



Reply to the Throne Speech 2016

VISION 2025

OUR PLAN FOR A BETTER BERMUDA

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Introduction

Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour and privilege to address this Honourable House on the occasion of the Progressive Labour Party's Reply to the Throne Speech. I am aware that this may be the last Throne Speech Reply before a general election, thus the responsibility falls to me to ensure that the people of this country understand what a future Progressive Labour Party government will bring.

The people of this country have endured four years of broken promises; four years of a government that has not put Bermudians first; and four years of a government that takes care of its friends before it takes care of its people. The one thing that the One Bermuda Alliance seems successful at doing is getting Bermudians to pack up and leave the country. A far cry from their "we will leave no one behind" mantra from their 2012 election campaign, it seems that the Bermudian people have voted with their feet and are leaving our country behind. This measure alone should be a stinging indictment on the One Bermuda Alliance's term in office — a term that will soon come to an end.

It is time to build a Bermuda where the people can have faith in their government to look out for their interests. It is time to build a Bermuda where the people are not mere spectators but are active participants in their democracy. It is time to build a Bermuda where the words "transparency" and "good governance" are not just ploys to win votes, but are the actual bedrock and foundation of a government that is truly representative of the people.

A Tale of Two Bermudas

Mr. Speaker, as Charles Dickens once wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times...", but while he wrote *A Tale of Two Cities*, the OBA Government has instead written, over the past four years, *A Tale of Two Bermudas*.

While one Bermuda enjoys wealth, privilege and security, the other Bermuda is living from pay cheque to pay cheque — if they are fortunate enough even to be collecting a pay cheque.

In one Bermuda, jobs for non-Bermudians are growing, while in the other Bermuda, Bermudian jobs continue to be lost and Bermudian businesses continue to close their doors.

In one Bermuda, permanent residents enjoy full employment, while in the other Bermuda, Bermudian unemployment continues at unacceptable levels.

In one Bermuda, the quality of our children's education is determined by how much money their parents have, while in the other Bermuda, students attend schools without wireless Internet and where the infrastructure is substandard.

In one Bermuda, the elite and the privileged enjoy their golden years, secure in the knowledge that their children's future is itself secure, while in the other Bermuda the senior citizen needs to go back to work to help support her children and grandchildren.

Mr. Speaker, these are the facts that confront Bermudians every day: diminishing opportunities, an ever-increasing cost of living and shrinking pay cheques. This is the Bermuda that has driven so many of our families and friends away and that causes so many of our young people to view anywhere but Bermuda as a land of opportunity. This is the Bermuda that most of our voters live in.

Mr. Speaker, the OBA consistently says, in a display of mock empathy, that they know the *recovery* has not reached everyone. They are right. The *recovery*, such as it is, cannot reach everyone because it is not designed to do so. What we see is what we get. This is it. The reason the *recovery* is not reaching everyone is because these policies from a bygone era are designed to recreate a Bermuda that existed during what some refer to as the glory days. Sometimes we pretend that hard times are new, that they are a product of the 2008 recession. For many in this country they are not. The recession received so much attention because it made have-nots out of those who were used to having. For many people, though, the recession simply deepened what they had been experiencing already. This *recovery* is the extent of what the OBA's policies can produce: there is no second act in this OBA drama.

Mr. Speaker, these are yesterday's ideas from yesterday's men and women, who are trying to fit them into today and tomorrow, and the people know it, they feel it and they are living it. The people realise the OBA is not acting in their best interests, and are not doing the work necessary to bring the transformation that Bermuda requires.

The OBA sees only one Bermuda, while we in the PLP see what our people see and experience everyday: two Bermudas, separate and far from equal.

In the PLP, we seek an end to the two Bermudas and we believe:

- Quality and higher education should not be limited to only those who can pay for it.
- When it comes to opportunities, what you know should be more important than who you know.
- Seniors should be able to enjoy their golden years in peace and dignity.
- Healthcare should be affordable and universal.
- We must reduce crime by upholding the law and reducing the key contributing social factors.
- We need to develop a tax structure that is fair and just.
- An immigration policy that puts Bermudians first, while recognising the legitimate needs of businesses to ensure growth and stability is essential.
- It is important to broaden our reach for global investors and actively promote new economic opportunities.

Today's Bermuda must make a way for the gifted children whose mother cannot sit with them to help with their homework because she has to work two jobs to make ends meet.

Today's Bermuda must make a way for the poor who have the will but not the means to make life better for them and their children.

Today's Bermuda must include the man who has just been released from jail, has served his time and only needs a second chance to be a valuable and contributing member of our community.

Today's Bermuda must find a place for the young person who has lost faith in society, has dropped out of society and is threatening to become a menace to society.

Today's Bermuda must find a place for the senior who still has much to contribute and much to offer but to whom society has said, "Your expiration date is past due."

Today's Bermuda must include our unwed mothers, our teenage fathers, the people of faith and those who have no faith, the people who are straight and those who are gay. We cannot afford to toss anyone aside or leave anyone behind. The next PLP government is committed to this.

That would be a Bermuda that works for all Bermudians not some. That would be a Bermuda that would inspire hope in our people and create real, lasting change for everyone. That is the Bermuda that the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party intends to build.

Lessons Learned in Opposition

Mr. Speaker, being the Opposition has been a humbling and beneficial learning experience for the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party. We have had the opportunity to reassess, rebuild and renew our commitment to the belief that Bermudians must come first in opportunity, jobs and success in our own country.

We have learned that we cannot be all things to all people and are prepared to make the tough choices necessary to build a better future for Bermudians. The responsibility of any government is to help those who cannot help themselves and to inspire those who can. We must peel away the layers of systemic dysfunction to empower our people and make our government programmes a means to promote strength, while we address whatever issues challenge our people. The old adage of demanding that people pull themselves up by their bootstraps means nothing if people have no boots.

