

*Creating a vibrant Bermuda that works for everyone.*



# ***REPLY TO THE THRONE SPEECH***

**DELIVERED BY  
THE HON. N.H. COLE SIMONS, JR, MP  
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION**

One Bermuda Alliance operates on the principles of Opportunity, Responsibility, Integrity, Transparency, Fairness, Inclusiveness and Service (“our Principles”).



## **2021 Throne Speech Response.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Before I delve into our response to the Government's Throne Speech, it would be remiss of me, if I first did not address the elephant in the room- the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We are here in November 2021, and who would have thought that we would still be facing this pandemic?

A pandemic which in 19 months, has turned this country upside down, inside out and sadly has resulted in over 100 Covid related deaths. It has changed how each one of us go about our daily lives, and how we manage our community and cultural activities.

Just look at the fluid manner in which our schools must now operate. Look at how our work/life balance is distorted. The number of people working from home would have been unheard of pre - Covid. Look at tele-medicine or at the new Hitch culture. Indeed, there is a new spirit of entrepreneurialism in Bermuda. We have only to look at the exponential growth of online shopping both locally and abroad, and the increase in restaurant take-out orders.

As a result of the pandemic, we now have reduced sizes in our family gatherings, be they christenings, graduations, marriages, or funerals. Christmas, Easter, Cup Match and Bermuda Day activities have also been scaled back to adhere to the safety protocols. In fact, look at this scaled back opening of Parliament.

Due to the government-imposed state of emergency, there has been an increased strain on our healthcare system, and the added pressures on our social support networks. Unfortunately, we have also had to implement and continue to provide millions of dollars in unemployment benefits, with additional strain on our Financial Assistance programme and our security forces.

To date, there have been four Covid-19 spikes, with the latest one finally coming under control, and thankfully, we are adjusting our lives accordingly, as we have had to do with other catastrophes.

**Mr. Speaker,**

It is time that we come to terms with Covid-19 and accept that it has changed the way that all Bermudians live their lives. While we have longed to return to normal, we in the Opposition believe that it is time to accept a new paradigm and that we, the people of Bermuda, must come together and rebuild a vibrant, prosperous, and safe community which we were in the habit of taking for granted pre-Covid-19, because let's face it, there were many things that were broken before the onset of the pandemic.

As a country, we need to be cognizant of and recognize that some of the decisions made by this government and others have failed to provide the needed solutions. If we are going to successfully come out of this crisis, we must learn from our failures.

Ed Yong a journalist for “The Atlantic” a U.S. magazine recently said: “...normal has led to this. To avert the future pandemics, we know will be coming, we must grapple with all the ways that that normal, has failed us. **We have to build something better.**” The OBA agree that it is time for us to capitalize on the new opportunities that have presented themselves to rebuild a better Bermuda, both socially and economically.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Many may say that I am very optimistic and that I should take a reality check.

**Mr. Speaker,**

My answer to those critics is this - I am confident, in fact I know that we can get through this because I know that Bermudians are a very resilient and resourceful people. We have worked our way through many challenges and pandemics in the past, and we will do so successfully now and, in the future, because that’s who we are.

What makes this pandemic more challenging is understanding who the enemy is. As a small island nation, where generations of locals, long-term residents and foreign workers live, we must recognize that **Public Enemy Number One is the Covid-19 Pandemic, not one another.** We must use our collective wisdom and energy positively, and we must be laser-focused on the fight against the pandemic together. It will take discipline, respect, resourcefulness, creativity and a spirit of community on a level playing field, where there is social, economic, and cultural equity for all.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In that vein, let me begin my response to the government’s Throne Speech by congratulating, thanking and showing our appreciation to our frontline workers, the executive team at Bermuda’s Department of Health, Bermuda’s Chief Medical Officer and team, our health care workers, our armed forces, our supermarket staff, and medical support staff, our hospital staff, the media, those who care for our seniors, and others whom I may have missed, who placed themselves at risk by providing outstanding service to our country by managing and mitigating the risks associated with Covid-19.

May I also take this opportunity to commend and congratulate the people of Bermuda for their commitment, patience, diligence and discipline in the continued mitigation and management of Bermuda’s Covid-19 pandemic.

