



*Delivered by Hon. Marc Bean, JP, MP
Leader of the Opposition
November 15, 2013*



Mr. Speaker,

Under the Westminster System, cooperation is neither needed, nor expected between the Government and the Opposition. Even if the opposition were to fight and oppose every bill brought forward by the Government, the system is designed to operate in a manner that usually results in the Opposition having its say, and the Government having its way. The Westminster system is by its very nature, adversarial. Yet the system has been created to serve us, as we are not created to be slaves to a system, and traditions that serve no purpose but to divide us. We believe that an opposition can and should provide moral support to the government, offer amendments to improve solid government ideas, and when necessary, be the government's conscience and the voice of those who have no voice.

In the past year, we have shown that we are willing to provide moral support to the government when their ideas have merit, and, where we agree with them that they will do more good than harm to our people. This isn't just words; the PLP supported an overwhelming majority of the bills the OBA brought to Parliament during the last session.

In the past year, the PLP have shown that we are willing to provide the insight of our experience, the wisdom of our hard learned lessons, and the spirit of cooperation, by offering amendments to government bills that would help better achieve the purpose intended; that of benefitting Bermudians. We have freely brought forward ideas for Bermudians to consider and the government to act upon without fear or favour. Our ideas and suggestions are intended to benefit Bermudians, no matter who puts them in place, or when.

To that end the Progressive Labour Party believes that we can support the Government's proposals to:

- Expand the Career Pathways Programme
- Provide funding to Focus Counselling and The Family Centre to help families in need and to support short term job opportunities
- Have a gaming referendum in the first quarter of 2014
- End Conscription and modernize the legal and disciplinary system for the Bermuda Regiment
- Strengthen Food Security
- Fully implement the Cash Back to Communities Program
- Revisions to The Criminal Code to ensure that sentences laid down in Bermuda aren't watered down in the UK
- Modernization of the Proceeds of Crime Act
- Introduce Co-Parenting Orders
- Introduce absentee balloting and extend the days for the advance poll
- Introduce a Vulnerable Persons Act and the strengthen the Senior Abuse Register Act 2008
- Mandatory ID checks in bars
- Efforts to become a certified Air Navigation Service Provider

We can discuss in greater detail and work with the government on ways to:

- Strengthen government's ability to collect outstanding debts while working to ensure that businesses are not driven out of business by this measure and that new, more positive ways to address outstanding debts are brought forward.
- Ensure that their proposed Office of the Contractor General is not just a rebrand of the Office of Procurement already in existence, and operating to oversee government projects from tendering to completion, and ensure that rules, guidelines and policies are strictly enforced.
- Ensure that the giving of up to 20% of government spending on goods and services to small businesses does not represent a substantial reduction in the much higher percentage of government goods and services provided under the PLP government.
- Ensure that in the review of labour laws to consolidate and modernize the legislative framework that the hard-fought for protection for the rights of workers, is neither eroded nor torn away.
- Ensure that as we allow the sale of wine and spirits on Sundays, that we manage the accompanying potential negative social impact
- Ensure that the amendments to The Bermuda Health Council Act 2004 and the Public Health Act 1949 address rising health care costs as intended, and does not, through deliberately or otherwise, target Bermudian businesses that employ Bermudians and contribute to the well being of our community

Mr. Speaker,

The role of the opposition is to offer critical analysis of the government and hold them accountable. We are the check and counterbalance to raw, unbridled power. Without a strong opposition, governments have a tendency to drift into self-indulgence, and to acquire and act upon dictator-like tendencies. The Opposition is the first line of defense against a government that seeks to stifle voices of criticism...that uses intimidation tactics in an effort to create fear in their opponents...that has direct influence or control over key aspects of the media, while ducking and suppressing issues or legitimate questions from other media, and who operates with the silent, unquestioning assent of their supporters.

The OBA's Throne Speech should have given Bermudians:

- A real plan to get Bermudians back to work
- A real plan to stimulate growth
- A real pathway for Bermudians to upgrade their skills, enhance their competitiveness and strengthen their marketability in our local job market
- A real plan to confront the deepening cost of living crisis that is driving more and more of our people into debt, poverty and despair
- Real Ideas on diversifying our economy
- Real solutions for increasing government revenue

Instead, we get plans that benefit one Bermuda now, while everyone else has to wait and hope for the best.