Mr. Speaker, our priority as a government must be to change the trajectory of our country, from one of division to one of unity. We must ensure that we include all in the transformation of Bermuda, as the global challenges require that we adapt and adapt quickly.

The One Bermuda Alliance Record

Mr. Speaker, four years ago the OBA became the government following a campaign that made promises which won them the election. As the Opposition, it is our duty to point out the gap between their rhetoric then, and the reality now.

1. In 2012 the OBA pledged to “create 2000 jobs”. Four years later Bermuda has lost 2124 jobs.
2. In 2012 the OBA pledged to “pay down our national debt”. Four years later the debt has doubled from \$1.2 billion to \$2.4 billion.
3. In 2012 the OBA pledged to “reduce the cost of living”. Four years later the cost of living has risen and students, workers and seniors are worse off.
4. In 2012 the OBA pledged to “reduce the cost of health care”. Four years later health care costs are squeezing employers and employees alike, while many employers are reducing coverage due to the increasing costs.
5. In 2012 the OBA pledged to “implement a Zero Tolerance Policy for unethical behaviour” and promised a transparent government. Four years later the people have borne witness to scandal, a shocking lack of transparency, and anything but zero tolerance.
6. In 2012 the OBA pledged that “privatisation is not part of our plan”. Four years later the OBA plans to privatise our airport in a sole-sourced deal in contravention of financial instructions.

To the people of Bermuda, the people we were elected to represent, we ask: Has the OBA Government’s approach of taking from the workers, the youth and our seniors, while giving concessions to the elite and privileged, worked for you? Do you feel more included and more a part of our island’s success? Do you truly believe that Bermuda is working for those whom it should? Do you believe your children will have more opportunities and greater success than you? Are you better off under the OBA?

Mr. Speaker, over the past four years in this Honourable House the PLP has laid out its plans for the future. They are rooted in a long-term plan — Vision 2025 — that will diversify our economy, create jobs for Bermudians, invest in our people, and create pathways to Bermudian success. Many of the plans and policies you will hear about today are not new: they are policies the PLP has developed through careful consultation with community and business stakeholders during our time as the Opposition.

Creating Jobs, Opportunities, Wealth and Prosperity for Bermudians

Mr. Speaker, for too many Bermudians, employment has gone from being a means of getting ahead to just a means of getting by. It is our belief that a better environment must be created in which Bermudian businesses can thrive, opportunities for Bermudians can be created and in which capable, qualified Bermudians can earn opportunities to work, train and succeed at every level in the private sector.

Agenda for Growth

To this end, the government must do everything possible to stimulate job creation. This means we need to reduce the incentive for companies in Bermuda to outsource existing jobs, while creating a favourable environment for growth in our domestic and international sectors which will lead to new jobs. One of the major factors hindering this growth is the cost of doing business in Bermuda.

To address the urgent need for jobs, the PLP will reduce payroll taxes to help stimulate job creation. Payroll taxes depress employment, and by taxing employment we are taxing the very thing we need in Bermuda: jobs. Payroll taxes dissuade businesses from hiring new employees and increase the incentive to outsource. However, Mr. Speaker, that alone is not enough. We must also tend to the urgent need for economic diversification and recognise that Bermuda must position itself to benefit from the rapid changes in technology. Technology is transforming the way the world works and we must be in a position to reap the economic benefits of technology for our people.

Economic Diversification Unit

Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will form an Economic Diversification Unit. This permanent organisation will consist of a small number of persons with a proven history of developing economies. The mission of this organisation will be to identify new opportunities for economic diversification and subject them to structured analysis and research. Once areas have been identified and agreed, the unit will seek partners and investment to develop the new local industry.

The Economic Diversification Unit's goal will be simple: to develop one new primary industry that directly provides at least 5% of our GDP and three new secondary industries that each directly provides at least 2% of our GDP by the year 2025.

Mr. Speaker, this focused approach to diversification will yield results and will finally allow us to achieve our aims of diversifying the Bermuda economy.

Creation of a Bermuda Fund

Mr. Speaker, if we are to create long-term economic growth, we need to use the tools at our disposal to invest and generate economic activity in Bermuda. There is a high level of investment expertise in Bermuda and the next PLP government will take advantage of this expertise by creating a "Bermuda Fund". This fund, which will be seeded with a small portion of the pension funds that are under the control of the government, will allow Bermuda to tap into the investment expertise on the island, while providing an additional outlet for our large pension funds to invest more of their monies in Bermuda-based equity investments.

The Bermuda Fund will not be exclusive to pension funds and other institutional investors; it will be listed on the Bermuda Stock Exchange to allow individuals to invest and contribute to the development of Bermuda.

This fund must have strict controls so that it is not subject to political whims, and will be run for the specific purpose of generating positive returns while investing in the development of Bermuda-based businesses. The fund could invest in industries identified to diversify the economy by the Economic Development Unit. The Bermuda Fund could also be used to attract job creators to our shores while we invest in emerging global industries such as cyber-security, FinTech and mobile application development.

Mr. Speaker, this is not exclusively the PLP's idea. It is one of many ideas that have been recommended by respected members of the local business community. Before the armchair critics speak about the underfunded state of our pension plan, I would urge them to consider that this proposal represents a small portion of overall pension funds.

Establishment of a Technology Incubator

Mr. Speaker, to grow our economy the PLP will develop a technology incubator at Southside. This will allow start-ups in the technology field that require little more than a computer and an Internet connection to use our regulatory environment while developing their new products and services in Bermuda.

A successful technology incubator could lead to other well-established global technology companies setting up a physical presence here. Bermuda First recommended that Bermuda become a global centre for intellectual property. Having a technology incubator could assist in realising that goal. Success in this area will grow our economy and also provide job opportunities for Bermudians.

