

PEACE AND PROSPERITY

OUR PLAN FOR A BETTER BERMUDA



Reply to the Throne Speech 2015

Delivered by:

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Peace & Prosperity: Our Plan for a Better Bermuda

“You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.”
Abraham Lincoln

Mr. Speaker,

We in the Progressive Labour Party are cognizant of the fact that we are called to service; not in service to a status quo of entrenched interests, nor in service to a world that no longer exists. Nostalgia, after all, cannot serve the interests of our people, nor provide a progressive blueprint for the future.

In its 21st century context, that blueprint must offer a sound and realistic plan of action to achieve one simple objective; to make the lives of our people better.

It must result in an increase of our common wealth as a nation, by empowering our people and enhancing Bermuda’s place and stature in the world.

Yet, we in the PLP also know that we cannot achieve even these basic commitments to our people unless we can increase our competitive advantage by re-tooling our economy and maintain Bermuda’s position as a global center of excellence.

Mr. Speaker,

We know that there is no going back, neither to the glory years of the 1970’s when tourism defined our future and fueled the growth of a dynamic and emerging middle class, nor latterly to the heady and unprecedented economic growth of the last decade, when GDP in Bermuda doubled within the space of 7 short years.

Our Peace & Prosperity agenda represents that blueprint, in sync as it is, with our ambitious Vision 2025 document that was laid before the Bermudian people in our Reply to the Budget statement in February, 2015.

As previously said by one of my colleagues, and consistent with the quote of Lincoln, the work to create the Bermuda we wish to see in 2025 must begin now. And we gladly accept that responsibility.

Mr. Speaker,

In effect, this blueprint outlines the policy and legislative steps necessary for us to take in order to achieve those goals over a 5-year period under a PLP Government.

As such, it is also a reflection of our deeply held values and our ideals. These ideals reflect our Party’s proud legacy in its unwavering commitment to social and economic justice. But it also reflects our progressive tradition of reinterpreting those values and ideals in light of changing circumstances in order to better serve the interest of our people and this great country.

Mr. Speaker,

There is no doubt that we are experiencing significant structural change in Bermuda, not only to our labor market, but more broadly to our economy.

Similarly, the world continues to undergo profound change on a number of fronts as we recently witnessed in Europe, firstly with the refugee crisis, and latterly with the tragic events in Paris.

Increasingly, the realization is emerging that we are at another inflexion point in world history, with deep and abiding implications for our political economies and respective societies.

Mr. Speaker,

As to that structural change of which I alluded; it is our view that this trend has been present for some time, but was largely masked by the booming economy of the early 2000s.

It has become more apparent by the day that the economic challenges that we have faced since 2009, and continue to face (including increased business failures, significant unemployment, rising emigration, and a contraction of Bermuda's once vaunted middle class), are deeper than that represented by a cyclical recession.

All indicators say that we are still in a recession. The OBA and other commentators, either through ignorance or self-interest, continue to offer another narrative. It is false, with the intent to deceive and fool Bermudians. The reality on the ground is that conditions are getting worse for Mr. and Mrs. Bermuda, not better.

That is not to say that we will not see renewed growth and vitality in our economy – especially if we can create a more diversified economy along the lines that we have recommended – but that growth, and the Bermuda that it will benefit, will be a different type of economic growth than we have previously experienced.

Mr. Speaker,

Peace & Prosperity, our plan for a better Bermuda, is designed to meet the challenges posed not only by the lingering impact of the recession as noted, but also, in a more meaningful way, address head-on the impact of the more problematic structural change that continues to buffet this economy.

This plan for economic development and social harmony is a forward-looking and classically liberal one. It addresses the pronounced structural deficit that has bedeviled our economy for some time – as indicated – and positions Bermuda to firmly and realistically establish additional pillars of our economy by way of our diversification agenda.

One of the transformational commitments we have made is to establish – as outlined in our Vision 2025 for Bermuda – a technological incubator at South Side, where we can lay the foundation for the establishment of what in the world of financial services is a FinTech (or financial technology) presence in Bermuda.

FinTech, as translated, denotes *an industry comprised of companies that use advanced technologies to make financial services more efficient*. These companies can range from those that provide mobile banking services, to online gaming, peer-to-peer lending, micro financing in the developed world, and beyond.

It is one of the fastest growing areas in terms of the global financial services industry. While we will need to ensure that the right regulatory and tax regime is in place and that costs, as it relates to communications and energy, are competitive, we are confident as with similar island states such as the Isle of Man, along with traditional centers such as Silicon Valley, New York City and London, that we to can compete in this space.

Mr. Speaker,

The above represents the “Prosperity” half of the equation, or at least a significant part of it, but we cannot neglect the central role that our people must play when it comes to economic development.

That is why, recognizing that the bar to entry for good paying jobs is rising once more, as it did during the 1990s during the rise of Bermuda as a global offshore insurance hub, we must double down on education, training, and overall workforce development.

Mr. Speaker,

We cannot emphasize this enough: we cannot replicate multi-generational failure in this regard.

We propose to implement significant reform to education and training that is consistent with present realities by fully integrating STEM learning throughout the curriculum from primary through to our proposed university college.

But the road ahead will be difficult, even in this regard, unless we can engender more critical thinking skills amongst our students. We are pleased that some of our top-level educators are beginning to address this through the adoption of a more collaborative approach to learning, and although we are far from getting on board “the self-learning” revolution, these first steps are positive ones.

Mr. Speaker,

We believe that the immersion into STEM and related fields represents a pathway to good, well-paying jobs and lucrative careers.

We also believe that it represents a proven pathway to entrepreneurship and business ownership for Bermudians. We must achieve both.

More to the point, if we are going to implement our diversification agenda as envisioned, we must begin to prepare our young people for this brave, new future.

We must ensure migration of Bermudians into the high-end jobs that will be created, but we must also ensure they have the tools to compete and succeed.

We intend to accomplish that.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

In the next PLP Government, we will have zero tolerance for any form of corruption and graft by any member of parliament, the civil service, or the public.

Mr. Speaker,

Confidence comes from honest, transparent governance.

Mr. Speaker,

The recent report by the Auditor General highlights the need for the Good Governance Act to be implemented. The next PLP Government will do just that, and without delay.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss the findings and recommendations contained in this report, as we also look forward to the Auditor General's reports on the time period of OBA governance. We hope that this is done prior to the Auditor General's well-deserved retirement after years of public service.

In fact, Mr. Speaker, this provides us with an opportunity to repeat the most serious of our many policy positions.

In the next PLP Government, we will have zero tolerance for any form of corruption and graft by any member of parliament, the civil service, or the public. This zero-tolerance approach also applies retroactively to all activities under the former UBP, PLP, and current OBA Government. As mentioned, the first step we will take is to implement the Good Governance Act.

Members of the public should take note: while I, as the leader of your future government, can boldly state this anti-corruption position with clean hands and a pure heart, neither the Premier nor any of his colleagues can honestly state the same. The mere presence, in the Dunkley Cabinet, of a former Premier who had to belatedly resign in disgrace for good governance issues destroys their opportunity to be trusted on this issue.