“Be patient” the OBA says. “The trickle down is coming” the OBA says. Yet our people know the truth. After nearly a year of inaction, a year without a plan, a year without strong, purposeful leadership, the OBA have shown each of us who they truly are... a party devoid of ideas, devoid of a plan, and devoid of a commitment to Bermudians. Instead of fighting for Bermudians, our people saw an OBA that:

- Broke promise after promise with no apology, no remorse and no conscience.
- Tried to give the right to work to the children of foreign workers over our own children.
- Insulted Bermudians with the slurs of “Kool Aid drinkers” and “xenophobic”.

Our people saw an OBA that put everyone else first and Bermudians last. Our people saw an OBA that couldn't keep a promise or keep a story straight from one day to the next. Our people saw an OBA that gave away work permits, tax breaks for businesses, and jobs for OBA insiders like Halloween candy, while cutting civil servant pay and slashing programs.

Mr. Speaker,

From this observation, what does the OBA offer in their second Throne Speech to give hope for Bermudians still waiting for the trickle down, and still waiting for an OBA jobs plan? A cynical plea for Bermudians to be patient, while the OBA busily schemes to give away status to thousands of non-Bermudians, and further push our people to the economic and political sidelines. Our elders have seen this before, so they can be forgiven when thinking that the OBA is actually the UBP, and that “a leopard cannot change its spots”. The attempt to grant status is modern day wickedness against one's own people of the highest order, and no amount of vile, deceptive propaganda, no amount of coordinated public relations via surrogates who claim to be non partial and pro Bermudian, will be able to justify these activities. The PLP will not allow it. It is a red line that will not be crossed, lest the forgetful and arrogant be brought into remembrance of the modern political history of this country, and the lessons that should have been learned at that time. This is not a threat, but it must be accepted as a serious warning. The PLP will not stand by and watch persons with minimum ties to Bermuda, use our current economic realities as a pretext to offer status to persons who can have status elsewhere by virtue of their parents, yet Bermudians will once again be reduced to POLITICAL second class citizens. Yes, Mr. Speaker, as our elders know, this move has nothing to do with economics, and everything to do with the political sorcery of solidifying one's power by altering Bermuda's voting base.

While they push an agenda that benefits one Bermuda and leaves everyone else behind....and relieves the burden of one Bermuda while everyone else bears the burden... elevates and embraces one Bermuda while everyone else is shoved under the bus....Bermudians are watching. After less than one year in office the people are beginning to notice the disconnect between OBA words and the reality...their actions. They have told us who they are and what they are really about, and no army of consultants and foreign political advisors can change that.

Mr. Speaker,

Today, The Bermuda Progressive Labour Party presents our vision for Bermudians and the island that we love. At a time when many of our people feel as Bermuda isn't working for them...that they are being left behind, marginalized, displaced, and disadvantaged in our own country, we believe in a vision that places Bermudians at the centre, and not as bystanders. To us, it is only right and just that Bermudians come first in our vision, first in our plans, and be the first to benefit from all that Bermuda has to offer. Now is not the time to go wherever the winds of fate blow us. Now is the time that Bermudians become masters of our own destiny.

Mr. Speaker,

Today, we will build on our vision of a Bermuda where we no longer have two paths; one inevitably leading towards poverty and failure and another irrevocably leading towards wealth and success... A vision of a Bermuda where Bermudians no longer have to rely on who we know more than what we know, to earn opportunities, provide for our families and build wealth....A vision of a Bermuda where Bermudians no longer have to just get by, while everyone else gets ahead.

To achieve this, we will all need to free up.....free up from our preconceived notions..... free up from the beliefs and the attitudes that are holding us back, and free up from some of the restrictions and old thinking that no longer has any benefit for our people.

Mr. Speaker,

It is evident that in the words of Lord Tennyson, "The old order changeth yielding place to a new." The twin pillars of our economy through global conditions, a changing global market, and our collective lack of foresight and vision, have become stagnant, and no longer yield the bountiful harvest that it used to yield. We could, as some suggest, continue to do as we have done for decades and watch our crops shrink, wither, and die, or we can face reality. The reality is that the international business model has changed, demanding fewer and more highly skilled staff. The days of thousands of actuaries, accountants, and executives flooding our shores, renting our apartments, buying our products, and riding in our cabs, is unlikely to return and certainly not in the numbers we experienced during Bermuda's boom years.

The reality is that our tourism product, once the industry leader and the envy of all, has become tired, stale, stagnant, and with little relevance to the needs and demands of the 21st Century traveler. The days when a slick Madison Avenue ad campaign could inspire the imagination of a wealthy New Yorker or a New England professional are over. We have clung to the old ways of doing things, we have been uncomfortable with progress and change, and we have foolishly believed that the good times would never end.