Doing the Right Thing for Bermuda's Workers

Mr. Speaker, the PLP was created by and for workers. We are encouraged by the foundation that was laid by labour stalwarts of our past. The PLP and the country's trade unions are critical parts of Bermuda's labour movement. That fact demands that solidarity is maintained so that we can collectively advance the interests of working-class Bermudians. We are a labour party and our roots demand that we are the political voice of labour, the guardian of labour rights in the Legislature and the champion of the causes of the hard-working men and women the unions represent.

The government's role is not only to create an environment where businesses have the opportunity to open and be profitable; we must also protect Bermudian workers and ensure that the only limits to Bermudian success in the workforce are the ones we place on ourselves.

To create a fairer, more inclusive workforce the PLP will:

- Remove the structural imbalances that make employing foreign labour more cost-effective than employing Bermudians by requiring employers to provide occupational pensions to employees on work permits, who are currently exempt from the requirement.

- Complete a comprehensive examination of the social insurance programme, including the impact of changing employer and employee contributions from a fixed rate to a percentage of earnings, and the appropriate level for the cap on social insurance contributions. The objective of the review will be to increase the take-home pay of low earners and put more money in their pockets.

Promoting Entrepreneurship

Mr. Speaker, the PLP's position is that a key path to empowerment for Bermudians lies in the expansion of entrepreneurship and the facilitation of doing business in this jurisdiction. We have heard how government is often the biggest obstacle when it comes to Bermudians getting their business started. Red tape and bureaucracy have strangled far too many legitimate business concepts in the cradle and that must end.

In 2016 it makes little sense that an entrepreneur needs to visit multiple government departments and often must use a lawyer in order to start a business. The PLP will make starting a local business as convenient as possible by creating a concierge service for first-time Bermudian entrepreneurs to handle interactions and transactions with government agencies in one place. The next PLP government will remove obstacles from business, instead of being an obstacle to business. We will:

- Provide new tax relief for first-time entrepreneurs.
- Reform our laws to allow greater freedom for peddlers and vendors.
- Expand access to foreign capital for first-time business owners through liberalisation of the 60/40 Rule.
- Increase the lending capacity of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, enabling new small business owners with credible business plans to access the capital they need to create jobs for themselves and others.

Growing International Business

Mr. Speaker, international business is the primary pillar of our economy, creating direct and indirect employment. While it is a priority that we diversify our economy, our competitors and threats to international business cannot be ignored. We will continue to protect and grow international business in collaboration with industry stakeholders by the ongoing review and modernisation of our business legislation, enabling the introduction of new products to the market in order to keep Bermuda ahead of our competitors. The PLP will strengthen our international advocacy to protect our reputation in a time of global uncertainty caused by the United Kingdom's exit from the European Union and the recent US Presidential Election.

Reducing the Cost of Living

Mr. Speaker, the cost of living is the primary concern among our people and is the reason why many Bermudians leave to live overseas, as it is just too expensive for them to lead a comfortable life in Bermuda. Quality of life should matter. For many in Bermuda, however, doing two jobs is the norm just to stay afloat. This should not be the case and we therefore have to construct an economy where a parent only needs one job in order to raise their family, not two or even in some cases three jobs.

The next Progressive Labour Party government will focus its efforts on attacking Bermuda's cost of living problem. Our policies must reduce the cost of living across all areas — including health care, housing, food and electricity — to ensure that Bermuda is affordable. Reductions in these costs will also boost our attractiveness as a jurisdiction as they will reduce the cost of doing business, which can lead to job growth.

Fiscal Prudence

Mr. Speaker, as the next government our priorities are clear but our aspirations must be tempered by the need to balance the budget. We cannot enact programmes, policies and legislation that the Bermudian taxpayer cannot afford. Living beyond our means is not an option. Therefore, the next PLP government will create a Revenue and Government Earnings commission to examine how we collect revenue and present recommendations for increasing government revenues. We will also implement SAGE Commission recommendations that target waste and inefficiency.

Quality Education for All

Mr. Speaker, we believe that a proper and substantial education is a fundamental right for all, not a privilege for the privileged.

The next PLP government will ensure we have an educational system that provides the requisite foundation and skills for the natural talents and interests of our children. It will encourage use of diversified curricula and programmes, fostering autonomy at the school level so that each school can decide the best approach needed for its students to succeed.

As in all matters involving tough decisions and leadership, there has to be a high level of accountability. While teachers and principals must be accountable, it must start at the top, within the Ministry and within the Department of Education. So it is essential that the tools and resources needed for success be provided so that those at every level in education can reasonably be expected to perform and achieve. All stakeholders can then be held to account for their part in the student success journey.

The PLP's plan includes phasing out the three-tiered system, which will see the end of middle schools. Perennially, this system has failed to deliver the desired student outcomes. The grades, attendance and behaviour of our students at this level have displayed a disturbing pattern over the years. Our middle schools have fostered unwanted consequences which, some have suggested, can be observed in certain manifestations of local gang culture.

In collaboration with educators, the Bermuda Union of Teachers, parents and community stakeholders, the PLP will reshape our school system with one better suited to the needs of our youth and the wider community. A key initiative of the PLP's reforms will be the development of "Signature Schools" at the secondary school level, focusing on the learning styles and interests of our children, including academic, technical, arts, business, sports and special needs.

We will launch a "Head Start" programme in our pre-schools, raising the standard of early education and giving all our children equal access to the skills they will need to make a successful start at primary school.

We will expand access to after-school programmes to provide educational and homework support, and we will add to this components to develop entrepreneurial, athletic and life skills.