Mr. Speaker,

Let us also take the opportunity to encourage the Minister of Finance to reveal to the people of Bermuda the details of what he found when “Looking under the Hood”. After all, the public had to hear that familiar refrain for over 18 months, yet, for some odd reason, we have not heard it from the Minister or his supporters in caucus since. This silence suggests that maybe the Minister found more than he bargained for when looking under the hood, when he saw some engine components made by a manufacturing firm called Team UBP, now OBA. Indeed, politics makes strange bed fellows!

Mr. Speaker,

As evidence of poor governance, and the effects it has on a nation's economy, we can look at the type of projects that the current government touts as signs of success.

The majority of these projects have some form of government interference and intervention, which was contrary to the OBA's stated intent to improve our economy through the facilitation of private sector foreign direct investment.

Mr. Speaker,

They have done the opposite. The reason is because foreign capital is not influenced by the confidence-fairy propaganda stemming from a generally OBA-controlled local media. Foreign capital is not easily manipulated like some voters. The lack of private foreign direct investment (FDI) into Bermuda is the evidence of a government that not only has lost the trust of the voter, but more importantly, the trust of global capitalists, too.

Mr. Speaker,

Confidence doesn't require the mouthpiece of the Royal Gazette to be generated. Confidence is derived from a government that is honest, open, transparent, and respects the rule of law. To our detriment, we have a government that exhibits bankruptcy in regards to good governance.

Mr. Speaker,

On the matter of enhancing democracy, the PLP supports the intention to introduce absentee balloting for Bermudian students. The PLP will join the government in a joint select committee to determine the details of its implementation and operation.

FISCAL PRUDENCE

Mr. Speaker,

Our deficit reduction plan, as articulated in our 2014 Budget Reply, is indicative of the fact that a future PLP Government recognizes the reality of one of the foremost political obligations, that being the practice of prudent fiscal responsibility. It should be noted that our deficit reduction plan arrives at the same destination and at the same time as the OBA, the difference being one of altitude and attitude, or in other words, an alternative glide-path.

We also recognize that fiscal responsibility ultimately benefits all of society, but in particular, it benefits those most in need, those of us within the lower- and middle-income bracket. Make no mistake, Mr. Speaker, it is not the rich who will suffer from increased national debt and the specter of default, rather, it is the ordinary citizen and resident who will bear the brunt of the negative effects of such a scenario.

Mr. Speaker,

Spending freeze, lower taxes, less regulations.

It is also important to recognize that fiscal responsibility is not an end within itself, and it must eventually translate into a commitment to reduce the level of interference that we, politicians, via laws, policies, taxes, and regulations, impart on our people in their daily lives. While the OBA and others continue to advance the notion of a smaller government through cuts and efficiencies, the PLP posits that a smaller government will not have any appreciable impact in the lives of our people if it is not combined with the principle of LESS government. This is manifested from a government in the form of policies that reduce regulations, barriers to entry, and a commitment to reduce the tax burden on society. If eradicating dependency on government is a desired outcome, then there must be an alternative for our people to have the freedom to raise their standard of living by their own efforts, and the help of others.

As a part of the requirement to put Bermuda on a sustainable path towards fiscal prudence, the quest for reduced public spending ultimately involves a divisive discussion regarding the size of the public sector workforce, and the need to either privatize/outsourcing government functions, or make public sector workers redundant.

In this current environment, for either option, the risks outweigh the potential benefits whether it is of the former, that raises legitimate concerns in terms of wealth transfer from taxpayers into the hands of a select few and their cronies, or the latter, which will see mass unemployment of skilled Bermudians who have existing financial obligations and families to care for.

Mr. Speaker,

Neither option is politically or economically palatable. The reasons for this are four-fold and all based on prevailing ATTITUDES;

- The existing private sector that has traditionally shunned Bermudians, in particular Black Bermudians, from the hiring process in favor of foreign workers across all job categories.
- The current government, similar to their forefathers, whose continuous promotion of anti-Bermudian immigration policies reinforces the attitude of the private sector, alluded to above.
- The public sector worker, in reaction to the first two attitudes, sought employment refuge from government of the day. A natural phenomenon the world over, public-sector workers cultivate a bureaucratic mindset, which is in contrast to the commercial mindset required to be competitive in the private sector labor market.
- The corporatist, oligarchical attitude of protectionism and anti-competition, which stifles and intervenes with any entrepreneurial idea that may challenge a privileged position.

The PLP's position is that unless and until these attitudes are changed, then the discussion on government employee reduction is mute. Our economy cannot absorb the additional burden of thousands of unemployed, skilled Bermudians. Consumer spending will be negatively affected, leading to downward pressure on business income, which inevitably will create additional private sector job losses.

Financial Plans

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will focus on 6 key financial actions over the short term.

We will:

1. Balance the budget by the end of our 5-year term. This will be accomplished by increasing investments in diversification, business development, tourism infrastructure, and our human capital, all of which generate return for our economy. Our focus on diversification will yield additional tax revenue due to the increase of jobs and economic activity as a result of economic diversification.
2. Freeze spending at 2013 levels for 3 years, forcing us to be more efficient in the civil service. Any extra spending will be used to invest in Vision 2025 initiatives on education, training, the youth, and seniors.
3. Reform social insurance to make it more progressive. Instead of contributions being fixed, they will be set at a percentage of a person's income. This will increase the take-home pay for any worker making less than \$65,000 a year.
4. Stop the OBA's development of the airport. This will create immediate jobs by committing to renovate the current airport to extend its life by 10 years, and use the additional funds to invest in tourism development, with the goal of increasing air arrivals to 375,000.
5. Create a Bermuda fund to invest in businesses that bring jobs to Bermuda. Bermudians need jobs; we will provide new sectors of growth to create jobs, and Bermudians can use our savings to invest in companies that will create these jobs.
6. Implement Vision 2025, a long-term economic vision. Although it will not yield immediate results, the investments made over the next 5 years can determine our future for many years to come. Technology is changing many things around us, and Bermuda must invest in our people and our infrastructure to lead small island states as a technology and intellectual property hub.

TAX REFORM

Reforming our Tax System

Mr. Speaker,

The government's announcement that the feasibility study into broadening Bermuda's tax base will be presented to government from the Caribbean Regional Technical Assistance Centre (CARTAC), an IMF regional body, is a welcome move. We look forward to the report being tabled in parliament so that a full and open debate may be had by members.

Reducing Payroll Tax

Last year, the PLP made it clear that we must transition from deriving a large chunk of our revenue from employment taxes to gaining a larger share of our revenue from consumption taxes on goods and services. The reason given was the simple economic case that payroll taxes depress employment and in the act of 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 jobs.