## **THE ECONOMY:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

As indicated by Bermuda First, economic diversification and growth are rarely the result of a government plan. They come from innovative entrepreneurs and visionaries who have an appetite for innovation and risk taking. In many ways, growth is the product of the Government getting out of the way and facilitating access to on- and off-island capital and talent. **Government should be the enabler, Government should not be the solutions provider.**

Considering this, Bermuda needs a creative and workable economic recovery plan, which does not only address infrastructure development, and tax concessions. Given the economic malaise faced by the global community and Bermuda, this Government must make economic diversification a real priority, beyond the digital and e-commerce industries.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Bermuda Government has touted much in the Throne Speech about the 31-point Economic Recovery Plan, which will include the creation of new industries such as medical tourism, vertical farming, space communications and other initiatives. In addition, they have engaged KPMG to provide project management and delivery services which will support Bermuda's economic recovery. I have also been advised that KPMG will be the primary project manager which will oversee and parcel out sections of this major project to the other big three international audit firms that have a presence on the Island. How much will this cost the people of Bermuda, and can the Government provide details on the tendering process which resulted in KPMG's engagement?

In addition, one questions why this project was not managed within government? The Minister of Finance has a strong team of competent executives. During this time of austerity, what expenses will be trimmed within the Ministry to cover the costs associated with the KPMG engagement?

Anecdotally, it has been my observation, that the small army of people performing Covid testing and vaccinations, including those who keeping the records straight, and those providing security are probably the largest stimulus recipient group. The question is are they civil servants, or are they private contractors?

As one senior executive said to me, this government should choose three of the top Economic Recovery initiatives and deliver three well-crafted, world-class initiatives, which will position Bermuda to succeed both socially and economically. He went on to state that to try to address 31 initiatives all at once is farcical and should be a non-starter.

Another senior executive said that we should address the economic recovery by addressing immigration, inward investment, and restructuring the cost of Government.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Around the world, people and businesses are facing shortages of everything from coffee to coal. According to the BBC, supply chain disruption caused by the Covid pandemic is mostly to blame and its effects are being felt in different ways.

**Mr. Speaker,**

You may ask, why I am bringing these supply challenge issues to light? It is because we and other countries around the world are all inter-connected and interdependent economically because of our global trading systems. What we sell on Bermuda's shelves are sourced from around the world; from the US, China, UK, Thailand, Brazil, and other distant countries. What impacts these countries will ultimately impact us in Bermuda. When their production costs go up, when shipping costs continue to rise along with energy costs, and the cost of goods and services, this will result in the increased cost of goods and inevitably, global inflation.

**If current global inflation is hovering at around 4-5%, Bermuda should expect inflation to be 6-7% for the next year or so. Bermudians will have less purchasing power, and experience less value for our money, as our real purchasing power will decrease accordingly as the prices for a basket of essential goods increase.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Bermuda's fuel prices have increased at the pumps. A gallon of gas costs approximately \$18/gallon, compared to other overseas territories which are priced between \$4 to \$6 per gallon. This must stop. We must review the taxes which are applied to our fuel at the pumps as it has a significant negative impact on Bermuda's cost of living.

**Mr. Speaker,**

A very interesting revelation presented in the Throne Speech is the Government's intention to work with the Island's lending institutions to provide financial, loan and mortgage assistance to communities of faith and the third sector entities. It goes on to say that the role that they play has been vital to our community wellbeing—this must be a revelation for the PLP government!

Most of our churches and charities are strapped for money and financing and can ill afford loans from the private sector. In fact, just a few months ago, this PLP Government withdrew 50% of the charitable contribution streams to Bermuda's charities when the recent amendment was made to the Trade Unions and Relations Consolidation Act. In essence, this is a real example of Government biting the hand which literally feeds our community.

We in the Opposition take a different view. We believe that our third sector partners are doing an excellent job. They continue to fill the voids and gaps left by Government in our communities. Their outreach

programmes provide a much-needed safety net for some of our seniors, the vulnerable, the homeless, and some of our young people.

## **INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

When it comes to International Business, the Fitch Rating Agency believe that the tax advantages held by Bermuda's insurers and reinsurers will eventually be reduced because of a recent G20 endorsement of a 15 percent Global Minimum Tax.