Mr. Speaker,

True leadership understands that before we can fight a problem we first must face it. Bermudians are beginning to face a harsh reality that many of our leaders have not; that government cannot create jobs for us, and with every day that passes, is less able to feed us or keep a roof over our heads. Bermudians are beginning to face a harsh reality that the business community, both local and global, is no longer able to give us the opportunities and job security we once knew.

Bermudians are facing a harsh reality that crony, oligarchial, so-called capitalism, is rolling back the long fought for beliefs such as a fair days pay for a fair days work, and that their promises mean nothing. This newly re-arisen oligarchal spirit is also destroying the confidence of our international partners and observers, and stifling new business investment.

The 2012 Labour Force Survey revealed that a 1/4 of our Bermudian workforce was unemployed or underemployed, with our Bermudian women being the worst hit in terms of salary and job losses. In the 12 months since the Labour Force Survey was released, each of us are painfully aware that those numbers have worsened significantly. Bermudians don't need patience. Bermudians don't need poll tested slogans or disingenuous words of understanding. Bermudians need JOBS

Mr. Speaker,

To create conditions for Job Creation we propose:

- *Implementation of the Infrastructure Development Strategy, to identify much needed improvements or repairs to our infrastructure. This will not only enhance our overall quality of life, but create business opportunities for construction companies and lead to jobs and short term relief for Bermudian construction workers.*
- *Moving immediately on a referendum for gaming; allowing our people to have their say and to eliminate investor uncertainty in our tourism industry. The framework to execute this has been in place since December 2012 and a year has been wasted...a year where jobs could have began to be created, a year when our tourism industry could have been revitalized and a year where for no reason our people were forced to wait when action was needed.*
- *Designating a segment of BLDC land as an "Economic FREE Zone." Targeting global businesses such as high value physical commodity trading and satellite operations, with incentives such as payroll and other tax exemptions.*
- *Doubling existing special relief provisions in the tax codes to be applied exclusively to Bermudian employees*

These proposals will directly create conditions that will aid job creation within the private sector and equally as important, generate revenue for the public purse that will help offset our deficit, and reduce our debt.

We further propose measure to keep our seasonal hospitality workers employed by:

- **Ratifying agreements with our Caricom partners to allow the reciprocal free movement of labour during our opposite high seasons in tourism. This would give Bermudians the opportunity to work and gain international experience during our off season and allow employers to more easily fill posts where there are no qualified Bermudians with qualified capable hospitality workers from the Caribbean.**

Mr. Speaker,

It is critical that Bermuda diversifies its economy as we seek to modernize our services and products for our existing pillars of our economy. A diverse economy means more jobs for Bermudians, more opportunities for service providers, more opportunities to attract foreign dollars, and a move away from our current one and a half legged economic structure, to a more stable and diverse economy that benefits all of us.

Under the PLP's Plan to diversify our economy, we would:

- ***Develop our Exclusive Economic Zone for Sea-Bed mining, Aquaculture, and Off-Shore Fishing, to create new jobs, diversify our economy, and create new revenue streams. The Bermuda Progressive Labour Party does not support bowing to non-Bermudian globalised interests, deliberately throwing away a means to get our people back to work, trashing a revenue stream to reduce our debt, and wasting an opportunity to strengthen our economy***
- ***Freeing up regulations to allow greater foreign investment in the Bermudian marketplace with a particular emphasis on creating greater competition in the insurance, fund management, wealth management, telecommunications, information and technological/Ecommerce, and legal services***
- ***Freeing up regulations to attract foreign investment and expand competition in the local banking sector, put an end to predatory banking practices, enable capital be freed up for the private sector, and stimulate our economy***
- ***Freeing up restrictions to attract a wider, more global and more diverse legal sector. Local branches of international law firms would not only provide employment opportunities for Bermudians, but would also provide more people selling and marketing Bermuda to their clients around the world.***
- ***Leverage our Telecommunications reform and IB infrastructure to introduce global online gaming legislation, currently a 35 billion dollar per year industry***
- ***Establish Bermuda as a Global Innovation Incubator***
- ***Expand airlift with a focus on Europe, The Caribbean, The GCC Region, The Azores and Latin America.***
- ***Develop a cruise ship port in the town of St. Georges in conjunction with major cruise lines***