Mr. Speaker,

The government has previously declared, through the Minister of Finance, that "Payroll taxes, our primary source of revenue, for example, are not a tax on consumption at all. It is a tax on labor — not a type of taxation that would tend to increase the number of jobs." We agree with this view, as it aligns with the proposals we put forward in last year's reply to the budget. The question, Mr. Speaker, is if you reduce payroll tax, what do you replace it with? Your next PLP Government will seek to introduce a broad-based, low-rate, Goods and Services consumption tax.

Consumption Taxes

Mr. Speaker,

Our current system taxes goods in our economy but does not directly tax services. As the Minister of Finance has stated, the vast majority of our consumption is in services.

In looking at tax reform, some in Bermuda have recommended that we adopt a Value Added Tax (VAT). The PLP is of the view that the likely administrative burden resulting from the implementation of a VAT system would not be good for our economy. Additionally, given the nature of our economy and our heavy reliance on imports, there is very little "value added" in the local domestic economy that would warrant a VAT. However, there are other models of consumption taxes that may be feasible in Bermuda and which can broaden our tax base with the addition of tax revenues derived from our diversification strategy. We look forward to the IMF report that the government has commissioned. One thing, however, must be said, Mr. Speaker; any consumption tax must not increase the tax burden on those who can least afford it.

Make Social Insurance Progressive

The next PLP Government will examine the Social Insurance program.

Mr. Speaker,

There are other opportunities to make our tax system more just and more progressive. The next PLP Government will examine the Social Insurance Program, with the view to changing employer and employee contributions from a fixed rate to a percentage of earnings with the appropriate level for a cap on social insurance contributions.

The objective of this change would be to increase the take-home pay of low earners while having high earners pay more into the fund. Any changes resulting from this examination should be revenue neutral or revenue accretive to the Contributory Pension Fund.

Currently, a low-wage earner (\$18 / hour) pays 4.75% of their salary to Social Insurance whereas a high-wage earner (\$75 / hour) only pays 1.14% of their salary into the fund. If all workers paid into the fund at the same rate as a worker earning the median income (2.7%), the change results in low-wage earners receiving \$720 more take-home pay a year, while contributions from high-wage earners would increase.

We will make this system fairer in line with social insurance programs around the world, in which contributions are based upon how much you earn.

Payroll Tax Concessions

Mr. Speaker,

It bears repeating that when these concessions were first introduced, they only cost the government \$2.2 million a year; however this figure has now swelled to \$30 million a year.

Though these concessions are a quick and simple policy tool for short-term support, when they remain in place for extended periods of time, they can cause distortions in the economy and reduce an economy's efficiency and productivity. Businesses must be able survive while fulfilling their tax obligations. If we have companies that are surviving based upon these temporary tax concessions alone, this can indicate that the business owners have not made the necessary adjustments to make their business competitive. Productivity is required for economic growth, and the move to end these concessions was the right one.

Occupational Pensions

Mr. Speaker,

We have previously spoken about the structural imbalances in our economy that make employing guest labor more cost effective than employing Bermudians. A major culprit is the National Pension Scheme (Occupational Pensions) Act 1998, which only requires employers to cover the pensions of their Bermudian employees. This provision naturally puts Bermudian labor at a disadvantage by making them more expensive.

The next PLP Government will address this imbalance. Any move to change this practice will cause pain for employers who rely heavily on foreign labor; however, in the long run, it will benefit Bermudians, and in our minds, these are the people who come first.

INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Your next PLP Government will be willing to rise to the defense of our commercial partners.

Our International Business sector has, over the years, served Bermuda well. Times have changed, with businesses now under the strain of ever increasing external regulatory rules and mandates. The PLP understands the needs of our international business partners, which includes a stable government, low taxation, light touch regulations etc. The international business community can be assured that the next PLP Government will continue to provide that enabling support, yet we recognize that the real threats are not internal factors, but rather, it's the statist external institutions and their ever changing rules of the game that poses the ultimate threat to our key industry.

Your next PLP Government will be willing to rise to the defense of our commercial partners, but only if these same partners are willing to join with us to put forward a credible defense of our collective position. This defense must be based on classical economic principles, and presented as a cohesive argument. We are now at the crossroads of decision. Mr. Speaker, it's either "hold or fold", "fight or flee".

TOURISM

The numbers do not lie.

Mr. Speaker,

Any centrally-planned industry is bound to produce abysmal results. The BTA is failing, in spite of their savvy PR efforts. The numbers do not lie. In the meantime, the one industry that represents the best opportunity for unemployed Bermudians to earn a living is in decline.

Despite millions of dollars spent with little political oversight, non-performance based bonuses, and no accountability, the Bermuda Tourism Authority has failed to get the results we were all hoping they would achieve. Your next PLP Government will make the BTA board directly responsible to the Minister, who in turn will be responsible to parliament. The current crony-capitalist construct where we see the BTA, without accountability, picking winners and losers by the arbitrary redistribution of taxpayer funds, will end. All contracts will adhere to financial instructions. All employment contracts will be renegotiated, and remuneration will be aligned with other public sector positions. Bonuses will only be granted if widely-communicated performance targets are met.

Product

Bermuda remains an expensive destination, with a dated product that has earned a reputation as failing to give value for money. The challenge we face is a reflection of the historical-social disharmony in Bermuda, which, heretofore, has prevented us from developing a national identity. It is simple: where there is no cohesive identity, there will not be a cohesive product. Compare us with our competitors in the Caribbean and the one distinction that is apparent is that Bermuda is unique in providing a non-indigenous product. Whether it's the food, music, entertainment or activities, we cannot compete because of the attitude that rejects the African Caribbean culture that provides a clear competitive advantage for other destinations. Again, the numbers do not lie. Seventeen million visitors per annum choose the Caribbean, 300,000 choose Bermuda. Seventeen million people have no interest in our stale, stiff-necked British traditions, and if they did, they would find that it's cheaper and more authentic to just fly to the UK. In fact, the majority of UK residents feel the same way, and that is why millions choose to fly over Bermuda to enjoy their holiday in places like Barbados, Tobago, Nevis, Turks and Caicos etc.

Mr. Speaker,

Simply put, it is high time that we recognize that the people are our product.

Lastly, while it is true that Bermuda is a very beautiful island, we have too many regulatory burdens that prevent visitors from enjoying it. This level of regulation must be relaxed so that the customers and business owners may freely engage in voluntary exchange. If we want the type of action that induces visitors to spend money, then it is the PLP's position that we need to "free up".

The next PLP Government will:

- *Implement an immigration policy that protects local entertainment and places local entertainers at the center of our product rejuvenation. This will include the claw back of hotel concessions for hotels that do not employ local entertainment.*
- *Boost our nightlife offerings by permitting entertainment establishments to operate until 6am.*
- *Remove regulations that prevent the development of island-wide beach facilities, inclusive of food and alcohol.*
- *Liberalize our retail sector by removing the 60/40 rule, thus permitting the introduction of non-food international franchises.*
- *Remove regulations that constrain the free development of vendors and small businesses in any area of Bermuda.*

Recreational Cannabis

The next PLP Government will legalize the use of recreational cannabis, creating a market-based, private sector licensing framework for its production and distribution.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year, we also acknowledged the need, in addition to the proposed legalization of medicinal cannabis, to look at the CRC report recommendations on the issue of recreational use. The global trend is such that we will not hesitate to turn this into an opportunity that can help stimulate tourism and provide entrepreneurial and job opportunities.