Our belief that education should be available to all will be demonstrated by an increase in scholarships and funding, so that our students have increased opportunities to secure higher education.

We recognise the jewel that is Bermuda College and the many opportunities it provides our residents. To assist in developing our talent and offering Bermudians local options, the PLP will work with Bermuda College to offer bachelor's degrees in education, nursing, accounting, insurance and business.

The PLP has listened for the last four years, and the next PLP government, together with our educators, parents, community organisations and business partners, will make the necessary reforms to give all our students the best possible opportunities for success. Success is personal and varies for each student. In today's fast-paced, ever-changing, technological world, it is paramount that the educational environment be adaptable so that our students are able to pick the road to success best suited to them.

Mr. Speaker, the PLP will re-establish public education as the primary and best option for Bermudians, and I look forward to sending my daughter and son to a school that is part of a vibrant and reformed public education system that prepares our future leaders for a rapidly changing world.

Quality, Affordable Health Care

Mr. Speaker, the PLP is committed to alleviating the costs of health care. Access to medical treatment is an important right for our people and should not be reserved for those who have the financial means.

The cost of health insurance is causing real pain for families across this island. Over the last four years we have seen a rapid escalation in health insurance costs continue and this squeeze not only affects individuals but also businesses. As a country we must do better and we have to recognise the fact that our health care system is not servicing our needs. We have poor outcomes combined with high costs and a system that is not delivering as well as it should. The other day, a young man told me on Twitter that his employee deduction for health insurance for both him and his son totalled \$1900 per month. Many Bermudians are unable to afford health insurance and they are forced to neglect their own health. We have entered a dangerous

era by creating a system that reserves medical treatment for those who can afford it and leaves others behind.

Mr. Speaker, the people that we serve must question why, four years after the election, the OBA have failed to live up to their election promise of reducing health care costs. Four years have elapsed since the election and it seems the OBA is still examining how to reduce costs. After four years, the examination should be complete and Bermuda needs a plan of action that will bring relief to the employees and business owners who so desperately need it.

While the PLP was in office we developed the National Health Plan. This was a plan that would reduce costs and provide better and greater coverage across the country. After dismissing the National Health Plan, the OBA has failed to replace it and has offered Bermudians more of the same. This is not effective governance, this is not what the people need, nor is it paying attention to what is really causing our people pain. The National Health Plan remains the most progressive step in ultimately reducing health care costs for all Bermudians. A PLP government will revisit this plan and look to reintroducing it. Additionally, to reduce the cost of health care the PLP will create incentives to expand competition in the local insurance sector to drive down insurance costs and create more affordable options for Bermudian families. A PLP government will also require insurance providers to cover established, recognised complementary and alternative medical services.

We welcome the creation of a Chronic Disease Register which will further provide statistics and insight on the prevalence of two of the most frequent health conditions affecting Bermudians, obesity and diabetes. A PLP government will make tackling these central to our health policy. Using the results from the Chronic Disease Register will facilitate setting health care policies concerning chronic conditions, which will in turn improve evaluation of the support services needed.

Mr. Speaker, the Government stated that it would “consider allowing the importation of herbal supplements containing cannabidiol to allow more options for treatment”. Though we support this step, the Progressive Labour Party would go a step further and allow licensed medical practitioners to prescribe medicinal cannabis to their patients to address legitimate medical issues. Bermuda continues to lag behind our neighbours on this issue, and it is time for us to be progressive in order to ensure that we are giving our medical professionals the flexibility to prescribe what they feel is best for their patients.

In addition to the items mentioned above, the next PLP government will:

- Conduct a comprehensive review of inpatient and outpatient mental health services in Bermuda with a view towards making progressive reform.
- Implement a sugar tax, with the revenue derived to be used for health education and early intervention.
- Implement incentives for businesses who offer staff wellness programmes and healthy living initiatives.

- Explore the opportunity for small businesses to join together with other small businesses to obtain group medical insurance coverage through local insurance providers. The sharing of risk across these small businesses will likely lead to reduced costs.

A 21st Century Approach to Tourism

Mr. Speaker, tourism numbers are improving. The BTA is working hard and the team they have assembled deserves our support and constructive criticism. They also deserve a government who will deal honestly with the issues currently confronting our tourism development and provide the financial investment needed to grow our tourism product. The PLP welcomes the increase in visitor arrivals, but we must point out that it has followed an increase in the money available to the BTA for marketing Bermuda. Since 2014, we have called for increased investment in tourism marketing and we hope that this uptick in tourism will be sustained via continued investment in tourism marketing.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is wrong to suggest that investor confidence has returned and that it explains whatever hotel development is underway or on the horizon. The fact is that every hotel development is underwritten either by significant concessions to the prejudice of the public purse or supported by mammoth government guarantees which have been frowned upon by the Fiscal Responsibility Panel. Investors are taking little to no risk in this area and the people of Bermuda have assumed it in their place. This is a false economy which has not yet been accompanied by the rapid product development and the change we need to see to protect the public from the risks assumed in their name.

Mr. Speaker, there are positive signs in the growth of tourism. In fact, the measurement of all things related to tourism is based on how they compare with 2008 when the Progressive Labour Party achieved the last upward trends in visitor arrivals. There are also lessons in the trends we are seeing. The lessons are that travellers today are younger, more interested in experiences, less interested in being told what they can and cannot do and want a destination to provide not just a reputation but a memory. Bermuda can be that place, but we must develop a product that is attractive to this discerning traveller and have a marketing strategy that reaches demographics we used to spurn and pre-determine were not for Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker, much has been made of the return of cruise ships to St. George's and we share the hope that this signals to the East End. This modification to the cruise ship policy for Bermuda, however, cannot rest on its own laurels. Two important things must be done to make this return of ships sustainable and beneficial to the East End. Firstly, St. George's must demand the support of the government for a makeover. The Towne must be given the tools to improve its product offerings for the next wave of travellers these ships will bring. Secondly, the long-awaited marina must be brought to fruition as the real future of the Towne lies in its ability to service and welcome back yachts of all varieties.

