comment on how well the education programme was doing, when he spoke to the SPS. He said, Mr. Speaker, **“we have allowed a myth to take over our public education system; that our children coming through the public school system have been poorly educated... That being Caymanian, and being educated within one of the best-funded education systems per capita in the region, somehow make them ‘less than’ those individuals educated elsewhere.**

This is a lie that we have allowed to take root in the hearts and minds of our students and our people. I have seen it impact their self-esteem and self-confidence. It is a lie that we have allowed to chip away at our sense of pride in who we are; but our external exam results, our curriculum, the performance of our students, the dedication of our teachers and administrators, proved beyond a shadow of a doubt that the big lie is just that: a fallacy, a myth, a construction of falsehood.”

I agreed with the Premier when he spoke those words in July. Those words were a testament to the work we have done over the preceding eight years. Indeed, I believe that the adoption of our Education Minister by the Premier and the PACT-Government is the best endorsement of the education programme and policies that she, as a Minister in the Progressives-led Administration promoted and our government adopted; however, I also agreed with the Premier when he went on to say that there are areas in our public education system that still need work.

This is, therefore, the time to stay strong and build on the reforms we began last term in order to develop the education system that our people deserve on our future economy needs. If we have any disagreement with the Minister of Education, it is possibly over the details of how she proposes to achieve the goals, not with the ambition for improvement that she

has maintained from her time working with us as a Minister. On this side of the House, we have confidence that if she is given the support she needs, she can continue to deliver those improvements.

The question that we in the Opposition had coming into this budget process was one I know was also on the minds of many other Caymanians: How would the government allocate its resources across the many and varied priorities it had set out? Could it show that there are clear paths to deliver the things that it has promised and that the budget had allocated the resources necessary to implement the plans it has?

As yet Mr. Speaker, those questions remain and the answers are not obvious. As I have said in many areas, where the new Government is continuing the approach of the old, we can expect that the ability to deliver will be there, if the Government works hard enough. It is in the other areas, either because the promise is new or because delivery may be complex, where we fear there may be a gap between what they say and what they can actually deliver. Let us look at some examples, Mr. Speaker.

Just in the domain of healthcare, we can see more than 20 promises made by this Government in the SPS, some of those the Premier referred to in his speech. They range from the sensible and achievable, such as encouraging more wellness checks; to the worthy and ambitious, such as improving efficient efficiency and reducing waiting times at HSA; to the bold and stretching such as an unequivocal pledge to provide free health care to children and the elderly.

Similarly, under the heading of 'Providing Solutions to Improve the Well-Being of Our People so they can Achieve their Full Potential,' there are, by my count, double the number of promises made than was even in the case for health care. More than 40 separate promises that the country will be expecting this budget to be providing the resources to deliver. Again, there is a widespread of commitments made from helping families to meet the cost of day-care; to building new courts; a new prison; to reducing import duties; improving public transport and considering a universal basic income.

I am not seeking to debate this morning the merits of the individual promises made by this Government now. As I have said, many of these we will wholeheartedly support, others we will challenge, but the real issue we need the Government to face up to, is deliverability. First, are the resources provided adequate to achieve the stated goals? Secondly, does the Government have the capacity and competence to achieve the goals? There is a real danger, Mr. Speaker, that expectations among our people are raised only to see expectations dashed.

One way of demonstrating that the Government is putting its resources behind its promises would be for the Premier and/or his Finance Minister to produce for us a record of the promises made in the

SPS, and the resources allocated to each of them in this budget. This would seem to be in keeping with the promised value of transparency and it would certainly help us in the Opposition and more importantly, voters outside of this House, to hold this Government accountable for its achievements and any failures.

In the last SPS produced by the Progressives-Led Administration, we recognised the need to reform the Government's whole budget process to focus it much more clearly on outcomes. However, as the Financial Secretary told Public Accounts Committee in January of this year, the mammoth task of moving from the current system meant that this is unlikely to be achievable for the budget we are discussing here today. Instead, full reform would need to wait until the 2024-25 budget.

Of course, I understand that, Mr. Speaker, and I am not asking this PACT-Government to do something in six months that we were unable to accomplish during our terms of Office; however, it should be possible to work through the exercise I have suggested, to map spending plans against the SPS objectives. The analysis does not need to be exact and down to the last dollar—and I am not asking for more clarity from this Government, just to be difficult.

There is much in their announced plans that we in the Opposition would like to get behind and support, but to be supportive, we need to see that the necessary resources have been allocated to the programmes to make them successful, and to hear from the Government exactly what they plan to do. Let me give this Parliament a very tangible example of that, Mr. Speaker.

The SPS made a commitment to '*address the root causes of criminality in our communities in order to develop and implement an effective anti-gang strategy to reduce crime and to support vulnerable young people.*' We very much support that objective, Mr. Speaker—there was a very similar commitment given in our manifesto at the election; but we also know, Mr. Speaker that the root causes refer to are complex and require coordinated and long term action by a number of agencies inside and outside of government, all coming together to make and to take the actions that are going to be necessary.

We know from the work we did on this issue prior to the election, that tackling the causes of crime and meeting the challenges of keeping young people from falling into gang activity and criminality, will take considerable effort and significant resources from us all. Very simply, we want to know if the PACT PACT-Government is serious in making this SPS commitment. If so, what resources it has allocated in the budget to delivering on that commitment.

The procedure we adopt in Finance Committee of scrutinising government's proposed budget line by line has its benefits. It ensures that every dollar of proposed spending is properly scrutinised and exam-

ined, however, the system has several flaws. The first is highlighted by the example I have just given. The solutions to complex social and economic problems do not fall neatly into the penny pocket lines of our budgeting system.

Where action is necessary across many budgets and involving multiple Ministries and outside organisations, we need to see the bigger picture before we look at the detail. It is that bigger picture that I am asking the Premier and the Minister of Finance to give to the House.

The second major flaw in the approach we take is that we can ask as many questions as we like about any line of expenditure in the budget, but how are we to challenge the things that are missing? If the Government fails to allocate the resources necessary, then how do we hold them to account for that choice? Again, more transparency [when] linking the resource allocations would allow us to debate areas where that analysis reveals important gaps.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, we spend what seems like endless hours going through \$500 budget lines, but very little time, if any, discussing the Government's overall financial strategy. To give us a chance to question and debate that financial strategy requires the sitting Government to clearly state the direction it is taking and the fiscal principles it is working to.

I am sure that you, Mr. Speaker, and others in this House will recall, that the past two Government-led Administrations consistently set out the financial strategy we were working to. I repeat that mantra again: we worked towards the achievement of year-on-year substantial budget surpluses. No new taxes or fees levied on families or businesses and reducing existing tax burdens where possible. No new borrowing and the paying down of the existing Government debt, and importantly, all capital investments to be made from operating revenues.

These were principles that we kept repeating, but more importantly, Mr. Speaker, they were principles we lived by. As I said in this House before, going through two full terms in Government and meeting those strict financial strategies must be a record for these Islands. Even as the pandemic struck, forcing government revenues to fall, while Government spending to keep families and businesses afloat increased, the resilience we had brought to Cayman's public finances enabled us to meet the challenges head on, and to do so utilising the reserves we have built up for just such an occasion.

We believe that was the right choice and the right financial strategy to follow then, as we believe it is a strategy that the Cayman Islands needs now to continue moving forward. Strong finances today provide the resilience to meet the challenges and uncertainties of tomorrow; and indeed, as we look forward and into the future, greater challenges will continue to emerge.

Yet, it would seem from this budget that the PACT has turned its back on the past eight years of prudent financial principles that brought stability to government finances, underpinned our consistent economic growth, and created the headroom that allowed the country to chart a steady and safe course through the initial stages of the pandemic. I remind the Government of the advice of the Governor, when he noted that the pandemic is not over and prudence and caution is very sensible. They should be the buzz words that we embrace.

Our biggest concern with the PACT PACT budget, therefore, lies not in the detail of the resource allocation decisions, but the disregard that it shows for the long term financial interests of the Cayman Islands. At the heart of this budget lies a single choice made by this Administration, and that choice is to go down the path of massive borrowing once again.

The contrast with our progressive strategy is very clear, Mr. Speaker. Over the period of the Progressives-led Government, the national debt fell from around \$560 million in 2013 to under \$250 million on the day we left Office; A reduction of over \$300 million or over 55 per cent in Cayman's national debt. Mr. Speaker: no government in the history of Cayman ever, ever, achieved this.

That meant a strong and rock-steady credit rating with major agencies, reduced financing costs, so more to spend in services for people and more flexibility to meet future challenges, including COVID. Most importantly, it meant that Government paid its way investing for the future, while not saddling future generations of Caymanians with the millstone of debt around their wallets.

This PACT-Government has thrown a highly successful strategy into reverse. Instead of prudently paying down debt, they are borrowing with abandon, in taking out new loans totalling right around \$350 million over the two year period which, I might point out, is some \$20 million more to fund the infrastructure, than they initially reported in the SPS .

This Government is negating with one stroke the hard work done by the last past two Progressive governments. By the end of the period, debt will have spiralled back up to around \$400 million. In just the two years covered by this budget, the proportion of debt to government revenue nearly doubles, while the cost of servicing that debt goes up by nearly a third.

I can imagine Mr. Speaker that the Finance Minister might respond to the concerns that I have raised. First, he might well say, the borrowing that is being done is in large part utilising the line of credit that I set up. That is of course true, Mr. Speaker. However, my government negotiated that line of credit for contingency and security purposes, to be used only if it was absolutely needed.

As we told the country at that time, we viewed it like how we would view an insurance policy, not to be used for a spending spree. Thanks to our financial

strategy, the reality that while other governments around the world had to borrow, what in some cases were truly eye watering amounts to get through the crisis, the hard work we had done to build up cash reserves meant we could meet the needs of businesses and families without recourse to borrowing.

As I said earlier, Mr. Speaker, the crisis is still with us, but this borrowing has not been necessitated by this crisis. Rather, it reflects a choice made to fund large amounts of capital spending from borrowing, rather than paying for it from operational revenues, as we did.

At this point, the Finance Minister may object that this is a financial choice made by governments all over the world, and we would say that is true, but look at the consequences of that choice. All around the globe, national debts have escalated with little thought as to how debt will be reduced over time. Politicians are mortgaging the future and leaving their children and grandchildren to pick up the cheque. The Minister kept repeating, that like the past government had done, this budget did not place additional tax burden on the shoulders of people, but what it is doing is placing the burden of increased debt on the backs of our people today, and long into the future.

That is not a path that Cayman should be treading, not just for reasons of intergenerational fairness, but because it is unsustainable. For a Government that professes to believe in sustainability, I strongly suggest that they rethink their strategy.

In my view, the PACT Government is taking this approach to avoid difficult political choices. New and inexperienced Ministers are naturally keen to see the priorities of their Ministry funded in the budget. By borrowing for capital purposes, it means that all the available revenues can be dished out for Ministers to use on their ministries' projects without any need to choose between relative priorities.

Rather than enforce fiscal discipline, the Premier and Minister of Finance have presided over a free for all. I listened carefully to the Minister explain how prudent they had been as they set out to prioritise the budget. He spoke of compromise, and how the Premier reminded his colleagues that they cannot go crazy with borrowing—but Mr. Speaker, the reality says something else.

Despite initially forecasting a surplus in 2022, we are now seeing a deficit of \$15.8 million for the year and just over \$8.5 million surplus for 2023. I say *just* \$8.5 million, Mr. Speaker, because it would not take very much to go wrong for such a small surplus to turn into a deficit. This suggests to me, a Government not willing to make hard choices and trim its spending to match the resources available.

Then what happens in the long term? The reality is [that] once the revenue spending begins, it will be very hard to reverse, even as times get tough. We all know, once new programmes are funded, no one wants to see them taken away. The only alternative

then, is to carry on borrowing more and more, to fund the capital investments, and God forbid, if operating expenditures were to rise.

Mr. Speaker, there are certainly projects where it can be sensible for Government to borrow to utilise other forms of long-term financing, especially where the infrastructure need is a specialist one or the cost is too large for government to go it alone. The ReGen project is a good example of that, Mr. Speaker, where the detailed financial appraisal demonstrated that a public-private partnership was the best way to progress the project, not just to spread the cost, but to allow government to transfer appropriate risk to the private sector; but projects, such as road works, ought to be afforded and funded out of government revenues.

Mr. Speaker, we are not the United States. There are limits to our ability to borrow. Legal limits, and I would perhaps add, common sense limits. At the same time as interest rates rise from the historic low, and it is increasingly likely that they will start to rise in 2022, debt funding costs will increase, putting further pressures on revenues; and how then can Government respond? Will we be forced then to put up taxes to balance the books?

Mr. Speaker, I also want to draw the attention of this House to three further issues arising from the budget presented to the House by the PACT-Administration.

The first, Mr. Speaker, is that it remains unclear whether the Government can move forward the big decisions that will solve some of Cayman's most significant problems. Beyond the obvious issue of the COVID crisis, I am thinking in particular, Mr. Speaker of project ReGen, which I mentioned just now. The completion of the ReGen contract will end this country's unsustainable reliance on landfill and turnout garbage from a problem to be dealt with, to a resource to be harnessed, as we composed and recycle more and ultimately use waste to create energy in a state-of-the-art-facility.

Preventing the methane generation by the landfill from leaking into the atmosphere and diverting it to help produce energy for electricity, is one of the single most important things that we can readily do to limit the emissions of greenhouse gases in Cayman. This was highlighted at the recent COP26 summit where the dangers of methane were restated several times. ReGen is a sustainable project that is good for Cayman and the planet, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the last Progressives-led Administration signed a project agreement that would achieve the solution to our solid waste problems [that] our country desperately needs; yet, thus far, the Government has been incapable of getting the contract to financial close by the deadline, and in response to my questions about the lack of progress with the project, the Premier told the country [that] he and his colleagues had other, higher, priorities to work on and

that the contractual conditions precedent that needed to be resolved, were complex. Well, of course they are.

It is a complex, technical project with a decades-long contract that needs to cover every eventuality. That is why it needs to be given the time and attention the project deserves, and not simply left to one side. I have submitted a very simple and straightforward question in the House, asking the Premier what new deadline has been established for financial close on the contract, and I hope he is willing to answer that question, Mr. Speaker.

The Premier told the country that he is committed to the project but that commitment needs to be real, and we need tangible progress from this point if we are to ever have a hope of any chance of seeing the new facilities in place before the existing landfill space is exhausted. You only have to look now at what is starting to emerge; with the closure of the mound, and where the garbage is now being piled up and compressed, you start to see the potential for fires erupting again.

Whatever new deadlines he has established, the Premier should also tell the country about the consequences the delay has created. We know that with any delay comes increased risks. There are invariably going to be higher costs and more environmental damage as the solution to the waste problems get kicked down the road.

I have asked the Premier to set out for the country, the answers to those questions and despite the professed commitment to transparency and accountability, he declined to answer those questions for me. Mr. Speaker and Premier I'm asking you to do so now, before this House; but it is more than this single project that is concerning me, Mr. Speaker.

I mentioned earlier my fears over the deliverability of many of the promises made by this Government. Many of the ambitions set out by the Government are laudable, but I doubt their capacity for delivery, when the solutions required are, by definition, complex and difficult.

The last two Progressives-led Administrations had a proud track record of delivery, Mr. Speaker, and I'll mention just a few:

- Expansion and redevelopment of the airport terminal and other improvements at Owen Roberts;
- New John Gray High School;
- Expansion of the East-West Arterial Road and the various road improvements across the entire Island;
- Capping the dump;
- New small business development centre and expanded and improved support services;
- The implementation of E-government—improving the efficiency and accessibility of public services;

- Greatly expanding vocational opportunities for young Caymanians, for example, through the highly successful Public Works Apprenticeship Programme;
- Investments in neighbourhood policing, border security and the new Coast Guard Service;
- The long term residential Mental Health Facility in East End;
- New affordable housing schemes and reductions in stamp duties, helping young Caymanian families into home ownership;
- New marine parks and the buying of land for preservation and protection;
- Increased salaries and better professional development programmes for teachers who have improved the quality of teaching in our public schools;
- The new education curriculum; and
- Increased stipends for seamen and veterans and increases for long-serving civil service pensioners.

These are just some highlights, Mr. Speaker. Progressive-Led Governments consistently delivered to meet the needs of Caymanians today while ensuring we were building strength to meet the challenges of tomorrow. Governments that took hard decisions and recognised the obligation to both deliver in the short term, and plan for the long term. The budget leaves unresolved the question of whether the Government can deliver against the raised expectations being created.

The second issue I want to raise is whether the Government has been robust enough in its financial planning to handle the very real risks to government's finances that we now face, both in terms of spending pressures and the risks to revenues.

The Government's own Plan and Estimates provide the following warning on page 24. **"The uncertainty about the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, including restrictions imposed to slow the spread of the virus, creates uncertainty for the Cayman Islands' economic and financial outlook. The forecasts assume the ongoing successful suppression of the transmission of the virus to tolerable levels, and are therefore more dependent on assumptions about future developments, than normally is the case.**

"The COVID-19 pandemic still has lasting impacts on the economic and development landscape of the Cayman Islands. The cost of the pandemic continues to linger longer than expected and has left little room for expenditure budgets to be increased unless either taxes or borrowing also rise. However, if the economy performs better than expected, there could be more room to manoeuvre and more programmes funded."

That's their budget, Mr. Speaker. That's what their budget document says. Let me read a key part of this again, Mr. Speaker: **“The cost of the pandemic continues to linger longer than expected and has left little room for expenditure budgets to be increased unless either taxes or borrowing also rise.”** These are sobering words Mr. Speaker, and they are found in Government's own budget documents.

I spoke earlier about the crisis the country is now facing thanks to COVID-19 and, as I said, I will return to that. The consequences of the spread of disease through our community, the impact on our health services and the consequences for our economy all need to be reflected in Government's thinking, and as noticed above, there are clear budgetary consequences that need to be understood. The plans for government spending need to be flexible enough to respond as changes occur. The implications for revenues need to be taken into account and it is not at all clear that this budget properly reflects the financial risks facing the government.

The changes between the SPS allocations in the budget now being presented show that more work has been done. Yes, they are projecting increased revenues, but they are also projecting much higher spending, and that spending outpaces revenues. Instead of thinking through the implications of the changing picture they were facing, the Government simply decided to present a deficit to the House and hope that things are marginally better by 2023. Mr. Speaker, that's not proper financial planning, nor is it prudent stewardship of the nation's finances.

In the current circumstances, the Government should be managing its spending carefully and giving itself headroom to manage future problems that may develop. We all know, COVID is not going away anytime soon; it is going to be here with us for years to come and it is going to put pressure on government spending over the time period.

During the SPS debate, I urged the Government to consider future uncertainties and risks as it prepared the detailed budget. What is not clear from what has been spoken about in this debate so far, is what modelling and contingency planning, if any, the Government has undertaken; and, if it has done the work, how is that reflected in the figures that have been put to the House? More importantly, how will the Government manage risk and uncertainty in the public finances as we continue through troubled times? For it is not just COVID that presents significant risks to these Islands.

Only a couple of weeks ago, the United States reported that inflation hit 6.2 per cent year over year in their economy—the highest rate in more than three decades. We all know that inflation in the US will mean inflation in Cayman. We know too, that most of the inflation that exists in this country is imported inflation; imported from the United States where we

source 80 per cent of our goods and services. We are already seeing it in the prices at the gas pumps, utility bills and in the grocery stores. Businesses will see it as the prices of material rise and Government will see its own costs rise significantly and if its forecasts are fixed by a two-year budget that has not addressed the issue, it will find financial challenges ahead.

Inflation often hits the poorest and most vulnerable in our society the hardest. As costs rise due to inflation, so must government support for our people. Mr. Speaker, at the time of the SPS, I called for the Government to reverse its announced halving of the stipend paid to displaced tourism workers. I am pleased they listened. More listening is required and, Mr. Speaker, the Opposition has consistently made the case for an increase in the stipend to \$2000 per month, 18 months into this crisis.

Current and projected rises in the cost of living and the ongoing crisis in our tourism industry makes that case ever more pressing, and so I repeat today the plea that I made to the Premier and the Minister of Tourism in the summer: now is the time to stand with our tourism workers, not to sell them short, raise the monthly stipend to \$2000. The need to respond flexibly, and raise stipends if necessary, is just one example of why contingency planning is so important at this critical juncture.

Fortunately, Mr. Speaker, the Government is still reaping the rewards of the legacy of strong financial management that the Progressive Government left to the country. In addition to the benefits of overall strategy I spoke about earlier, we put in place changes to the government revenue system, in particular for financial services that will, and are helping, quite significantly to maintain some buoyancy in the Government's finances even as other revenue streams are threatened and remain subdued.

I am thinking of the new Private Funds Fee structures that we introduced last year that have contributed in such a big way to the positive variance in revenues in recent months. Over the first eight months of this year alone, it brought in some \$50 million, and while the strength in such revenues will help to mitigate risk in other areas Mr. Speaker, it does not eliminate that risk and over time as other benefits from the Progressive strategy are eroded, more robust handling of the financial situation will be required.

Mr. Speaker, the immediate budget needs to be, needs to be based on the long term understanding of how Cayman can create and sustain the levels of economic growth it needs. Before the Premier accuses me have been preoccupied with what is good for investors rather than for average Caymanians, let me remind him what I said earlier: without growth, Government will not be able to afford to deliver on its ambitions for the people, no matter who is in Office.

In this country, private sector investment is the driver of prosperity, not government spending; private sector investment is the driver of prosperity

and economic growth, not government spending. A healthy, confident private sector, willing to invest and create jobs and opportunities for Caymanians is an essential ingredient of delivering the very improvements for Caymanians that the Government has described.

We agree that more needs to be done to spread the benefits of prosperity more evenly, and that COVID has made it even more imperative, but if Government's action stifle investment and growth, everyone loses. Levelling the playing field must not become an exercise in levelling down. I will repeat it: levelling the playing field must not become an exercise in levelling down.

Again, the Progressives-led Governments understood this; [we] focused on developing and maintaining what we described as a virtuous circle. We delivered the sound public finance and stable government that created confidence and spurred private sector activity and investment. That in turn yielded employment and opportunities for local entrepreneurs and greater government revenues that allowed our strategy of creating substantial surpluses, investing in the future and reducing debt to be successful.

I am sure Premier Panton will recall his pride and that of my colleagues, as our positive economic actions taken when he was Minister responsible for Commerce, in the 2013 to 2017 Progressives Administrations, helped revised and significantly grow the number of small businesses in our Islands. That success continued and was greatly expanded when the Member for George Town North was the Minister responsible, so I have to admit this morning, Mr. Speaker that I found it difficult to understand how, as a part of a Progressive Government, the Premier could stand here on Friday and accused the Previous Administration of locking out Caymanians from opportunities for economic prosperity and entrepreneurship.

The last Progressives-led Administration continued the successful economic policies and growth strategies that were in place during 2013-2017, and that was a government which the now Premier was a part of. He helped create those strategies and campaigned on them in the 2017 election, and he supported them in Cabinet and in Caucus when he was a Progressives Member.

Furthermore, Mr. Speaker, while the Premier complains now about waivers of Local Companies Control ACT, formerly known as the LCCL, I remind him that between 2013 and 2017, requests for the LCCL waivers would have been brought to the Cabinet by him and no one else. As best as I can recall, there were certainly no more waivers done during the last Administration than were done when he was a part of the government. Our economic strategy was highly successful, Mr. Speaker and Caymanians benefited, including entrepreneurs.

The Premier knows this and he knows it very well, despite what he said on Friday. By removing red

tape that was stifling small businesses and reducing fees, almost 5,000 small and micro businesses benefited during the last Progressives-led Administration so, not only did we create stable and robust government finances, but we also delivered the economic growth that fuelled employment and created business opportunities for Caymanians.

It bears repeating that under the last two Progressives-led Governments growth rates peaked at 3.8 per cent in 2019, prior to the impact of COVID, and we oversaw five years of consecutive growth, averaging 3 per cent through to the end of 2019. That success meant that nearly 3,000 more Caymanians found jobs, with Caymanian unemployment falling to under 5 per cent prior to the pandemic. Mr. Speaker, I remind this House and all Members, when we took Office in 2013, Caymanian unemployment stood at 10.5 per cent.

Again, Mr. Speaker, I feel certain that this too is a record that no other government has achieved. Our government understood how the Cayman economy functions. We delivered strong government finances and supported private sector enterprise to create jobs and improve the lives of Caymanians. I don't see any understanding of this from this Government. Nowhere in either of the speeches that we have heard, does it seem that the government has any kind of coherent financial strategy.

The dash for debt, while mismanaging the revenue, will dent confidence and undermine future investment decisions. Confidence among businesses and investors is already waning. Local businesses continue to suffer, as the anxiety felt by local people keep them at home, rather than out, spending. Some investors are postponing investment decisions and I know others have already sought investment opportunities overseas, rather than in their own country where they have invested their entire life.