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will legalize the use of recreational cannabis, creating a market-based, private sector licensing framework for its production and distribution.

Marketing

Mr. Speaker,

Bermudians can be forgiven for thinking, when at home watching TV, that we have no advertising presence in our target markets. Instead, we see the presence of our competitor Tourism Boards and their respective private sector properties all over multiple channels.

It is clear that we require demand-led growth in tourism, and that can only be derived from an intelligent marketing strategy that spares no effort in advertising to our target markets. We require intelligent marketing that promotes an accurate description of our people and product, instead of a false picture reflecting what we are not.

In addition, the PLP recognizes the incompetent and strategic error of increasing the airport departure tax in order to sweeten their proposed AECON deal. Clearly the left hand knows not what the right hand will do in the OBA Cabinet. We should not need a senior manager of Jet Blue to tell us what 10th grade high school economics students can state, that an increase in taxes will suppress demand. In another sign of poor governance, we note that the Ministers of Tourism and Finance, on one hand, are willing to pay the BTA non-performance bonuses while simultaneously hindering the BTA from improving on the performance of the most critical target: air arrivals!

Mr. Speaker,

Your next PLP Government will:

- *Increase tourism's marketing budget by at least 50% to be in sync with an effective advertising strategy.*
- *Immediately reduce airport departure tax to pre-2015 rates.*

Economic Diversification

The next PLP Government will spare no effort to diversify our economy. Our policy proposals are intended to attain the following goals:

- *Real economic empowerment through ownership*
- *High-paying, private sector job creation*
- *Increase our productive population*
- *Increase government revenues*
- *Increase commercial and private real estate activity*

Mr. Speaker,

The global ratings agencies have warned us about the dangers of the lack of diversification of our economy, yet the OBA continue to ignore these warnings, ignore the job losses, ignore the company closures, ignore the wage reductions, and have demonstrated neither the interest or the ability to diversify our economy.

The OBA's myopic focus on maturing industries, and failure to even look at diversification and new industries, will not produce the growth our people and our economy require.

Mr. Speaker,

As noted, the PLP fully supports tourism and international business, and we will continue to put resources and policies in place that will allow these industries to thrive. However, relying on these two industries alone will not be in our best interest. We must increase our scope of the possibilities, and open up doors and opportunities that have never been done before. Over the years, we have schooled our people to be workers and not entrepreneurs. Those who have attempted to put their hands in the fire to attempt entrepreneurship have been turned away by the system, or they have found barriers put in their way due to a lack of capital.

Mr. Speaker,

Some Bermudians have come up with creative business ideas over the years, but have been shut down due to monopoly policies. We have become an island that does not allow competition on a serious scale. We have lived in a protective cocoon for too long, and while the world is taking on new investments, we bow to pressure by elite special interest groups. If we are going to keep or increase our standard of living, the economic walls of anti-competition must come down.

Mr. Speaker,

Your next PLP Government will be positive about the development of online gaming.

Last year, we spoke of the need for Bermuda to create Online Gaming/E-Gaming legislation.

It was no surprise that the monopolistic, oligarchical tendencies of the OBA arose to dismiss the idea altogether, with the petty excuse that it would not be good for our reputation. If that was in fact the case, then it is ironic that when seeking information regarding our online gaming competitor, the Isle of Man, Google refers persons to one of our most prominent law firms, Appleby, for advice and guidance.

Basically, Mr. Speaker, the people must understand that in the eyes of the OBA, it is OK for their interest to benefit from online gaming, but it becomes a jurisdictional risk if the rest of the people desire to participate. We understand, Mr. Speaker, that it is not in the interest of the OBA to establish an industry in which those people who have been historically dependent on their patrimony can now economically empower themselves by owning a piece of the global economic pie. Indeed, that would destroy the very essence of their 50-year race-based political strategy; a strategy that seeks to keep people economically dependent in order to keep them politically attached.

But like Appleby, your next PLP Government will be positive about online gaming development, and will take steps to derive similar benefits to those of the Isle of Man, such as 1000 high-paying jobs, and over 40 million euros in taxes and fees for their government. Let us also remember our sister overseas territory, Gibraltar, with their 2500 jobs, and 50+ million euros in taxes and fees. Let us also be reminded that Gibraltar has reported another budget surplus for the previous fiscal year, the main driver of course, being online gaming.

Mr. Speaker,

Last year, we stated that we welcomed the idea for the diversification of the local banking sector. It is something that we first called for in our 2013 budget reply, and we were happy that two years later the OBA had apparently seen the light. Twelve months have passed and it is quite evident that the Minister of Finance either lacks the willingness or ability to back his empty words with actions. Suffice it to say at this stage, that while the Minister finds himself between a rock and a hard place, the PLP have identified another opportunity to attain the stated goal of diversification of the banking sector. This is essential if we are to attain our goal of diversifying the economy while increasing ownership and job opportunities for Bermudians. We need alternative mechanisms by which the majority of Bermudians may have access to financing.

The Key to the Future

Last year, we also made it clear that we were pleased to see that the BMA is seeking to reform the money service business regulations, and that this initiative has the potential to strengthen our economy and provide opportunities for Bermudians to participate via ownership or employment. The PLP has been in discussions with officers at the BMA, and as the next government, we will work closely with the BMA in this process, as we support the position that MSB reform should meet equivalence with the EU Directive of Payment Services and E-Money Directive. We are aware of the presence of multiple entrepreneurs who are eager to enter into this high-growth sector.

In particular, the PLP had identified an emerging sector that, with these improvements, can become a source of additional diversification of our economy: a *Global Mobile Money Service Business* sector. Since then, we recognize that the public would not have had the opportunity to understand the vast potential of that idea. Today, we will broaden that narrow term and expand it to a much broader term; FinTech.

FinTech

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will work in tandem with the BMA to transform Bermuda into a major FinTech jurisdiction.

"FinTech" – a contraction of "finance" and "technology" – refers to companies that provide financial services through the engagement of technology. The FinTech space has become increasingly prominent in recent years. Global investment has more than tripled in a 5-year period, with less than \$1 billion invested in 2008 compared to almost \$3 billion in 2013. Investment is expected to grow further in following years, growing to an estimated \$8 billion globally by 2018. The range of financial services offered by the FinTech space is extensive, including, but not limited to, money lending, payments, currency exchange, portfolio management and wealth management.

There are many financial services offered now by FinTech companies to provide competition to the traditional finance sector dominated by banks. Their rapid growth is largely attributed to the rapid advances in technology that have made such innovation possible, as well as other factors. The Global Financial Crisis of 2007-09 is also a notable reason for the rise of FinTech. For instance, bank credit for the private sector and for individuals across the globe was severely curtailed after the crisis, which created a need for alternative lending, one of FinTech's largest services.