Mr. Speaker,

Our people are our greatest resource. Yet as we are today, many of us are in danger of becoming obsolete...of no use to the private sector, no use to our society and no use to Bermuda. We must become more productive and more competitive in order to be full participants in, and contributors to, the global economy. As educated or as skilled as you may be, the degrees you have earned will not be worth the paper it is printed on if it doesn't provide you with skills that are marketable TODAY. Our investment in education, job training, and workforce development must reflect the needs of our economy, both local and global, as it is and will be in the future, and not in fulfillment of the needs of the past. If our people are our greatest resource, than we should invest in those who have the will, but lack the means to better themselves, and not stand in the way of those who seek to better themselves. Most importantly, in terms of education, our various curriculums must have as its essence, the power to impart within the minds of students, the ability to THINK, in a rational, yet critical manner. Easier said than done, yet it is crucial to our success and wellbeing.

The PLP Proposes:

- ***Developing The Bermuda College initially into a University College, and eventually a fully endowed University, with the introduction or enhancement of programs that allows for the acquisition of professional designations relevant to filling the needs of our economy.***
- ***Expanding opportunities for Bermudians to train for and work in IB by widening professional and continuing educational programs. As a world leader in IB, through a process of knowledge transfer, our people should be able to receive training that not only meets the standards of our industry but also gives them the skills and experience to make Bermudians more competitive in the job market.***
- ***Expanding youth apprenticeship and internship schemes.***
- ***Implementing the PLP's Job Corp Programme***
- ***Dismantling the failed Middle School System. While some may choose to blame the teachers, across the world countries are discovering the deep and inherent flaws in the Middle School System and the damage it inflicts upon our students and our societies. As it stands it is failing too many of our children and for too many it is assisting in the cultivation of conditions that strengthen and grow gangs.***
- ***Providing Principals with greater autonomy to run their schools and be assessed by the only meaningful result, student achievement.***
- ***Introducing School Councils to strengthen and enhance parental and community involvement in our schools***
- ***Supporting and expanding credible alternative educational options***
- ***Lowering the school entrance age to 4 years old to enable our young people to get a head start on their schooling.***
- ***Supporting the professional development of teachers and their licensing requirements with the creation of an education faculty at an upgraded Bermuda College/University College of Bermuda.***
- ***Investing in Science, Technology Engineering and Math or STEM Learning, in recognition of the growing need for highly specialized technical skills and enabling Bermudians to not only compete for jobs with their global counterparts in the 21st century workplace but to also potentially become entrepreneurs and job creators for others***
- ***Working in concert with our USA and Canadian partners to lengthen existing Technical Training Visas available upon completion of tertiary education in those countries. This would give Bermudians the opportunity to obtain greater global experience and making them more competitive in the local job market***
- ***Offering increased opportunities for scholarships across all sectors***
- ***Work with our partners at The University of The West Indies and other regional learning centers to create quality, affordable options for international studies by Bermudians***

Mr. Speaker,

Bermudians who have educated and trained themselves to compete in our local job market certainly cannot be guaranteed a job, but we have an obligation to them that they have a fair, unbiased and equal opportunity to compete for a job...fair, unbiased and equal treatment at their workplace, and a fair wage or salary for a fair day's work.

The Bermuda Progressive Labour Party proposes:

- ***Requiring all businesses to advertise the salary range for advertised posts to minimize opportunities for wage disparities based on race, gender or sexual orientation. Government already employs this practice in advertising vacant civil service posts and the private sector should also***
- ***Introducing tougher penalties on businesses that are found in violation of the Human Rights Act, including a provision to name and shame individuals and companies that violate the act***

We further propose increasing penalties for Immigration and work permit violations. A fine of \$5,000 per penalty is no real deterrent to vulture-like businesspersons more interested in profits than Bermudian job creation, and are determined to exploit cheap foreign labour. To many, the risk of getting caught is low and the profits pocketed too high to view a \$5,000 fine as nothing more than a potential cost of doing business. Penalties must reflect this reality, act as a real deterrent, and give a real, short, sharp shock to these criminals. In this regard, our position is:

- ***Banning companies/principals found guilty of abusing immigration laws from applying for/receiving new work permits for a period of no less than 3 years.***
- ***Increasing the number of Immigration Enforcement Officers. This will not only aid in protecting our borders and prevent people from stealing jobs from Bermudians; it will also create employment opportunities for Bermudians. If we care about protecting jobs for Bermudians, we would find the money to ensure that Bermudian jobs are protected***
- ***Strengthening laws and policies to protect domestic workers. These are among the most vulnerable of our workforce: they work in isolation, often face intimidation, often face language barriers and are not unionized. Knowing the entrenched class and race based attitudes in this country, for many domestic workers, it must be akin to living in the depths of Hades. We propose to institute a series of random checks on such employees to ensure their working conditions conform to the law, and penalize those employers who contravene the law.***