Mr. Speaker, airlift is important to the growth of tourism but it must be airlift that we can afford. Flights secured by minimum revenue guarantees are part of tourism development but our marketing must make these arrangements short-lived so that flights will stand on their own and our airline partners will not look for Minimum Revenue Guarantees to support our aims in tourism development. It is time to target aggressively the price locks on some of our key gateway cities served by a single carrier, which put a Bermuda vacation out of the value considerations of some travellers who want to visit our shores.

Comprehensive Immigration Reform

Mr Speaker, throughout our history immigration laws and policies have been mired in the combustible mix of race, politics and class. They have divided our community, created distinct benefits for some and resulted in the marginalisation of others. Only this year the One Bermuda Alliance attempted a radical and dramatic change to the law, which, were it not for the mobilisation of thousands of residents, would have been law today. Any unilateral approach to immigration reform must be avoided — such reform must be collaborative and it must be comprehensive.

The next PLP government will undertake comprehensive and bipartisan immigration reform and will do so under the following clear principles:

- Bermudians must come first in their country.
- Policies will be developed through dialogue with the business community to ensure immigration policy and developing our economy move in tandem.
- We will have clear policies to protect vulnerable guest workers from employer abuse and to sanction abusing employers.
- Policies must recognise that the needs of local business are separate and distinct from the needs of international business.

Mr. Speaker, you will note that I said when the PLP are returned to government we will involve the OBA in immigration reform. This is necessary because true leadership puts the needs of the country above narrow political self-interest. A stable system of labour regulation is key to the PLP's growth agenda, and for it to be successful, it must be supported by both parties. Why is it important for us to work together on this issue? International investors need to know that they have a stable platform on which to base their investment decisions. Currently, immigration policy can change from government to government; and we will not attract the long-term investment that we need if potential investors feel that the rules may change after an election. That is why it is important for both parties to support a common approach that we can present to the international investment community.

Healing our Social Fabric

Mr. Speaker, even before the recession Bermuda had a host of social problems. However, since the recession our social problems have only become worse. This is a natural symptom of economic malaise, where you have increased crimes of opportunity, increased homelessness and increased despair. As a country, we must tackle these challenges and the government has an important role to play overall.

Dealing with the Root Cause of Violence

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda continues to suffer the impact of an ongoing conflict between groups of young men which manifests itself in murder, most often by a bullet. Mr Speaker, these young men live in your constituency and mine. They are our cousins, our godsons, our nephews, our neighbours and, in some cases, our sons. Gun violence affects everyone. It affects the quality of life, it impacts the budgets for national security, it reduces the attractiveness for Bermuda as a tourism and business destination and, most of all, it impacts the countless families who have lost young men to the ongoing violence.

Mr. Speaker, this violence will not be ended by increased enforcement or tougher penalties. It will not be stopped by bans on tinted visors or shutting down bars earlier. We can triple the number of surveillance cameras in the country but it still will not stop the violence from taking place. We must have the courage to deal with the root causes of this violence or it will only get worse.

As I have said many times before in this chamber, black males are not genetically predisposed to murder. Given that we are not genetically more likely to kill each other than our white counterparts, we must accept that there are societal factors at play. Mr. Speaker, for far too long young black males in our society have been marginalised, and what we are witnessing is the effect of that marginalisation.

This violence is the symptom, not the cause, and we must address the root causes, which are difficult for many persons to come to terms with. Until we as a country understand and take the required action to heal the root causes of poverty, education, lack of opportunity and structural racism, the violence will continue and may likely escalate.

Many of our young males exist in a place where they have little hope. They do not have hope because Government and society has not provided them with a proper chance in life; in education, in opportunity and in community support. Often the only way for them to eat and sleep with a roof over their head is life on the streets. Mr. Speaker, I say this not to excuse crime, but to state that it seems, by the actions of our leaders that we value them less than others. If our actions in government do not value their lives, how can we expect them to value their own? The truth is that we as a country have, in many instances, failed our young black men, and we must do better.

Mr. Speaker, the bold education reforms that we have proposed are a step in the right direction but they deal with the future. What about the young men who are too old for school or the young men who are already caught up in the conflict? If we as a country are not prepared to address the ongoing effects of systemic racism and discrimination in our country, we will not heal these wounds. This is why the next PLP government will be committed to ensuring that young men on the street have options and places to go if they want to educate themselves or use their entrepreneurial talents to start a small business. However, education matters little if there are no jobs to be had, and that is why not only do we need to get our economy creating jobs, but we need to be sure that our young black men have the skills to succeed.

Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will implement the Job Corps programme to harness and enhance the talent and skills of our young men to prepare them for success. We will also tackle systemic racism and discrimination with the following actions:

- Strengthen Bermuda's anti-discrimination laws to create real, tough consequences for discrimination.
- Strengthen the powers of the Human Rights Commission to investigate and penalise businesses that discriminate against Bermudians.
- Introduce Equality Impact Assessments as a component of our legislative and policy development process to ensure that current and future laws or policies do not expand or encourage discrimination.

Tackling the Scourge of Addiction

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda has a problem with substance abuse and addiction, and seemingly more and more persons are falling victim to the disease of addiction. We must do a better job of providing assistance for those who wish to break the grip of addiction and manage their disease.

The next PLP government will re-evaluate the services available to persons who may be struggling with drug addiction and/or alcohol abuse. We will also provide dual diagnosis services for those persons who are affected both by drug addiction and/or alcohol abuse and by mental illness in prison and residential treatment.