Mr. Speaker,

Some examples of FinTech subsectors are as follows.

Money transfer

Money transfer services provided by banks and brokers were the only means available to complete international money transfers before FinTech providers began springing up. Such FinTech companies offer foreign exchange services that engage advances in technology, including the ability to close trades at the live mid-market rate with no spread involved.

Equity funding

As a result of the sharp reduction in bank lending to companies after the Global Financial Crisis, equity crowdfunding has been the solution for many budding start-ups, providing much needed capital in exchange for equity. Equitynet and FundedByMe are but two examples.

P2P lending

P2P lending companies including Zopa, Funding Circle and MarketInvoice have seen a surge in popularity. Many businesses have been turned down for financing requests from banks, and so, they turned to the P2P FinTech space. As banks divert their investment in government bonds rather than the corporate sector, the growth of P2P lending firms will almost certainly rise. As the term “P2P” becomes more mainstream, with people slowly but surely coming round to considering alternatives to the established, traditional financial sector status quo, FinTech companies offering P2P lending services will likely make up the largest portion of the FinTech sector. Lending Club, a P2P money lender, is seen as the most prominent FinTech company in the world. The company launched their initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange in 2014.

Mobile payments

Allowing people to conduct transactions through their mobile phone or tablet, FinTechs such as Square and SumUp have stolen a march on banks by leading innovation in mobile payments.

Trading platforms

People can now trade for themselves using a wide choice of online trading platforms. Some even provide services where the research is done for you and specific stocks or mutual funds (group of stocks) are recommended. Rather than go with a broker or investment bank, people are now choosing platforms such as Nutmeg. Moreover, such FinTech platforms are able to offer much lower fees than the traditional bank or stockbroker rate.

Additional FinTech subsectors

As well as the main types of FinTech, there are many others, including financial advice services such as NestEgg. FinTech is even home to companies with big social change objectives, like Kifiya, who aim to “bank the unbanked”. In Africa particularly, this is a problem, where the vast majority of the adult population (80%) do not have bank accounts. Kifiya aims to change that.

Mr. Speaker,

Every single FinTech company's product or service leverages technology at their foundation.

Mr. Speaker,

For those skeptics who reject the messenger and thus will claim the PLP policy of targeting the FinTech industry as pie in the sky, I have attached the links to a report prepared by Ernst & Young on behalf of the UKTI as to the real and tangible benefits FinTech provides for the UK economy, and a KPMG report highlighting the same for Sydney, Australia.

[http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Landscaping_UK_Fintech/\\$FILE/EY-Landscaping-UK-Fintech.pdf](http://www.ey.com/Publication/vwLUAssets/Landscaping_UK_Fintech/$FILE/EY-Landscaping-UK-Fintech.pdf)

<https://www.kpmg.com/AU/en/IssuesAndInsights/ArticlesPublications/Documents/fintech-opportunity-sydney-oct-2014-full-report.pdf>

The Blue Economy

Mr. Speaker,

The third sector of our diversification strategy is focused on harnessing our natural resources. We support investment in the Blue Economy, with an initial emphasis on offshore fishing within our EEZ. This will lead to new job opportunities, provide foreign currency, and create additional revenue streams for government. Based on the quotas allocated to Bermuda, it is estimated that the market value for this seafood resource is \$200 million USD per annum.

Mr. Speaker,

A PLP Government will facilitate offshore fishing by developing a shore-side processing facility, which will provide the value-added, quality control services that will enable our product to be sold in international markets.

Mr. Speaker,

The primary purpose of our strategy is to provide Bermudians with the opportunity to build wealth and improve their material standard of living.

We have set out our plans for economic diversification and some of the benefits to be gained by our island home. Let us be clear; a major impetus for diversification is to provide an opportunity for Bermudians, in particular our youth and the middle to lower income class, to economically empower themselves. Yes, we expect jobs to be created, and yes, we expect our government to receive the boost in revenues necessary to meet our defined fiscal targets, but the primary purpose of our strategy is to provide Bermudians with the opportunity to build wealth and improve their material standard of living. It is a purpose driven by the desire to increase innovation and productivity as the path towards prosperity, instead of the alternative approach of redistributing the wealth of others. Our plans are focused on introducing foreign exchange earning business sectors that the average Bermudian can fully participate in. This participation, however, will be predicated on one crucial factor, and that is the ability of our people to compete on a global stage. The next PLP Government will prepare our people to compete, and it is through education and training that we will accomplish this objective.

EDUCATION REFORM

Mr. Speaker,

We recognize that in order for Bermudians to fully participate in the new economy, and not be marginalized in our own society, the next PLP Government will need to embark on radical education reform.

Our plans for a reformed educational system will possess the rigor and provide the skill-sets for all students to operate successfully when transitioning to either tertiary institutions or directly into our workforce.

Mr. Speaker,

The FinTech and online gaming sectors require that STEM-based learning must now become a central component throughout our education system's curriculum, from the entry level up to and inclusive of mature students.

Our institution of public education will maintain its fundamental purpose of ensuring an educated populace. It is for this reason that the next PLP Government will reform our system so that it is more responsive, competitive, and is the primary option and first choice for educating future generations.

Mr. Speaker,

We have a pre-school system with the entry level for children aged 4 years. The primary purpose is to prepare children for primary one in numerate skills, literacy skills and social skills. Pre-school provides an early opportunity to identify behavioral and/or academic issues and to apply appropriate counteractive measures at this level.

Mr. Speaker,

A future PLP Government will provide a national curriculum for pre-schools to ensure standardization and a record of assessment for entry into elementary school.

Mr. Speaker,

Elementary schools are traditionally for children aged 5 years. Students remain at this level for 6 years. They actively engage in the Cambridge system, with the focus being on Mathematics, English and Science. Other courses are locally based but mandatory, i.e. social studies, health and P.E., art and music. The next PLP Government will reinstitute primary 7 in our elementary schools.

Mr. Speaker,

Retention at every level will be implemented to ensure that students who fail are not advanced with significant deficits that will impede success at the next level. Before any student is retained they will be given an exam to assess performance; if successful, they will be promoted. At the culmination of 7 years, standardized exams in Mathematics and English will be administered to assess mastery. This, combined with a student's 7th year performance, will be used to determine promotion. If failure is significant, retention will be upheld.

Middle Schools

A PLP Government will end the middle school system.

Mr. Speaker,

As we have repeated on multiple occasions, the middle school system will be phased out and replaced with 5-year decentralized high schools. Some middle schools will revert to senior schools. Clearwater, Whitney Institute, Spice Valley, Sandys Secondary and The Berkeley Institute are schools that will be converted into secondary schools. It must be made clear that students transitioning into high school will not be placed according to where they reside, rather, it will be determined by academic assessment and other non-geographic factors.

Mr. Speaker,

A PLP Government will adopt the CXC curriculum.