Thankfully, the Fitch agency said: "Bermuda's advantageous tax status for the (re)insurance industry will be reduced at the margin with the expected passage of the recent multilateral agreement to establish a 15 per cent Global Minimum Tax rate under Pillar Two of the OECD Inclusive Framework on Base Erosion and Profit Shifting (BEPS).

**Fitch made it clear that Bermuda will continue to benefit from an established position in the global (re)insurance marketplace, with demonstrated underwriting expertise, a strong and efficient regulatory regime, Solvency II equivalence and reciprocal jurisdiction status in the US.**

"The overall benefits of maintaining a Bermuda market domicile and operations will likely endure, but the net profitability gap between Bermuda and non-Bermuda incorporated companies is expected to narrow over time."

In essence, while the Agency does not foresee taking a near-term rating action against Bermuda (re)insurers because of the agreement, there is some long-term uncertainty.

For this reason alone, Bermuda must continue to support International Business, we must continue to work with them so that as their businesses flourish, our economy will flourish.

In fact, we should work with CEOs in the executive suites as they may be a source of innovative ideas and may be able to suggest policies that will help Bermuda flourish.

## **TOURISM:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I was very startled when in this Throne Speech, the Government indicated that they were leaning towards dismantling the Bermuda Tourism Authority ("BTA"). I then reflected on the historic tension and strain between the PLP government and the BTA, as a former PLP tourism minister stated that they, the government, were going to quote "rip out the engine of the BTA" end quote.

**Mr. Speaker,**

**We in the Opposition take another view. Bermuda Tourism should be managed and led by tourism professionals, who are independent of the government.**

Moreover, as a country, we should salute the work performed by the Executive and Staff members of the BTA, who are performing yeoman services during these very trying times. Especially given that the resources made available to them has dramatically declined with the decline in BTA Cruise Passenger Fees, BTA Hotel Guest Fees and Vacation Rental Fees to the tune of approximately \$12 million dollars. This reduction is directly attributed to Covid-19 and its catastrophic impact on Bermuda's tourism revenue, and the reduction in grants made to the Authority in 2020/2021.

**Mr. Speaker,**

According to a former BTA CEO, in response to the massive global tourism industry decline, Bermuda experienced 155 cancelled cruise calls, resulting in a loss of 445, 469 cruise ship passengers, \$99.7 million dollars in cruise visitor spending, 137,967 in air visitor losses and a staggering loss of \$206.8 million dollars in air visitor spending.

It was only through the prudence of the BTA, and their robust austerity programme that they were able to find their way through this very dark period.

**Mr. Speaker,**

A year later, despite the continued presence of Covid-19, there is now pent-up energy and resources, and the global tourism industry has begun to re-emerge. In November 2021, people are now living with accepted global Covid-19 protocols and are beginning to travel again. We are beginning to see some shoots of vibrancy in Bermuda's tourism industry, but there is much more to be done to revive this important sector for all Bermudians to enjoy.

This revival must begin with an updated National Tourism Plan. We in the Opposition believe that Bermuda should be the guiding light for the BTA and Bermuda Tourism going forward. The BTA should look for more social media engagement and an active presence in the digital space. The Plan should focus on our visitors to ensure that their experience is authentic and enjoyable as it will also have positive knock-on effects in the growth of hospitality jobs and more fee revenues.

**Mr. Speaker,**

If we are going to get tourism back on its feet, the Plan must also include increasing our airlift routes and getting our airline carriers and partners sorted out.

The government knows that the loss of our Boston route deeply affects one of our core east coast markets, and those who rely on the direct flight for overseas medical treatment.

Other key air links have drastically reduced service, including Miami, which for months has been a hit or miss as far as flights are concerned.

Not only is Miami a link to the Southeast, but it is also a key link to the Caribbean, and Central and South America. So, the question is: "Why are airlines cutting back services to Bermuda when travelers appear to be regaining the confidence to fly again?" Let's not forget that our residents also rely on airlift, which has impact on the hospitality bottom line.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This government has been very vague on the status of the re-opening of the Fairmont Southampton Hotel. It appears that they still have challenges in finding and securing the required capital for the \$180 million dollar development. In addition, there has been no progress on the Caroline Bay Hotel to bring it to completion and no update on the status of the Bermudiana Beach Resort.