I pause here to reflect that revenues earned from the volume of property transactions through to September was some \$51 million. In my view, there is no action being taken by this Government to instil confidence and drive future growth in our pillar industries, and no strategy to further diversify the Cayman economy. I'm not scaremongering, Mr. Speaker; I am only saying what is happening and what everyone in this Parliament knows, even if we don't want to accept it as fact. There is much that we agree with the Government in doing, but they cannot achieve it without the adequate economic growth. I don't wish to get into economic semantics with the Government about trickle down or middle out economics. I am talking about common sense economic policies, Mr. Speaker; this is not rocket science.

The decline or lack of economic activities directly impacts government finances. We risk future revenues flat-lining or falling, as debt and financing charges spiral and any fiscal difficulties for the Gov-

ernment would then further undermine confidence and reduce business activity and investments.

This creates a new vicious circle: Government inaction and fiscal weakness undermine confidence, and dampen investment; lower level of economic activity hit government revenues, further weakening our fiscal position. That in turn, has for the real world economic impact, and so it goes. Meanwhile, the approach that the Government is advocating whereby Government steps in to provide an abundance of seemingly free services, creates both resentment among those who are paying for those services through government fees, and the risk of a culture of dependency among recipients.

Cayman has a proud tradition of self-reliance, Mr. Speaker. The Premier no less referred to this during the lengthy history lesson in his Address last Friday. Most Caymanians want to provide for themselves and their families, they feel proud to support others in their community; they look to government, not for perpetual handouts, but for support when it is needed. That is the Caymanian way, Mr. Speaker.

As Progressives, we have supported families in need directly, but more importantly, we have given thousands the opportunity to get into work so they can get back to self-reliance. We have expanded support for small businesses so that they could grow, flourish, and move away from the need for government help. We have stood behind and supported tourism workers and businesses, but we have been clear about the strategy for reopening while minimising risk. That, Mr. Speaker, is the proper role for Government.

I have no wish to come across now as the prophet Jeremiah, prophesying disaster Mr. Speaker, however, by failing to think through the long term consequences of the choices they are making, and by playing fast and loose with the government finances, the PACT-Administration is exposing the Cayman Islands economy, its businesses and its people to considerable future risk.

Mr. Speaker, I said that before I closed, I would turn to the issue of the ongoing COVID crisis. We believe that the Government has made mistakes in its handling of the crisis.

The introduction of the five-day quarantine was but one such mistake and we believe there was no coincidence that within two months, we had identified our first case of community spread in over a year. To compound matters, the Premier admitted at a press briefing that the Government was expecting an outbreak after the border reopened, but was not prepared for one before then.

We understood that managing this crisis is difficult, particularly as circumstances shift, as we are now seeing with the new Omicron variant. There is no playbook to follow and Ministers are asked to make judgements based on imperfect information. We were in that position in government when the crisis struck, so we understand; we know it first-hand.

However, times when things are difficult and information is scarce, are times when it is all the more important that judgements made are sound. Ministers therefore need to be prepared to listen to others whose experience can help inform their judgement. It really is a pity, therefore, that the Premier chose not just to ignore those on these benches who could help, but to question our motivations.

When we warned about the increasing risk of community transmission that would stem from the apparent weakening of enforcement of existing restrictions and new Government decisions, notably the decision to relax the quarantine rules, we were told we were scaremongering and playing politics. The Premier's reaction was not to stop and consider his course of action, but to accuse those who challenged him of letting down 'Team Cayman'.

Well, being a team player does not mean sitting idly by while others in the team are making mistakes, or heading in the wrong direction. If things in Cayman are going wrong, then it is part of the Opposition's job to challenge and to suggest alternatives. That's our constitutional role and it is in the interest of Cayman if by challenging, we can prompt improvement. By way of example, when we implored the Government to delay reopening until we had boosters available to protect our people and ensure that our systems and health care services were robust, we were said to be politicking.

Within weeks, however, Government did just as we suggested. It took them a while and a conversation with UK experts to understand what we were saying all along. While we believe they have mismanaged the reopening, I nonetheless acknowledge again that we had to reopen our borders and we are where we are today. I pray though, that our people remain safe and do what is necessary to protect themselves and others.

I will pause here to thank everyone in our public and private healthcare institutions, as well as those in public health, for the brilliant work they do to keep our people safe and to get them on the road to recovery if they fall ill. Cayman owes them a debt of gratitude for their unwavering commitment to see us through this tragedy. I tilt my hat to them.

Returning to reopening, as I said previously: before we return to cruise tourism, we should have a national discussion on the direction we want to take regarding this important part of our tourism mix. I speak from experience Mr. Speaker, and again I pray that the Government will listen, we need to do it. It is an ideal opportunity for us to reset the clock on cruise tourism.

Mr. Speaker, I have concentrated my remarks today on the bigger, more strategic issues arising from the Government's budget. As I have indicated, we share the Government's ambition to improve the lives of Caymanians; therefore, I am sure there will be spending in the budget that we will want to support,

including the very large number of actions that are being carried over from our Administration, or were promised in our own manifesto.

However, as an Opposition we also have, as you would expect, many concerns about the details, and those we will raise as we go through Finance Committee discussions. Most of all, we remain concerned over the lack of clarity on how the priorities will get delivered on the ground, and I do hope that Ministers in their contributions this week, will have more to say on that subject, Mr. Speaker.

As to the budget as a whole, I have concluded from my initial examination of it, that it is not in the long term interests of the Cayman Islands. Sound finances to support economic growth seem no longer to be the guiding principle for budget setting in Cayman and I regret that, Mr. Speaker. The only guarantee in this budget is that we will end this period much deeper in debt, while significant risks to our economy and the government revenues remain unaddressed; and in the end, that puts at risk the whole mission that the Government has set out.

Let me be clear: our private sector is resilient. I know businesses will do their best to adjust to these new risks. I only hope that it will be sufficient to mitigate the impact of Government's approach. And I pray too, that the average Caymanian family who look to their elected representatives to make decisions that better their lives over the long term, will not be the worst for the financial decisions of this Government and the choices made in this budget.

Meanwhile, the current COVID crisis continues to need to be addressed as a matter of urgency, if Cayman is to return quickly to future prosperity. It is only by regaining strength today, Mr. Speaker that we can properly meet tomorrow's challenges.

Finally, I acknowledge the efforts of the Financial Secretary and his team of professionals in the Ministry of Finance, for the excellent work that they have done in putting the budget documents together. I know first-hand, the many hundreds of hours it takes for them to achieve this, and so I say a very huge thank you to the Financial Secretary and his staff.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk Thumping]

The Speaker: Two matters.

Firstly, I will call: Does any other Member wish to speak? *(Pause)* Does any other Member wish to speak? *(Pause)* Does any other Member wish to speak?

I am sure that Members want to speak so what I will do, is take the lunch suspension at this time. That will give Members enough time to move around in their minds whether they are going to speak or not.

[Crosstalk]

The Speaker: We will return at 1:30pm.

We will take the lunch suspension at this time and return at 1:30pm.

Proceedings suspended at 12.22 pm.

Proceedings resumed at 1.34 pm.

The Speaker: Proceedings are resumed; please be seated.

When we took the suspension we were moving for the debate to continue. Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* That was the last call.

Does the mover wish to use his right of reply?

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Minister of Tourism?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Yes, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Yeah, but Joey you know the protocols. The Speaker is in charge of this honourable House; he recognises who he wants to. Honourable Member, you know better.

The Speaker: I said I was giving some latitude earlier.

[Laughter and cross talk]

The Speaker: And I suspect that there should be some silent sighs of relief, now that the Minister of Tourism has risen.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Tourism.

Ministry of Tourism and Transport

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would rather not get into the difficulties of a back and forth after hearing some of the comments by the Leader of Opposition so for the first time in my political career I am not going to respond, because my mother always said to me, *when you got nothing good to say, do not say anything.*

With that being said, Mr. Speaker, it's an honour to deliver my first budget speech since the people of the Cayman Islands afforded me the privilege of becoming the Minister for Tourism and Transport. I

am humbled to have leadership over the portfolio which includes the responsibility for the growth and the development of the second major pillar to the economy of our wonderful Islands—at least the second major economy pillar.

My oversight to the tourism industry comes at a critical time, as we endeavour to navigate our way safely through the turbulent times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and on to calmer waters. Following the re-opening of our borders to visitors, just days ago, I am optimistic that brighter days are on the horizon Mr. Speaker.

Since assuming office, most of the government's attention has focused on getting the country ready for the reopening and now that that is accomplished, it is time to forge ahead with our plans for improving the lives of the people of this country. Today marks a step forward in that new direction, Mr. Speaker, as the budget reflects the aspirations of a different administration. Though we have been in office for seven months, the true reflection of this Government's new policy direction will not come into fruition until January 1st when the finances associated with our policies begin to take effect.

As I outline the projects and initiatives that will be undertaken by the Ministry of Tourism and Transport you will note, Mr. Speaker, that they are aligned with the Government's overarching policy objectives and particularly relate to strategic broad outcome number 10 in our Strategic Policy Statement, which is defined as improving our tourism industry as a product and economic driver.

The past 18 months have been an incredibly difficult time for the Cayman Islands' tourism industry, Mr. Speaker. In 2019, prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism represented 25-30% of our GDP and contributed millions of dollars to our economy, but the landscape has changed drastically since early 2020 and the tables have turned. Our tourism industry, like many across the world, has borne the brunt of the economic impact caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Jobs have been lost, businesses have closed, and income from the sector is a fraction of what it was back in 2019, Mr. Speaker; but all is not lost, because the P in the PACT administration stands for the people. We are a people-driven government that is showing on a daily basis that our people can depend on us to provide support where is needed, and take the necessary steps to help them through these difficult times, even if that means we need to do more borrowing.

For many, especially those who rely on tourism, the pandemic has been the most challenging time of their lives because, while we have seen other sectors of the economy such as construction and real estate return to pre-pandemic levels, the tourism sec-

tor recovery will take time; but even so, the tourism industry's value to the Cayman Islands should not be minimized, Mr. Speaker. It is a sector that once played a vital role in our country's economy, prosperity, and growth, and it will do so again, Mr. Speaker.

On 20th November, as we moved to Phase four of the reopening plan, it was a joy to see the families reunited and visitors returning for unforgettable vacation experiences highlighting the pent-up demand to visit our wonderful shores. I was there to witness first hand, Mr. Speaker, the arrival of the first flights that were coming in, full with travellers. Over 760 people arrived on that one day and Mr. Speaker, the hope is that will continue. This past Saturday we welcomed 564 people, and I look forward to the numbers improving as more flights are added to the schedule in the coming weeks and months. Tourism may be down, Mr. Speaker, but it's certainly not out.

Today, I don't want to talk about the obvious and dwell in all that we have been through over the past year and a half. Instead, I will take a more forward-looking approach and speak about where we are now, on a path to tourism recovery and where we are headed because, Mr. Speaker, as my good friend across the aisle would always be fond of saying, there is no future in the past.

To start the ball rolling Mr. Speaker, I should preface my remarks by saying that one of my first undertakings as the Minister for Tourism was to make a concerted effort to meet as many tourism stakeholders and partners as possible. Meetings have been held with the Cayman Islands Tourism Association (CITA), the Chamber of Commerce (CoC), the Florida-Caribbean Cruise Line Association (FCCA) and many, many others, to gain a clear understanding of their organizations, the issues they are facing and what drives their performance.

These meetings also provided opportunities to address some of the specific issues affecting our tourism industry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. With the tourism industry being an important pillar industry and a major contributor to these Islands economy, I value collaboration with the public and private sector partners and welcome the opportunity to ask and answer questions during our candid conversations.

Having also met with many tourism operators and visited some of our major tourism attractions these past seven months, I have witnessed the competency, the passion and professionalism that exist within the industry. Though we may not always agree on every matter, I extend my thanks to our strategic tourism partners for their unwavering commitment to the Cayman Islands and the development of the tourism product.

From the moment the PACT administration announced the phased approach to reopening, the Ministry and Department of Tourism have been working very hard behind the scenes to fine-tune our reo-

pening strategy, which can essentially be broken down into three major components:

1. To minimize the risk and keep tourists and residents safe. This includes the introduction of sanitation and safety protocols, lateral flow testing and visitor management
2. To bring back jobs and get Caymanians back to work. This is the primary reason for reopening at this time, Mr. Speaker.
3. Strengthening the marketing and promotion of our Islands to let the people know that we are open and to entice them back to our shores. This includes renewed focus on sustainability and quality over quantity by attracting higher net-worth visitors rather than relying on mass tourism like the last administration.

I will speak briefly on each of these areas to provide more details on what each section entails starting first with safety.

Mr. Speaker, although the overarching goal of reopening is to bring back jobs and put Caymanians back to work, Government has not lost sight of the need to keep residents and visitors safe. Safety remains a top priority because the objective is not to just reopen and kick-start tourism, but to safely remain open without having to lock down in a matter of weeks or months, as other jurisdictions have had to do. Delaying our reopening till now has allowed the PACT administration to carefully consider the decisions and consequences from other countries across the world, and incorporate that learning into our own decision making.

Underpinning this commitment to safety, the Department of Tourism has collaborated with the Ministry of Health, Department of Environmental Health and private sector stakeholders, to develop sanitation guidelines for the tourism sector that businesses can customize to their own specific operations. The guidelines are available for various industry sectors, including accommodations such as hotels, guest houses and apartments, as well as attractions, car rentals, restaurants, bars, retail, public transport providers, taxi drivers, tour operators and water sports such as fishing, snorkelling and scuba diving operations.

Mr. Speaker, to ensure that the tourism industry can welcome tourists and operate safely, lateral flow testing forms an important part of our overall safety protocols and will do so for the foreseeable future, until the pandemic has been brought under control. A lateral flow testing policy for the tourism sector has been issued by my Ministry with the support of the Programme Board.

The policy stipulates that all travellers, which include Caymanians and returning residents, are required to take a lateral flow test on days 2, 5 and 10 from a certified testing provider and the results will be reported to Public Health. The initial list of certified

healthcare providers is published on various government websites and we anticipate that more healthcare providers will join the programme over time as visitor arrivals increase.

With respect to the industry readiness, the Department of Tourism has collaborated with tourism partners to gather feedback on areas such as visitor management and service provisions in COVID-19 environment. In response, tourism accommodations and businesses reported that there are in compliance with the public health regulations and many have implemented even more stringent safety measures to protect the health and safety of their employees, their guests and the Cayman Islands community as a whole. This is to ensure that visitors can feel confident in the industry's level of preparedness, as well as in their ability to provide a safe and memorable vacation in this new-normal travel environment.

Mr. Speaker, earlier in my contribution I noted that a major component in the tourism reopening strategy is to bring back jobs and get Caymanians back to work. That is the primary reason for reopening; quite simply, because it is the area that has the potential to make the biggest difference in the lives of thousands of Caymanians. This is a subject that is near and dear to my heart and is high on the list of priorities, both for me as a representative of George Town and as the Minister responsible for tourism.

With that said, I am also committed to transforming the face of our tourism industry and encouraging Caymanians to become more involved and invested in our tourism product and industry. We have heard through countless surveys in the past that our visitors want to meet the people of our country; they want to meet Caymanians, they want to learn and understand something about the Caymanian culture. This has been a steady wish from the horse's mouth, so to speak, Mr. Speaker. Our tourists are telling us that locals' participation within the tourism industry is lacking heavily and we know this to be true. Consequently, with the backing and the support of my colleagues in Caucus and in Cabinet, I am prepared to do all that I can to encourage a stronger Caymanian participation in the industry.

Mr. Speaker, as a starting point, one of the first things I did as Minister in June of this year, was to conduct a survey to collect the data from stipend recipients because these are the people we know were in the tourism industry as employees. The real goal was to gain insight into the recipients—who they are, where they are located, what sectors of the industry were they employed in and whether they wanted to return to the industry. The data confirmed that 65% of the respondents worked in stayover tourism versus 35% in cruise, and also identified how many are available to fill vacant roles.

The service showed that there are thousands of Caymanians and permanent residents who are available for employment; displaced workers who

have been surviving on stipend some government at a cost to the public purse of \$5.5 million dollars per month, told us that they are ready to return to work to regain their independence and to provide for their families; and this government is in full support of their request.

Mr. Speaker, reopening the borders should bring back jobs that were sacrificed at the start of the pandemic. The way I see it, those who wish to return to their former employment should seamlessly be re-absorbed. As long as the company is still trading in the Cayman Islands, they should have no reason not to rehire past employees.

National Tourism Education Strategy

As part of our efforts to Caymanise the tourism sector my Ministry, through the Department of Tourism, will expand the current national Tourism Education Strategy and will also promote greater Caymanian ownership of tourism-related businesses. A wide range of training opportunities and courses designed for the hospitality sector, such as customer service excellence, COVID 19 Environment, and a Driver for Excellence training have been afforded through the Department of Tourism to address some of the industry's current needs, while also elevating the standard of service provided to visitors; from January 2021 to date, the Department of Tourism has conducted or outsourced through other vendors, a total of 50 different training courses, 31 of these, which is over 50 per cent Mr. Speaker, have taken place through my tenure in office.

In 2021, the Department of Tourism invested over \$400,000 on training programmes and I am pleased to report that close to 700 individuals have improved their employability through various courses. Recognising how important it is that we continue to train our people, a total of \$887,000 have been budgeted in the 2020 to 2023 budget to continue these important programmes. With this level of investment, Mr. Speaker, I am very disappointed when I read articles in the media that say we are not doing anything. The sheer level of this investment in training opportunities demonstrate that that's not the case.

As I have stated, the P in the PACT administration stands for people, and under this administration the budget for training and development of our people in tourism has increased from \$400,000 with the last government to \$887,000 in the 22 and 23 budget. Mr. Speaker, I am not trying to be petty by stating the percentage of what it is, but I can assure you that it is more than double the amount of the last administration.

Shakers International Bartending Course

As we speak, 16 Caymanians are receiving training through the Shakers International Bartending course, which is fully accredited. As well as bartending, 25 Caymanians are also pursuing courses in front of house operations which entail meeting and greeting guests, restaurants server training, kitchen safety guidelines, sanitation regulations, up-selling and much more. You will be pleased to note, Mr. Speaker, that both of these training opportunities were offered free of charge to students and adults. Even the bartending kits—basically the bartenders' toolkit for the trade—have been provided to the participants at no cost. These courses will yield tremendous opportunities for persons interested in starting a lucrative career in the beverage and service industry, I thank our partners at Wineschool3 and Cayman Spirits Company for joining with the Department of Tourism to make this possible for our people.

Mr. Speaker, I have spoken at length about the tourism training opportunities for Caymanians because, despite all the challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic has presented us with a timely opportunity to change the way we have been doing things; and that includes the way we manage the hiring process with respect to Caymanians. I believe the time has come to correct the imbalance within our tourism workforce which is predominantly staffed by expatriate workers.

Tourism is a major employer and as the Minister with responsibility for tourism, I am determined to do everything within my power to ensure that Caymanians are the first in line for employment opportunities. The ultimate goal, which is shared by every Member of this administration, is to see a substantially higher percentage of Caymanians included in the tourism workforce where they are able to contribute to, and benefit from, our tourism industry.

With that being said Mr. Speaker, my Ministry continues to actively encourage young Caymanians as well as displaced tourism workers to register with Work Opportunities & Residency Cayman (WORC) to improve their chances of filling a vacant job in the tourism industry. In this regard, I will continue to work closely with the Deputy Premier, who is also the Minister responsible for labour to ensure that Caymanians are not overlooked in the hiring process.

Before I move on to the next topic Mr. Speaker, I should mention that I have made it clear to tourism stakeholders, hoteliers, business owners and the like, that the Government is keen to work with them to ensure Caymanians are included in the tourism workforce. I trust the private sector's view will align with the Government's expectations in this regard, because my preference is to work collaboratively with all concerned. Mr. Speaker that is what you call, "*the carrot approach.*"

Given that we have the data on how many Caymanians have worked within the industry before, if we find for some reason or another that they are not being absorbed back into the workforce, or excuses

are being made to justify work permits for jobs that we know Caymanians are available and qualified for, then stringent measures will have to be looked at to ensure that our people are given their rightful chance to be employed. I hope that we will never have to go down that bumpy road with industry players, but if we find ourselves in that position, this administration will not shy away from doing what is right for our people.

Don't get me wrong, Mr. Speaker, work permit holders have and continue to make a significant contribution to our society and economy; they continue to add value to our communities and their engagement is greatly appreciated, but the fact remains that Caymanians deserve the opportunity to contribute to the development of this country, particularly in respect to the tourism industry, which first and foremost, is about selling the Caymanian experience and who better to promote and deliver that experience than a Caymanian.

Mr. Speaker, I think I've expressed myself clearly, so I won't belabour the point any longer. Suffice it to say, I look forward to working closely and collaboratively with private sector to ensure that Government's expectations with respect to re-hiring of Caymanians are realised. Besides, why did we open the borders, if not for our people? The Ministry understands that persons who were employed in the cruise sector who wish to return to their former jobs, will need to continue receiving the stipend until our cruise industry resumes in earnest in 2022 and I will speak more to that point a little later.

I have spoken at length about safety and job creation, and will now move on to the third category in our tourism reopening strategy, and that is: strengthening our marketing efforts and maintaining competitiveness in the regional and global arena. Tremendous effort is being placed on creating awareness of the fact that the Cayman Islands is open and waiting to welcome visitors back.

Tourism marketing initiatives

To this end, the Department of Tourism is ramping up its marketing of our Islands, to re-ignite demand and encourage holidaymakers to choose the Cayman Islands for their next vacation. In the current global environment, with less tourism dollars and more competition, getting the attention of tourists and convincing them to book a vacation, requires marketing to audiences in ways that stand out in an already overcrowded international marketplace.

The Ministry is mindful, that just because it's safe to travel doesn't mean that people will be travelling at pre-pandemic volumes. This heightens the importance of attracting more discerning, high-yielding tourists that are looking for a great experience rather than just a cheap deal, Mr. Speaker. Consequently, the Department of Tourism will continue its efforts to connect with, and inspire affluent travellers to visit the

Cayman Islands, by pushing relevant key messages on the channels that they use, as they move through their path to purchase.

Prior to the pandemic, stayover arrivals had reached record breaking levels. Business was good, the economy was thriving and the strategy seemed to be more, more, and some more! I'm not saying that growth is bad; but a high rate of growth over a short timeframe is simply not sustainable. Mass tourism levels put far too much pressure on our infrastructure and our natural attractions.

If we think back to when we had 500,000 stayovers and almost two million cruise passengers, we were already starting to see overcrowding on our beaches and negative impacts on our environment, not to mention the impact on the day-to-day lives of our people—residents would literally avoid going downtown on cruise ship days! Now, Mr. Speaker, if that's the way we felt, how do you think the visitors felt? Before we return to high volumes of tourists we have a golden opportunity, and I am glad to know that the Leader of the Opposition has recognised it as well, to re-imagine tourism under a far more sustainable model. This is an opportunity that we must seize with both hands and that is exactly what we are going to do.

Mr. Speaker, while the borders were closed, contact with travellers was maintained through social media and other online channels, and marketing messages were re-positioned to support and develop a strategy of quality over quantity.

Porsche Carrera Cup in North America (PMNA)

These included highlights of the Cayman Islands' more affluent activities and events, such as our partnership with the Porsche luxury car maker through our title sponsorship of the Porsche Carrera Cup in North America (PMNA). This sponsorship allows the Cayman Islands to have a presence at various high-profile events across the United States and Canada. These events are hosted by the Department of Tourism and are designed to highlight the luxury, adventure, culture and beauty of the Cayman Islands to Porsche owners and race enthusiasts across North America.

Dubai Expo "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future"

Mr. Speaker, another event that the Department of Tourism will be showcasing our product at, is the Dubai Expo. Dubai is hosting the World Expo from January to March, 2022 and according to the organisers, over 192 nations from across the world have confirmed their participation; I am pleased that the Cayman Islands are counted among that number.

The theme for the Dubai Expo is "Connecting Minds, Creating the Future", which aptly describes the intention behind the Ministry of Tourism's participation. Our goal is to use the 'Dream in Cayman' campaign as a vehicle to connect with the minds of potential travellers as part of our efforts to create a positive and prosperous future for the Cayman Islands' tourism industry. Although plans are still in the initial stages of development, it is envisaged that the Department of Tourism will also showcase our Islands' natural beauty and other key attributes at this prestigious event. These are some of the examples illustrating how the Ministry of Tourism plans to focus our efforts more on quality, rather than quantity as we rebuild this very important industry.

In line with this approach, the Department of Tourism will increase its marketing to travellers who fall within a particular income bracket and can comfortably visit and enjoy what our Islands have to offer. Tweaking the business model to encourage quality over quantity also means ensuring we have high quality infrastructure in place and assets like the General Aviation Terminal, which handles private jets and charter flights, fall into this category as it needs expanding and upgrading. I will speak more to that a little later, Mr. Speaker.