The BSR will be retained as a transcript for local achievement. Last year we indicated that "every school can continue with Cambridge GCSE, but are not limited to such. Students will be able to elect to sit other exams, such as the CXC, IB, RSA, City & Guild, Trade exams, and SAT."

Upon further research and consideration, and in alignment with our overall theme and vision, the PLP has determined that upon assuming government, we will implement the Caribbean-based Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) curriculum and exams as the standard curriculum. The academic rigor is equal to or surpasses that which is found in the UK, with STEM-based learning an important component. Most importantly, it is a curriculum that will impart a sense of self-respect and civic duty, derived from a strong emphasis on Caribbean history and culture. As was the case in the past, if the standard of the curriculum is aligned internationally, many should have success.

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will transform the Bermuda College into a University College.

The Bermuda College will work to acquire accreditation for full Bachelor programs in multiple subjects, but in particular, those degrees in which our economy requires adequate and trained manpower, such as Nursing, Accounting, Tourism Management, Business Administration, Education, Law, and Information Technology. The University College will also provide training for those persons who are interested in working within those new sectors of diversification. In addition, our University College will be utilized for the purpose of providing opportunities for students to gain professional designations similar to that of the Bermuda Insurance Institute. With an influx of human capital into Bermuda, the next PLP Government will seek to harness and transfer this knowledge to Bermudians by encouraging persons to teach in these various institutes. This is especially important for working adults or mature students, who must retrain in order to either enter into the private sector or change careers. The University College will also introduce Master's degree programs in the same areas as the Bachelor programs, and continue to offer degree programs with sister organizations overseas.

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government's focus is on STEM learning.

The next PLP Government will establish a cabinet-level task force to meet our workforce development goals.

CedarBridge Academy will become a part of the University College. With facilities such as AutoCAD rooms, a hairdressing room, a music, film, and auto mechanic studio, paint booth, woodwork studio, and the more typical class settings, this facility, under the umbrella of the University College, will become the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) campus. The next PLP Government's focus on STEM learning is in acknowledgement that in an economy that is being rapidly transformed by advancing and disruptive technologies, we will require a workforce development model for the 21st century; not one reflective of a 20th-century-style economy that is rapidly disappearing.

If we are to maintain our global leadership as a center of excellence, and enhance our competitive advantage, this is imperative.

Mr. Speaker,

In this light, the next PLP Government will establish a cabinet level task force to formulate policy and legislative prescriptions to meet our workforce development goals at the strategic level, consistent with our Vision 2025 statement. No longer can we afford to have government operating in silos. Therefore, this taskforce, comprised of Education, Workforce Development, Immigration, and Economic Development, working in a synergistic and collaborative manner, will have as its remit the responsibility to ensure that our people are not only fully prepared in terms of education and training, but also that the requisite career and entrepreneurial opportunities are there to match their aspirations and ambitions in an emerging world, where the only constant is change.

Teacher Training

Mr. Speaker,

As you would know from your experience, Bermuda is blessed with first-class educators who have now reached retirement age. One of the major components of a quality education system is quality teaching. For the purpose of teacher training and classroom assistance, the PLP will seek to engage our willing and able retired teachers to come out and shadow classrooms and younger teachers.

After all, some techniques have always worked and never grow old, and we would be wise to tap into this considerable experience. This will require a reallocation of resources so as to provide some remuneration for them.

Combined with a streamlining of the Department of Education, thus reducing bureaucratic cost, shifting performance outcomes to individual schools and their principals, and creating a competitive environment within and among the schools, we will place our education system in a position to provide the tools for all of our people to compete, and to become the masters of their destiny.

IMMIGRATION

The new PLP Government will immediately embark on comprehensive immigration reform.

Mr. Speaker,

Our policy goal is to ensure that the rights of Bermudians are advanced and protected, while recognizing the need to grow our economy with fair and balanced work permit policies, and the starting point is the Bermuda Immigration and Protection Act 1956. This reform process will have as an essential component an extensive public consultation. It will address the issue of Bermuda status grants – how they are to be granted going forward and what criteria needs to be met, and what number of PRCs should be issued on an annual basis. We will create a policy of equal political status for individuals in a family, rather than the current circumstance where one sibling could hold Bermuda status and the other have no rights at all to permanent residence.

Mr. Speaker,

As the PLP recognizes that our plans for diversification will require at least half the new jobs created to be filled by highly skilled and experienced international labor, balance is required. Our policies will reflect this reality.

Mr. Speaker,

Another key area of reform by the next PLP Government will be the repealing of the Job Makers Act.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will reform healthcare into an integrative system.

Mr. Speaker,

The overriding challenge that we face is the continued escalation of the cost of healthcare provisions. With both the past and current government advocating for a system that provides “need-based universal access”, and healthcare costs continuing to rise, the next PLP Government will embark on a program of healthcare reform.

Mr. Speaker,

During the 20th century, the majority of governments adhered to a premise that continues to drive up cost: that the responsibility for good health rests in the hands of others, and not the individual himself. This led to the collectivization of medical costs. From that premise, state-controlled healthcare systems were developed, which has led to the following challenges that continue to see rising costs and a progressively unhealthier population, namely;

- The potential for a limitless rise in the price of medical services
- The potential for a practically limitless increase in the quantity of medical care demanded
- Perverting technological progress into a source of higher cost rather than lower cost
- The very high prices of patented prescription drugs
- Hospitals wasting money in the purchase of unneeded, costly equipment
- Below-market rates and cost shifting for state-run insurance schemes
- Bureaucratic interference with medicine, and the rise of administrative costs

Mr. Speaker,

With these and other challenges facing us in terms of healthcare provision, the need for a vigorous, honest, and comprehensive debate by all of us in Bermuda must commence. While this occurs, there are some actions that we will do now to bring a greater awareness to our people of the need to take personal responsibility for our individual health. After all, it is one of the first steps towards Bermudians cultivating greater self-knowledge as a community, in the physical, mental and spiritual realm of life.

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will take the following steps towards real reform:

- *Promote health and wellness education in the pre-schools, primary schools, and high schools;*
- *Liberalize the market to permit international insurance companies and FinTech-based micro-insurance providers to enter and compete in Bermuda. The PLP holds the position that competition will drive down the cost of health insurance, with more services options being made available to the consumer, many of whom cannot afford the current prices offered by local health insurance companies;*
- *Mandate insurance companies to include coverage for established complementary and alternative medical services widely termed as naturopathic medicine;*
- *Ban the import and use of GMO food; and*
- *Remove the Bermuda Health Council.*

Mr. Speaker,

Ultimately, the next PLP Government will reform healthcare by transitioning towards an integrative system that combines the best of allopathic and naturopathic medicine – a system that reduces cost, improves patient outcomes and wellness, and removes the multiple non-medical-related interventions that hinder the sacred doctor-patient relationship.