Mr. Speaker,

There are thousands of Bermudians who work full time, every day to feed their families, and still they live in poverty. There are thousands of Bermudians who through no fault of their own are out of work and facing mounting bills, being evicted from their homes, and a daily fight against hunger. We believe that government has an obligation to help those who are unable to help themselves and that they should not be a partner to increasing the pain and suffering of our people. We propose;

- ***A 2 Year Freeze on all government fees or taxes that contribute to the high cost of electricity in Bermuda***
- ***Duty Relief on the importation of food to drive down food prices and further provide relief to our people, not just one day a week, but every day of the week***
- ***Ending the long standing practice of jailing of Bermudians for debt***
- ***Regulating of The Debt Collection Process to expand fairness and eliminate exploitation***
- ***Work with our local banking institutions on solutions to keep struggling Bermudians in their homes***

- ***Instituting Human Rights Protection for our Seniors in the Workplace. This is to prevent them from being forced to stop working while they still have much to offer and contribute to the workplace, and while many have become the de-facto breadwinners for their job-seeking children and grandchildren***

In these times, Bermudians who have always worked, always paid their way, and have always made their contribution to Bermuda, are for the first time forced to turn to Financial Assistance to help feed their families and keep a roof over their heads. They are not deadbeats, they are not shiftless and they are not lazy. They are victims of a global economy that has devastated communities across the globe. They have always paid their way and now that they can't, despite their best efforts. We have an obligation to help our fellow Bermudians, and not kick them when they are down.

The best form of assistance is a job, but in the absence of a job, we must ensure that those on Financial Assistance are neither looked upon with scorn and derision, nor victimized by a system that they have helped to pay for through their tax dollars.

After much consideration, the PLP proposes for the duration of this economic crisis:

- ***Examining the requirement to submit weekly Job Search Forms by persons receiving unemployment assistance. This made sense when Bermuda had over employment, but today it isn't that people aren't looking for jobs, they simply aren't out there.***
- ***Removing the requirement that families on Financial Assistance have to sell their car as a condition of eligibility. With many jobs requiring that their employees own their own vehicle and many people seeking employment, or hustles at unsociable hours, or in areas with limited access via public transportation, a car isn't a luxury. For many it is a necessity.***
- ***Examining options for families with able-bodied unemployed sons and daughters above the age of 18. The current policy made sense in a booming economy, when we were dealing with some members of our society sponging off the public purse and their parents. In an economy where there are few jobs, breaking up families and punishing families for helping each other makes no sense, and will only exacerbate worsening social condition***
- ***Examining the current salary requirement for Free Child Daycare Allowance***
- ***Increasing the penalties for Financial Assistance fraud. In this economy, those who seek to steal benefits from their truly needy countrymen are worthy of scorn, derision and the highest penalties applicable under the law.***

Mr. Speaker,

The Bible teaches us that "Babylon the Great has fallen....Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins, so that you will not receive any of her plagues." If we continue to cling to the old ways of doing things, our old false hopes, our old dying dreams, our old weaknesses, and our old dependencies, we will be dragged down into the depths of deeper poverty and deeper despair. For generations, we have sniffed behind others begging for a place at the table, smiling when we weren't happy, laughing when it wasn't funny, and degrading ourselves for a place at the base of the table amongst a few crumbs on the ground. Now that there are no more crumbs to fall and the trickle down has trickled away, the time has come for us to look into ourselves, to unite, cooperate, pool our resources, create our own businesses, provide our own services, employ our own people, and compete for our own share of the economic pie. YOU must become job creators for yourselves. The time has come when you must beg no man. You must get up and do it for yourself.

Mr. Speaker,

In order to survive, everyone must eat, yet how many of us know how to farm and how much of our farm land sits vacant and unused. All of us wear clothes yet how many of us can design, create, mend or sell them to people? Today, more and more Bermudians are embracing a mindset of entrepreneurship, self-sufficiency, and wealth accumulation. We have no choice in the matter. This is not something to be afraid of. This is not something to be fought or undermined. This is something that must be embraced and supported. And if you cannot support it, do not interfere with it, especially, those institutions that play an integral role in facilitating new business, namely our banks. Applying various forms of discrimination towards Bermudians entrepreneurs not only will cause those persons undue hardship, but will also increase the tension in our community, thus bringing added risk to all of us, including the bankers and others, who practice such wicked discrimination. We can come together as a people. We can have better social relations, and we can have an economy that works for all of us. The work must begin, within ourselves.