Financial Assistance Reform

Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will reform financial assistance to reflect the needs of today's families in need, preserve dignity, minimise abuse, create a pathway away from assistance and get tough with individuals who abuse the system. The current structure of financial assistance does not incentivise able-bodied persons to work, as all money earned is automatically deducted from a person's award. A simple principle should apply, that someone receiving financial assistance should be better off in work. This minor change will provide added incentives for recipients to take part-time work as their income will increase.

Our reform will also separate able-bodied persons from disabled-bodied persons and track each individual programme and budget separately. Additionally, we will include a person with a disability on the Financial Assistance Review Board to ensure diverse representation.

Supporting our Youth, Seniors and Families

Mr Speaker, the PLP believe that we must make a sincere commitment to fulfil the needs of our youth, seniors and families. Children and seniors are the most vulnerable of our society and we must do all we can to protect and support them.

Reducing Child Poverty

Mr. Speaker, in September 2015 the United Nations adopted 17 Sustainable Development Goals. The first goal is “no poverty” — to end poverty in all its forms everywhere.

After many years of economic challenge, it is no secret that poverty and inequality have become more prevalent, more obvious and more problematic. Poverty cannot be overcome easily or overnight. However, as a country we must commit ourselves to the challenge.

Mr. Speaker, a PLP government would take the first steps towards tackling poverty with the introduction of a Child Poverty Act. Such an Act will set targets relating to the elimination of child poverty, through measurement of poverty in Bermuda and setting out a Child Poverty Strategy.

It is unfair that children should bear the burden of our economic challenges. It is a fact that growing up in poverty — relative or absolute — has detrimental impacts in terms of educational attainment, health, social and family life and future opportunity. We know that there are no silver bullets and that we must address parental employment and skills, financial support, childcare and educational opportunity, health, housing and neighbourhood conditions. However, given the better outcomes for society that come from eliminating child poverty, it is a worthy goal for the next PLP government to pursue.

Extending Maternity and Paternity Benefits

Mr. Speaker, in 2000 the PLP created the Employment Act which for the first time guaranteed all mothers eight weeks of paid maternity leave. Sixteen years later it is time to re-examine what we have done and look to extend that leave to 13 paid weeks, while also making allowances for paternity leave. The next PLP government will consult widely on this proposal; however, we will ensure that the duration of paid leave is extended so that mothers and fathers will have more time to bond with new additions to their families.

Decriminalisation of Cannabis

Mr. Speaker, this year, for the first time since 2013, the OBA has again raised the issue of decriminalisation of cannabis in their Throne Speech. A cynical person would say that this is just an election ploy, but for the OBA this issue represents yet another campaign promise unfulfilled and an example of a government unwilling or unable to deal with an issue that affects the youth of this country.

Mr. Speaker, this is also an issue of fairness as black people in our society are far more likely than whites to be arrested, charged and convicted for cannabis possession. The criminalisation of our citizens for minor, non-violent possession is an open sore on our society, damaging the lives of hundreds of Bermudians, young and old.

Mr. Speaker, it is upsetting to hear the stories on the doorstep of the young father who cannot go away to see his child play in a sporting tournament due to a conviction for simple possession many years ago. Many have been obstructed from years of real opportunity to improve their lives and those of their families. The Government again this year called for more consultation while their continued inaction will see more young lives impacted forever.

Mr. Speaker, the OBA has had time to lead on this issue and they have failed. Therefore, the PLP will table a bill to remove criminal penalties for simple cannabis possession below a prescribed amount.

Caring for our Seniors

Mr. Speaker, earlier this year our pensioners were treated to the first cost of living increase in five years! That increase, though I am sure it was welcome, did not keep up with the rate of inflation, which means our seniors are worse off than they were five years ago. To ensure that our seniors do not fall further behind, the next PLP government will institute annual cost of living increases for social insurance that will be indexed to the rate of inflation.

And Mr. Speaker, while I have the attention of this Honourable House, I call on the OBA to resolve the patient elevator issues at the Sylvia Richardson Care Facility which are negatively impacting the quality of life for residents and have loved ones concerned about the safety of their relatives at that facility.

Innovative Solutions to Make Bermuda Better

Mr. Speaker, there are many other issues that the next PLP government will address. These range from building the green economy and protecting our environment, to assistance for students, both here and abroad, to innovative planning reform.

Create A Fair Government Travel Expenditure Plan that Gives Back to Students

Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will require all travel booked with public funds to be recorded under a business frequent flyer plan in the name of the Government of Bermuda. The benefits accumulated from this travel will be used to assist students who are recipients of training awards to defray costs for their travel and to help other citizens in need.

Work With Bermuda College to Make Government More Efficient

The next PLP government will collaborate with the Bermuda College to promote local application development skills by having students design, maintain and enhance mobile apps that make government better and more efficient. This practical work will provide real-world experience to our students, will make government services more convenient, and will benefit the college as the applications developed could be licensed to other governments worldwide. The apps developed will help the government relay information to its citizens and allow residents to communicate issues to the government.

Creation of a New Type of Dwelling Unit to Stimulate Construction

Mr. Speaker, to stimulate construction demand and provide homeowners with additional income, the next PLP government will create a new category of dwelling unit. These new units will have assessment numbers, but will be restricted from having a private car registered at the address. These new units can be restricted to one-bedroom or studio units with all standard planning requirements except for the need to provide additional space for car parking. Many homeowners have space to create an additional unit but are unable to create additional parking spaces. This new type of unit would be ideal for young people just leaving home, students returning to Bermuda wanting their own space or guest workers who are not interested in

purchasing a car. This new type of unit can provide additional income for homeowners with smaller properties who previously were unable to create a rental unit.