Mr. Speaker,

What is naturopathic medicine, you may ask? Naturopathic medicine can be defined as a unique and comprehensive approach to improving health and treating illness. Focusing on prevention and using natural substances and treatments, naturopathic doctors (NDs) clinically support and stimulate the body's ability to heal itself. The primary goal of naturopathic treatment is to address the cause of illness, rather than to simply treat or suppress symptoms. The patient is seen as a whole person, and the ND takes the physical, mental, emotional and spiritual dimensions into account when diagnosing and developing a treatment plan.

The primary therapies used by naturopathic physicians include: clinical nutrition, botanical medicine, homeopathic medicine, acupuncture, and oriental medicine, physical therapies and counseling. Naturopathic treatments are often combined with conventional medical treatments. It is becoming more common to find NDs working with medical doctors and specialists for the good of the patient.

Mr. Speaker,

It is the PLP's position that Bermuda must embrace naturopathic-traditional medicine.

There are four important reasons why Bermudians will embrace naturopathic medicine.

First, from a healthcare delivery perspective, naturopathic medicine makes perfect sense. Traditional and complementary/alternative medicine has demonstrated effectiveness in areas such as mental health, disease prevention, treatment of non-communicable diseases, improving the quality of life for persons living with chronic diseases, as well as support for our ageing population. Although further research, clinical trials, and evaluations are needed, naturopathic medicine has shown great potential to meet a broad spectrum of healthcare needs. However, the most commonly reported reasons for using naturopathic medicine are that it is more affordable, more closely corresponds to the patient's ideology, and is less paternalistic than allopathic medicine.

Second, from both personal preventative health and financial perspectives, naturopathic medicine offers undeniable benefits. The prevention of disease and the attainment of optimal health have short- and long-term cost benefit value to the individual that will not only increase their quantity, but also improve their quality of life. Not only do naturopathic physicians educate and promote safe lifestyle choices, they also assess risk factors, heredity and susceptibility to disease, and make appropriate, timely interventions in partnership with the patient to prevent illness. Herbal medicine is a key component in the healing process. When taken under the supervision of a trained naturopathic physician, most standardized herbs and other naturopathic modalities have proven to be in some cases more effective, and less physiologically taxing and expensive than chemical-based pharmaceuticals. Based on the undeniable value of both allopathic (surgery in particular) and non-allopathic medicine, the position of the PLP is that integration can provide the best of both worlds.

Third, from a business point of view, naturopathic medicine has significant value to existing business owners and future entrepreneurs. With a steady growth of awareness among the Bermudian population concerning naturopathic medicine, there will be an equal proportionate increase in the demand for the supply of all items pertaining to naturopathic care and the organized delivery of an integrative healthcare system. The hospitality industry can also place itself in a position to capitalize from vacationers who are predisposed and rely on naturopathic care. The micro- and macro-economic return on investing in the future of naturopathic medicine is an investment opportunity that should not be ignored.

Finally, from a nation-state building perspective, naturopathic medicine provides the best assistance in managing the growing difficulties of healthcare delivery in Bermuda. The rising cost and challenges facing the national health insurance system is best met with the low cost and prevention reality of naturopathic medicine. As many governments worldwide step up to the plate and evaluate the merit of adopting integrative medicine, Bermuda should likewise follow suit.

CBD OIL

The next PLP Government will place emphasis on the use of CBD oil.

Mr. Speaker,

We will promote the distribution and use of CBD oil, a powerful healing extract derived from the cannabis plant. Research now indicates that CBD oil is an effective treatment of many ailments that residents suffer from, and the use of CBD oil will benefit all residents, but especially our seniors and young people.

SENIORS

The next PLP Government will not neglect our senior citizens.

Mr. Speaker,

We recognize the tremendous financial and health challenges that beset our precious seniors.

Our plan for an integrative healthcare system is intended to provide a lower-cost method for our seniors to meet their healthcare needs, while simultaneously making them feel better. It will reduce their dependency on the multitude of pharmaceutical drugs, with all their associated negative side-effects.

There are other steps that the next PLP Government will take in support of our seniors. We will implement our plan to increase the number of senior facilities across the island. This will be accomplished through the private sector and the government. These will include activity-based day facilities and long-term care facilities.

In addition, the next PLP Government will create a Charter of Rights for the protection of our seniors from all forms of abuse. In particular, the next PLP Government will ban age discrimination from the workplace. After working for the majority of their lives, many able-bodied seniors are placed on a path towards mental and physical decay when they are told that, by virtue of age and nothing else, they can no longer work. We will end this practice.

Another step the next PLP Government will take is to provide seniors with an independent living subsidy to support families who prefer their seniors to stay and be cared for at home.

In serving our seniors, the next PLP Government will consult closely with experts such as Age Concern and others, who we will call to provide detailed policy recommendations for the upliftment of our golden treasures.

YOUTH AND SPORT

The next PLP Government will invest in our Sporting and Workmen Club's infrastructure.

The next PLP Government will extend the Sports Academy concept to include a comprehensive Arts Academy.

The next PLP Government will fully commit to the funding and expansion of the Mirrors Program.

Mr. Speaker,

Given the noted decline in performance and results in some sports, and the successes of others, it is the PLP's view that the time is right for the creation of a Sports Academy. Here, notable and experienced sportsmen and women, combined with a first-class educational component, will work in tandem to improve our sports development and build a strong, well-rounded athlete on and off the 'field' of play. This Academy will be for athletes who have been identified at the school competition level of our reformed educational system as having the talent and discipline to excel on the international stage. Likewise, and as a part of our reformed education system, the next PLP Government will extend the Academy concept to include a comprehensive Arts Academy whose purpose is similar to that of sports.

Mr. Speaker,

Of necessity, the physical education and health standards for our primary and high schools will be revised to reflect a 21st century model. Competitive inter-school sports will feature prominently in our new education system. Collaboration between the Ministries of Community, Culture and Sport, Education, and Health will be paramount. Healthy children become healthy adults and, therefore, create a more sustainable society, which has less of a dependence on the healthcare system.

Mr. Speaker,

Sport is seen by many as a more cost-effective approach to dealing with social problems than correcting the consequences of aggression, crime, violence and abuse through police, correctional or social services. Therefore, the next PLP Government will invest in our Sporting and Workmen Club's infrastructure. Our position is that these community-based facilities represent the best approach to developing our young people through sports. And while many clubs are plagued by violence in their midst, the PLP recognize that these same clubs represent the best vehicle to transform the thinking and behavior of our youth. Our plan includes the development of all clubs island-wide. We stand side by side with those clubs operating in the trenches. Whether it's St. Georges and St. David's, Baileys Bay or Hot Peppers, Devonshire Rec and Western Stars, Paget FC, PHC, Southampton Rangers, Somerset Bridge, or Somerset Cricket club, your next PLP Government has your back.

All sports will receive an equal boost in funding and support, not just cricket and football. The PLP Government will reallocate resources saved from the National Security/Judiciary Ministry budgets as a result of our policy to legalize the use of cannabis.

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will fully commit to the funding and expansion of the Mirrors Program. This is a program that is close to our hearts, as we know the supreme benefits that our young people may gain through participation.