Re-imagining our business model requires that we also look closely at whether our people are really getting their fair share and benefitting from tourism in the ways that they should be. The cruise sector is one example that comes to mind where the business model needs reforming to give tour operators and others a bigger piece of the pie. If pricing scales were revised, they would still be able to earn a good living from less passengers, rather than having to depend on the mass, or high, volumes of cruise passengers. I intend to meet with industry stakeholders to further explore the economic, social and environmental implications of this model, as well as the benefits that would be derived by pivoting the tourism strategy more in this direction.

National Tourism Plan (2019)

One of the key priorities on my Ministry's agenda is to revise the National Tourism Plan developed in 2019, to help steer the industry's development in ways that were socially, commercially and environmentally viable. The plan covers the five-year period from 2019–2023 and provides a framework for managing growth while conserving our natural resources and cultural heritage. It is not my intention to recreate the wheel Mr. Speaker but, recognising that the tourism landscape is now vastly different in a post-pandemic world, I intend to revisit the plan to make the necessary adjustments to bring it more in line with this Government's strategic thinking.

Mr. Speaker, for tourism to make an enduring contribution which benefits future generations, it has

to be sustainable. Even before I became Minister of Tourism I had concerns about the impact of tourism on our natural environment. It was clear to me that the traditional model of mass tourism needed changing. In the wake of the pandemic, while the focus is rightly being placed on the revival of our tourism sector, we are taking the opportunity to address sustainable tourism development in a more meaningful way during this recovery and rebuilding phase.

The Ministry will be more environmentally cautious in everything that we do. As per the Government's policy and focus on eco-friendly tourism experiences, this will form a part of the Department of Tourism's emphasis when marketing the Cayman Islands. I would like to see the tourism industry, particularly the dive and water-sports sectors, do more to encourage the use of eco-friendly chemicals that are less harmful to the ocean.

Mr. Speaker, as an Island nation, the Cayman Islands is highly dependent upon direct, convenient and competitive airline service to connect us with the rest of the world and bring stay-over tourism to our shores. To date, three international airlines namely British Airways, JetBlue and Cayman Airways, are connecting our people to important gateways such as London, New York, Miami, Tampa, Jamaica and Honduras.

On November the 20th, JetBlue launched its service from Boston and will resume service from Fort Lauderdale on the 21st December.

Air Canada is scheduled to be the first international carrier to resume service from Canada and will relaunch its Toronto service from the 4th December—which is my mother's birthday—followed by WestJet on the 16th December. Cayman Airways will also resume service to New York starting on 16th December.

Airline seating capacity is the single most important factor for achieving growth in tourism. The more international airlines we have servicing the destination, the faster visitation will grow, and I am happy to report that all of the international airlines that were flying to the Cayman Islands before the pandemic have confirmed their intention to return between now and March of next year. This includes American Airlines, Delta, Southwest and United.

In the first quarter of 2022, during the month of January, Cayman Airways will resume service to Montego Bay, Jamaica.

During the month of February, United will resume service from Newark, Washington, Houston and Chicago on the 12th and American Airlines will resume service from Miami on the 17th and Charlotte on the 19th.

In March, Cayman Airways will resume service from Denver, Colorado on the 5th; Southwest will resume its operations from Fort Lauderdale on the 10th March and Baltimore on the 12th and Delta will offer service from Atlanta, also on the 12th.

In April, American Airlines will resume service from Philadelphia, Chicago and Dallas. The specific dates are still being determined. Now Mr. Speaker, you can see that the Government and Ministry of Tourism do have a plan for bringing back visitors.

The resumption of these services will be hugely beneficial for stay-over arrivals because visitors will be able to get to our Islands from over 21 gateways in the UK, USA, Canada, Jamaica, Cuba and Honduras. Once this occurs, we expect to see an uptake in tourist arrivals, in addition to the steady flow of travellers visiting family and friends.

Earlier this month, the Department of Tourism announced that it had selected PHG Consulting as its new agency on record to assist with supporting our long-term goal of growing our presence in Latin America. PHG Consulting will help to raise awareness about the Cayman Islands in Argentina, Brazil, and Mexico through promotional, public relations, trade and marketing initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, the continued investment in Latin America is aligned with the goal of flattening seasonality. The winter season in Latin America runs from June to August, which is traditionally the slow season for the Cayman Islands. Stimulating this market will allow us to receive a steady flow of visitors year-round, which will help to boost visitation in our slower months. The Department of Tourism's hugely successful global campaign, 'Dream in Cayman', will be rolled out in affluent Latin American markets, positioning the Cayman Islands as a Luxury Caribbean destination that delivers unique and unforgettable experiences to visitors. This type of messaging aligns with the strategy of moving more deliberately towards quality over quantity tourism.

Mr. Speaker, I would now like to turn my attention to the future, and address some of the key areas my Ministry will be focusing on in the 2022-23 budget cycle and beyond. My overarching vision is a simple one, Mr. Speaker. That is, to improve the lives of the people through Tourism and Transport, by ensuring that my Ministry delivers better outcomes for our society and our economy.

Achieving these goals will require determined efforts and innovation to bring about industry diversification, sustainable development and long-term tourism planning. If the pandemic has taught us one thing it is that we should do everything within our means to diversify our tourism industry [in order] to reduce dependency on any single area or product. This strategy would not only improve resiliency if one sector becomes affected, it would also provide alternative revenue streams and facilitate the creation of jobs and training opportunities for our people.

Cayman Islands Film Commission

In line with this thinking, one of the many ways that my Ministry plans to diversify our tourism

product is by aiding the development of the film industry in the Cayman Islands under the direction of a new Film Commission. The Film Commission is already established as a government entity within my Portfolio and is tasked with promoting the Cayman Islands as a premier location for film, television, music and advertising products.

The sum of \$2.5 million has been included in the budget to fund a rebate programme which would support the development of this industry through financial incentives for production filming in the Cayman Islands. My Ministry also intends to create an attractive legislative and regulatory framework that will encourage film producers and directors to film in our country.

The film industry is a highly competitive, global industry which can locate itself anywhere. It therefore has the potential to be a significant source of revenue for our economy. Given that our Islands are well known internationally as a safe vacation destination with first-world amenities, outstanding scenery and friendly and welcoming people, we would be remiss not to pursue opportunities in this field.

I have selected a robust and experienced committee to lead the film commission which will be headed up by one of our own—Frankie Flowers Jr., with Miss Chandra Glidden as his Deputy. I understand dialogue has already begun with potential stakeholders who have a strong interest in establishing a film studio right here in our Islands, which I know the Minister for Investment, Innovation and Social Development is excited about.

Another project that my Ministry will be spearheading is something I am very excited about, Mr. Speaker, because it will benefit the tourism industry and will create untold opportunities for Caymanians; and that is, the development of a completely new tourism attraction in the heart of George Town.

Multi-purpose tourism venue

Government has acquired a property, and my vision is to transform it into a multi-purpose tourism venue that would integrate training, leisure and entertainment in one central location. The site that we have recently purchased is the old Resort Sports property just north of the Lobster Pot Restaurant. The best-selling point of this area as a future tourism attraction is the breath-taking ocean view; at almost 2 acres in size, the site has the necessary width and depth to adequately provide a world-class, multi-purpose experience.

With projects such as this, location, location, location, is one of the most important factors and this location, in the heart of our capital city, more than fulfils that requirement; I know the elected Member for George Town North will be rather excited about this as it falls within his constituency. There are a mix of wooden and concrete buildings on the property, which

will be repurposed and turned into a bar and restaurant-type facility that will be used to train Caymanians to assume roles in the service and hospitality sector, as bartenders, front of house servers, kitchen staff, chefs and the like.

In addition to training, the location would provide a perfect new home for the Cayman Islands Craft Market. It could also be used as a venue to host musical events and the Pirates Week George Town District Day celebration, which would avoid the closure of Cardinal Avenue that causes inconvenience to businesses and road users.

If, as a Government, we say we are committed to future generations, we have to take advantage of opportunities to develop our people. I therefore see this facility as a place to nurture talent and creativity. It will be a site that will produce the future labour force for the tourism sector, but not just as tourism employees, I also envision Caymanian entrepreneurs coming from this place; being inspired and empowered to learn how to run their own businesses in tourism.

This is all being driven by my passion for the people, Mr. Speaker. One day, in the near future, we will have a place that Caymanians can be proud of, that they train at and frequent to showcase their talents, but more than that Mr. Speaker, we increasingly hear Caymanians complaining about beach access disappearing and the coastline being unattainable for our people. They feel that it is being lost to commercial development. This site gives back a piece of the coastline to the people of the country. You can't put a price on the people owning a slice of the pie, and this is for them.

I'm sure Members of this House are wondering how much all of this will cost. The PACT-Administration initially plans to invest \$1 million in this visionary project to get it established; once developed, it has the potential to generate sufficient revenue to fund itself, especially since it is situated next to a hotel with two others planning to be built within the next two years—I will speak more to that in a bit, Mr. Speaker—providing an obvious target audience for business.

To recap Mr. Speaker, the benefits of this site, and the Government's vision for it are almost too numerous to mention, but most importantly, it is an investment in our people that will provide recurring benefit to current and future generations of Caymanians.

Sports tourism opportunities

Another example of Government's collaboration, is that the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Sports will be working closely to encourage more sports tourism opportunities for Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the strategy linked to sporting activities is to invite university level and major league teams to the Cayman Islands during

their off seasons. Hosting friendly tournaments and pre-season games on our shores drives incremental visitation because these teams travel with sizeable contingents which include family, friends, coaches and spectators.

These types of events provide a financial boost for local businesses and often convert the visiting teams into advocates for our Island who return with their families for future vacations; basically, moving marketing campaigns. The Minister of Sports will be announcing a number sports tourism opportunities, and I look forward to working with him at the appropriate time to bring those to fruition.

Global Citizens Concierge Programme (GCCP)

Still on the subject of attracting incremental visitation, Mr. Speaker, I have granted approval to extend the Global Citizens Concierge Programme (GCCP) for a further year to the end of 2022. For your ease of reference, the programme allows financially independent persons employed outside of the Cayman Islands to relocate and work remotely from our shores for up to 24 months. Several high net worth individuals have taken us up on the offer to "escape to our paradise."

As of the 23rd November, a total of 213 applications have been approved and 52 are currently pending. Associated fees amounting to \$293,000 have been remitted to the Treasury, with a further \$8,876 in the process of being collected, Mr. Speaker. The fees collected may not sound like a lot because the contributions are less than \$300,000, but we will not only make money from there; we also benefit from their high-end rental accommodations and their spending in our local restaurants and supermarkets. We can all see the benefits from the trickle-down effect.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry's focus for the development of tourism is not limited to Grand Cayman. As you know, Cayman Brac is in my DNA so I consider myself half Bracker / half George Towner.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Oh, you want me to say half little-Caymanian too?

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: We are all Caymanians, but you know that Cayman Brac has a little special space in my heart; come on now. I have a deep and abiding love for Cayman Brac and a strong connection to my people there, so I very much want them to prosper.

Island hopping tourism initiative

For tourism to be of any real benefit to the people in Cayman Brac, the number of tourists who go there has to increase significantly, Mr. Speaker. It's basically a numbers game. One of the unique selling points about Cayman is that we have a trio of islands, each with its own distinct look and feel. To capitalise on this three-island experience, the Department of Tourism has launched an initiative to promote island-hopping.

The idea is to encourage visitors to day-trip between Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac as a part of their vacation experience. A series of ads which align with the Dream-in-Cayman theme has been created specifically for the Sister Islands. The ads incorporate a QR code which visitors can simply scan with their cell phones to pull up everything they need to know about day-trips or staying overnight; the QR code [is also] linked to a dedicated webpage which allows the Department of Tourism to access data at the back end to measure its performance and tweak our marketing tactics, if necessary.

At Ministerial level, I am conscious that extra stimulus is required to encourage investment in our Sister Islands, particularly in Cayman Brac; and to the elected Member for Cayman Brac West: I believe that the Island would be well served by a mid-sized hotel with about 50 to 100 rooms, especially if the focus was on adventure tourism. If an investor came forward with a good proposal for any new development in Cayman Brac, I feel confident that this Government would be willing to work with them to make it attractive to build in Cayman Brac.

The next question is *well, how do we fill this additional capacity?* One way is through the Department of Tourism's increased stimulation of the European market, Mr. Speaker. European travellers in particular, tend to gravitate towards outdoor and adventure-type activities which are well aligned with what the Brac has to offer. European guests also tend to stay longer in destinations, giving them plenty of opportunity to take advantage of the multi-island vacation option. More tourists mean more revenue for retailers and restaurants, which would allow Cayman Brac to profit from a steady income stream year-round.

For Little Cayman though, Mr. Speaker, the thinking is a little different. Little Cayman has incredible natural beauty that appeals most strongly to divers. We would support growth of that tourism product as long as it is done in a sustainable way that preserves [Little Cayman's] natural environment and way of life, because that is a big part of the Island's appeal and what makes it attractive to visitors.

Accommodations

Mr. Speaker, I will now turn my attention to the infrastructure and attractions which make up our tourism product, starting with accommodations. One

of the biggest decisions when planning a vacation is choosing where to stay. Room stock across the three Cayman Islands currently stands at 6,992:

- 6,561 rooms in Grand Cayman (which includes hotels, condominiums and villas);
- 258 in Cayman Brac; and
- 173 in Little Cayman

In terms of new hotel developments, there are 10 properties in the development pipeline which include four with completion dates ranging between 2022 and 2024; these are spread between George Town (5), West Bay (3), Bodden Town (1), and East End (1). When completed, these new accommodations will further stimulate economic growth and provide jobs in the industry. Just to give you a highlight of three of those, Mr. Speaker:

- One in George Town, which will be built on Goring Avenue with 177 rooms;
- The Hotel Indigo planned for West Bay Road with a proposed 282 rooms; and also
- The Grand Hyatt Hotel and Spa, which will be located at the old Pageant Beach location in George Town with an expected 351 rooms.

Mr. Speaker, as you would be aware, the absence of tourists was particularly difficult for the food and beverage sector, and has led to the unfortunate sale or closure of several local restaurants. I am sure I speak for the industry at large in saying that we appreciate the owners' courageous efforts to ride out the pandemic since 2020, and we are sympathetic to their decision to close.

Aside from those closures, four new dining experiences have opened up recently. We welcome them to the industry, and wish them every bit of success in their new business ventures as we slowly open our borders. I would also like to take a moment to thank the public for strongly supporting the domestic tourism through staycations, and helping many of our hotels, restaurants, and tourism businesses to stay afloat while the borders were closed.

One thing I can always say about our people, is that we rally together and do what we need to do, when they need to do it and I encourage the industry to never forget that, because sadly Mr. Speaker, I am already hearing that some accommodations providers are rejecting local bookings now that borders have opened. That is not acceptable and quite frankly, it's a slap in the face when they depended on us in the leaner times. I urge the industry to continue to welcome our people at their establishments.

Tourism Attractions Board

Still on the subject of our tourism product Mr. Speaker, you would know that visitors typically look for unique and interesting things to do during their

Cayman vacation. The Tourism Attractions Board, which manages some of our Islands most notable attractions, including Pedro St. James, the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park, Hell, and the Cayman Craft Market, is adding new twists to enhance the visitor experience and, as you heard me say Mr. Speaker, we are adding a new multi-purpose attraction in the central part of George Town, which eventually will also be managed by the Tourism Attractions Board.

Pedro St. James

The COVID pandemic has had widespread impact on all tourism related businesses; for attractions such as Pedro Castle, the biggest impact has been the decrease in the number of visits from both tourists and residents alike. In addition, the number of events hosted at the site has also decreased. In an effort to boost visitation, the management are encouraging other government agencies—and Ministers, I want you to listen to this closely now: we are encouraging other government agencies to utilise the facilities where possible when planning events for their respective agencies and Portfolios.

International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame Museum

I am pleased to report that the International Scuba Diving Hall of Fame Museum will be hosted at Pedro St. James making the exhibits accessible to all. A space has been designated for the museum and we anticipate that the fit-out process will be completed by 31st December. I am sure that the diving community in particular will be very proud of the display when the installation is completed.

Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park's Children's Garden

Moving on now to the Queen Elizabeth II Botanic Park. The Children's Garden at the Park is an ongoing project which requires continued Government support. The Garden is approximately 60 per cent complete and is expected to be fully completed by 2022, provided the required raw materials are not significantly affected by global logistics and the required labour force is available locally—well, that should not be a problem at all, because we have many people who want to work. The Management are currently looking at several sustainable initiatives for other areas which fall within their remit, and are hoping to implement some of these within the next two years.

Stingray City Feeding Programme

Now on to the Stingray City Feeding Programme, Mr. Speaker. The Ministry has budgeted \$27,000 per month totalling \$81,000, to extend the

Stingray City feeding programme for the final 3-month period from January to March 2022. It is anticipated that as the market increases and tourists begin to return, the need for government to continue feeding the stingrays will reduce over time. This initiative was undertaken to ensure that the stingrays, which are such an important part of our tourism product, were being cared for while borders were closed.

Aquila's Service Excellence: COVID-19 Edition Training Certificate Course

I am also pleased to note that 20 Tourism Attraction Board staff members recently completed the Aquila's Service Excellence: COVID-19 Edition Training Certificate Course in preparation for reopening; and Mr. Speaker, talking about preparation for reopening, we made sure that everyone that is under the Government's responsibility was doing all the necessary preparations and training, and understanding the regulations well enough, that when tourists do arrive, they are prepared to offer a safe experience.

National beautification initiative

Turning our attention now to a project that is important to our country both from a tourism and national pride perspective, but particularly because our primary attraction is our Islands' natural beauty, Mr. Speaker. I am referring to our country's beautification. The sum of \$250,000 per annum, totalling half a million dollars, has been allocated in the 2022 and 2023 budget to fund the national beautification initiative.

I have delegated this area of responsibility to my Parliamentary Secretary, the Elected Member for Savannah, who is the former Chair of the Beautification Committee. The Parliamentary Secretary, who will be leading this beautification project on a national level, has years of experience in this area and is passionate about ensuring that our Islands look clean and presentable—especially to our visitors.

I am sure she will have lots of ideas for beautifying our country that she will speak about if and when she delivers a contribution.

Tourism Scholarships and training

Mr. Speaker, I spoke about training opportunities being offered to displaced, tourism workers. Now I wish to touch briefly on the scholarships and training that the Ministry provides to help Caymanians who are not yet in the industry, become qualified. By way of example, these include:

- Students undergoing training at the Hospitality School at UCCI;
- Scholarships in the amount of \$15,000 to assist students pursuing studies in tourism

or hospitality at the Johnson and Wales University in Miami; also

- Recipients of the Ministry of Tourism (MOT) scholarship programme, which allows students to pursue a Bachelors and Master's Degree in tourism or tourism-related disciplines.

One of the Ministry of Tourism's primary goals is to attract a steady stream of skilled tourism workers who can benefit from, and contribute to, the growth and prosperity of our tourism sector. Consequently, hundreds and hundreds of Caymanians have been trained through these and other programmes, at significant cost to the public purse.

In addition to Tourism training, the Ministry of Tourism has held the franchise for the Miss Cayman Islands Pageant for the last 24 years and provides a scholarship in the amount of C\$70,000 to the winner. This has helped past winners to further their tertiary education at universities in the UK, USA, Singapore and locally. The range of subjects they have studied include Law, Film and broadcasting, Business/Office Management, Business Development, and Marketing just to name a few, Mr. Speaker.

Many of our former pageant winners are gainfully employed in middle management positions across the Islands. They are also serving on Government boards and other professional and charitable organisations making a difference in our society. This type of outcome is exactly what Government scholarship and training programmes, funded by the Ministry, are meant to accomplish.

Unfortunately Mr. Speaker, the picture is not so rosy when it comes to tourism. Judging by the amount of funds that have been provided to support these programmes, it is evident that the objective is to provide Caymanians with the necessary training to take up positions in the hospitality sector. It is not unreasonable to think that those who successfully complete their studies would be on a clear path to employment within the industry. Similarly, it is not unreasonable to think that Caymanians who are qualified in other disciplines, such as marketing, accounting or HR, should also be able to enjoy rewarding careers within the tourism industry.

As Minister for Tourism, I intend to pay very close attention to how many of our scholarship recipients are being absorbed within the industry that they have trained for. This brings me back to the point I was making earlier, Mr. Speaker.

One of the primary reasons for reopening our borders is to get our people back to work. Recognising the risk that comes along with it, Government has taken the hard decision to reopen the borders—under much criticism from those across the aisle—so that our people can be employed and begin to rebuild their lives, which have been on hold for the past 18 months. For this Government, our people are our priority, and I will advocate for them in every way possi-

ble—especially if we start seeing work permit applications on the rise while Caymanians are being overlooked or cast aside.

This is not something that is negotiable nor something that I am willing to compromise on, Mr. Speaker. It is something that I take very seriously and I will be paying close attention to it, so I am urging employers to do the right thing and re-absorb Caymanians into the workforce, especially those who have made an effort to get retrained and improve their employability. Let me be clear, to avoid any misunderstanding:

I recognise that there may be instances where work permit holders have to fill highly-specialised roles where Caymanian are not found to fill the position, but these should be rare and exceptional circumstances; aside from that, there should be no excuses when it comes to rehiring of Caymanians and giving them the opportunities that others from every country across the globe have enjoyed at the expense of my people.

Mr. Speaker, getting to a more positive note, I would like to make an announcement that my colleagues and I have agreed to.

Attracting skilled and professional workers to the industry, is a responsibility that the Ministry takes seriously; in this regard, I am pleased to announce that I will be introducing a new annual scholarship opportunity for two Caymanians to become qualified airline pilots. The fact that our national airline falls within the remit of my Ministry, makes this scholarship both timely and appropriate.

The Ministry will fund up to \$60,000 per person to support this new training opportunity, and I hope to see the recipients of these scholarships proudly flying for Cayman Airways, sometime in the future.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Speaker, I would now like to turn my attention to the Statutory Authorities which fall under the Ministry of Tourism and Transport.

Cayman Islands Airports Authority (CIAA)

The 2022-23 budget period represents a restart for the Airports Authority as it endeavours to return to normal operations since the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020.

According to industry indicators, the aviation sector is expected to return to 2019 performance levels by Quarter 4 of 2024. While we are hopeful that the Airports Authority will exceed that forecast and reach pre-pandemic levels earlier, it is too early to tell at this stage what the outcome will be. Nonetheless, the Authority expects to return to a positive cash flow

position during 2022, and begin rebuilding its previously strong financial position. With that said, it should be noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly impacted the Airports Authority in two key areas.

Firstly, despite implementing cost-saving measures in other areas of business, the cost of the increased cleaning frequency and the changes in cleaning methods in the terminal continues to have an impact. In addition, substantial amounts of personal protection equipment had to be purchased to ensure the staff operating at the Owen Roberts International Airport and the Charles Kirkconnell International Airport have the tools to keep them safe. These costs must be sustained as it protects against the spread of the COVID virus as it continues.

The second key area Mr. Speaker is [that], since September, and particularly during the month of October, the Airports Authority has been impacted by the increase in local transmission of the virus. This is resulting in mitigating measures having to be taken to ensure operations can be maintained.

Outside of their normal operations, a number of projects will be undertaken at the airport during the budget period. These include, but are not limited to:

- Replacing the West perimeter fence at the Owen Roberts Airport; and
- Upgrading aviation security equipment to improve security and enhance passenger experience.

As you would have heard from the Honourable Premier, the General Aviation Terminal adjacent to the Owen Roberts International Airport, which caters to private and chartered flights, needs redeveloping. The terminal handled 983 aircrafts in 2020 and that number is expected to increase as the pandemic subsides and travel returns to pre-Covid levels.

A new and modern facility is required to provide more ramp capacity, parking, and storage facilities for general aviation aircraft. A new terminal will also enhance the passenger experience, bringing it more in line with the services and amenities that high-net worth travellers are accustomed to in other locations around the world.

A Strategic Outline Case for consultancy services to produce a business case has been written and is currently with the CIAA Board for review. Once approved, it will be presented to Cabinet for approval. I will provide further updates to the country as we advance through this process.

Looking to the future, the Airports Authority is developing a new master plan which will guide the airport's development over the next 20 years. This master plan will define the projects required to ensure that our airports meet the air travel needs of the Cayman Islands going forward, and will form the basis of our capital spend over the coming budget periods during this Administration.

I would also like to note, Mr. Speaker, that the budget includes plans to introduce some key positions in the organisation that will provide opportunities for Caymanians to develop and progress up the ladder. While in most cases this must conform with regulatory requirements, in every case there are plans for Caymanians to be developed to meet these requirements.

Still with the Airports Authority Mr. Speaker, you will recall that in August 2021 the Cayman Islands Airports Authority announced changes to the flow of traffic when entering and exiting the Owen Roberts International Airport. This is to comply with a new Airport Landside Security regulatory requirement. These regulations have been implemented in the United Kingdom in compliance with International Civil Aviation recommendations that vehicles are not permitted within 30 metres of any airport terminal building.