**If this government is committed to the growth of Bermuda's tourism and are focused on letting people know that Bermuda is open for business, tourists cannot come here with their hard-earned dollars only to find a ghost island.**

The country needs answers, and this government must provide them. The Fairmont Southampton cannot and must not be another Caroline Bay Hotel which remains devoid of investors.

#### **GAMING:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Bermuda's gaming challenges must be settled once and for all, to make gaming a reality in Bermuda. The Opposition understands that the Government holds the key to opening this industry, which is vital to the growth of our economy. All they must do is provide the Bermuda Gaming Commission with the same independence and autonomy that the Bermuda Monetary Authority enjoys. With the stroke of a pen the government can get our local banks' correspondent banks on board to support this industry if the Minister responsible for the Gaming Commission is shifted from the Premier to the Minister of Finance.

**Mr. Speaker,**

**It is not lost on the Opposition, nor should it be lost on the people of Bermuda, that there is a possible conflict of interest when the Premier, who is also the Minister of Tourism and has gaming as an amenity in the tourism portfolio, is also responsible for the Ministry that regulates gaming. Why is the Premier and Minister of Tourism also responsible for the Bermuda Gaming Commission? Again, the country and the Opposition want and deserve answers to this very important question.**



**Mr. Speaker,**

I have been advised that if the Gaming Commission is shifted to the Minister of Finance, Bermuda should finally be poised to open the Gaming industry with cashless gaming using credit cards only at this time.

#### **IMMIGRATION & LABOUR:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

From an economic perspective, Bermuda will not improve without more people paying taxes and consuming services.

A person with no long-term residential security who is treated like a second-class citizen, cannot reasonably be expected to commit to a place that will not commit to them. Treating a person as a second-class citizen hurts our economy, offends this very important group of people, trashes our reputation of hospitality, impugns upon our sense of dignity and respect, and ultimately, deprives our people of opportunities.

The current efforts, including the Economic Investment Certificate & Residential Certificate Program, implement the simplest, least contentious parts of the Pathways to Status programme. **This government needs to address the hard questions such as what a transparent, equitable route to achieve full Bermuda status looks like?**

There could be cross ministry cooperation between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labour, who together can present mutual benefits for job seekers, corporations who are looking for economic incentives and local resources and the government can achieve its Immigration priorities, making this a win-win for all the relevant stakeholders.

**Mr. Speaker,**

**It just makes sense that the government should make life easier for the industry groups that are keeping the economy afloat.** That means as the insurance sector experiences a hard market, the government should increase speed-to-market by cutting red-tape and further incentivize spending in Bermuda and on Bermudians with 'good corporate citizen' benefits, such as charitable giving closely connected with public policy outcomes.

Strategically, the government should clarify specific skillsets for each Work Permit job and then create a specific training path at Bermuda College ("BERCOL") to generate that specific skill set. If it requires overseas travel or experiences, then build that into the BERCOL budget and explain why it is necessary.

The enforcement team at Immigration must also be empowered to bring cases to court quickly and efficiently. Those who contravene the trust we put in them as job creators must be publicly held accountable for their disregard of Bermuda.

## **THE DIGITAL INDUSTRY AND E-COMMERCE:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

As indicated last year, the One Bermuda Alliance supports the discussions regarding the digital industry and e-commerce. With Bermuda's legislative, regulatory and telecommunications frameworks and digital communications infrastructure, we stand ready to capitalize on this emerging and growing industry. **We expect the provision of robust training and internship programmes, and the creation of new jobs for Bermudians.**

From a taxation perspective, the digital sector will also enjoy the traditional tax schemes currently in place in Bermuda, such as company taxes, payroll taxes and land taxes. The Opposition recommends that the government should consider further examination of a negotiated value added tax for the privilege of companies booking their local and global internet business earnings from Bermuda. This approach is not new to industry stakeholders.

According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development ("OECD"), in the absence of a new international rule book, a number of member governments are planning their own digital service taxes.

They are taking this action because of growing public pressure on large multinationals such as Google, Facebook (now "Meta"), and Amazon, to pay their share under international tax rules after Covid-19 strained national budgets.