PUBLIC SAFETY

The next PLP Government will tackle crime by directing resources towards executing our multi-pronged Education, Immigration, Youth and Sports strategy.

Mr. Speaker,

Despite the long-term cowardly silence from the otherwise media-loving Minister of National Security, violent crime has not abated over the preceding year. Shootings and stabbings continue to plague some communities.

Mr. Speaker,

This is happening under the OBA Government, whose leader pledged to stop the shootings. The OBA and its predecessor, the UBP, were continuously critical of the previous administration's role of addressing gun violence. What these incidents have shown us is violence and crime activity, especially gang violence, was never going to be easily challenged; the solutions were never going to be provided by political slogans or promises. The OBA Government has discovered this, and now must honestly acknowledge one of the most serious challenges that faces Bermuda. Fratricide is not a political football!

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will tackle crime by directing resources towards executing our multi-pronged Education, Immigration, Youth and Sports strategy. Like health and wellness, prevention is better than cure.

Mr. Speaker,

We note the announcement in the Throne Speech to once again end conscription. This is a recurring pronouncement by the OBA Government, and like many others, we await real action by the government to fulfill this promise. We repeat what we stated in August last year:

“An orderly transition to a volunteer Regiment is supported by the PLP, yet while the OBA drags their feet without explanation, our young men continue to be drafted and in some cases criminalized for their opposition to being forced into military service against their will. This must be addressed sooner, rather than later.”

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will give priority in its legislative agenda to a number of economic and social justice laws.

It is important that, as we transition to a volunteer and more professional Regiment, every step is taken to smoothly transfer the command of the Regiment back into Bermudian hands throughout the top levels of the organization.

The PLP's focus of inclusion of Bermudians, and not their marginalization, is the rudder that will steer our laws and policy. In order to achieve more inclusion in the social and economic affairs of Bermuda, and to remove barriers to freedom and progress among historically under-represented groups in our society, the next PLP Government will give priority in its legislative agenda to a number of economic and social justice laws, such as:

- The Bermuda Defamation Act
- The Legalization of Cannabis Act
- The Vendors Amendment No 1 Act
- The Criminal Code Amendment Bill to repeal Section 199
- The Bermuda University College Incorporation Act (to make provision of a four-year university in Bermuda)
- The Land Injustices Compensation Act
- The Debtors Amendment Act

Mr. Speaker,

Policies and laws that erect barriers to Bermudians' advancement will be reviewed by the Ministry of Justice. Ministries will be advised on the most direct and effective legal basis to repeal laws and discontinue policies that are identified as creating barriers to Bermudians. The light touch extended to international business will be extended to local business and Bermudians. Less government must be extended to all.

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government, in consultation with the DPP, will institute a code for Crown Prosecutors
The next PLP Government will create a Public Registry of Pedophiles

Prosecutors must be fair, independent and objective. They must not let any personal views about the ethnic or national origin, gender, disability, age, religion or belief, political views, sexual orientation, or gender identity of the suspect, victim or any witness, influence their decisions. Charging decisions by prosecutors, as a general rule, follow standard, often unwritten protocol. A code for crown prosecutors will codify the protocols for the protection of the public, and add a level of accountability to this important process. The next PLP Government, in consultation with the DPP, will institute a code for crown prosecutors.

The next PLP Government will create a public registry of pedophiles. This is long overdue, Mr. Speaker, and with the prevalence of such heinous acts, violating the innocence of many of our young people, it is time that the country as a whole is made aware of who these perpetrators are. This 'name and shame' approach is from the standpoint of safety, and to send a clear message that we know who they are, and we will not tolerate further attempts to defile the dignity of our young people.

ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENT

The next PLP Government will reduce the regulations in terms of allowing for the creation of aesthetically amenable facilities on public beaches.

Mr. Speaker,

The PLP encourages the private sector to fully participate in the development of our maritime resources, otherwise known as the Blue Economy.

We agree with BEST that the OBA must get on with making a decision regarding the use of our EEZ. The next PLP Government will stand on the economic side of the argument, as our EEZ is a key component of economic diversification, but we recognize that without adequate environmental safeguards, over the long term, there will not be any economic opportunities to be derived from our EEZ. Balance is vital for such decisions.

Mr. Speaker,

The PLP continues to encourage the use of alternative energy sources where possible, such as photo-voltaic/solar, wind, ocean, and ethanol/bio-fuels.

Mr. Speaker,

The next PLP Government will reduce the regulations in terms of allowing for the creation of aesthetically amenable facilities on public beaches. This is in support of improving our tourism product.

Mr. Speaker,

Also required is the reform of the Bermuda Plan guidelines that strikes a sustainable balance for the 21st century and beyond with a focus on respecting the right to private property, a hallmark of a free society. The next PLP Government will ensure that this reform is implemented

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker,

Bermuda stands on the cusp of a dramatic change in our economy, and in our very way of life. This should not be feared but rather embraced with all the vision, intellect and courage we possess. We walk in the path of our forefathers who overcame the collapse of various industries, survived the scourge of slavery and segregation and who built this great island we call home.

Mr. Speaker,

We understand that it was not any one government that allowed our people to survive; it was our collective will, our collective strength and our collective willingness to work. Another year has passed, and the general consensus is that the tide is still receding.

Mr. Speaker,

Today, instead of solely criticizing and attacking the current government for their choices of policies and actions, we thought it to be of higher service to all of Bermuda by presenting the plan of their next government. In so doing, we have identified solutions to get our people back to work, expand Bermudian entrepreneurship, and protect our vulnerable seniors and youth. Our theme is peace and prosperity for all of us, and through good governance, fiscal prudence, and economic diversification, we are confident that more Bermudians, especially the sufferers, may share in an ever increasing material standard of living, aka PROSPERITY.

Mr. Speaker,

Likewise, in order to cultivate the social harmony required for Bermudians to produce and enjoy the fruits of our labors, we have provided a plan centered on an evolving standard of education, a lower cost and more effective, prevention-focused, integrative healthcare system, and a responsive strategy to ensure that the aged are protected and the youth are cared for. In other words, Mr. Speaker, we have presented the next PLP Government's plan for social cohesion and, ultimately, PEACE.

Mr. Speaker,

Ideas are not enough. No politician or government has the capacity to plan the actions, choices, and lives of the people we serve. As such, this vision will accomplish little without Bermudians pushing, striving, and uniting to make it a reality.

Mr. Speaker,

We must cooperate in order to compete.

As the world around us continues that slow decline into chaos, we want to remind Bermudians that the answers to our problems lay within each and every one of us. We can reinvent our economy, we can create our own businesses, and we can build a Bermuda that works for Bermudians if, and only if, we open our minds, reject fear, and with courage, bravely step into the future. We must no longer go "wither the fates carry us" but seize control of our island home to become the masters of our own destiny.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I now invite members to engage their minds to an open and full debate on the Reply to the Throne Speech as presented.