Regulators have agreed to allow authorised vehicles, including pre-booked buses and limousines, which are considered "vetted" vehicles, because they have gone through a robust airport and public transport screening and licensing process, to continue to operate within the 30-metre zone. Private vehicles are considered "un-vetted" vehicles and must observe the 30-metre restriction.

The Authority is working hard to implement the least impactful and most cost-efficient solution to address this issue, while remaining in compliance with international security requirements; such efforts have included diverting traffic to the short term parking lot, and other alternate solutions are being considered for the longer term. While the impact to the passenger drop-off/pick-up experience is regrettable, in the meantime, to minimise inconvenience, travellers may use the airport luggage carts to carry their luggage to the terminal at no cost. Airport Customer Service personnel will also be on hand with umbrellas to assist passengers in inclement weather conditions, and golf carts will also be available.

I should also note, Mr. Speaker, that a new Board of Directors has been appointed for the Airports Authority under the stewardship of Mr. Johann Moxam, who serves as the Chairman for a period of two years, effective September 2021. The new CIAA Board members are highly-regarded professionals, with diverse expertise and will provide strong strategic direction to the Airports Authority Management team, and I wish the new Board every success in their undertakings. I would also like to take this opportunity to thank to previous Board Members for their service.

Mr. Speaker, turning my attention now to another important Portfolio under my Ministry.

Cayman Airways (CAL)

The Cayman Islands is fortunate to have our own National airline which never fails to support us in times of need. Whether the requirement is to strategically open new tourism gateways, to provide evacua-

tion during hurricane season, or to simply give our people access to travel, Cayman Airways plays a vital role in the Cayman Islands.

During the recent border closure, Cayman Airways had to take on a new role, and has been our lifeline as it kept our country connected to the rest of the world with regular repatriation flights, while also transporting high volumes of cargo.

With our borders now open, Cayman Airways will be continuing with its scheduled service to Miami, Tampa, New York, Kingston, Montego Bay, Havana and La Ceiba, while domestic service will continue allowing travel between our three Islands. Cayman Airways will also continue working closely with the Department of Tourism as un-served and under-served source markets are identified. CAL will be used to establish those new routes and services.

The Ministry is currently exploring Los Angeles and San Francisco as new gateways for Cayman Airways. In addition to opening up the western United States to tourists, we believe that these two locations will also assist in the development of two key industries—namely technology and the film industry. As you know, Mr. Speaker, Hollywood is in Los Angeles and Silicon Valley in San Francisco.

We believe that we are building the country not only from a tourism perspective, but from the economic development perspective of these industries; these gateways would also provide opportunities for visitors from Asia to connect to the Cayman Islands, and is another example of our efforts to support the philosophy of quality over quantity.

Against that backdrop Mr. Speaker, you can see that Cayman Airways' primary function is to facilitate the growth of tourism by making it easy for tourists to get here from major markets; consequently, the airline may never be in a positive financial position, despite its efforts to operate efficiently. Notwithstanding, the airline continues to be a significant contributor to our local economy, and therefore the Government continues to invest in its operations in order to use the Airline strategically.

A series of independent economic impact studies accomplished over many years, have consistently revealed that the economic contribution of the airline to the country is in the region of \$200 million annually. As a result, we can be certain that through our investment in the airline, the government consistently receives a ten-fold return on its annual purchase from Cayman Airways.

In terms of the airline's future focus, the new fleet of Boeing 737-8 aircraft now gives Cayman Airways the ability to reach anywhere in the continental United States; most of populated Canada, all of Central America and the Caribbean, and much of South America. This will allow us to be far more strategic with respect to where they fly. In addition to the extended range, the jets also offer added seating capacity combined with exceptional reliability and signifi-

cant cost savings, both in terms of fuel and maintenance.

A new Board of Directors, chaired by Mr. Jude Scott, CEO of Cayman Finance was appointed in September of this year, and will provide strategic direction and oversight to the management team. The Board also includes the honourable Marco Archer, a former Member of Parliament, whose strong financial background and expertise will assist in holding the airline accountable with its spending. I look forward to working with the entire board, and take this opportunity to thank the previous Board members for their service.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to state that the country owes Cayman Airways a debt of gratitude for the repatriation flights they provided during the height of the pandemic. I would like to publicly thank them for their tremendous service and commitment to the country.

Mr. Speaker, moving now to another very important entity to me and to the country.

Port Authority of the Cayman Islands

This entity was on a path of strong growth prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite not having an increase in most of its fees for over 10 years, operating revenues were increasing at an annual average of 4 per cent, which was largely due to annual increases in cargo volumes and cruise passenger arrivals.

Despite these accomplishments, there were underlying staffing issues to be resolved, because the growth in the staff compliment did not match the growth in the volume of activity. In the four years preceding the pandemic, the staff compliment grew by 7 per cent whereas cargo increased by 27 per cent and cruise passengers by 8 per cent. This placed additional burdens on most of the staff and resulted in burnout, discontent and other negative outcomes. Although management recognised the need for additional staffing, they faced challenges due to changes in the leadership structure, along with fees that had not been increased in over 10 years—but I promise you [that] I will be fixing that, Mr. Speaker.

A specific challenge that the Port Authority faces is maintaining operations and motivating staff to keep producing at a high level, while still remaining within the revenues being earned during a worldwide pandemic. However, with cargo operations performing better than expected over the medium term, the Port should be able to address the challenges being faced, while maintaining a solid financial position.

Recognising our increasing population, rapid growth on the importation of goods, and the limitations of the port's current location, the country will soon outgrow the current space available at the cargo facility. A new board has been appointed, chaired by a former Member of Parliament Mr. Cline Glidden Jr.,

who brings extensive experience to the role. The Board has been tasked with recommending a long-term solution to the capacity constraints, while also considering the limitations of the public purse and its finances. I hope that within the next year we will be able to have a report for the Government to review, and take a decision on the way forward.

My intention is to look at all of the options and examine the pros and cons, determine the best solution for the country over the long term, and come back to the country with updates; but let me be clear Mr. Speaker: the Government is not amenable to any expansion taking place within the current port facility downtown, although some upgrades may be necessary landside to improve the cruise passenger experience. When funds become available, and the country is in a healthier economic position, we will look at options on whether improvements can also be made at the Spotts location.

I would like to use his opportunity to thank the former Board members for their service and the Port staff and management team, in particular, for their dedication and hard work which has allowed us all to retain a high level of normalcy throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite a huge increase in the amount of imported goods, they efficiently managed the process in very cramped conditions and we owe them a debt of gratitude [as well].

Cruise sector

Mr. Speaker, we cannot speak about the Port without speaking about another major sector of the tourism industry, [namely,] the cruise sector. In my first few weeks in Office, I met with Florida Caribbean Cruise line representatives, and have maintained open dialogue with respect to bringing cruise passengers back to the Cayman Islands.

Safety is still the Government's top priority; consequently, we have requested that cruise lines place the Cayman Islands as their first port of call following their departure from the United States, and I am happy to say one cruise line has stepped up to the plate.

As you heard from the Premier in his address, Government has approved a Holland America cruise ship to call on Grand Cayman on Tuesday, the 28th December of this year. This marks the first cruise ship approved to return to Grand Cayman since cruise travel was suspended in 2020. The cruise ship was approved to call on Grand Cayman because it has been able to meet the strict criteria and safety protocols stipulated by Government, which are:

1. Grand Cayman must be the first port of call;
2. Passenger capacity is limited to a maximum of 1,600 representing 60 per cent capacity of the vessel;
3. All guests and crew must be fully vaccinated with an approved COVID-19

vaccine at least 14 days prior to the start of the cruise;

4. All guests must have a negative PCR or antigen test taken within 2 days of their embarkation;
5. All guests and crew going ashore must observe local requirements regarding face masks and social distancing; and,
6. Most importantly, no unwell guests or crew will be allowed ashore, and let me say that again, Mr. Speaker: *no unwell guests or crew will be allowed off the ship.*

Stringent safety protocols and several layers of protection are in place to screen passengers prior to boarding the ship; with Grand Cayman being the first port of call within 24 to 48 hours after embarkation, this reduces the risk of passengers contracting the virus and is therefore the safest option.

Mr. Speaker, though I am honoured to announce this cruise call, I think it's important that I set a realistic expectation of what this one-time cruise visit is expected to accomplish, and that is: we are using this cruise call as an opportunity to test the safety protocols and iron-out any kinks so that we can confidently look forward to welcoming more cruise ships in the new year, but this cruise call is not expected to be the blue-print for how the cruise sector itself will be moving forward. As I mentioned earlier Mr. Speaker, the Government intends to reform the cruise industry in our Islands and consequently, I will be looking at changing the way we do business with cruise lines to obtain better value for our people.

Mr. Speaker, I hope that answers the Leader of the Opposition's request about how we are handling cruise. The old way of doing business is not sustainable for the Cayman product. This is especially true with respect to the tourism operators who put their hearts and souls into giving visitors the best possible experience and are only getting a small percentage of the pie. It is my intention to rebalance that equation, but that will take some time. In the interim, the Cabinet and my Ministry decided to move forward with this cruise to give a spark of hope to those in the industry that the Government is committed to the cruise sector, and to show that steps are being taken to facilitate its return.

With that being said, I would like to also announce that a steering committee is currently being established, which will be tasked with providing the necessary criteria and recommendations for re-establishing the cruise industry, and moving it forward in alignment with Government's policy. I intend to meet with all stakeholders in the cruise industry before the end of this year to give them an outline of the Government's plans for reforming the industry, and I will be seeking their feedback, buy-in and support, on this new way forward.

This one-time cruise therefore presents a timely opportunity to assess the safety protocols, while we re-engineer the business model so that when cruise lines return, hopefully in the first quarter of next year, we will be ready to implement some of those reforms. I remain in constant conversation with the cruise industry stakeholders and I am optimistic that other cruise lines will be able to meet some of the protocols as Holland America has done, enabling them to return to Cayman in the New Year.

As we continue renewing and rebuilding the relationships with our international partners such as the Florida Caribbean Cruise Association, the Caribbean Tourism Organisation and others, it is my intention to re-establish the Cayman Islands interests with these stakeholders. The reality is, we need to have a bigger presence and more visibility in international markets given that we have been missed for a full year of tourism.

This has allowed other jurisdictions to capitalise on our absence, Mr. Speaker. To restate the obvious, this is why it is so important that we have these conversations and recalibrate the thinking and expectations of our tourism stakeholders, to be more aligned with the change in our business model for quality over quantity.

Mr. Speaker, turning my attention now to one of the most frequent and vexing complaints affecting the residents of these Islands.

Traffic

I know this has been a major bone of contention, not just for the people of George Town Central, but for every resident in these Islands, particularly those in the Eastern Districts who travel to the Capital every day. I know the elected Members for North Side and East End...

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: And Bodden Town...

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: And Newlands and Savannah...

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: And Prospect.

Mr. Speaker, as you can tell, this is a vexing issue for everybody. It seems like you are the only one who put in that new highway and the West-Bayers are not complaining about it; but it is a big issue for many Caymanians.

The Speaker: That is because so many people complained about it.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Fed-up families are spending anywhere between two and four hours a day commuting to school and work. The absence of a national transportation system compounds the problem, by not being able to ease some of the pressure on our roads.

The Ministry of Transport is cognisant that the traffic congestion is a serious problem that is increasingly taking a toll on our quality of life. The cost can be counted in lost productivity, increased fuel consumption and higher CO2 emissions. I wish the answer was an easy one that could be put into place tomorrow or even overnight, but unfortunately that's not the case, Mr. Speaker. Tackling the issue of traffic congestion requires a holistic approach underpinned by reliable data, because simply building more roads is not an effective solution; consequently, I will be conducting research to gather the facts and statistics on the entire issue.

I also intend to travel to some of [the] regional Islands who already have well-established, functioning national transport services in place, to review their operations—and I am happy to say, Mr. Speaker, that I spoke with a Parliamentary Association member who is the Minister for Transport in one of the Caribbean Islands. Their bus systems are eco-friendly, and in the New Year he is looking forward to come and show how their operations work.

I will also establish a transportation task force that will review all of the operations during this budget period and will be able to come back with their recommendations and solutions for implementation, hopefully in the near future.

The Ministry will review the recommendations and identify the best options to present to the country as the way forward. By then the economy will have significantly rebounded, giving us a better funding options to examine. In the interim, I will be using the time to undertake the necessary legislative reforms and data collection. Within the next year, I intend to reform the Transportation Law to strengthen the scope and capabilities of the Traffic Department. I also intend to bring legislation to the Parliament to update the Tourism Law, which was last updated in 1995—a long time ago—and needs to be modernised in order to be more applicable to today's industry.

As you can tell Mr. Speaker, there are a number of strategies and plans in place for the Ministry of Tourism and Transport to accomplish over the short to medium term, and these are dependent on having the necessary funding as highlighted by some in this Parliament. Though the primary focus over the past seven months has been safely reopening our borders, with that now accomplished at least to Phase 4, the New Year presents the opportunity to lay more groundwork for the future. As such, the country can expect to see more forward momentum from tourism in the first quarter of next year.

Mr. Speaker, as you know, the process of budgeting is a very complex one because it relies on all kinds of ever-shifting variables, including past history, future trends, infrastructure forecasts and an understanding of the expectations of our citizens—the people who voted us in; but somehow, disaster has a way of redefining priorities.

As a result we have juggled many uncertain and evolving dynamics, and accepted many sacrifices to arrive at the budget that the Honourable Deputy Premier presented on Friday. You will notice that it reflects an increase of just under a million dollars from 2022 for the entire Ministry of Tourism and Transport, which represents 1.4 per cent over the previous budget, and for 2022 an increase of just \$1.5 million or 2.3 per cent. All other increases are equity injections into our statutory authorities due to the loss of revenue from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Even though we are still required to be more aggressive in our marketing to attract visitors to come to the Cayman Islands, we are prepared to do more with less, because we understand the financial situation the country is in. Whilst Government may have seen increased revenue in 2021 in some areas, other areas have been severely impacted due to the absence of tourism. This is particularly true for industries which depend directly on tourism visitation and consumption. Before the pandemic, in 2019, we had over half a million stayover visitors which provided the government with \$38 million in tourism tax revenue.

The Department of Tourism is aiming to deliver at least 40 per cent of the 2019's arrivals within the first 12 months of the border opening; through increased marketing efforts, we will do so. That 40 per cent target will translate into a contribution of \$15 million in tourism tax dollars for the country.

I should note though, that as of January 1st 2022, responsibility for managing the stipend programme will shift to the Ministry of Labour. The reason for this is because the Ministry of Labour has the necessary framework and resources in place to assist Caymanians with finding suitable employment. Assisting displaced tourism workers to find jobs, is primarily an employment issue that is best situated under the Ministry of Labour, whose staff have the expertise and experience in dealing with labour matters and can assist stipend recipients to actively seek employment.

Mr. Speaker, although I bear the constitutional responsibility as the Minister for Tourism, I am firstly elected as the representative for the good people of George Town Central, who remain at the forefront of my mind at all times. In my campaign I addressed a number of issues such as the minimum wage, affordable housing for Caymanians, pension reform, reducing the cost of living and plans to mitigate flooding and drainage, to name just a few.

I have already spoken at length on the subject of jobs for Caymanians, particularly when it comes to tourism, and I expect that the rest of these

matters, which are areas of concern to my constituents in George Town Central, as well as to the wider public, to be discussed in greater depth as you heard from the Honourable Premier and Deputy Premier, and potentially from other Ministers who hold the responsibilities for those areas.

Central Scranton Park

With that said, I would like to provide an update on the Central Scranton Park. It is my intention during this budget period to complete the development of the Park to provide a safe community space for the good people of George Town Central and the wider community. I have been working with the Minister responsible for Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure, and have received preliminary plans and site drawings. We have already started preliminary works such as site clearing for the first stages of the development of the park.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister and elected Member for North Side so much for his work in respect to this area. The people of George Town Central are indebted to him because he knew how important this was to me, and he added his commitment saying, *'Minister, anything you need, my Ministry will do'* so, Honourable Jay Ebanks: on behalf of the good people of George Town Central, thank you so much for your hard work in that respect.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Speaker, it is my intention that after approval of this budget, that the money will be available for the rest of the work necessary to make the park a reality up to \$500,000—now, I say “up to”, because we do not think we will need to use as much, as we hope to get some donations in respect to the park, so up to \$500,000 has been allocated in the budget to develop and complete this project through EA153 (National Park Upgrades).

The Central George Town area has very little space allocated for community and recreation activities. Creating this space will be key to encouraging people to walk and exercise, and will allow residents to socialise together in a safe, communal environment. It is worth noting that the George Town Revitalisation Project initiated by the previous government in 2015 spans approximately 200 acres. Studies have proven that there is currently only 0.1 per cent of public open greenspace within this area—0.1 per cent. This puts into context the severe need for public areas like Central Scranton Park. When completed, the park will provide a beautiful, community-friendly space that will be a tremendous asset to the George Town area.

Mr. Speaker, before I conclude my remarks, let me thank all those persons who came out on Saturday to help with the clean-up of the Central Scranton

ton Park. The Central Scranton Committee has been committed to that area for so, so long and some of the Members on the other aisle know that we share supporters on that Committee, but the good news is that this is one area that we don't make politics get in the way and we work together, because we know that all the good people of George Town and George Town Central will work together. I know that some Members on the other side want to know about the update, so hopefully that answers their questions.

I [also] want to thank Mr. Michael "Bobby" Peart, a police officer who is so committed, for his hard work; he is always there when we call on him.

Mr. Speaker, in concluding my remarks, let me just say that until the global health crisis is under control, recovery will be slow. Growth will be incremental. While our domestic tourism market has helped to sustain the industry, the reality is, we need international visitors to return in significant numbers to bring about any meaningful recovery. Encouraging visitation is just the starting point.

My goal is to put the necessary policies and plans in place that will enable the tourism industry to re-emerge in a safe and sustainable manner, on a foundation of commitment, understanding and mutual benefit. Most importantly, it must bring jobs and opportunity for our people, because at the end of the day, if our people are not benefitting, then why are we opening the borders?

Tourism has proven resilient before and I am optimistic that the industry will recover from this crisis and thrive again, Mr. Speaker. There will be challenges ahead, but the Government's commitment to tourism is unwavering. I will continue to work with my colleagues in Government to ensure that the sector is given the support needed to re-emerge in a more resilient and sustainable way.

Mr. Speaker, it has been an honour, for the last seven months, to work with the staff of the Ministry of Tourism and Transport, and the Statutory Authorities within my Portfolio. I have the privilege of leading an incredible team made up of talented and intelligent individuals, and I thank them all for their support and guidance as I got familiar with the internal processes.

I would like to particularly thank my Chief Officer, Mr. Stran Bodden; and the Director of Tourism, Mrs. Rosa Harris. I look forward to working with them and all of the staff, to achieve my vision and the Government's vision, for the development of tourism. I also wish to recognise and thank my Parliamentary Secretary, the elected Member for Savannah, who has been a pillar of strength and takes a lot of the load off my shoulders.

Though much of the Government's policy direction has changed from the last Government to this Administration, the differences when it comes to tourism are not so profound, Mr. Speaker, and I would like to extend my thanks to the former Minister of Tourism

for the solid foundation that he has left for me to build on.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Though we are on opposite sides of the political arena, I believe we fundamentally agree on the overarching vision for the development of this important pillar industry. The major difference in our approaches will be my focus on sustainability and encouraging quality over quantity which you would recognise by now, Mr. Speaker, is a recurring theme for me and this Government.

It is not normal in political circles to praise your predecessor, which is underscored by the fact that I am not your typical politician so, I am not afraid to call a spade a spade and thank someone or give praise when it is due. It would be remiss of me not to thank our industry partners in the private sector who I am happy to work closely with.

I am keen to maintain an open and productive relationship and look forward to working collaboratively to build the tourism industry, and that line was specifically for Cayman Islands Tourism Association's (CITA) President, Mr. Marc Langevin—we have to work closer together, but you have to give my people work. Okay.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to say a special thanks to His Excellency the Governor; and Mr. Speaker, to be honest you know, he turned out to be a lot cooler than I thought.

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: And I think it is important that I say this in this honourable House, Mr. Speaker—

[Laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: So the general public understands the character of the man who holds the post of Governor.

Mr. Speaker, I can say with my hand on my heart that I do believe the Governor loves the Cayman Islands. We may not always agree on policy decisions for my country, but I genuinely believe he has the best interests of our people in his heart; and I want to say thanks to him. It is an honour to work with him thus far, as a Minister in Cabinet. Now, I know that I give him a lot of trouble but... that is the nature of the beast.

Finally, I would like to close by thanking you Mr. Speaker, as well as my Caucus and Cabinet colleagues for their support and collaboration; and the Premier, for his commendable and caring leadership of this country.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Forgive me, Mr. Speaker.

[Pause]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: I just got through thanking the Governor, nah true? Yeah, that's right.

[Laughter and crosstalk]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: No, I do not want to sit down yet. You see, I am so used to be up there talking, I want to make sure that I use my last 11 minutes.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Finally, I would like to close by thanking you Mr. Speaker, as well as my Caucus and Cabinet colleagues for their support and collaboration, and the Premier for his commendable and caring leadership of this country.

Mr. Speaker, you know, regardless of the politics, I know none of the Members on the Opposite side can [say] about the Honourable Wayne Panton that there is any lack of love for this country. We will disagree on policy, but I know none of them would ever question that. I am proud to say that he is working hard; some days I feel sorry for him, he comes inside looking like he wants to cry because his eyes are so red because he will not go to sleep.

An Hon. Member: Hmmm.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: That is the sign of hard work and [our] forefathers always said, *if you put the work in, it will come out*. So we will disagree on the direction of how we are getting there, but we are never going to disagree on how much we care and how much we are going to do.

Mr. Speaker, this group is made up of independent minds who came together in the best interests of this country. None of us knew what the collaboration would bring about with the dynamics of so many different personalities—and I can promise you, Mr. Speaker, we have some personalities over here; but I am happy to say today, in this honourable House, that I am proud to be a Member of the PACT-Administration.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: It's an honour to work every day with each and every one of my colleagues, because they love the country; and with that love, I think we are going to be able to find many, many, solutions for our home we call Cayman.

I trust that throughout my remarks, it has been evident that [in] everything I do and I plan to do, as a representative for George Town Central and the Minister for Tourism and Transport, I will put Cayman and

Caymanians first. You know how the symbol goes, right? C1.

Mr. Speaker, to the people of George Town Central, I would like to close my contribution by saying how grateful I am for this opportunity to speak in this honourable House, not only as their representative, but as their Minister of Cabinet, to finally have the power to make the necessary changes to improve their lives. Though the COVID-19 pandemic is not creating an easy road it is a road that we, the PACT Administration, are committed to travelling to give you a better life, not only for today but for tomorrow.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to say to all the voters and the good people of the Cayman Islands: I love you, I thank you, and I promise to give you all of my heart and 100 per cent of my efforts—in respect to this job that I have, not only as the representative of your voice but as the Minister responsible for Tourism and Transport—to bring back the second most important pillar of our economy, and make it vibrant again.

Mr. Speaker, those are my remarks, and thank you for the opportunity.

[Desk thumping and applause]

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? Does any other Member wish to speak?

The Honourable Minister of Health.

[Pause]

Ministry of Health and Wellness

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, Minister of Health and Wellness, Elected Member for Prospect: Mr. Speaker, it is a tremendous honour to stand in this honourable House to offer my contribution to the debate on the 2022-2023 Budget and Throne Speech.

Despite the ongoing challenge of COVID-19, my Ministry remains committed to serving the people of these beloved Islands. I have seen first-hand the demands of the pandemic since taking up Office in May of this year, and it remains ever so critical for all of us to continue to work together to mitigate the effects of the pandemic on our people and in our Islands.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into my speech today may I humbly seek your indulgence, and acknowledge the Health services Authority (HSA), Public Health and our healthcare workers. Mr. Speaker, I wish to salute these superheroes for their tireless efforts and sacrifices that they make every day as they execute their duties.

Mr. Speaker, for the past 20 months, our healthcare workers, especially the HSA and Public Health staff, have been managing COVID patients and regular patients at the same time, in the same

facility, regardless of the long hard hours, the mental and physical strain that [comes with] being a healthcare worker. In these times, these superheroes as they all are in my opinion, still show up for their shifts and produce. Let us not forget that from day one, the HSA has been ground zero in the care and management of COVID patients. Caring for COVID patients, takes place pretty much all at the same time as them still being able to manage the rendering of elective services, so I salute our brave health care and public health workers for all that they endure and continue to endure. Words cannot express how grateful we are for their contribution; along with my Honourable colleagues, we appreciate each and every one of you for all [that] you do.