## **BERMUDA'S SMALL BUSINESSES:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Throughout the past 18 months, a number of small businesses have been absolutely decimated. Local businesses which have been around for decades were dramatically forced to close or downsize, for example, where is the A.S. Cooper's Men's Store? Where is the Cake Shop? Where is the Muslim bakery? Where is the Hickory Stick?

Many surviving businesses have had to reconfigure their business model such as Crisson's Jewellers, Calypso, the English Sports Shop, and not to forget our friends in the town of St. George's.

The island appeared to be systematically shutting down. What is this government doing to remedy this? The decline cannot continue.

How do we remedy this?

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Opposition firmly believes that businesses must be given the freedom to grow, and that the government must support their aspirations, not kill them. We recommend that for the time being, corporate taxes must be kept to a minimum.

This government must do all it can to encourage our entrepreneurs and silent investors to invest in small businesses to increase business productivity.

With respect to Customs duties, we recommend implementing a “tax deferral scheme” for up to one to three months, which will enable retailers to pay their Customs duties after their products are sold, and not at the time the products are imported.

In addition, there must be true equity when it comes to Bermuda’s immigration policies. These policies must be just as user-friendly to local small businesses, as they are for our international business sector and partners.

**Mr. Speaker,**

From Somerset to St George’s the stories are the same. Small Bermudian businesses lament that they must give business away because they cannot get local employees to service their clients. We have heard the repeated refrain, “we want to hire Bermudians, but they do not stay.” The sentiment is prevalent within the landscaping, restaurant, farming, and grocery sectors. In fact, one small businessman approached me and said that he is trying to get one expat guest worker for his workforce of 15 Bermudian employees, but the application keeps getting rejected, while a chain of convenience stores has all expat workers. Where is the equity?

The other challenge for small businesses is securing financing from our local banks. These small business entrepreneurs feel that they are unacceptable or unwelcome when they go into our banks and ask for support. This must change, and the Government has a role in making this change, despite the support and guarantees provided by the Bermuda Economic Development Agency.

One businessman also shared that he wanted to secure a truck permit to help grow his business, and it took him over eight months to receive his permit. What a nightmare. This kind of experience is just not good enough. How can small businesses grow or for that matter survive?

**To help our economy grow, this government must cut the bureaucratic red tape when dealing with government agencies, for small businesses, and other stakeholders.**

Another small business owner said that because of Customs duties, they are not bringing their beauty care products into Bermuda. Instead, they are “drop shipping”, mean that the wholesaler wraps the product using the local business’s wrapping and packaging and then ships the orders directly to the client whether they’re in Bermuda or overseas.

This innovative idea reduces the operating costs for their businesses, by reducing their Customs duty expenses.

## **EMPLOYMENT:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

The disappointing employment numbers are not unexpected and are consistent with other economic indicators which point to a very bleak future. Essentially, economic suffering will increase in Bermuda until this Government changes its policies, or when Bermudians change this Government.

The job numbers represent what we already know. There is less money flowing in our economy, so there is less money to pay and to be paid. Distressingly, it's going to get worse before it gets better.

As mentioned, the cost of goods is increasing, predominately due to supply chain challenges, shipping, and resource costs from other countries. Local inflation is expected to increase. Working seniors, some of whom have already taken funds out of their pensions, will be forced to quit working due to retirement and redundancies, meaning less money going into health insurance and pensions. This also means less money to be spent on consumer services and purchases. When spiraling unemployment is added to the list, sustainable living will get harder and harder every year.

**And even more alarming is the fact that guest workers and locals alike will have to recalculate how long they can afford to live, work, and invest in Bermuda. Can they afford to step aside so that the next generation can take their place on the job ladders?**

Is the Government trying to staff the economy as it was, rather than as it is and will be in the future?

## **PUBLIC ACCESS TO INFORMATION ("PATI"):**

The Public Access to Information Act 2010, grants Bermudians and residents a legal right to access public records. It takes away the discretion of a public officer to decide whether or not to give information to the public. In essence, it allows individuals and organizations who believe that our government institutions have not respected their rights to access records that they have and holds these agencies to a higher degree of transparency and accountability.