More Work for Public Service Vehicles

Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will reduce the competition for tourism dollars between the government and public service vehicles. The first step to accomplishing this goal will be to reduce the current use of public buses whose sole purpose is to take visitors on sightseeing tours. This reallocation of equipment would not only provide consistent service on all the islands buses routes, it is anticipated that this change would increase the earning potential for the many entrepreneurs that are public service vehicles owners and operators.

Protecting our Environment

Mr. Speaker, our environment is a precious resource and we must be sure that we do all we can to protect it. The next PLP government will introduce a charge on single-use plastic bags. Other jurisdictions have implemented this charge and it has successfully reduced the number of plastic bags entering the environment, and particularly the marine environment, where they pose a threat to marine life.

In keeping with our pledges made in Vision 2025, the next PLP government will establish a mandatory recycling programme, which will result in economic benefits for the island. Additionally, we will produce a Green Paper on a Beverage Container Deposit system.

Investing in the Green Economy

Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will place shifting Bermuda to a low carbon economy as central to our administration. One of our first steps will be a new Green Paper on Energy to build on the foundational work of the 2011 Energy White Paper. Not only does Bermuda have a moral obligation to reduce our carbon footprint, but it makes sense from both an economic and national security perspective to lessen our dependence on fossil fuel imports and retain hard currency within the Bermuda economy. A PLP government will make sure energy equality is at the forefront of this initiative, assisting those on fixed incomes to reduce their energy costs through supporting reduced interest loans for installing energy-efficient technologies and solar panels for energy production.

The next PLP government will take the lead in investing in the Green Economy, by outfitting government buildings with renewable energy generation technologies, enabling the government to become a net producer of energy, thus saving it \$20 million annually. The PLP will also convert the government's fleet of light vehicles to hybrid and electric vehicles.

The OBA's Airport Privatisation will Cost us More than Building it Ourselves

Mr. Speaker, in March 2014, the Shadow Minister for Transport brought a motion to this Honourable House which called for the creation of an Airport Authority. During that debate, he described what the PLP's approach would have been to redeveloping the airport, an approach that would save the taxpayer millions when compared with the reckless path the OBA has chosen. Earlier today, the OBA tabled a bill to create an Airport Authority and also a bill granting tax concessions to a Canadian company that was awarded a no-bid contract worth over a billion dollars in contravention of financial instructions.

Mr. Speaker, the Government and the OBA have spent thousands of dollars trying to convince the people of this country that the privatisation of our airport is the right thing for Bermuda. The irony is not lost on me that the party led by the Honourable Premier Michael Dunkley, who pledged in 2007 to shut down CITV, is now using that channel to play a government propaganda video regarding the airport development which is replete with false information. This continues a campaign of misinformation which started two years ago with the Minister of Finance misleading the country by stating that there was no vendor selected for the project, when Aecon was the vendor from the start — a fact that he hid from his own Accountant General.

Mr. Speaker, I could talk for hours about why this is the wrong project for Bermuda's seniors, students and taxpayers but I will just make two financial points that should make it clear why everyone in this house and in Bermuda should say no to this deal.

Mr. Speaker, my first point is that this project will negatively impact our annual budget by at least \$18 million. The OBA has created a website that says this airport project will "Free Up Money to Help Schools and Seniors" and last week in their Throne Speech they said this project would not reduce "our capacity to invest in education, safety and other social programmes". Mr. Speaker, this is a blatant falsehood! The figures provided by the Ministry of Finance to the Public Accounts Committee show that this project, which gives away all of our airport revenue to a Canadian company, will negatively impact our annual budget by \$18 Million! That \$18 million will need to be found somewhere and that means that we are either going to increase borrowing, raise taxes, or cut services; however, none of those options will mean that this project will "Free Up Money to Help Schools and Seniors" — it will do the exact opposite by draining precious resources from our treasury while our airport profits are exported to Canada.

Mr. Speaker, this project will cost the taxpayer real money, and sadly it will cost a lot more than if we were to build the exact same airport terminal ourselves. The last line of defence for the Government supporting this project is that Bermuda will be protected from cost overruns. Mr. Speaker, Bermuda markets itself as the "World's Risk Capital". It would take the Minister of Finance less than a week to get a policy that would insure against the risk of overruns for this project, and I promise you it would cost less than \$18 million a year.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, a local insurance professional informed me that a policy would cost only \$2 million for the entire project!

Mr. Speaker, the second financial point shows just how great a deal this is for Aecon, which is assuming no risk as the taxpayers are guaranteeing the debt repayments. This deal will give \$34.9 million of Bermuda Government revenue to Aecon, while they only assume \$11 million in expenses annually. We will also reimburse Aecon for their electricity, meaning Aecon's gross profit in year one will be \$26.5 million! If we assume that Aecon will borrow \$255 million at the rate of 4.5%, Aecon will clear \$10.8 million in profit in year one! Mr. Speaker, if Bermuda were to build the exact same terminal but we did it ourselves, we would keep that \$10.8 million profit here in Bermuda, but the OBA thinks it is best to ship that \$10.8 million to Canada.

Mr. Speaker, the PLP does not oppose a new airport terminal. What we oppose is this deal, which raids our country's treasury while sending Bermuda's profits to Canada, when they should remain at home. We oppose this deal as it will cause us to spend extra money that we do not have, which will divert money from education, seniors and social programmes. It is a bad deal, it is the wrong approach and the Progressive Labour Party will continue to fight this deal as it is detrimental to our country's future.

Good Governance & Better Government

Mr. Speaker, the OBA's airport deal is a perfect segue into the topic of good governance. We have heard a lot about good governance lately and that is not a bad thing. The people's representatives should always strive to practise the highest standard of governance; however, that is not something that Bermuda's voters have experienced over the past four years. We remember the pre-election pledges of transparency and integrity, which were followed by JetGate, \$18 million dollars gone missing and an airport project that is in contravention of the Good Governance Act.