Mr. Speaker, we are now bracing to face a new variant that was given the name Omicron—or SARS-CoV-2 B.1.1.529—which was brought to the attention of the world on or around last Thursday November 25th. In speaking with our Chief Medical Officer (CMO) Dr. John Lee, we do not really know enough a lot about Omicron, or SARS-CoV-2 B.1.1.529 as yet. The World Health Organisation (WHO) has now acknowledged that it is a variant of concern, in just one short week. At the same time, we do not know of its infectivity, nor do we know its ability to cause sickness; and this information requires more scientific evidence to help guide our next steps.

Mr. Speaker, the experts tells us that the natural evolution of viruses is to become more infectious, but less deadly; that ensures a virus' survival. What we do know is that our best defence at keeping these viruses at bay, and better managed, is the vaccination of as many people as we can, coupled with boosting the vaccination strength in eligible persons.

Mr. Speaker, the beneficial evidence of vaccination has spoken not only worldwide, but also right here in our population; those persons in hospital are overwhelmingly the people who are not vaccinated, and this is something our community has the power to change. As provided by Dr. Lee just last night, here are some stats of the total number of vaccinated persons in the Cayman Islands, based on age group breakdown for first doses, of which 49 per cent are female:

- Ages 2 to 18 years: 82 per cent (leaving approximately 650 unvaccinated);
- 18 to 30: 86 per cent (leaving approximately 1509 unvaccinated);
- 30 to 40: 92 per cent (leaving 1121 unvaccinated);
- 40 to 50: 98 per cent (leaving 237 unvaccinated);
- 50 to 60: Approximately 99 per cent; and
- 60 and over: Approximately 99 per cent.

Let me take this opportunity to share with our public, as it has just been released—so it is with this Ministry—that we have heard back from the Governor

and we are pleased to announce that boosters for all adults ages 30 and over will start for one week, and then everyone will be entitled to get their boosters. This is in our efforts, Mr. Speaker, to ensure that we have the largest coverage possible.

Mr. Speaker, there have been so many unexpected turns with the Coronavirus over the last 18 to 20 months that budgets have had to be very flexible and change at a moment's notice. We have made adjustments for:

- Mass PCR testing;
- New terms to manage border controls;
- New IT systems for vaccination evidence, both inbound and for those people we have vaccinated; and now
- Community Lateral Flow testing to ensure business continuity in the face of widespread community infections.

Mr. Speaker, these have all supported the safety of our community, the protection of education and at the same time allowed life to continue as safely as possible with COVID and the border reopening. Now, until we know more about Omicron, the PACT-Government will continue to push for all eligible persons to get vaccinated and to continue to push non-medical public health safety protocols by the wearing of masks, frequent hand washing and sanitising of hands, trying to avoid large gatherings as much as possible, practice social distancing and, if you test positive, adhere to Public Health guidelines and report your positive status to Public Health. With all of us being compliant I believe we can live with COVID, because it does not seem to be going anywhere anytime soon.

Now, Mr. Speaker, it is the PACT Government's priority to keep our vaccinations high in our fight against this virus and minimise deaths, and we are prepared to act swiftly, as we have, to protect and keep our people as safe as we can, guided by the science, medical experts, and doing our best to learn from other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker, for a first time Member of Parliament, first time Minister, and the first female to sit as Minister of Health, my sincere thanks to the good people of the Prospect Electoral district for giving me this opportunity. When I was entrusted with the Ministry, I wanted persons to be able to view health in its entirety, and as such with the support of the Premier and my other honourable colleagues, "Wellness" was added to the Ministry's name.

However, the title is one thing, but the weight of the responsibility and the complexity—the challenge, especially, as we navigate life with COVID-19—only fuelled my desire to serve my country even more so, it is an honour to contribute to the presentation of the first budget for the PACT Administration, and to show the people of the Cayman Islands that we

will, once and for all, address this area of sustainability.

Let us talk a little bit about our vision: Mr. Speaker, as a Government, my colleagues and I are committed to responsibly improving the quality of life for this and future generations of Caymanians. Our vision is for a Cayman Islands which is held up as one of the most sustainable countries in the world, we are a trio of Islands where all of its citizens can thrive; a peaceful and prosperous place known for its resourcefulness, its diligence, its resilience, and its innovativeness. The Ministry of Health and Wellness, plays a vital role in creating a sustainable country—a country where all its citizens can thrive.

Mr. Speaker, a healthy population is imperative for any society, and never more so, than these past few years. Our People-Driven Government believes that health care is a human right, and that all of our citizens should be able to avail themselves to affordable, quality healthcare in order to thrive. In my view there are few investments as important as the approximately \$108 million proposed for each of 2022 and 2023, that this budget proposes, to make the health and wellbeing of our citizens better.

Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Wellness is responsible for a wide range of services, critical to the well-being of the people of the Cayman Islands. The team in the Ministry, its various Departments, Authorities and Agencies will strive to ensure a healthy population, through the development and implementation of strategic policies and legislation that will ensure sustainable use of resources and the environment, as well as the development of our human capital through innovative programmes.

An underlying principle of how we will formulate policy and make decisions going forward will be the use of data, statistics, analysis and insights. It was remarkable how little data and analysis has been used historically to inform policy and make decisions. We must do a better job of collecting and validating; analysing and sharing relevant data. It is becoming more and more evident that health care will be data driven moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, the composition of the Ministry takes a holistic approach and encompasses all aspects of physical health as well as mental and emotional health, through the Department of Counselling Services and the environmental health of our communities through the Department of Environmental Health and the Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU).

Our Strategic Broad Outcome 2 is to ensure an equitable, sustainable, and successful healthcare system.

Mr. Speaker, the proposed budget appropriations will be used by the Ministry of Health and Wellness to fund the following priorities as outlined in the Strategic Policy Statement:

- Ensuring a sustainable and successful healthcare system for our Islands in the provision of optimal health and well-being of our people, while reducing health inequalities;
- Enhancing the standards of health care services and recognising health care as a basic human right through the reform of current health care systems and provision of centralised health insurance coverage; and
- Through a more preventative-care-focused approach to improve overall wellness leading to better physical, and mental health outcomes, allowing our people to thrive.

Mr. Speaker, the last five words: “allowing our people to thrive”, is at the core of everything the Ministry of Health and Wellness is embarking on; it is the ‘*why*’ behind every initiative proposed in the 2022-2023 budgets and ultimately, the reason I invite all Members of this Parliament to support the proposed appropriations.

It is hard to imagine a more challenging assignment: Tackle COVID-19 and promote health and wellness in a society, at a time when health care professionals the world-over, are feeling the toll of a pandemic entering its third year. Mr. Speaker, COVID-19 has challenged health care systems the world-over, and ours in the Cayman Islands has also been challenged, tested, and strained; however, from adversity, we learn and grow, and there are many lessons learned.

We have learned the importance of effective communication—internal and external; data collection and comprehension, cross-Ministry collaboration and skill-set sharing, both public and private; access to resources and financing and the importance of human capital. Mr. Speaker, may I say lessons are being learnt every single day, and I can almost say almost hourly.

Mr. Speaker, early on in my professional career, I was trained as a Licensed Practical Nurse and for several years, I thrived while caring for the people at the George Town Hospital. Though my career took a different turn—I started a family—helping people was part of my DNA, both professionally and personally. It is why I entered public service, and if you ask many of my friends, family and constituents, it is my default mode of operations, so when I see the current challenges facing my community, I instinctively switch back into my nursing mode.

This pandemic has given us, and the entire world, the unwanted, overstaying guest of COVID-19 and all its different variants, Mr. Speaker. We must, however, take some comfort and realise that we are still a blessed country.

Looking at the statistics globally, looking at our vaccination total when compared to our overall population and the number of deaths, locally and around the world, this PACT-Government has pushed and we will continue to push for the vaccinations of our people; and to date we must attribute our low-death rates to our high vaccine uptake and our drive in support of vaccine/booster uptake for all eligible persons. I am hoping, now that the booster is being open to everyone next week, that we will see even greater uptake in persons protecting themselves.

Serving as Minister for Health and Wellness Mr. Speaker, allows me to help my country at a time when health is at the centre of almost every national discussion; and beyond the pandemic, a healthy community will be the linchpin of a sustainable country. Serving as Minister of Health and Wellness at this point in our history also allows me to work collaboratively with my colleagues, and the Civil Service, to shape a healthier future by way of policy and regulations at a macro level and—through programmes, projects and initiatives—work directly with Public Health, the Health Services Authority and health care providers across the country.

Education, Culture, Tourism, Financial Services, all hinge on a healthy people living in healthy communities, Mr. Speaker. As my esteemed colleagues in this Parliament contemplate how they will vote on this budget, Mr. Speaker, make no mistake: the Health and Wellness of our people is at the front of our survival as we navigate COVID-19, preventable diseases and acute life-threatening medical issues. With COVID-19, we are on a quest for survival that came with no instruction manual; a quest that mandates health practitioners to be messengers of hope and beacons of humility. This is not the time to say who did what and live in the past. This is a time to move forward, and the PACT-Government stands strong in taking us forward.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to touch briefly on the Departments and Statutory Authorities which are under the remit of the Ministry of Health and Wellness to highlight a few areas of focus for the upcoming budget period.

Mr. Speaker, enhanced resources at the national level are planned for further support of Public Health. This will include senior leadership at the Ministry level, including the addition of a Chief Nursing Officer and a National Epidemiologist to further support the Chief Medical Officer and Medical Officer of Health positions.

Mr. Speaker, our Islands have lacked key data and pertinent local statistics of a public health nature for quite some time now. It is important that we are able to produce relevant reporting based on our own data for decision-making and future planning. We need to know what our numbers are, even in the ab-

sence of a pandemic. How else are we to properly prepare and plan relevant policies for our people? This Mr. Speaker, ties into the renewal of a National Policy and Strategic Plan for Healthcare. It is so very important that we know what it is that we are seeking to achieve on a national level, for us to feel confident that we are heading in the right direction.

Mr. Speaker, enhanced communications with our health practitioners across the private sector is a must; our common goal has to be the provision of the best healthcare possible for our people at the lowest cost and with the best access to services.

Wellness

Let us look at the wellness side. Mr. Speaker, wellness is such an important concept. We live in the most beautiful place on earth and yet we are so busy, that we often fail to really appreciate our surroundings. Wellness offers such a holistic approach to physical, spiritual and emotional well-being.

As my Ministry undertakes to explore more of what is really meant by the term 'wellness' and how it can be embraced and included into our whole life on a national level, I am excited and optimistic that this will be embraced to better all of our lives. We are all aware of the high incidence of Chronic Non-Communicable Diseases, or "CNCDS" around us locally, regionally and internationally. It is a global epidemic, and I am certain that the lives of everyone here today have been impacted in some form, either personally or through family members or friends, by one of the "big four" CNCDS, namely: Diabetes, Cardiovascular Disease, Chronic Respiratory Disease, and Cancer. More can be done to educate our population on better lifestyle habits which would lead to much better outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, I am an advocate for knowing our numbers so that we can better undertake the required policies and changes which would lead to our communities living more fulfilled lives. One such example relates to cancer and the establishment of a Cancer Registry. I wish for us to come together as a community and end the stigma around this. The benefits of having a trusted, well respected means of tracking our incidences of cancer are numerous. I intend to explore this possibility further, as I am optimistic that we can find common ground with a robust system which will enable us to better target our resources to ensure that privacy is upheld, stigmas are banished, and we make the greatest impact in terms of prevention.

Long-Term Mental Health Facility

Mr. Speaker, let us talk about the long-term Mental Health Facility. The Cayman Islands' first Mental Health Facility for long-term care for persons with

mental health issues is well on its way. I am pleased to say that completion is still on track for the end quarter of 2022.

I know that this will be welcomed news for families with loved ones who require mental health care, including our citizens at institutions abroad who would be able to return home. This is a major achievement for our country and our people.

The long-term Mental Health facility is located on 15 acres of property off High Rock Road in East End, will house up to 54 residents. The design of the facility incorporates a main building with nine cottages, each of which can accommodate six residents. The 2022-2023 budget makes provisions for the remaining capital and ongoing costs for this very same project.

Mr. Speaker, the public will recall that ground was broken on this facility in October 2019, however, there were delays due to the lockdown caused by the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and material shortages, later in the same year, which impacted the initially proposed end of 2021 completion date. My Ministry will be launching a competition shortly whereby the public will be able to participate by submitting a suggested name for the facility and its cottages. More details of this exciting opportunity will be announced shortly.

My thanks to my Ministry team; Doctor Lockhart, Chair of the Mental Health Commission and its various Members, along with the Project Management team at PWD for their continued efforts in progressing this critical project.

Mr. Speaker, let me delve a little into Legislation changes. My Ministry will continue work on critical pieces of legislation needed to move healthcare forward. This will include an overhaul of the Pharmacy Act thereby allowing pharmacists to stay abreast of changes to ensure safe and legal practices; to protect the public through licensure, regulation and information to bring Cayman Islands' pharmacists into the 21st Century practice of pharmacy, thereby protecting and promoting the health of all residents, while providing a healthier future for the people of the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, enhancements will also be made to the Public Health Act, which encompasses environmental health. We have seen numerous changes to the Regulations under this Act as the COVID-19 pandemic has continued, however, a comprehensive review of the Act is underway and proposed amendments will be brought to this honourable Parliament in due course. It is important that our Public Health Act remains as robust and up to date as practically possible.

A review and update of the Health Insurance Act will also be undertaken during the upcoming budget period Mr. Speaker, to give consideration for the inclusion of mental health coverage for persons. The pandemic has certainly reinforced the need for

access to mental health services, so ensuring that our people are provided with the relevant coverage is vitally important.

The Health Practice Act will also be reviewed with amendments proposed to update this piece of legislation, and regulations to facilitate the increased number of healthcare practitioners and facilities. This will allow for further enforcement capacity.

Amendments to the Tobacco Act and Human Tissue Transplant Act are also slated for review and update during the upcoming budget period.

Mr. Speaker, this may seem rather ambitious—and yes, it is. The review and update of these various Acts are critically important as the Cayman Islands continue to attract multiple healthcare professionals across various disciplines. The fast-paced demands seen in the healthcare sector makes it vitally important that these are addressed to ensure the modernisation of the healthcare infrastructure in these Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I sincerely wish to thank the hardworking ladies and gentlemen of the Ministry of Health and Wellness led by my Chief Officer, Ms. Nellie Pouchie; they have undergone constant and tremendous pressures, but continue to step up each and every day to do their best and go beyond the call of duty. I recall stepping into the Ministry only to find that I had an Acting Chief Officer and no Deputy Chief Officer—the Deputy Chief Officer was confirmed before my Chief Officer. There is no communications' person [and] there is a lack of policy persons and resources.

However, I am so grateful for the collaboration of the civil service [and] the support of the Deputy Governor, who has afforded the honour and confirmed Ms Nellie Pouchie in her post, approximately four months after me sitting in this most noble position. I congratulate her for sticking it out, and as she continues to thrive we will grow, outfit, and build the Ministry of Health and Wellness—a Ministry that all will be proud of.

Department of Health Regulatory Services

Firstly, the remit of the Department of Health and Regulatory Services is to ensure that the provision of health insurance in the Cayman Islands is well regulated and that greater assistance is provided to the public in resolving complaints. Through the Health Practice Commission, the Health and Regulatory Services will provide supervision of the Health Practice Councils, policy advice to the Ministry and regulate healthcare facilities.

Mr. Speaker, demand for licensing and enforcement by the Department of Health Regulatory Services are of key importance. This budget will seek additional staff to support the duties of this Department. Funding is also included to continue the assessment of shifting from manual processing of appli-

cations for healthcare practitioners to electronic means, which will lead to increased efficiencies for the Department. For the 2022-2023 budget years, the Department intends to:

- Maintain a public education campaign on health insurance and health practice in the Cayman Islands;
- Resolve complaints and queries arising from health insurance with health practice legislations;
- Effectively collect the contributions for the Segregated Insurance Fund (SIF), whilst also monitoring the number of insured persons in the Cayman Islands; and
- Carry out the functions of the Department of Health Regulatory Services as prescribed under the Health Insurance and Health Practice legislations

I would now like to thank the Superintendent of Health Insurance and Director of the Department, Mr. Mervyn Conolly and his team, for their continued hard work in carrying out their important tasks. Additionally, my thanks to the various Councils and Commissions which also fall under the Ministry.

Department of Counselling Services

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Counselling Services is the agency within the Cayman Islands Government that provides high quality, cost-effective treatment services. The Department is comprised of four distinct agencies: The Counselling Centre, which provides specialist assistance, trauma-informed care, and evidence-based therapies to residents of the Cayman Islands who may require assistance with a variety of life challenges. These services are provided to residents of the Sister Islands at Brac Haven Sister Islands Counselling Centre.

The Caribbean Haven Residential Centre located in Breakers, Grand Cayman offers residential treatment that is tailored to the needs of adult male and female clients who suffer from a substance abuse disorder, or are dually diagnosed with a mental health issue—hence the importance of getting our mental health facility up and running in a timely manner.

Staff at the Family Resource Centre provide family programmes, individualised parenting services, psycho-educational parenting workshops, crisis intervention and advocacy to victims of family violence; and spearheads public awareness campaigns aimed to strengthen families and individuals to provide the foundation for a healthy society.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Counselling Services has provided essential support to many persons during this pandemic. The Department was instrumental in assisting with the mental health helpline and continues to be a vital source for families and

persons needing counselling and mental health support in our community.

Opportunities for better alignment with other key partners and stakeholders in the provision of counselling and mental health services on a national level, will be reviewed to ensure that the country benefits from any such available synergies. This may encompass more partnering with the mental health unit at the Health Services Authority and the new Long-Term Mental Health Facility, once operational.

For the 2022-2023 budget years, the department intends to continue the expansion of family programmes, including:

- The evidence-based, internationally accredited Positive Parenting Programme (Triple P), to support families in conflict and provide parents with simple and practical strategies to help them build strong, healthy relationships, confidently manage their children's behaviour, and strengthen the family system;
- Continued partnership with Department of Education Services to support continued delivery of the Stop Now and Plan (SNAP) Programme, designed to teach effective emotion regulation and self-control, [and] decrease aggression to enhance the child's success in school, reduce parental distress and increase parental competency; and ultimately delay or reduce their involvement with the criminal justice system;
- Strengthened collaboration with partner agencies to support families who are experiencing personal distress from separation or divorce, which is impacting or complicating their parental responsibilities, wellness and overall family well-being;
- Introduce a disorder component into the residential treatment programme at Caribbean Haven Residential Centre that will allow for the concurrent treatment of those suffering from mental health and substance abuse disorders;
- Continue the enhancement and expansion of family therapy services to broaden the range of services available to those residents of our community who may be struggling with issues such as trauma, grief, depression and anxiety, post-traumatic stress and substance abuse; and
- Expand service provision in Cayman Brac to more adequately meet demand for therapeutic services on the Sister Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to express my gratitude to the Director Ms. Judith Seymour and her teams at the Department of Counselling Services, the Family Resource Centre, Brac Haven Sister Islands Counselling Centre, and the Caribbean Haven Resi-

dential Centre for their ongoing contributions under very trying times.

Department of Environmental Health (DEH)

Mr. Speaker, let us move our attention on the Department of Environmental Health (DEH).

Responsible for a wide range of services that promote a healthy population and a clean, safe environment for both visitors and residents alike, the DEH is equally important for our well-being and sustainability.

Ongoing amendments to the Public Health Act will address updated provisions for cemeteries. This budget includes additional funding of approximately \$170,000 each year, for the construction of vaults at cemeteries across the Island. Mr. Speaker, for the 2022-2023 budget periods, the Department will:

- Further develop and enhance all environmental health and safety programmes to improve health and safety standards at all establishments and institutions in the Cayman Islands;
- Upgrade the existing departmental fleet of vehicles and equipment to improve service delivery, and meet contractual obligations. (Mr. Speaker, I am happy to say that in the seven months that I have been in this position, our Government has approved additional funding that allowed the DEH to acquire much-needed equipment, such as two additional grapple trucks—and we realised how important they were after the recent tropical storms; a well-needed excavator and a backhoe. We saw the importance of the timeliness in getting them and providing the funding for these equipment, because we saw the strain and how they ate up all services that were provided in the local market);
- Expand environmental health awareness, education and promotion programmes to students and the public to enable them to do their part in controlling or eliminating environmental health nuisances, risks, and diseases through behavioural modification and civic pride; —Ms. Heather will have her work cut out for her.
- Continuously improve upon the current solid waste collection operations in Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac, and Little Cayman through the replacement of outdated vehicles used, the standardisation of residential containers, and the use of mechanical lifting to improve efficiency and reduce risks;
- Continuously improve upon the current solid waste management of the landfills in Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac, and Little Cayman through investment in necessary staff and re-

placement of outdated equipment and inadequate infrastructure; and

- Continue to upgrade the Department's laboratory and information system to enable it to achieve and maintain international accreditation standards.

My gratitude to Director Richard Simms and his team, on the amazing job being done to timely collect and manage waste in our Islands. The DEH crews have been instrumental in keeping our Islands clean and have demonstrated how essential they are from the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The annual bulk waste clean-up is once again underway and I applaud the Department for continuing to do its part.

Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU)

Mr. Speaker, let us turn our attention to the Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU). The remit of the Mosquito Research and Control Unit (MRCU), is to suppress mosquito population to protect residents and visitors from mosquito-borne diseases and minimise discomfort from mosquito bites, thereby enhancing the quality of life for people in the community and promoting the economy of the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, for many years, the MRCU has been short-staffed and definitely under-resourced. My aim is to fill some of the gaps in this regard by ensuring that funding is available for much-needed human capital support and equipment needs. This Unit continues to be a vital component of ensuring the well-being of our people, as we can all appreciate the benefits of effective mosquito control, especially when conditions contribute to a high surge of mosquitoes, as we experienced this past summer, and as early as last night.

The Ministry has been working with the Unit to fill the human resourcing gaps and to complete a re-structure of the Unit in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness. I am pleased to report that this work is ongoing and is making steady progress. This budget also contains capital funding for much-needed equipment, including more fog trucks.

Mr. Speaker, MRCU will continue to carry out island-wide, large-scale larvaeciding operations, including Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, to prevent mosquito emergence. For the 2022-2023 budget periods, the MRCU will:

- Reduce the abundance of *Aedes Aegypti* mosquitoes by implementing a robust Island-wide surveillance and control programme;
- Prevent Chikungunya, Zika and Dengue from becoming epidemic on the Islands;
- To minimise the number of local cases through effective and professional mosquito surveillance and control;

- Develop and implement a public education programme to enhance the effectiveness of the Department's overall mosquito control strategy, by improving public awareness of the issues surrounding mosquito control and encouraging the involvement of the general public; in particular, control methods;
- Ensure the continued efficiency and cost-effectiveness of insecticides used, by applied research into the resistance status of mosquito populations on all three Islands; and
- Improve application efficiency by applied research in the area of larvaecide and adulticide application dynamics.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to express my gratitude to recently-appointed Director Dr. Alan Wheeler, and the hard-working men and women of the MRCU who strive every day to make all our lives better.

National Drug Council

Mr. Speaker, the National Drug Council (NDC) continues to play an important role in keeping our young people informed on the dangers of alcohol and other substance abuse. The key strategic goals for the National Drug Council for the 2022-2023 financial years are:

- To provide policy advice, advocate for policy and legislative change, and review matters as it relates to alcohol and other substance misuse and abuse in the Cayman Islands;
- Educate the public—that includes our youth, adults, special-interest groups and communities as a whole, on issues of alcohol and other drug misuse and abuse with the goals of prevention and reducing the negative impacts to our society;
- Conduct research and provide information that is culturally relevant and based on scientific research and local data;
- Evaluate relevant programmes to ensure effective programming;
- Ensure best practice and adherence to relevant regional and international policies related to alcohol and other drug issues; and
- Encourage and foster affiliations and exchange of information on a local, regional and international level.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to voice my thanks to Acting Director Brenda Watson and her team, along with the Board of the NDC for their continued diligence in carrying out their important function.

To reiterate our key points: we recognise Healthcare as a basic Human Right. At present, Mr. Speaker, Caymanians' access to healthcare is often limited by their employment status, their position on

the socio-economic ladder, their discretionary income and their age; none of this should be so, Mr. Speaker. We believe that all citizens should be able to reasonably access quality health care and preventative services regardless of their employment, income or age. The current situation leaves just too many people unable to access care and basic services except through CINICO; and it leaves too many with too little by way of preventative care.

We can no longer sit by and see our very own Caymanians choosing to retire in another jurisdiction because it is impossible to afford medical insurance premiums. We will take action to specifically and fully recognise healthcare as a basic human right in the Cayman Islands, and ensure we provide quality affordable and accessible, health care services. None of our citizens should go without necessary medical care because they just cannot afford it.