Government can help by removing impediments to entrepreneurship. We must cut the red tape and roll out the red carpet for BERMUDIAN businesses so that we can begin creating jobs and putting our people back to work.

We propose an **Incentive for Bermudian Job Maker's Strategy** that includes:

- ***Increasing the lending capacity of the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, allowing new small business owners with credible business plans, access to more capital, both debt and equity***
- ***A tax and duty holiday for new startups and single owner entrepreneurs for 2 years. For any business, the first 2 years are the most critical. For Bermudians who have taken the bold step towards becoming entrepreneurs, we must encourage and reward their efforts by giving them every opportunity to succeed.***
- ***Examining all fees and tariffs related to establishing a new small business***
- ***Identifying and relaxing restrictive policies that inhibit entrepreneurship and creativity.***
- ***Creating incentives to encourage the development of tourist accommodations such as guest houses, to spur entrepreneurship, create options for landlords unable to rent their apartments and condos, diversify our tourism product, and create more affordable options for our visitors.***
- ***Through the concept of a "Joined-up Government", improve the coordination across Ministries to ensure the removal of secondary, layered, bureaucratic impediments.***

Removing restrictions that hinder entrepreneurship will expand opportunities for our people to cooperate, compete, contribute to our economy in a meaningful way, feed their families, and create jobs for our people. Just imagine, being able to be your own boss, the master of your own destiny, providing for your family, and enhancing our tourism product with new options for our visitors. Just imagine that we, the people, become the essence of our tourism product! To become a reality, we will have to change our mindset, and the government and other special interest groups will have to stop being an obstacle to this new form of entrepreneurship. If the government is unable or unprepared to help entrepreneurs, then they MUST refrain from impeding their dreams and efforts to provide for themselves. We have noticed the hatred and jealousy that follows persons who desire to take the risk of business ownership, and employment creation. This selfish, crab-in-a-bucket mentality must cease. In fact, if the good or service is of the right quality and the right price; we encourage you to support these new firms.

Mr. Speaker,

Not everyone seeks to employ themselves and others. To them I say, make yourself someone worthy of being hired, invest in yourself, educate yourself, and give your employer a full day's work for a full day's pay. These changes within us, as individuals and as a community, will transform Bermuda and Bermudians irrevocably for the better.

Mr. Speaker,

Conscription is a relic of the past, and is a form of intolerable forced servitude. As a 21st Century land, we can find new ways to achieve our objectives; ways that don't include forced labor and the criminalization of otherwise, law abiding citizens. This is a practice that should have been abolished long ago and remains a blight upon our notion that we are a modern and sophisticated jurisdiction that cares about Bermudians.

The PLP promised to end conscription in 2012, on the eve of our defeat. Since then there have been promises, idle chatter and more promises, but no action from those who SAY they believe that conscription should be abolished. While the talk continues, Bermudian men continue to be conscripted, continue to be fined, and continue to be incarcerated and criminalized by a society that claims our people as are our greatest resource. How long must we wait for action? Last week, the Bermuda Progressive Labour Party attempted to BEGIN the process to put an end to conscription, and we will continue to fight to see it struck from our island's laws forever.

Mr. Speaker,

A shift in the way we address cannabis use and abuse within our community must occur. Bermuda continues to criminalize people for what is essentially a health issue. This criminalizing of Bermudians has its greatest impact not on the street dealers and drug kingpins, but on those who find themselves behind bars, on the stop list, and reputations ruined for minor amounts of cannabis. Bermuda's current drug policies exacerbate lawlessness, criminalize non-violent offenders, and increase the cost of enforcement. It makes no sense to continue on this path.