It is helpful to remind voters of the OBA's record, but what I want to share today is what a PLP government under my leadership will represent.

Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between good governance — which deals with integrity, following the law and zero tolerance for corruption — and a good government. The Progressive Labour Party that I lead is firmly committed to both and after the next election Bermudians will have a government that strives to practise the best habits of good government.

Mr. Speaker, good government is transparent, good government invites scrutiny, good government is humble and it is aware that we as politicians do not have all the answers. Good government is being open, answering parliamentary questions, responding to parliamentary

summons, welcoming joint select committees, inviting scrutiny and making sure that the people have confidence that their government is acting in their best interest.

Mr. Speaker, that is the good government that the PLP will give after the next election and that is the standard that people can expect. Unlike the OBA, we will implement that SAGE Commission recommendation to establish three permanent oversight committees which deal with particular Ministries. The OBA rejected this recommendation, stating that “we have enough oversight already”. Mr. Speaker, it should be clear to all that in Bermuda there is nowhere near enough oversight. Parliamentary questions once a week and a single Public Accounts Committee without a full-time staff member are not enough oversight for our government.

Mr. Speaker, people may ask why the PLP would invite additional scrutiny of their government after the election, as it is bound to cause embarrassment because governments are not perfect and will make mistakes. The reason is simple: because better scrutiny and better oversight will lead to **better results and outcomes for the people of Bermuda**. That should be every MP’s mission, to make things better for our citizens.

When ministers understand that their actions are open to question and examination, they will not rush things through and they will make sure that things are done properly. When it is clear to governments that anything they do may be exposed, the temptation to do wrong is reduced and ministers are compelled to always act in the public interest. Only those with narrow political self-interest would want to reduce the amount of scrutiny to which the government is exposed.

Democracy is meant to represent the people, and the people's representatives should have the ability to provide the oversight that leads to better outcomes. As a father of two young children, I want them to grow up in a country that has a strong, vibrant and transparent democracy.

Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will also ensure that funding is made available so that a full-time staff member can be appointed to the Public Accounts Committee. The PAC is one of the most important committees that exist inside parliament, yet it has no resources to do its work. The last few years have seen what difference a little real-time oversight can make, so imagine how much better our governance would be if that type of oversight was full time and in real time on behalf of the people of this country. We should not be content with examining actions seven years after they happen with a Commission of Inquiry. Good government requires oversight when decisions are being made and the persons making those decisions can be called to justify their actions.

Mr. Speaker, we welcome the introduction of the Bribery Act 2016. However, we do not feel it goes far enough towards improving governance. Mr. Speaker, the next PLP government will introduce legislation to regulate political campaign finances in order to ensure a level playing field and reduce the risk of corruption at a political level. We believe that the best policy ideas should win — not the political party with the biggest war chest. Far too often in the world money has been used to undermine democracy. The next PLP government sees the introduction of campaign finance laws as a long overdue safeguard for our democracy.

The next PLP government will introduce Integrity in Public Office legislation to modernise our laws surrounding the buying of votes, voter fraud, conflicts of interest and other aspects of our electoral and political process subject to abuse by those who would seek to use wealth, influence or intimidation to obtain political or economic power.

The next PLP government will enact legislation that allows Bermudians to initiate referenda.

Mr. Speaker, the people of this country want a government that represents their interests. The best way to accomplish that is by ensuring transparency in office, and that is what a PLP government under my leadership will provide to the Bermudian people.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, the PLP has a commitment to fiscal prudence, a Bermuda where Bermudians come first, protection of the vulnerable and diversifying the economy. These are values that many Bermudians share. To paraphrase Jesse Jackson, whether we came over on the Sea Venture or on a slave ship, we are all in the same boat now.

Throughout our history it has been the PLP that has fought for the other Bermuda — the poor, the vulnerable and the disenfranchised.

To the unemployed, the underemployed and those who are losing hope: the PLP will welcome you, embrace you regardless of race, country of origin or sexual orientation and alongside you we will fight for a fairer, more inclusive Bermuda that works for Bermudians.

To the youth who believe that politics is politricks and that politicians are only in it for themselves: we hear you, we understand and we need you. Through our actions, not simply our words, we will demonstrate our commitment to your success.

To our seniors: we are listening and understand the pain you are feeling and the loss of dignity that so many of you have endured. We need your wisdom, your experience and your strength to be a part of this new movement for change.

To the disgruntled, disenchanted and disillusioned OBA supporter: there is a place for you here with us in the PLP. Together we can break the pattern of broken political promises and build the Bermuda and the “better way” that you envisioned in 2012 but that the OBA has failed to deliver.

As former Premier Alex Scott said, “Bermuda works best when we work together.”

It is my hope that the change Bermuda is seeking can begin in this chamber, today in this debate.

Let us refrain from boasting of prosperity that only touches the few while so many are going without. Let us refrain from mindlessly mouthing platitudes, rhetoric and slogans. Let us refrain from arguments that amount to little more than “it’s ok to do wrong because you did it too”. Let us strive for a level of debate more reflective of adults than of unruly school children. Let us put the focus where it should be — on the men and women who are counting on us to lead the way, who live here and call this island home — and not on politics as usual.

To those who are tired of the bickering and fighting, we pledge a new phase in Bermuda politics. We must offer constructive criticism and many times we will disagree. We must not, however, be disagreeable in our disagreement but handle ourselves in a respectful manner. As recent US presidential candidate Hillary Clinton reminded the world in her television advertisements, “Our children are watching.”

The PLP is determined to make our people proud, prosperous, and free to live in peace in the Bermuda that we will create for everyone.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.