In the upcoming two years, we will commence the requisite studies and analyses to inform how we go about the responsible implementation of the following:

- A transformation and expansion of services provided by CINICO;
- The provision of free healthcare for children and the elderly, with the appropriate reforms to existing criteria which determines who can access free healthcare; and
- Better mental health and special needs insurance coverage.

Mr. Speaker, even though CINICO does not fall directly under my Ministry, access to health care relies on CINICO coverage and I am happy to say that I have been working with my honourable colleague the Deputy Premier, to get this rolling, so that our people can be more at ease.

Human Capital

Mr. Speaker, in order for us as a people to fully achieve this aim we must be invested in, and believe in, our healthcare system.

At this time, when the job and career opportunities in the healthcare and medical professions are soaring, we have fallen short in preparing our own people to access and succeed in these fields. Mr. Speaker, this Government, Our Government, plans to change this; by this I mean we will educate, train and recognise Caymanians in the healthcare industry by highlighting local employment and career opportunities and learning programmes.

My life, Mr. Speaker, tells the story of the Caymanian perseverance, hope, never-ending faith and the Caymanian dream. Having [been] raised rather humbly right there in George Town, off Elgin Avenue, I went out in the public and assisted my mother and grandmother, visiting the elderly, providing food... I had structure and a loving family and honestly back

then, in a world that was far less materialistic, I do not even remember feeling any differently due to my family's modest means.

By the time I was in Third Form, or Year 9 as it is called now, I knew I wanted to be a paediatrician. That was my dream, to help children in a hospital setting. Throughout the rest of my high school years I opted for subjects that would help me through, but during this, my mother and grandmother were very active in the community; many weekends going through the neighbourhood and around the community through the church.

If it needed to be done, and involved helping people my family were there, and guess what? This little girl was right there with them. Because of them I saw at a very early age how lonely it was for our elderly when they are shut in; left alone for hours and days at a time. Through helping, I saw first-hand the look of relief and gratitude that followed when we delivered goods, hot meals or groceries to them—and even just sitting and giving them your time and attention. That sense of duty to help those in need was cultivated early in my life and has never left me.

At the end of High School, I was hired as a summer intern at George Town Hospital, where I learned so much. Not long into it, I accepted full time employment as a Nursing Assistant and then later on, part of the first-ever cohort of students to receive nursing training right here in the Cayman Islands. I was taught by Nurse Sharleen Henriquez and Mrs. Hyacinth Rose.

For two years, they taught us the theory of classroom materials and in parallel, we got on the job practical experience. For two years we worked and studied, and at the end we passed local exams, however, those ladies—Nurse Henriquez and Mrs. Rose insisted we got independent, international designation and they arranged for us to sit the Florida State Board Licensure exams. They coached and pushed us, and oh, yes, a group of Caymanian nurses came home with licenses. I must take this opportunity to say a special heartfelt thank you to both women, Nurse Henriquez and Mrs. Rose, for their vision, their dedication and their determination to train the next generation. Thank you, ladies.

As LPNs we worked on all the wards, and I can remember my favourite being the surgical ward. I remember even scrubbing in for a number of surgical procedures, because I loved the medical field. The only reason I left was because, once I started a family Mr. Speaker, I decided to make a career change to be able to have more time as a mother to my two sons. In the mid-1990s, I got an inter-governmental transfer to the Immigration Department. In 2005, I left for the private sector and started my own company.

Until I was elected, in April of this year, I ran my own business and continued to help people in the community. I am 100 per cent focused on the work of the Government and serving my community. As a

business owner, I know what it takes to deliver the products and services your customers expect, because if you do not, you do not get paid. I know what it is to compete with other service providers and to always strive to give clients the very best value for money.

When you look back at my life as an adult, I helped to arrange the Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) training groups. I never even contemplated being in this position, but my motivation was and is, to help [by] being a part of the solution. Independent of government was not something I contemplated until late 2020, when it became clear we needed a change.

People took a chance on me, Mr. Speaker. I want to create the same opportunities for young Caymanians, and Caymanians alike. I care, the PACT-Government will deliver. Together we must all do our part to create a better Cayman. We must help with the training and development of Caymanians. My personal experience as a high school leaver who was taught and mentored locally—teachings and practical experience that allowed me and a group of others to sit the State Licensure example—is proof that it can be done.

We must draw on the lessons of the past and create career paths for dozens more Caymanians over the next two years. This is where the good jobs are. Jobs with excellent career progression and good salaries. Yes, the hours are long and the shifts can be hard on families, but it is by far one of the most respected and fulfilling industries for people of all ages to work.

What is important is that we must have faith in our people, that they are basically good and smart Mr. Speaker. If we give them [the] tools, they will do wonderful things with them; that, Mr. Speaker, can be proven in some many of our Caymanians once they are equipped and given a chance. This PACT-Government will motivate and inspire our people to get a chance to evolve, as the world evolves. Furthermore, we will incentivise Caymanian medical professionals to return home to work. When they return, treat them with respect; we must all embrace their willingness to even return home and give back.

We will create clear pathways for them to not become stagnant, but climb to seniority by way of proper succession planning. Mr. Speaker, how many of our young and talented Caymanians go abroad and return to be left feeling like they are not worthy, like they are not good enough and lack the experience required to work in their chosen profession right here, in their own country?

Well, Mr. Speaker and Honourable colleagues of this Parliament, not under my watch as Minister; because this Government will promote healthier living and provide wellness education through better marketing of public health services. We will be encouraging more wellness checks and we will be strengthening youth mental health support.

Health Insurance Reform

Mr. Speaker, we are determined to ensure that health and wellbeing is taken in its broadest sense, where we will seek to achieve overall good physical, mental and emotional health for all our citizens. For all our people to thrive, we must not only consider an individual's health, but we consider the health of families and communities.

We will revamp and expand CINICO services to extend access to healthcare to more Caymanians, and we have our eyes on being able to provide free healthcare for children and the elderly, and reform existing criteria to access free healthcare; and finally, we must promote better mental health and special needs insurance coverage. It is that important that it is worth repeating.

The medical care every human requires does not extend solely to physical ailments like broken bones and chronic disease, but to our mental health as well. This aspect of healthcare is often severely limited under most health insurance plans. Additionally, individuals with special needs, including physically and mentally disabled persons, often suffer through lack of both insurance coverage and the access to specialised services. This must, and will, change.

The PACT-Government is keenly aware that any society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable people. It is beyond time that we address the health and needs of all of our people. Just as with education and other vital human services, there should be no more falling through the cracks in our healthcare system, in a society as relatively affluent as ours, as this PACT-Government will aim to not let that happen.

Mr. Speaker, we are a people-driven Government and we will no longer accept the idea that because a person may be poor, old, or otherwise without a voice in our society, that it is somehow acceptable not to listen, and not to assist as best as we can. One area in which we are currently lacking, Mr. Speaker, is assisted living care for our seniors. We have an aging population, and it is not right that many of our elders are not receiving proper care.

To end this Mr. Speaker, we will develop a Joint-Ministerial Council to research the needs and feasibility of establishing additional assisted living homes and retirement facilities and make recommendations on how these can be provided through public/private partnership models.

Suspension of Standing Order 10(2)

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, it has reached the hour of 4:30pm, and I know we intended to go beyond 4:30. Any Minister can move the suspension.

Honourable Minister of Health, you can ask for the suspension of Standing Orders.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Yes, I would like to ask so that we can pass the hour of interruption.

The Speaker: The question is that we suspend Standing Orders 10(2) so that the business can extend beyond the hour.

All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.

Agreed: Standing Orders 10(2) suspended.

The Speaker: You may continue, Honourable Minister.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Speaking to this goal, we will implement public education programmes on the negative impact of over-utilisation of healthcare services, on both the quality of services and affordability.

Mr. Speaker, it is my firm belief that the provision of quality care includes the physical spaces where the services are being delivered, because we aim to transform the experience in our healthcare facilities and this includes brand and space. The global pandemic has reinforced and reminded us all that we need to continually invest in, strengthen and support a strong public healthcare system in the Cayman Islands that has all the capabilities and resilience to address massive health threats with the collective responses they require.

This pandemic has once again proven that we are blessed to have a public healthcare service that all Caymanians can be proud of. It is 'of the people, by the people, and for the people'. While we acknowledge the immeasurable support of private sector, our public healthcare system, the core of which comprises the Public Health Department and the Health Services Authority, have been the cornerstone of our Islands' national health security, and the safety of our population, without which we would have been at a significant risk that would have undermined our ability to address the multiple challenges of this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, the HSA has dramatically improved over the years with excellent health outcomes. Quality indicators meet or exceed international benchmarks. Strategic expansion in areas like neonatology and primary healthcare has saved lives and millions of dollars for the Government.

The HSA continues to make significant investment in its infrastructure to ensure our residents have access to timely, quality and affordable care by renewing and expanding critical infrastructure, medical technology and the services provided. Some \$18.5

million is being spent this year, some of which will be referenced later.

Maternal and child health is an important public health issue and is a significant determinant of the health of the next generation. Success in this area helps to predict future public health challenges for families. The HSA continues to be the local centre of excellence for maternal and child health. In recent years, they have worked to build capacity in Neonatology, enabling care to be provided locally for newborn infants, especially those with illnesses and those born pre-maturely. This has already saved the Government millions in costs, as parents of neonates are often declared medically indigent due to the high cost of required care when infants must be flown overseas. The HSA plans to undertake an investment in expansion of the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit to increase the unit's capabilities.

Paediatric outpatient services are being expanded with extended operating hours for the Paediatric Acute Care clinic, to ensure our services remain accessible; and relocation of the Women's Health complex to create a dedicated Women's and Child Health Centre. Plans are also being pursued for the decentralisation of maternal and child services through the expansion of clinics held in Bodden Town and West Bay.

The future will see far more care delivered locally in areas such as Sports Medicine, Alternative Medicine, Neonatology, Neurology, mental health services, well-care programmes, and other therapy services. The HSA has acquired most of the Smith Road Centre building and has been investing in the creation of purpose spaces for the delivery of various services to fill gaps in local care and provide enhanced patient experience. When it opens, the facility will be renamed the Smith Road Medical Centre, providing a diverse range of specialist medical services under one roof.

The expansion of the Accident and Emergency Department is currently underway and will be completed in 2022, which will allow the Emergency Department to handle more visits and better serve the growing population with additional patient bays, an expanded waiting room, new staff lounge, privacy panels for patient beds, redesigned clinical workspace (nursing station) and improved environment of care to meet Joint Commission International (JCI) Standards.

The current Emergency Medical Services (EMS / Ambulance services) is being expanded to meet the demand of our increased population and patient profile. The EMS Department now averages over 6,000 calls per year, compared to 2,979 calls in 2007. Four new ambulances are being procured to replace the existing fleet and the HSA has future plans for a new EMS post in the Eastern Districts to improve their ambulance response times in critical life-saving situations.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Investment in staff and new vehicles is being made to expand non-emergency transportation [in order] to support our vulnerable patient population, including our Dialysis patients, and reduce the current pressures on EMS. Their resources capabilities and response to emergency medical incidents make a difference every day in the lives of people across these Islands. The HSA will also be offering an EMT training programme in January to training young Caymanians who are eager and willing to enter this noble profession.

The Sister Islands (Cayman Brac and Little Cayman) will also be given increasing priority in our infrastructure investment and service expansion plan. This year the expansion work for Materials Management and Physiotherapy was completed; next year we will commence initial works for an expanded Emergency Room and enhanced Radiology capabilities. Expansion of the outpatient clinic is also being planned for Faith Hospital. A purposed ambulance was acquired and delivered to Little Cayman this year. This was the first time Little Cayman received a purposed ambulance.

Regardless of the location of our facilities, it has always been the vision to provide the very best available care for our patients, and to work toward the achievement of optimal healthcare outcomes.

The small Faith Hospital built almost half a century ago by the people of Cayman Brac. It has slowly evolved to provide increasing services, including a JCI-accredited laboratory. We are proud of the services delivered, and all the lives that have been touched. Staff continue to do an amazing job with the management of the COVID-19 pandemic on Cayman Brac. This was a critical success given the local aging population's known underlying conditions, which makes Cayman Brac more susceptible to the symptoms of this disease.

Investment in mental health services is also being given priority. Demand for mental health services is growing exponentially in all strata of the local population. Heightened concerns from mental health practitioners have highlighted the increasing incidences of mental health issues, particularly amongst adolescents, and COVID-19 has not done us any favours in this area, Mr. Speaker. Out-of-hospital mental health care needs to become a much larger part of what the HSA provides therefore, we are also working urgently on the establishment of a permanent home for the day programme for our mental health patients.

We also want to expand access standards to cover a comprehensive range of mental health services including more children services, Applied Behaviour Analysis therapy (ABA), eating disorders, and treatment for those with bipolar conditions.

Beyond investments in the physical infrastructure, we are presently exploring a key private sector

partnership that will provide some 30,000 square feet of additional clinical space to expand our dental and ophthalmology services. Those services are presently experiencing unacceptable wait times, which can act as a significant barrier to care.

The HSA is also leading the way with environmentally conscious investments, including the installation of a 200-kilowatt commercial-grade solar system at the main campus. This will provide up to 300,000 kilowatt hours of clean energy annually, and reduce the \$150,000 per month that the HSA currently pays for energy. To further reduce energy costs, the HSA is also replacing four chiller systems which are beyond their useful life, executing a hospital-wide programme to replace all lighting systems with more efficient LEDs, and replacing the windows for better thermal protection.

Mr. Speaker, we will modernise the healthcare legal framework and expand public health services throughout our communities. We have seen the positive impact this has had in our various constituencies, as we promote the vaccine uptake.

Mr. Speaker, our expansion in services: We will do this with the use of Robotics and introduce Telemedicine practices in public schools and district clinics, and improve the facilities in our district clinics throughout our Islands.

As it is right now, West Bay has:

- A new Dialysis Unit to be opened;
- Upgraded infrastructure;
- Improved ambulance bay to accommodate a larger ambulance; and
- Expansion of WI-FI capabilities

Right now, in George Town, there is:

- The relocation of the George Town General Practice to new facilities at Smith Road Centre.

In the district of Bodden Town:

- The overhaul of the air conditioning system;
- Completion of transfer of Government property to HSA for future clinic expansion.

In North Side:

- The installation of new exterior LED flood lights;
- Repaving of the entrance; and
- The ambulance bay.

In East End District, at the district Health Centre:

- Replacement of the perimeter fencing;

- Replacement of the floor tiles and cabinets, and interior painting;
- Implementation of a district clinic shuttle system.

Mr. Speaker, the HSA is also expanding its Dialysis Service to provide additional capacity [both] at the Cayman Islands Hospital campus and district health centres. Two additional dialysis bays were put into operation this year and a new dialysis unit added to the West Bay District Health Centre.

Mr. Speaker, Caymanians are living longer, and we have an ageing population. The local healthcare system requires capacity, agility, and services that meet our changing demographic. The population of the Cayman Islands is ageing. The elderly population experiences more chronic conditions and comorbidities than the younger population consequently, there is increased demand for specialty care for this population, as well as a need to address the challenges faced by many of our older adults.

As we learned with trepidation the discovery of a new, more virulent variant of the COVID virus—Omicron—it is reassuring to know that our Health Services Authority already has the technology in place to quickly detect this virus. Investment in genomic sequencing has given the HSA and the Cayman Islands a significant boost in our continued fight against the COVID virus. We are one of only a handful of countries in the region with this advanced capability—an achievement we should all be proud of. Despite our relatively small geographic size and location, with advanced technology in times like these, the Cayman Islands and our people can be proud of our healthcare system.

Our Forensic and Pathology Lab at the HSA is internationally accredited and recognised, and is now a reference lab by our partners in other UK Overseas Territories. Huge shout out goes to Mr. Jonathan Smellie and all the others who I know he is training and working with; [it is] all about succession planning and getting as many of our Caymanians up to speed and not left behind, as I alluded to earlier.

We all witnessed the devastating impact of the lack of oxygen supplies on health systems in many parts of the world, and the regrettable loss of life due to the lack of this lifesaving commodity. As we enter a new phase of the pandemic with the many uncertainties of new emerging variants, the HSA has taken proactive steps to ensure we have all the necessary resources to provide care for our community.

A new oxygen-generation plant which will provide a reliable supply of oxygen manufactured on site at the HSA has been acquired, protecting the Cayman Islands against global supply chain shortages, whilst achieving significant financial savings. It is anticipated to arrive on Island in mid-December.

In a crisis, we all know how vulnerable reliable blood supplies can be in saving lives. In the New

Year, the HSA will open a new Blood Bank at the Smith Road Centre with more than double existing capacity and advanced capabilities, including production of platelets on-Island, ensuring reliable blood supplies, saving cost of blood procurement overseas and allowing us to meet the demands of emergency situations. Again, we all should be proud of the work and reputation of the Blood Bank since its inception.

To further enhance the patient experience, the Authority is investing in the technology to provide more convenient options for access to, and payment of services, with the planned expansion of telemedicine services, allowing for patient video visits as well as an online payment system. Our technological investments also includes new Human Resources, Finance and Procurement systems to improve internal efficiencies, automate current manual processes, enhance recruitment and personnel activities, as well as improved procurement and vendor relations.

There are numerous challenges and opportunities facing the HSA, however Mr. Speaker, we believe an effective partnership will allow us to leverage opportunities to overcome challenges, and progress the local healthcare environment for the benefit of our people by:

- Ensuring service quality;
- Building a resilient infrastructure;
- Attracting and retaining high quality staff;
- Leveraging technology for the advancement of care; and
- Optimising partnerships in care delivery.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I know that I have given much food for thought this afternoon, but I wanted to lay out how this first budget of the PACT Government demonstrates a cohesive, integrated, and people-driven approach to improving our country's healthcare system and the Health and Wellness of our people, so that the public can see how our appropriations are directed at effecting meaningful change.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to just end by reiterating my story as a little girl who had a dream, who always had hope and faith. A young woman who went as far as she could because local professionals believed in her, and who might have gone further but, as a working mother, left shift-work to focus on her children and build a career and a reputation for helping people, only to end up as Minister of Health and Wellness.

Life comes full circle, Mr. Speaker, all because people believed in the potential for excellence of young Caymanians, as I do.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: May my story inspire even one young person to have hope, to work hard, and to strive for a better life.

Mr. Speaker, as I conclude let me just say, there is power in the word "hope". Hope will help you look toward a brighter future even in the worst of conditions. Hope can be defined as "the belief that circumstances in the future will be better." It allows us to be optimistic about a positive outcome and increases our chances of realising our goals and dreams.

Although there are many obstacles in life, hope allows us to approach them with a success mind-set. It helps us to get closer to our goals despite the ups and downs of life. Hope brings joy, peace, protection, and strength; and provides a way forward even in the worst of conditions. When you have hope, you always have the will and determination to reach your goals. Life is full of twists and turns but without hope, or without the inner peace of knowing that better days are ahead, Mr. Speaker, it is impossible to fully live.

Let me take this opportunity to thank my colleagues and constituents for all their patience. Once this budget is passed, they will see the sacrifice, the fruits and the value of their vote, with my continued representation.

I would like to extend gratitude to my small, but mighty constituency office team, who give up themselves and represent me to the highest level, and my Chief Officer, Ms. Nellie, and all my Ministerial staff.

Mr. Speaker, I look forward to guiding the Ministry of Health and Wellness through this process of change and development, to ultimately provide greater access to health services for all of our people.

May God continue to bless our beloved Cayman Islands.

Thank you.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak?

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure, Elected Member for North Side: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Minister of Infrastructure. You nearly missed it.

Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure (PAHI)

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I know you would not have done that to me.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members, I rise to make my first contribution as Minister in this PACT-Government.

It is a great privilege and honour to be here today to address you, Mr. Speaker, and my fellow Members in this honourable House, as I present the current and future policies, programmes and projects, of the Agencies and Departments under my Portfolio in the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure (PAHI). I am very pleased that many of my priorities aligned with the Government's broad strategic outcomes and are among those that our Government will work to address over the next two budget years.

Mr. Speaker, before I get into the budget, let me thank my loved ones first. It has been a long journey to get here, and I thank God for giving me the strength and the well-being. I want to thank my wife, who has been by my side through thick and thin, and sleepless nights.

I would also like to thank my mother and my father and my campaign team for supporting me, and always keeping me motivated and always reminding me, *people first*.

Mr. Speaker, I am very grateful for my people in North Side, for giving me the opportunity to serve them and being the youngest Member of Parliament and Cabinet.

Mr. Speaker, one thing I can assure my people in North Side is that they are in good hands when it comes to me. We are going to do good things to improve North Side and the Cayman Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I have to thank you today, for showing me the way. Sir, you saw something in me 20 years ago, that I did not see. That is what it takes to be a leader; you need vision—someone who can uplift his people, inspire them and believe in them. From the bottom of my heart sir, I appreciate everything, I thank you.

Mr. Speaker, I was one of those children who was raised by the village. I had a mother and father everywhere I went, and I was very grateful for that. Mr. Speaker, as a young boy growing up amongst my forefathers and mentors who were here before their time and to sit and listen to them, they were a novel in their own.

There was not a day that you did not learn something from them. Statesmen like the late Mr. Cromwell Ebanks, Mr. Carlyle McLaughlin, Mr. George Seymour, Mr. Ashton Smith, Mr. Gerald Smith Mr. George Ebanks, and in his last year sir, Mr. Bo Miller. Mr. Speaker, they were men with true vision; there are so many more to list, that it will be hard to name them all today, but I am grateful for the knowledge that was passed on from them to me.

Without further ado, let us address this budget. Providing the solutions to improve the well-being of Caymanians so they can achieve their full potential through quality affordable housing; strengthening our agriculture sector, to enhance our national food security; training young people under Public Works Department apprenticeship training programme. To utilis-

ing technology to streamline the process at our public-facing departments, for greater efficiency and service delivery. Mr. Speaker, this is what we call investing in our people.

Building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands by updating and revising the National Development Plan, improving our road networks, as well as the storm water management and drainage system, development of the internet telecommunications sector through investment in a modern submarine cable, as we prepare for opportunities ahead.

Mr. Speaker, please allow me to begin my contribution with a vote of gratitude to His Excellency the Governor for his Throne Speech in this honourable House. As Kenneth said, I think he is here for the people of the Island. I want to thank him for his support to our Government and the people of the Cayman Islands, as we continue to navigate through these unpredictable times.

I would also like to commend the Premier, the Honourable Wayne Panton and my colleagues for the running of the Government and their attention to core public sector activities.

My Ministry stands ready and able to assist my colleagues for the development of these Islands, as previously referenced in the honourable House by the Premier.

The Honourable Minister of Finance and Economic Development, listed a number of priorities for the Government. Over the next two years, some of the initiatives led by the Ministry will improve the quality of life for all in the Cayman Islands, these include:

- Investment in technical and vocational training;
- Provision for affordable housing through Government Guaranteed Assisted Mortgages (GGAM);
- Funding for land acquisition for agricultural purposes;
- Creation of a national Infrastructure fund;
- The provision of funding for implementation of a new underwater communication cable to ensure Cayman remains connected to the world; and
- Enhancement of legislation and regulations to ensure that property development have the proper infrastructure in place, such as drainage, street lights and speed bumps. In all these areas, sustainability is crucial.

As a Government, we have the responsibility not just to the people of the Cayman Islands [today], but we must also ensure we have the right policies in place to serve the next generation of Caymanians. I am certain that this [is the] legacy upon which the success of our PACT-Government will be judged on.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to commend the Honourable Minister of Finance and Development for highlighting the importance and carefully balancing the needs and wishes of our colleagues and the people of these Islands. Deputy Premier, I say thank you.

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: You are welcome.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: I am glad to have a Finance Minister like yourself, with knowledge, experience and wisdom. I appreciate the close working relationship we have gained within a short period of time.

Mr. Speaker, in the face of the challenges that COVID-19 has thrown at us, I am confident that fiscal prudence, and creating an environment for economic growth and governance by the principles of being People-Driven, Accountable, Competent and Transparent, will make the lives of those we serve better. I can assure you, fellow Members that my Ministry will work to meet the broad strategic outcomes set out by the PACT-Government, so we can improve the quality of life of our fellow Caymanians.

Mr. Speaker, we all know that the best results come from teamwork and in that regard, I have the good fortune of working with a team of dedicated civil servants who comprise the staff of the Ministry of Planning, Agriculture, Housing and Infrastructure. I visited each of the Departments under my Ministry to get a better understanding of what they do on a day-to-day basis, and what challenges they encountered in carrying out those duties. I made a point to speak to the broad spectrum of staff, because sometimes we learn the most through the employees on the ground, those who are actually in the trenches.

It was a learning experience that has given me great insight into the complexity and diversity of the services they deliver to the people of these Islands, Mr. Speaker. It has given me keen understanding to be able to provide a meaningful and well-balanced budget submission.

Department of Agriculture

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Agriculture will contribute to the Government's broad outcome to provide solutions improving the well-being of our people, so they can achieve their full potential.