The Information Commission Office ("ICO") spearheads PATI requests for information, investigations, and addresses dispute resolutions in an effort to resolve complaints. It also monitors government agencies' performance under our PATI Act, and on occasion, provides legal advice on investigations related to legislative matters. This makes the entire government more accountable and removes unnecessary secrecy.

**Considering the government's proposed amendment to our Public Access to Information Act, Bermuda must not compromise the authority and invaluable services provided by the ICO.**

We in the Opposition, take the view that the ICO and its staff are doing an excellent job under trying circumstances. They are professional, independent, and truly a-political.

The ICO's Information Commissioner, Ms. Gitanjali Gutierrez, is tenacious and doing an excellent job and her role and responsibility should not be trimmed or diminished for political gain or political expediency. The public have a right to request information from public agencies with the expectation that the government is committed to being transparent. If the government are having challenges with their own operational efficiencies that should be examined further.

### **FLIGHT OF OUR YOUNG PEOPLE:**

#### **Mr. Speaker:**

Another growing concern which needs to be addressed are the challenges faced by our young people who fall between the ages of 20 and 35 years old.

Candidly, they feel that both political parties are a waste of time, they see no future opportunities in Bermuda for their passion-based careers, or any entrepreneurial opportunities for that matter. They find it difficult to find jobs that they love doing and are prepared to sacrifice the stability of 9-5 jobs, to do a job that they are passionate about and love.

**Bermuda's young people want an environment that is more progressive, and more receptive to their lifestyles, career choices. In fact, they are remedying these dilemmas with one-way flights to the United Kingdom, the US and Canada to chart a new path.**

They see Bermuda as a place to make some fast money, that will give them an economic foundation which will eventually help them to leave and settle in other jurisdictions overseas.

This scenario is most prevalent for young people who are interested in careers in the performing arts, and fine arts. It also applies to the sporting and coding industries, just to name a few,

#### **Mr. Speaker,**

**This government must do more to develop and support the performing arts in Bermuda by promoting local artists and entertainers. In addition, we should also have a national performance center and an institute for the arts.**

We in the Opposition would like the government to also establish more tech fairs to expose our young people to the cutting edge in robotics, coding, and animation skills.

The Opposition encourages the Government to develop more festivals so that our artists and entertainers can have year-round opportunities to work, expand film and TV incentive programmes to attract Bermuda-based production and create visibility for Bermuda and career opportunities and promote public/private partnerships to expand the availability of scholarships for the arts.



To help Bermudians to buy a piece of “the rock”, the OBA further recommends helping first time Bermudian home buyers with tax friendly lease-to-buy opportunities and waive stamp duties on such purchases.

## **EDUCATION:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

When it comes to education, the people of this country are expecting more details on what the government plans are for next year. We all know that our education system is in transition, and I have to say that the OBA were quite surprised that there was no mention of the new Education Authority in the Throne Speech. We were also surprised to learn that the first two signature senior schools are the Berkeley Institute and the Cedarbridge Academy. The Throne Speech states that the Berkeley Institute will deliver “Finance and Insurance” and “Health and Social Care” programmes. Cedarbridge Academy signature programmes will include “Trades for Building construction and Maintenance”, and “STEM” subjects. What will the curriculum for these specialized subjects look like? Where will we source the teaching professionals to teach the new signature curriculum?

**Mr. Speaker,**

While on the subject of the Signature Senior School curriculum, why has one of our primary industries have not been addressed?

How are we going to address the Tourism, Restaurant and Retail Industries? The Throne Speech does not speak to any of these sectors.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Now, more than ever, there is a dire need to view education through different lenses.

We need to look at the destination of our students from a career perspective – where are they headed? Instead of just looking at their academic qualifications. We must ensure that all subjects are equally weighted. Vocational subjects are just as important as academic subjects.

In fact, educational snobbery, and biases regarding the development of our young people, through the academic routes versus the vocational routes has no merit.

There must be equal opportunities and improved outcomes to help both students and teachers to realize their full potential. More resources and capital should be directed towards professional development and training so that our teachers can be the best that they can be. We must elevate the status of our teachers in our school system.

Another significant issue which needs to be addressed is the publishing of the results of all our external and internal exams in all our schools, not just our private schools. This is vital because these exams hold everyone accountable.