Mr. Speaker,

Many people who do not use, or condone cannabis use, accept that it is not necessary to punish citizens financially or deprive them of their liberty, especially in these economic times, when the burden of all Government expenses is being stretched to our maximum capacity. It costs in excess of \$80,000.00 to house inmates in our correctional facilities, and the expense to the Government could be curtailed significantly by de-penalizing simple possession of cannabis as a first step. Many people who do not use, or condone cannabis, accept that where an argument exists that cannabis may be useful for the treatment of disease, or alleviating pain attributed to medical complications, a doctor and not politicians, should be the most prudent to determine usage, and therefore be legally permitted to prescribe cannabis to citizens as they deem fit. The police would have additional time and resources to focus on more serious crime if the number of case files, witness statements and court attendance no longer transpired as it relates to arrests pertaining to cannabis;

The PLP proposes Cannabis Reform that can address the various options available, inclusive of

- ***Removal of penalties for simple possession of small amounts.***
- ***Introducing a Medical marijuana regime to address some of the debilitating effects of various diseases plaguing our people.***
- ***Regulating the sale and use of marijuana and ending the unnecessary criminalization of our people.***
- ***Creating a system for the government to get their share of the multi-million dollar profits generated by legalized marijuana sales, creating a new revenue stream to meet our responsibilities to our people and pay off the debt.***

Mr. Speaker,

The needs of our people are great and while we strongly oppose the notion that government is the answer to all ills, we do believe that the government has a powerful role to play in the cultivation of a strong community spirit.

To that end, we propose:

- ***Exploring the creation of a National Lottery for the specific purpose of revitalizing our community clubs as safe, positive, thriving, parts of the communities in which they operate. In return for this support, community clubs would be required to abide by strict measures for compliance, including the enforcement and reporting of illegal or anti-social behavior on their premises. If we want community clubs to be for the community, we cannot allow them to be a place where parents do not want to send their children.***
- ***Allowing community organizations and the parish councils to use vacant government properties or to assume responsibility for derelict government properties for nominal rents.***
- ***Moving forward with our proposed private-public initiative that would see members of the business community assist in renovating at least seven Workman's Clubs with an investment of approximately \$30m. This would not only provide work for potentially hundreds of Bermudians, but would also revitalize and improve the condition of the participating communities.***

Mr. Speaker,

In regards to improving our criminal justice system, it is important that justice is seen to be served. It is the primary responsibility of any Government. To that end, we encourage the OBA to:

- ***Introduce a Judicial Complaints Authority***
- ***Establish a Small Claims Court***
- ***Introduce a Sex Offenders Registry and update legislation to allow the naming and shaming of sexual offenders***
- ***Introduce a Victims Compensation Fund into which convicted prisoners would be required to contribute a portion of their earnings***
- ***Enhance and improve the Witness Protection Programme***
- ***Expand the use of Community Service Orders with Suspended Sentences***
- ***Modernize the alternatives to incarceration program with a new emphasis on restorative justice***

Mr. Speaker,

We have noted the lack of attention by the OBA in regards to Energy and the Environment. We have also taken notice of the current government's poor attempt to selectively pick bits and pieces of the National Energy White Paper, which indicates a lack of will and/or ability to tackle our Island's rising energy cost. Promises and pronouncements from various Ministers bring little comfort to residents when they receive their monthly energy bill. Quite frankly, when seeking to tackle our rising energy cost, the OBA government must recognize that BELCO shareholders are not the only stakeholders to give regard and attention towards. Like many other PLP initiatives, we implore the OBA Government to continue the excellent work commenced by our previous government by;

- ***Full implementation of the Energy White Paper***
- ***Facilitating the introduction of Natural Gas into Bermuda to drive down electricity costs***
- ***Investigating the options for eco-friendly buses and government vehicles***

Mr. Speaker,

In terms of matters on the Environment, we propose the;

- ***Creation of new, modernized policies on Dog ownership, breeding, licensing and training***
- ***Revision of the limit of the Permitted Development Application (One-Day Permit) to allow for larger or necessary structures to be included along with the ability of the Director of Planning to determine if a project outside this remit can be included.***
- ***Complete revision of the Bermuda Plan 2008, as the current plan provides more influence and power to special interest groups, at the expense of private property owners and their inherent, fundamental rights, which in turn, represents an attack on the fundamental tenets of a free and just society.***
- ***Improving the application form process and requiring more information to be documented up front, to allow for more consistent initial screening of applications in order to catch deficiencies early.***
- ***Revising the Architect Act to enforce architectural standards, improve the quality of planning submissions, and reduce application processing time***
- ***Allowing Applicants/Agents to make presentations to the DAB where the Planner and Agent disagree on the application***
- ***Streamlining the Planning objection process***

Mr. Speaker,

Critics and those with a genuine concern for the future of our people and our island home, will naturally have two questions; Why didn't you do any of these things when you were government and how will you pay for it?

To the first question our answer is simple...with new leadership comes a new vision, a new approach and new way of doing things. Having listened to the people, and been forced to take a long, hard, critical look at ourselves, we have united behind this vision and will work tirelessly to see it become a tangible reality for the people and the island that we love. Bermudians deserve nothing less.