CI Farm Programme

As Members may be aware, under the capable stewardship of the former Agriculture Minister, Honourable Juliana O'Connor-Connolly, the Cayman Islands Farmers Assistant Relief Measures (CI Farm Programme) was implemented in December 2020 to June 2021 to provide an economic relief to the local farming community affected by the COVID-19 crisis. Phase one of that programme was geared towards

stimulating the interest of local agriculture and to provide support to the farming community affected by the restrictions caused by the pandemic.

On assuming the responsibility of Agriculture Minister, I had to carefully review the programme for the agricultural sector and the resources needed to best support farmers to enhance our Islands' food and nutrition security.

One of the major changes made to the CI Farm was to shift the benefits to focus on commercial farmers. Under phase two of the CI Farm, which started September 1st and ended on November the 30th, there was an increase of the monthly allocation to commercial farmers to purchase livestock feed, fertiliser, pesticides and other agricultural products from the Department of Agriculture. Our Government provided close to half a million dollars additional funding to phase two of CI Farm; a total of \$1.5 million allocated to this project facilitated the establishment of several backyard gardens and boosted domestic production in the poultry sector, for example, increasing consumption of local products provided.

Tropical Storm Grace Farmer's Assistance Project

In addition to the CI Farm Programme, my Ministry launched the 'Tropical Storm Grace Farmer's Assistance Project' to provide relief to the commercial farmers who suffered loss of income and livestock or damage to crops and farm infrastructure as a result of the storm in August.

Mr. Speaker, Tropical Storm Grace impacted the Islands causing extensive damage to the agriculture sector, particularly crops, with an estimated 60 to 90 per cent of fruit trees affected. The impact to livestock was less severe, with losses of poultry, pigs, goats and a few cattle reported, however, there was significant damage to farm infrastructure, especially shed houses, caused by fallen trees. In the month following the passage of the tropical storm, the Department of Agriculture assisted some 58 farmers to resettle and rehabilitate some 1800 [sic] to 26 acres of fruit trees at no direct cost to the farmers.

Mr. Speaker, I want to pause and take the opportunity to thank the team of the Department for all the work they have been doing and continue to do; when we talk about helping people, this is what we mean—a direct benefit to the farmers. You and other Members in this House are farmers, you all know how much it means to get help when in need.

Mr. Speaker, I always said that farming is one of the hardest jobs.

An Hon. Member: Oh, yes.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: A farmer has to deal with everyday plagues. You have the birds that want their share; the rabbits, the iguanas, the caterpillars, and

even the thieves at night! It is a hard road to travel, sir. I salute you all.

An Hon. Member: And you cannot sell sometimes.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, as immediate response aid in the quick recovery of the agricultural sector, the PACT-Government allocated \$3 million in relief support to provide supplementary income to cover labour costs and purchase of agricultural inputs necessary for the farmers to recover from loss and damage sustained as a result of the storm—\$3 million, sir.

The Department of Agriculture received over 120 applications, completed over 106 assessments, and made payment to over 70 farmers. Again, Mr. Speaker, this is what the PACT-Government means when we say ‘invest in our people’. Direct investment.

It is our hope, Mr. Speaker that many farmers will be able to rebuild their production and continue to strengthen the resilience and further bolster the Islands’ agriculture sector. In our effort to improve the quality of local cattle across the Islands, we have provided a \$350,000 grant to support the Cayman Islands Agricultural Society import of some 150-180 heads of cattle and some goats, sir. We could not leave them out because they said they needed goats.

Aligned with the plan, is a current preparation to implement the national livestock identification and tracking system to enable us to identify and track livestock within the jurisdiction; again, Mr. Speaker, investing in our people. It is anticipated that the tracking system will be rolled out when the first batch of imported cattle arrive on Island during the 2022 budget cycle, Mr. Speaker.

Ensuring that our Islands will have adequate and locally accessible food supply for years to come, is an important priority for the Ministry and the PACT-Government.

The National Egg Strategy (NEST)

The National Egg Strategy (NEST), to support and upgrade food production, facilitates the implementation of the government-backed safety and quality certification programme for all egg farmers. The Ministry has met with relevant stakeholders and agreed on the way forward for implementation. There is no reason why Cayman cannot sustain itself on eggs; we just need to invest in our people and that is what is going to take. That is all, sir. We cannot forget investment into our people.

Stud-Bull Programme

Mr. Speaker, the cattle-breeding programme, to ensure that we have a breeding programme on Grand Cayman that includes artificial insemination,

natural insemination and even embryo transplant technology, is the future for cattle breeding.

The Cayman Brac Stud-Bull Programme is expected to revive natural insemination for cattle in Cayman Brac. This will improve diversity and genetics of local stock, and increase the number of animals by at least 40 per cent over the next four years. The first drafting for the Stud Bull Policy has been prepared; it is being reviewed and will be implemented in the first quarter of 2022.

Agricultural Land-lease Policy

Mr. Speaker, our policy team and legislative drafters are preparing the necessary documents to support the legal and regulatory framework for the development and modernisation of our agriculture sector, and these include agricultural land-lease policy. The Ministry will be working with the Ministry of District Administration and Lands to develop this policy, which aims to make large tracts of idle arable land available to farmers for the growing of agricultural produce and the rearing of livestock.

Again, this has been asked for, for the past decade; and you wonder why we are here? It is because some people were living in wonderland. This Government believes in the people and in investing in people’s lives, in real time.

Cayman Islands Food and Nutrition Security Policy

Mr. Speaker, the Cayman Islands Food and Nutrition Security Policy has been finalised and is ready for consultation in the New Year.

Animal and Plant Protection Laws and the Pesticide Control in Agriculture Bills

In addition, both the Animal and Plant Protection Laws are being revised, while instructions have been given for the drafting of the Pesticide Control in Agriculture Bills which are being prepared. The Ministry’s target is to have these Bills before the Parliament by the end of the financial year 2022 - 2023.

Breaker excavator

Mr. Speaker, one of the first things I did as Minister, was to hold a meeting with Grand Cayman and Cayman Brac farmers to understand what they wanted from me as the Minister. The meeting brought to my attention the need for an excavator with a hammer to help clear farmlands.

The farmers had been asking for this for 20 years—20 years, Mr. Speaker. I am glad to say that the machine will be here in the coming year, but Mr. Speaker, I have to give credit where credit is due. I

want to thank the Honourable Julianna O'Connor-Connolly for getting the ball moving on the process to get the machine. Ms. Julie, on behalf of all of the farmers, I thank you, I really do.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I also want to let you know that we are not only getting an excavator, but we are looking into getting a large mulcher for the farmers as well; that way we do not have to be carrying everything to the landfill. We can mulch the vegetation matter and spread it back over large tracks of land, sir; because following Tropical Storm Grace, we saw how much the stuff that we carried spread the landfill. It used it up, sir.

Mr. Speaker, it does not stop there. We also plan to start a delivery service for the farmers and adding a debit card machine to the Agriculture [Department's] system, to help make farmers' life easier.

Again, this is what the PACT-Government is doing: investing in our people, and they have the nerve to talk about *'we did nothing'*? Come on, man. We need to come out of wonderland.

An Hon. Member: Hmm.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: So, Mr. Speaker, you can see that my agriculture team is hard at work and plans to deliver on everything from my farmers.

National Housing Development Trust (NHDT)

Turning to another area that is a major priority for me and my Government: the provision of quality affordable housing solutions for fellow Caymanians. Did you hear what I said, Mr. Speaker? This is a major priority and not just lip service, sir. Housing in this country is a major priority for us.

Our Government is committed to empowering the National Housing Development Trust (NHDT) to not only increase the number of houses built across the districts, but to ensure they are built in an energy-efficient, sustainable way.

North Side Housing Development

I am particularly pleased to see, that the housing development in North Side is moving forward. You know what they told us about housing in North Side? That *'nobody was applying for housing and that was why they did not look at North Side'*—they also said the past Member did not support housing in North Side; that is what they said, sir. Well, Mr. Speaker, I always knew that North Side people wanted affordable homes, because one thing is for sure: if you do not listen to your people, you will not get the chance to represent them.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Amen.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, we have a 45-lot subdivision plan for North Side, and I am glad to say that we had over 52 people apply and there may be more, as days go by.

Mr. Speaker, when I found a property for the new site I called the honourable Dwayne Seymour and told him I had found a perfect site for homes North Side, and you know what? He supported me with it and purchased the land for the affordable homes' site in North Side.

Mr. Speaker, I have to thank the Honourable Dwayne Seymour for this, but I want it to be on the record: John-John, the people of North Side and I want to thank you for giving us the opportunity, when everyone else was saying 'no'. I thank you.

I thank you.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: To touch on North Side housing a little bit more, just last week we were given planning permission for the development of the 45 parcels. Mr. Speaker, this is a milestone for the people of North Side and the wider Cayman Islands. As a matter of fact, we hope to break ground on that site in December, as soon as we get this budget out of the way.

This has come to reality because Mr. Seymour shared the same vision. You know, John-John, you are one of those hard-working politicians who did not get enough credit for all you have done for this country—from being one of the first to raise the red flag on COVID, to building the Mental Health Facility in East End, to all the other things you have done. If I stand today and list everything you have done, I will use up my two hours, sir. You really deserve that OBE. You really do.

[Laughter and desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: John-John, I want you to know that there is a seat on the PACT-Government for you, because you have the same vision as our Government: Cayman First and investing in our people, sir. There's a seat here for you.

[Desk thumping]

East End and Bodden Town Developments

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, as it relates to the East End and Bodden Town developments, further work is being done to facilitate ten more homes—seven in East End and three in Bodden Town. The houses are 90 per cent completed, and the NHDT has given its commitment to close the project and seek

approval from the Planning Department so that the prospective owners can transition into their homes before Christmas.

I am pleased to submit, that despite the increasing cost of materials on the Island due to the impact of COVID-19, there have been no significant overruns on the previous project.

Phase 2 of the West Bay Project

Mr. Speaker, not leaving the friends in West [Bay] out, further development to support 20 houses on Phase 2 of the West Bay project is slated to take place on a new site. The sub-division plan and Storm Water Management System have been approved along with the new affordable template, which consists of four models of two and three-bedroom homes.

Government Guaranteed Home Assisted Programme (GGHAM)

Mr. Speaker, the Government Guaranteed Home Assisted Programme (GGHAM) is a priority area for which we will provide additional support. The NHDT continues to administer the existing clients under the programme and provide administration for the new applicants from the proposed new agreement, which will assist approximately 200 families based on the headcount from the existing programme. There is ongoing, continued demand for this level of assistance, and our plan to reinstate the programme.

Concerning construction of a building on your own property, the NHDT continues collaborating with the local banks to assist applicants under the programme to construct their own houses. There are currently five applicants waiting to be considered, while two have been pre-approved and we are seeking approval from the respective banks to bridge the financing.

While the NHDT continues to concentrate its efforts building on vacant land at the affordable housing sites in North Side, East End and West Bay, it has been tasked to replicate these efforts in George Town by seeking new land to support housing development plans in the area. Our plan as the Government is to take a multi-sector approach to address the growing housing needs across the Islands, so I want to take the opportunity to encourage private developers and the banking industry to work with us to offer better housing options for Caymanians.

Mr. Speaker, while the NHDT has kept construction costs low, it has duplicated its efforts in equipping its houses with amenities that contribute to the overall value, such as wooden cabinetry, granite countertops and porcelain floors, and has also integrated a new design for making the upcoming houses energy efficient.

The commitment of the NHDT and the Government is to deliver high-quality sustainable houses

for prospective Caymanians to realise their dream and pride of home ownership for years to come.

Mr. Speaker, I am ambitious and I want to see the NHDT roll out a minimum of 75 homes. I know my colleagues say, "*Boy, they want to push me to 100*", but I am working on 75. I am pushing in that direction, but I think I will break my quota. Seventy-five homes per year under the leadership of the new board, sir, is what we call investing in our people, in case they do not know. Building homes for people, giving them the homes that they need.

Facilities Management Department

We now turn our attention to the Facilities Management Department, which has provided outstanding support to civil servants and visitors of the Government Administration Building (GAB), particularly during the global pandemic. Some of the ongoing projects being undertaken by facilities management on the Administration building include:

- A car park access upgrade—(still in progress);
- Close circuit televisions upgrade (at procurement stage and expected to begin next year); and
- 100-kilowatt solar project which has had some delays, but is expected to be completed in the second quarter of 2022.

In an effort to improve customer service to the general public as well as the Cayman Islands Government staff, facility management has purchased an energy-efficient electric shuttle to assist with the commute between parking lot and the Government Administration Building so now, when it is raining and you have to park across the road, you can take the shuttle and come across and not get wet. That is just a service that we are offering, again, looking out for our people.

Additionally, the Department is exploring avenues to make information more accessible to the public through a contact centre that aims to provide customers with a central point for information on queries concerning the government services of the Administration Building.

Mr. Speaker, the PACT-Government is ensuring that we enhance the job opportunities for Caymanians. The Facilities Management Department is moving in that direction with the Caymanisation of the security force that provide services at the Government Administration Building. Again, investing in our people.

This year, the Department also completed a number of projects at the civic centres across Grand Cayman.

At the North Side Civic Centre:

- Flooring;

- Ceiling;
- Stage;
- Complete fencing; and
- Replacement of installation of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations are currently in process.

At the East End Civic Centre:

- Flooring;
- Ceiling;
- A/C unit; and
- Staging and ducting completed; and
- Work continues on the bathroom renovation and installation of the EV charging stations.

At the Gun Bay Civic Centre:

- The facility has been equipped with new appliances, chairs and tables;
- LED lighting upgrade;
- Entry door replacement;
- Court resurface; and
- Procurement and installation of a basketball hoop are in progress.

For the 2022-2023 fiscal year, it is anticipated that the civic centres will be equipped with video and audio equipment, interior upgrades, automated security lighting, and security camera alarm system.

Department of Vehicle and Drivers' Licensing

Moving on to the Department of Vehicle and Drivers' Licensing, the Department has focused on a change in management agenda to improve services and adapt to the growing needs of our customers.

An important part of this process is the Department's modernisation of its services to better meet the needs of its customers. As a result, we are focusing on moving online as we have the third-party garages undertake more inspections in an effort to relieve some of the congestion that occurs at our centre.

In June this year, the DVDL launched a new and improved website, offering customers an easier way to access information and services online. The redesign of the website is another step in its effort to make the department more efficient and available to those people they serve. The Department has also increased the options available to customers to complete transactions without visiting the office location.

In addition to renewing their vehicle licence, customers can also renewed drivers' licence online with just their driver's licence number, the date of the first drivers' licence and a valid email address. There is no longer a requirement to have an electronic service identifier number to register renewals, therefore making the process less complicated.

Customers can also book an appointment for written and driving tests through the DVDL customer server support centre from the comfort of their homes. To further reduce foot traffic at the office, the Department has been encouraging customers to make use of the 13 approved private garages to conduct motor vehicles inspections. Again, Mr. Speaker, investing to make our people's lives easier.

Mr. Speaker, do you realise that everything I have said thus far has been about investing in our people and transitioning from hand-out to a hand-up for Caymanians?

[Desk thumping]

Fee discounts for senior citizens

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, as part of the PACT-Government's commitment to improve the well-being of our people, including our senior citizens, one of the first things [I did] as Minister, was to see how I could help reduce fees to help our seniors.

I am glad to say that August this year fees for motor vehicle registration, licence renewal, drivers' licence applications and drivers' licence renewals have been reduced by 50 per cent, while fees related to motor vehicle licence plates have been reduced by 33 per cent. These fee discounts are across Grand Cayman, Cayman Brac and Little Cayman for vehicle owners over the age of 65. Again, this is what people investment looks like, in case they did not know, providing dignity to our elderly.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I hear the Opposition over there saying that they did it. Maybe they came up with the idea, sir, but they left it sitting on their desk, on their usual table, on file 13—

[Laughter]

An Hon. Member: Hmm.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Because nothing came the Cabinet.

An Hon. Member: That is right.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: So when they say that they did something, they need to prove that they did something, sir.

An Hon. Member: That's right.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: They know the protocols; they have been here long enough.

DVDL portals

Mr. Speaker, the Government is working to make Caymanians' lives better. In short order, the DVDL plans to launch the insurance portal for online renewal for motor vehicles' licence, which will allow insurance companies to upgrade their clients' insurance particulars in real time, allowing for a smooth online transition, without the need for customers to upload their certificate of insurance cover note.

Other projects planned include the completion of the online portal for booking road and written [driving] tests, vehicle transfers, and vehicle registration.

New Licencing Office at the Jacques Scott Plaza (West Bay)

For the 2022 to 2023 years, the DVDL is collaborating with Public Works Department (PWD) to complete the fit-out of a new Licencing Office located at the Jacques Scott plaza in West Bay. I can say this was done under the previous Government, Mr. Speaker—at least the location was sorted out, sir.

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: The new location, which is expected to be ready in the second quarter of 2022 will include some 1300 square feet of space, public restroom facilities, handicap ramp and increased seating capacity for customers. In addition to improvement of the space capacity, the number of licencing officers at the location will be increased from two to four people.

There will also be an improvement at the crew Road location, with the expansion of the lobby area to increase the customer service window from 6 to 12. The DVDL, with the support of the PWD is expected to deliver the enhancement at this office in the third quarter of 2022.

It is anticipated that next year the DVDL's computer service department, in collaboration with TÖNNJES, will complete the re-plating of some 4,987 vehicles, Mr. Speaker. Members may recall that some years ago, the Department started the modernisation process for vehicle registration [introducing] an electronic vehicle registration system which works in tandem with the Gantry Inspection system that will be in West Bay and other locations throughout the Islands.

We feel certain [that] this system, Mr. Speaker, will enhance the revenue collection of unlicensed and uninsured vehicles, as well as [assist] the police in the detection and prosecution of an offence. There are a number of legislation reforms planned in 2022, including:

- Amendment to the Traffic Act Regulations to give the Cayman Islands the effective designation for driving exchange with the United Kingdom and its Crown Dependents;

- Amendment to the Traffic Act regulations for compatibility with the Geneva Convention on Road Traffic, and UK Road Traffic legislation, to allow for the international exchange of Drivers' License to countries that are signatories to the Convention

Mr. Speaker, the current legislation allows for six months to do the exchange; a 12-month time frame would assist DVDL with the backlog of the road test as a result of the COVID-19 challenges.

- Amendment to the Traffic Regulations to give effect to section 6(4)(a) of the Traffic Act, to exchange information with the insurance industry to enable update of clients' information in a real-time, online transaction;
- Amendment of traffic regulations to introduce electronic drivers' licence, electronic vehicle registration, online vehicles' registration including companies and car dealerships; and
- Amendments to the Traffic Control Regulations Road Code to facilitate recommendations to the traffic management panel and its release to roundabouts in the new traffic signs, road markings and traffic lights.

Department of Vehicles and Drivers' Licence succession planning

Mr Speaker, the Department of Vehicles and Drivers' Licence is also focused on succession planning and continues to fill leadership positions as well as job openings, with Caymanians. As you can see, the DVDL's team is committed to seeing things completed.

Department of Vehicle and Equipment services

Turning to the Department of Vehicle and Equipment services, Mr. Speaker, the priority project for 2021, 2022 years is the completion of Phase 2 of the Department Redevelopment Project in May, 2022. The construction and upgrade will provide a modern, state-of-the-art, 19 service-bay facility capable of servicing and maintaining the various vehicles and equipment owned by Government, which range from light duty to heavy duty.

The project, which commenced earlier this year, is expected to improve the working conditions, increase workspace, and reduce and repair bottleneck that we have. The new facility will ensure that the Government is in the position to support the new technology and National Energy Policy, as we expand our fleet of hybrid and electric vehicles.

The DVES continues to work with authorised dealers in private establishments that have demonstrated their commitment in protecting the Cayman

Islands environment through the proper support of hybrid electric vehicles and the life-cycle Programmes.

Department of Planning

I will now draw my attention Mr. Speaker, to the Department of Planning.

The Department has laid a solid foundation in its online planning system, which has enabled effective continuation of services during the global pandemic to further deliver timely services and enhance customer experience.

The Planning Department began conducting a virtual inspection in May this year, which will require an App to be downloaded on a mobile phone and allows the inspectors to see installation assessed to determine whether it complies with various codes and provisions. This move, Mr. Speaker, will reduce inspection visits to job sites and the time spent in transitioning, resulting in more effective scheduling and a higher number of inspections.

I am very pleased with how well staff and customers are adapting to the new way of doing business which we are confident will improve the development process; as we continue to direct greater efficiency in that direction, I am committed to providing the department resources needed.

Mr. Speaker, one thing is for sure: I am determined to remove all the red tape from the Planning Laws.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, taking up as Minister of Planning, I had so many contractors, electricians, plumbers, architects—even them who were along with the previous Government, came to me and said that there was so much red tape that needs to be cut and I asked them, *why come to me so quickly? Your group was there.*

Mr. Speaker, some of their best friends told me they did not want to do anything, so I took a few of their colleagues and I am getting ready to do something with them, sir; we will get to that as we get a little further.

Mr. Speaker, one thing is for sure, I am determined to remove all that red tape.

Mr. Speaker, I have already stressed how important I believe sustainability is to the infrastructure of our Island. With the increased number of projects in the works with the civil servants in the Planning Department, we will work to ensure [that we] strike the right balance to provide customers with an efficient approval process, while ensuring that the new developments meet the required high standards we expect in the Cayman Islands. We are encouraged as we see development continues to grow, with marked increases in all of our sectors.

Department of Planning

In the second quarter of 2021, there were 204 planning permissions granted with a value of over \$600,000 and 302 planning permits issued to the value of over \$130,000; in the third quarter, there were 225 planning permissions granted with a value of close to \$500,000 and 323 planning permits issued, valued over \$250,000.

Plan Cayman

Mr. Speaker, with the trend in growth, the Government remains cognisant to environmental issues and concerns; therefore all of us, the private and public sector, have to think differently about development, if we are to meet the current challenges that we face.

All of these issues are being addressed to the comprehensive national planning framework, Plan Cayman. A process that my Ministry will be working on, along with the Premier and his team. Plan Cayman will ensure that the land use decision works hand-in-hand with the economic, social and environmental well-being of the residents of our Islands.

For 2020 to 2023 financial year, Phase 1 of the five phases will be to review the Seven Mile Beach corridor with public consultation to begin shortly. The Department will also commence the review, development, and building control framework in the second area of the plan.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is committed to improving the delivery of services on this end. We have allocated funding to hire an additional staff to carry out the planning reviews and inspections. This would decrease the planning review on inspection timeline, and lead to higher efficiencies throughout the industry.

Mr. Speaker, something I want to add back to Planning is that 10 per cent you could add onto your house without having to go through—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: —the lengthy process.

Mr. Speaker, this is what you call *giving our people ownership in their investment*; again, investing in our people. This is what the Government was founded on—people-driven.

Mr. Speaker, some people do not realise how much that 10 per cent meant because they had enough money [that] they could go through the rigmarole, but for the poor man who could not afford the full thing, it meant a lot.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Sorry, sir? Thank you, Mr. Moses. Thank you, Honourable Member [for Cayman

Brac West and Little Cayman], for agreeing with me, sir. Thank you.

[Desk thumping and inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Well, we can talk about that afterwards, sir, you are an honourable man, sir. I know there are things that I said about you, sir, but I believe half of it was wrong.

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: I really see that you are an honourable man.

Mr. Speaker, one of the shortfalls in this highly competitive industry, is the difficulty in hiring and retaining new planning reviewers and inspectors. As a result, we are focusing on attracting Caymanians into these fields, to ensure succession plans are in place. This is to ensure that we promote sustainable human development for the future of our Islands.

Public Works Department

Mr. Speaker, turning to Public Works Department (PWD). Through the Department, the Ministry continues to invest in the future of young Caymanian men and women, through the successful delivery of the Public Works Apprenticeship Programme. Just last month, 50 young Caymanians, our largest cohort, enrolled at the training programme. Of this group, 31 were level 1, 14 were level 2, and five were level 3 learners. Our apprentices are undertaking training in carpentry, masonry, plumbing, electrical installation, air conditioning and refrigeration and welding, as well as building and construction management.

I look forward to partnering this programme with Michael Myles and Inspire Cayman training to push this programme even further; again, investing in our young Caymanians with dignity and hope, that there is a need for them. I want to ensure that people know that we are investing in our young Caymanians.

Mr. Speaker, I want to give Parliamentary Secretary (PS) Kathy [Ebanks-Wilks] her props for this Programme. This programme is dear to her heart, so much so, that she came barging into my office one morning motivating me—or more like demanding of me—to get this project going. She has worked closely with me when it comes to this project, Mr. Speaker, and I want to tell her thank you for all that she has done thus far. Together, we still have much to accomplish.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, with locally qualified job applicants to perform specialised roles within government and the private sector, it is important that we develop and mentor our Caymanian

workforce to be employable. That is why I want a synergy with Michael Myles and his training centre, because they have released so many young Caymanians, sir. Our PACT-Government is and will be committed to continuing to give Caymanians as many opportunities to succeed as possible.

PWD also continues to provide high quality maintenance support for over one million square feet on public facilities and over 100 public beaches; parks, cemeteries, and public spaces. The Department is currently overseeing a number of ongoing projects including:

- The Integrated Solid Waste Management project;
- The long-term Residential Mental Health Facility;
- The John Gray High School;
- The Grand Court fit-out;
- The Bodden Town Church of God shelter;
- Owen Roberts Airport Re-development Project Master plan; and
- The General Aviation Terminal

There are also a number of other priority projects such as the Bodden Town Primary School's Multi-purpose Hall—honourable Dwayne Seymour, this one is in your area again, sir. Another reason why you deserve to be over here, sir.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks:

- Phase 2 of the Department of Vehicle and Equipment Services (DVES) re-development project;
- The Old Man Bay dock;
- Phase 2 of Heroes Square;
- The Emergency Field Hospital;
- The Prison re-development project; and
- Various community and sporting facility upgrades.

Mr. Speaker, as you are aware, infrastructure needs to keep pace with development, to attract revenue-generating development activity and retain confidence in our continued growth. As the Honourable Premier already underscored, our Government is fully committed to continuing to invest and improve the road infrastructure on our Islands.

National Roads Authority (NRA)

Among the road infrastructure works currently being undertaken, is the airport connector road from Esterly Tibbetts Highway to Sparky Drive. The base field elevation was completed to an average of +2.5 feet above sea level. Phase 1 is 50 per cent complete with anticipated completion in the third quarter of

2022. Mr. Speaker, I want to dispel rumours that this project had stopped.

The Government is committed to completing this road. We were awaiting a large shipment of 40" drainage culverts which arrived on Island about three weeks ago, sir; so we will now go to tender for them to be installed. Once that is completed, we will be moving forward and having this road completed. We hope to have this completed in the first quarter.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, Phase 1 of the Godfrey Nixon Road extension linking Eastern Avenue to North Church Street is to be completed in the first part of the year, [and] Phase 1 of the East-West Arterial going east from Hirst Road to Woodland Drive is to be completed in Quarter 3 of 2022.

I think it is fitting at this juncture, to update the honourable House and listening public, on the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) for Phase 2. Mr. Speaker, the Government decided to push forward the project's Environmental Impact Assessment—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: From Woodland to Frank Sound. A sustainable environment is a key phase of this Administration, and we have to be especially sensitive to drainage and build impact of the vital and necessary pieces of infrastructure. The scoping document for this is now underway, and should be ready at the end of the year. Following the scoping documents of the EIA, consultant opportunity will be tendered and awarded, and an EIA undertaken.

Mr. Speaker, we are trying to ensure that we do everything right, sir.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Widening of Shamrock Road to the 6th lane: National Roads Authority (NRA) completed the accommodation work to include relocating the three roadside graves and the replacement of four walls and fences of the sea-side properties, relocating the drainage culverts and construction of a new east-bound left-turn lane at Grand Harbour round-about. This widening is expected to be completed within a month.

Repaving of the West Bay Road is expected to be completed. Member [for George Town North], do you remember that day that you called me and we took that ride in West Bay, sir?

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: The Honourable Deputy Premier was with me that day as well, right? Yeah.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: We committed that day to finish doing the West Bay Road, taking care of George Town North, and completing all of the roads that were started under the Honourable Minister.

Mr. Joseph X. Hew, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North: Building on a solid foundation.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: That is building on a solid foundation, sir; that is right—you are absolutely right, sir.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: We are committed to finishing what you started, sir. Give props where props are due.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to people's lives, there is no time to play politics. That is why we are committed to pick up were the honourable Joey Hew—Member for George Town North—left off, as this is not the time for politics. We realise the projects have to be done and we will do them; we do not care which area they are in. Leave the politics until a couple years down the road, when we get back on the campaign trail.

[Crosstalk and laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: In addition, we are focused on important projects for the traffic congestion.

Phase 2 of the Linford Pierson Highway lane expansion, from Agnes Way to Bobby Thompson Way, is our next significant project which will alleviate the bottleneck from the morning and afternoon commute. We have just gazetted the widening of the road, and are now preparing for construction to begin in the first quarter of 2022.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: So again, Member for George Town North, we are picking up from where you left off, sir. Picking up where you left off. We are not changing anything.

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: That is right, sir, that is right. Everybody knows that you started, sir, but we will finish it—that is all. So when you come up to debate, there should be no argument because we gave you all the props.

[Desk thumping and laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Unless you are going to be yourself. I don't know.

King connector and the Caribbean Utilities Company (CUC) roundabout upgrades, which provides a new service for the road from CUC roundabout to the King's Sports Centre, is something that we are looking into.

Expansion from 4 to 6 lanes from Crewe Road and Hirst Road to the Hurley Merren Boulevard, to alleviate the afternoon commute and better service the Red Bay and Prospect community.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, we know we have to ensure that we take care of the Prospect community this go-around.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Phase 2 of the East-West Arterial and Woodland to Frank Sound: I want to highlight, Mr. Speaker, the Environmental Impact Assessment for this particular project is currently underway; so, when some people out there in traffic sometimes think, "*Boy, when will this Government do something about it*", I want them to know that we are working on it, we are working on it.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: However, we have to make sure that we do it right.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, it is the Government purse that we are spending from; it is the people's money. We want to ensure that people are getting the value when they spend their money, not something that we have to go and tear up later on.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I mentioned that the EIA process is now underway, however, I also want to quickly outline our plans for the project, given that the assessment will take some 15 months.

It is the intention to fast-track this project once the EIA is completed; some people say, *well 15 months is a long time; it is a long time in politician years*. Yes, I agree with that. I have scratched my head and wonder myself, but it is our intention to fast-track that project, sir. We will construct the road in a three point: Woodland going East, Northward going back West, as well as East and then West from Frank Sound towards Northward. This will ensure that we cover as much ground as quickly as possible, while utilising a full-complement workforce so we ensure

that we tackle it in three phases quickly, [to make up] for the 15 months that we are losing.

I am pleased to share with Members of this honourable House, that during the 2022-2023 budget cycle, NRA will continue its island-wide hot-mix rehabilitation programme, as well as the district road improvement programme and local access of subdivision roads across all Grand Cayman. Since April of 2021, NRA has completed a number of spray-and-ship and hot-mix upgrades in all areas, particularly, in Grand Cayman.

Mr. Speaker, some people wrote in the media saying I was doing much more in North Side than I was doing in other districts. If they had not forgotten about it for 20 years, I would not have to spend as much time in North Side as I have been doing. I only want them to know that we have delivered more roads around the Island, than what we did directly in North Side, including George Town North.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: And Bodden Town East and West. We are working our way up Savannah, and Newlands; we are going into Prospect, going to West Bay, down West Bay stroller; midnights they were doing West Bay, Mr. Speaker, so I want them to know the NRA team is hard at work.

Mr. Speaker, I have to thank the Board and the Chairman, Mr. Alric Lindsay; Mr. Stanley Panton, and other Board members, for the hard work that they do. They have been pushing to make sure that we get the right things done.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Therefore we made the decision to use hot-mix on many of the roads, in order to get prolonged life and try to save Government some money, because we realised that we chip and spray this year, go back the following year and still have to come back and ship and spray that road over again.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: So we talked about saving the Government money. That is why we want to push more into hot-mix, because it is the people's money that we are spending and we have to do cost-savings where we can.

There is no difference from what would be required from Planning and the NRA; if these were new subdivisions, sir. If they were new subdivisions they would have to be hot-mix, they could not do chip and spray anymore; so why is our Government out there chip and spraying the older areas? Are you saying that, because you bought your house years ago in that area, you got a chip and spray road now, because the laws have changed, you are allowed to get

a newer, more modern infrastructure? No, sir, not under my watch. Not under my watch.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: My Ministry team and the NRA have worked directly with the local paver to develop an efficient workflow and specifications to provide value for money, giving us better district roads that will last much longer. Mr. Speaker, we had to do it that way because, boy, all we were getting in North Side was chip and spray for 20-odd years, so I have to make sure that we put some asphalt down there this go around, so it will last 40 years. We will leave the chip and spray for farm roads or something.

Mr. Speaker, on that note, I plan on bringing a Motion to this honourable House in the New Year, that any damage incurred to public roads by any third parties, they will be responsible to pay NRA, or a reputable paving company like NRA, to fix the road.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, this has become the norm; every time you fix a road, someone comes behind and digs it up and it is never patched back properly, which in turn causes NRA additional work and not only that—to get a black eye. So that will stop too. They know that they are going to pay one of us to do it properly from now on.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: In addition, the NRA will increase its speed bump installation and roll out some other traffic-calming measures to increase the safety throughout the districts, along our roadways.

Mr. Speaker, the NRA has been actively filling the car park area for the Old Man Bay boat ramp. Boy, Mr. Speaker, when I talk about this Old Man Bay boat ramp...18 - 20 years in the making, and we are just getting there now; 18 - 20 years.

There are considerable cost savings being recognised on this project, as the base film material used are surplus from the Authority's stockpile. The project continues with surfacing layers and other works planned for the next phase. When complete, North Side will have a long-deserved parking area for the planned public beach and boat ramp, complete with restroom facilities and a weather station for the National Weather Service. This small but important project, is but one example of our cross-ministerial collaborations.

Mr. Speaker, this is something that North Side fishermen have spoken about and have been wanting for decades, and I am glad to see it coming to light, Mr. Speaker; glad to see it coming to light. Even under your watch, sir, you never gave it to us when you were Leader.

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: This is what we call investing in our people.

Hot Rod Association

Well, Mr. Speaker, when we talk about "people's wants", I want this honourable House to know the NRA is dedicated to helping with the first Phase of the Hot Rod Association track that is planned in the eastern districts.

Again, Mr. Speaker, something that has been long overdue. This is what we talk about when it comes to putting our people first. How long do our people have to beg us for help? Most politicians only know them when it comes to election time; but I can tell you one thing: I am not going to be one of them.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Every election, every politician promised the Hot Rod Association that they were going to do something and nothing had ever come of it, but I can say, that this PACT-Government is going to do something for them.

Mr. Speaker...

[Inaudible interjection and laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, we will get to your road too, sir.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: We will get to your road, but we have to give the younger ones something to do, sir. Unna took away everything from them; unna took away everything that the young ones want to do. What do you want them to do? When they race on the road, unna complain about them, but unna do not want to give them an opportunity to go somewhere and race, and do what they love to do best, sir. What I am going to tell you is, [that] we are looking into that.

Flooding low-lying areas

Mr. Speaker, this one really hit me to know that the previous Government knew of our low-lying areas and refused to do anything to help the people. I can tell you that this Government is committed to seeing that we come up with a solution for Randyke [Gardens], Windsor Park, Cumber [Avenue] in Bodden Town, Bedrock Circle and Prospect; Garston Smith Drive, Scholars Drive and Heady Lane in West Bay *[sic]*.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Again, because we believe in investing in our people, we will connect all the dots. It is many of them, Mr. Speaker.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: The Ministry, along with the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, working jointly with agencies such as the Department of Environment, the Water Authority, Department of Planning, and National Roads Authority to formulate a national strategy to move forward, sir.

In addition to our roads, our Government is actively pursuing the renewal of a telecommunication infrastructure to support the Cayman Islands. Sir, we realise that that is very important.

The Speaker: Is this a good time to break? It is a natural break for you. If it is a good time for you to break, then we will take—

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, yes. I agree, sir, if you want to take a break.

The Speaker: Okay; we will take the evening break and come back at 6.45?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: 6.45? The House will suspend until 6:45pm.

Proceedings suspended at 6.00pm

Proceedings resumed at 7.00pm

The Speaker: Please be seated. Proceedings are resumed, the honourable Minister of Infrastructure, continuing.

Schooner Lane, West Bay

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, thank you, sir.

During the break my team reached out to me to say that we had left off a road in West Bay that needs some serious attention too, when it comes to flooding and with no disrespect, sir, I plan not to leave out anybody when it comes to flooding, so I want to let the people know in Schooner Lane, West Bay, that they too will be looked after regarding their flooding issues, sir.

Hot Rod Association (Cont.)

My team also let me know, Mr. Speaker, that the Hot Rod Association's first lease was actually done under your administration, sir; between you and the honourable Member from Cayman Brac East; so I want to thank you all for getting that lease actually

started on rift; moving towards finishing up to where this can finally become reality, sir.

The Hot Rod Association had a little bump in the road, sir. One of the problems that they had with the lease was the insurance policy, but just to let everybody know that that insurance policy has been sorted out, sir, and that is why this PACT-Government can now move forward with the leasing and pushing to see that the Hot Rod Association actually gets their track done on the eastern side of the Island.

Sir, some people may say, "Boy; racing cars? *The Hot Rod Association is nothing, we can find other things to do*", but Mr. Speaker, when you take away everything from the children, sir... idle hands become the devil's playground.

Jet Around Cayman and East End Surf Challenge

When we look around, back in our day we had the racetrack in East End, so it is only fitting for it to go back up there—but not only the race track, sir. We used to have many sports and activities going for the kids. We had Jet Around Cayman. Where has that gone to, sir? Something else that disappeared.

The East End Surf Challenge, sir, was a huge thing to the eastern side Island. Now, Mr. Speaker, I want to let this honourable House know that I am working hard to ensure that Jet Around Cayman will come back. Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, we intend to hold that on the Easter Monday holidays, so that Jet Around will be back in this country.

Again, Mr. Speaker, giving our people back the things that they need, because we need our children to be able to do something, sir. To be able to be involved in something, not just walking up and down the street and cannot find nothing to do.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: And Mr. Speaker, even though this not a Government-run Programme, I know that I do not have to ask the Minister from West Bay if he is going to support that, because I know anything for sports that man is there.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Now I can tell you that; that is a Sports Minister.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, let us move off from the Hot Rod and Jet Around Cayman, just so that the buzz can actually get going and the children can know that there is some hope in the pipeline for them, to see activities coming back—especially coming back to the eastern side of the Islands.

We have been forgotten but do not worry, everything is coming, and one thing I can say: this PACT-Government supports its people.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: We invest in our people!

Mr. Speaker, when the rest of them do not invest in them, and they only cater to the elite and do not worry about nothing else; that is why we are here. That is why we are standing up here today.

An Hon. Member: Preach.

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: That is why we are here.

National Digital Strategy

Mr. Speaker, the PACT-Government understands the critical importance of that modern high-speed cable infrastructure as a key-facility factor for a modern economy. Due to the significance of cloud computing and remote working, especially at the time of a global pandemic, there is an increasing demand for broadband service.

The Government's intention is to implement a submarine cable modernisation project that provides a new, resilient, redundant *[sic]* infrastructure that supports the Island's increasing dependency on high service.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, the Government will set the policy framework and support the use of the cable and the demand on the service through the development and implementation of the National Digital Strategy. The initial phase of the project is underway; it is estimated to take 24-36 months, including route selection, route survey, and deployment.

The Government intends to work with a range of subject matter experts on a highly technical undertaking; that is, resources, and environmentally sensitive technical challenges that requires local and international participation and coordination. The Government has earmarked funds for this project, Mr. Speaker, and my Ministry is committed to ensuring its timely delivery to this Island, on which a modern economy activity would depend.

Mr. Speaker, just to highlight a few other ministerial projects under my portfolio:

George Town Revitalisation

As part of George Town revitalisation, a number of ongoing projects are taking place, where I plan to work closely—and I say closely, with the Honourable Minister of Tourism—on the implementation of the following projects. Mr. Speaker, it is only fair, seeing that he is the Member for George Town Central.

Heroes Square upgrade; Mr. Speaker, when you go into somebody's backyard, it is courtesy to

bring them along with you. This is his playground, this is his area—George Town Central—that is why I have asked him to work closely with me on these projects.

Phase 2 of the Heroes Square upgrade started in August. The works include paving of the pedestrian crossing, installation of urban street lamps, and new flight poles. Work on this project is expected to be completed in the first quarter of 2022.

Cardinal [Avenue] and Main Street upgrade. The team received funding approval and will proceed with Phase 1 of the works to include repaving of roads, installation of urban street lamps, mature trees for shading, a redesigned integrated pedestrian crossing and parks close to the Post Office at Cardinal Avenue.

Mr. Speaker, the next one is very close to my friend, my colleague, my brother, it is a very close one to me as well: that is Scranton Park. As the honourable Member for George Town Central said earlier today, work has commenced in clearing of the site, securing the pond area and a front gate on the perimeter fencing. One thing I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, is that it is moving forward right away. We are moving on that. I am as committed as my good friend for George Town Central, to see this park completed under this Administration.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, I may be from North Side, but I have many family roots in George Town, in that central area too. I have many family roots, so I could never go through this term, sir, without helping them by seeing that this park—a park these people have been asking for over decades—that has been back and forth, back and forth, but had not gotten anywhere.

I am glad to say, the Honourable Minister for George Town Central is out there, pushing for it and making sure—as a matter of fact, just this Saturday he was out there cleaning up.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Thank you, sir.

Again, Mr. Speaker, we hear the people calling, we have to listen to our people. If we do not listen to our people, who are we here for? Who are we here for? For ourselves? I bet you when election time comes around, everybody listens to them though. I bet you they listen; they want to go sit down on every mama's front door then but oh, it only gets to election time when some people know people. Well, I can tell you Mr. Speaker, the people have been calling for that and we plan to deliver that.

George Town Initiative

Mr. Speaker, the George Town Initiative Manager is also focused on the preparation of the road infrastructure—a master plan. For this town, which means so much to our community, and for the capital to be revitalised, we must focus on key infrastructure, so that the private sector will have the continued confidence to invest in mixed-use development of the town with business and residential alike.

Mr. Speaker, we talk about it, every government talks about it, they want to revitalise George Town but as far as we have gotten, is what this Government has really done.

National Community Enhancement (NiCE) Project

Mr. Speaker, plans are in place to move forward with the National Community Enhancement (NiCE) Project for December the 6th to 23rd. Given the economic challenges resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the additional strains that the Holiday Season often poses, the Government saw it fit to continue to offer temporary employment for Caymanians and their spouses. It is important that we put people to work.

Mr. Speaker, I think Members said the NiCE Programme started under your United Democratic Party's (UDP) watch. I remember that, Mr. Speaker, they actually run the NiCE programme in North Side during that time. As I said, it takes vision to see things and you see how far this programme has gone today, and it is still going; but Mr. Speaker, the programme also tells us something: that we have left a few of our people behind.

Mr. Speaker, this programme has run between 500 - 700 people every year. I love to see that the NiCE programme is out there, because I know how some people feel to be able to get that cheque at the end of the month, when they know that they had nothing coming in. You know, to us it might not seem like much, but it means the world to them; but you know what else it tells me? That we forgot those 500 - 700 people!

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Because it is time for us to go back now, and make sure that those 500 - 700 people have jobs, because they should not be rolling over every year, sir! And if that is the case, we need to fix it. No. Having a job once a year? Is that why we sit here for our people? I want to see these people have a full-time job, sir. A full time job.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Yeah, that is right.

Mr. Speaker, given the environment we are operating under at this time, the Public Works De-

partment, which is overseeing the programme, ensures that the NiCE work teams are wearing their masks and adhering to proper hygiene practices and social distance protocols. In addition, participants in the project will be required to undergo Rapid Lateral Flow Tests throughout their involvement in the Programme; it is right that we do that, because we have to protect our people. We also try to put them in small groups so that we do not have large congregations of people. I really hope that everybody works along with the groups to get that done, and that everything goes really well through the COVID season, Mr. Speaker. It is not that we are not taking the proper protocols to make sure that we keep our people safe.

Since the start of the project, the NiCE Programme has ensured that Caymanians benefit from a healthy environment. To your credit again, Mr. Speaker, it was started under your watch. Vision. The Ministry will continue to partner with several departments in delivering the programme to build stronger communities and support the most vulnerable while keeping the Government's broad outcomes.

Mr. Speaker, just closing up now. Before I submit the budget statement to this honourable House and my speech on it, I would like thank God first, sir. That is one thing we all should do every single day: get up and thank God.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, you realise how lucky we are—these Cayman Islands—as a Caribbean Island?

Mr. Speaker, this pandemic has been rough on everybody; it has been rough on us too sir, but I have had people call, send e-mails, saying, "*You are doing a good job; you are the envy of the Caribbean.*". I know probably not everybody in here would agree with me on that, saying that we are doing a good job, to each his own; but one thing I want to say is that even the devil gives his advice sometimes—

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: And that can go badly too, I can tell you that. Well, most times the devil gives you advice, it is bad. One thing they told me, the devil can come in any way—any colour, any size, anything—so do not make him fool you.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to pause and express my gratitude to my constituents in North Side, who have been supportive of the work I have done thus far in my constituency. The people of North Side are looking forward to accomplishing great things and, indeed, for the Cayman Islands, in 2022. Something I want to make the country know before I close... Well, I kind of jumped ahead on that when I took the break. I will leave that one down for another debate.

Mr. Speaker, I am optimistic about the programmes and initiatives that my Ministry, its Departments and agencies will complete over the next fiscal year, which will improve our Islands for all Caymanians and residents. As you would have heard, this is what investing in your people sounds like, Mr. Speaker. This is a people's budget, we cannot forget them. It is they who elected us.

Mr. Speaker, even you I overheard say a few days ago, this is one of the best budgets you heard in a long time; even people on the other aisle—I heard them talking about it too, but they will not admit to it here.

[Laughter]

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks: This is what a budget for the people looks like, sir. This is putting people first. This is putting hope back into the people of the Cayman Islands. This is what we are here for. This is what the PACT-Government is here for.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak? *[Pause]* Does any other Member wish to speak?

I call on the mover of the Bill to wind-up the debate.

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

[Pause]

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, while I may have caught your eye before the Member for George Town North, in the interest of democracy I would cede if he is ready to speak at this point.

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, you might say that is what you are doing out of good courtesy; do not say because of democracy, because what I am doing is democratic.

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Yes, that is true.

The Speaker: I called many times in this House and nobody rose; the game is being played out and as Presiding Officer I have had enough of it. If you so choose then it is up to the other Members, but I did call on you, sir.

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Well, Mr. Speaker, out of good courtesy, I—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: I will. Out of good courtesy. I think it is the more courteous thing to do, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Member for George Town North rose after I called the third time. I did not see him, I saw you. I saw the Minister of Finance, and so I called the Minister of Finance.

If you care to give way to him it is okay, it is up to you all, but I think I have done more than I am called to do; and if that Member chooses not to get up after you have given him the chance, well, I cannot do anything about that.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Honourable Minister of Finance, if that Member is not speaking and you want—

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: I will wrap up now, Mr. Speaker, so we can get into Finance Committee very quickly and get the people's business done.

Sorry, just let me get my notes ready; I honestly expected there to have been more debate but, seeing it is what it is, I will just close up now, however, Mr. Speaker—

The Speaker: Before you begin Honourable Minister, I just say to this honourable House that I hope I do not hear anyone saying that I did not give the chance. I did the proper thing, which was to call three times; you yourself came back and tried to give way. The Member walked out, now you have begun. It is up to you to continue.

Are you continuing now Minister or are you continuing Wednesday morning?

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: I will finish Wednesday morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Can we have the motion for adjournment please?

[Pause]

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, can we have a five minute recess, please? Thanks.

Mr. Speaker, I needed less than five minutes to confer with the Honourable Premier. As I said, my initial speech is very caring, and he has asked me to once again invite all other Members who are willing to speak because we recognise that this is a very im-

portant debate and while politics is at play, we believe the country will be served even better if other Members would contribute to the Budget and Throne Speech.

So, if it is possible, with your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to re-open, to allow other Members to speak if they want so at least we give everyone else one more opportunity before—

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, if that is the will of the Government who rose, the Chair will make exception because the Government agrees to stand down, to give the other side an opportunity.

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: Yes, Mr. Speaker. We do not want what happened to Minister Bryan in his maiden term to happen to anyone else, so—

[Laughter]

Hon. Christopher S. Saunders, Deputy Premier: We want to extend that courtesy in the best interest of democracy and serving the people of these Islands.

The Speaker: The Chair understands what the Government is saying and gives leeway, therefore, I should repeat the question. Honourable Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

The Premier, Hon. G. Wayne Panton: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

Given the apparent reluctance of Members on the other side to take the invitation to speak, I would respectfully ask to move a motion for the adjournment of this House until 10am on Wednesday morning. Hopefully they may be prepared at that point to make a contribution in respect of this budget debate, sir.

The Speaker: Understood. If Government is satisfied that that is the position you are taking, then we will ask for the adjournment of this honourable House.

I consider the motion moved.

The question is that this honourable House do know stand adjourned until 10am Wednesday, December 8th, God willing.

All in favour, please say aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The ayes have it.

This honourable Parliament stands adjourned until Wednesday, 8th December, 10 a.m.

At 9:29pm the House stood adjourned until Wednesday, 8th December, 2021 at 10am.