To pay for these proposals the PLP will launch a:

- ***Revenue and Government Earnings (or RAGE) Commission –***
 - ***To review and recommend viable medium and long term opportunities to increase Bermuda's GDP.***
 - ***To examine and modernize Bermuda's existing tax model with an eye towards maximizing Government's earnings, without stifling economic growth.***

One day, the PLP will have the opportunity to deliver on this vision, free up this country, and put an end to the two Bermudas that works for some but not for all. One day, we will help lead Bermudians back where they belong; as the primary shapers and beneficiaries of our island.

Before that day comes, it is incumbent upon us to not make promises we can't deliver and speak words we don't believe. Before that day comes, there will be massive cuts to jobs, programs and benefits for Bermudians. In the absence of a plan to get Bermudians back to work, we stand to inherit a Bermuda far colder, far less compassionate, far less Bermudian, and far worse than the one we led in 2012.

We cannot promise that we will be able to roll back the civil servant job cuts, restore programs or increase benefits. We cannot promise to be all things to all people as that would be wrong, irresponsible and dishonest.

In good conscience, all that we can commit to is that we will never again sway from our commitment to put Bermudians first...to never again believe that the best ideas only come from within Alaska Hall, or come from outside our native land, and not from within the minds of our people.

Never again will we allow you to go hungry and without work, while others are elevated ahead of you. We pledge to preserve, protect and elevate Bermudians without apology, and when we are unable to do so, we pledge that we will not stand in the way of your legitimate aspirations in the country we call home.

Mr. Speaker,

Of our vision, there will be those who use our inaction on these matters over the course of our 14 year time in government, as an excuse for their lack of progress. Of our vision there will be those who focus purely on the financial costs and not the human costs. Neither austerity, nor reckless spending, but a balanced approach that puts all Bermudians at the centre, is what we advocate. All of our people need food in their stomachs, clothes on their backs, a roof over their heads, and the means by which they can provide all necessities of these for themselves and their loved ones. It is those shared human needs and a compassion for our countrymen that shapes our vision and the path we seek for every Bermudian going forward.

Our vision has its roots in the belief of Frederick Douglass that education is the path to freedom....has its roots in the teachings of Booker T. Washington who said, "*...I learned to love labor, not alone for its financial value, but for labor's own sake and for the independence and the self reliance which the ability to do something which the world wants done brings*" as he taught us the importance of acquiring practical technical skills...

Our vision has its roots in the work of the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey who said *"We are the arbiters of our own destiny. God and nature first made us what we are and then out of our own creative genius we must make ourselves what we want to be."* as he taught us that the same powers and institutions that created our mental, physical, economic and spiritual degradation, would keep us in a state of dependency and never give us the freedom, justice and equality that we seek, if perchance, we blindly follow their edicts.

Our vision has its roots in the work of the Most Honorable Elijah Muhammad who said, *"Do for self"* and taught us how to pool our resources, build our own businesses, support our own businesses and unite to compete and elevate our condition.

I call upon each of us to free up....from the self-limiting beliefs and notions that hold us back.

Free up from a mindset that seeks only to put roadblocks in the path of those seeking to do something positive.

Free up the rules and regulations that hinder our ability to compete.

Bermudians...free up, unite, work, compete and prosper as God intended you to prosper.

We were not meant to impede the success of others because of the color of their skin or where they tick their ballot at election time.

We were not meant to engage in threats and intimidation of people because they don't share our points of view or because they seek to compete in a free market society

We were not meant to pay people different wages because of where they come from or their gender.

We were not meant to hate the success and achievements of others because we lack the will, vision, and courage that they possessed to bring them their success.

We were meant to seek far greater things. We are meant to improve ourselves, work with others who share our vision, cooperate, grow stronger, compete and win.

Mr. Speaker,

Political power is transitory, and is not the be all and end all to achieve the needs of our people. The power to create opportunities for ourselves and to create jobs for Bermudians is within each of us. We begin with a simple belief. I CAN....a belief that begins with releasing ourselves from all that is holding us back, and uniting with those who share that vision.

There will always be pain and struggle, obstacles to be overcome, and problems to solve...challenges to face and barriers to knock down. We can't make that go away. Yet a people united will never suffer in pain alone, struggle alone, overcome obstacles alone, or solve our problems alone. We must be prepared to become free in a real way, and move forward together in a spirit of social cooperation and economic competition.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.