They should be used to judge the performance of our students, our teachers, our principals, our schools, and our school systems.

In this Covid era when it comes to external exams there is a lack of certainty on how to assess both teachers and students moving forward.

We all should be aware that up until the age of 14 most of our young people are discovering their subject preferences, which will ultimately lead to either an academic or vocational career choice.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is time to develop a curriculum that results in an overarching diploma which has academic, vocational, and extra-curricular components and features. A diploma that will prepare our young people for their rightful places in the real world and make them more marketable and employable in the global arena.

In the UK, students were surveyed about their educational needs, and results are similar. They want options. Some want vocational training, others want academic education, and others prefer a hybrid of a vocational and an academic educational path.

Having taken these options, these career paths should be supported by a broad-based general education with math, science, social skills, and languages.

A sound educational policy should be one where parents, students and counsellors work together. It should provide a roadmap for students who want to achieve careers in the arts, theater, sports, trades, supplemental health care, and in the digital arena.

More time and effort should also be invested in internships and apprenticeship schemes.

**Mr. Speaker,**

**Another area in education which needs immediate attention is that of mental health and social/pastoral care.**

For over 19 months, we have been bombarded with so many negative headlines relating to the pandemic. What started out as a trickle of information has escalated into a tsunami of negative headlines, day in and day out, cascading into a mental assault on the psyche of good-natured Bermudians, which has taken its toll, especially on some of our most vulnerable -our young people.

Currently most schools help their students develop physical fitness skills, but little is done to develop mental health skills and critical thinking skills. With Covid-19 and the challenges of our social media universe, more needs to be done to ensure that our students are also prepared and have mental health agility.

The same mental health support, skills and agility should be available to our teaching staff as they also face difficult social challenges.

**Mr. Speaker,**

**The other crucial issue that this Government has failed to deliver on is the implementation of an independent Education Authority.**

Both the One Bermuda Alliance and the Bermuda First Group have promoted this for over five years. The most recent report from Bermuda First indicated that the realities in today's education "makes the case for the creation of an independent authority for public education that is responsible for the performance management of educators and researching and implementing a holistic public education system, that is appropriately sized and structured, resulting in a learning environment that facilitates optimum student success."

After five years of the government kicking the can down the road, the Opposition is asking the government to provide a status update on this very important initiative.

#### **THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF OUR YOUTH THROUGH SPORT:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Bermuda's hero and 2020 Olympic Gold medalist Ms. Flora Duffy, put Bermuda on the map and showed the world and every young person in Bermuda, that dreams really can come true, though, commitment, hard work, discipline, blood sweat and tears, and family support.

However, for far too many, inactivity, obesity, unemployment, and conflict are not only global but local challenges as well. In this time of high anxiety over health and finances, it would be easy to forget the importance of sports.

Creating opportunities for our young people to be student athletes should be identified. If we aim for the Olympics but succeed with university scholarships or university attendance through sport, we can be seen to have succeeded. **Having a resource to guide young people to gain all the necessary physical training, mental health, nutrition, and sport scholarships is overdue.**

#### **HEALTHCARE:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

There's no doubt that the focus of health over the past 19 months has been on the management of the Coronavirus and now the Delta Variant. Globally, governments are tasked with ensuring the safety of their people. **The One Bermuda Alliance is today looking beyond the pandemic and asks this government the question once again: "How can they develop a healthy Bermuda without a National Health Plan?"**

What is the status of Bermuda's National Health Plan? If this pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we cannot take our eye off the ball and that everyone should have access to basic healthcare, no one should be impoverished by the cost of coverage.

When we read the Throne Speech, it appears that our government is guiding and leading Bermuda down the path to socialized medicine as we know it in the UK and Canada. That comes with its own unique set of problems.

**As the PLP government has run Bermuda's healthcare for most of the past twenty years, it is unconscionable and incredible that there is currently no healthcare plan. Bermuda deserves better.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

As far as hiring digital support and utilising technology, we acknowledge that our healthcare system needs to be efficient, and in principle we are very supportive of this initiative, even though it may increase the cost of the delivery of healthcare in the interim. When crafting a new plan, we would like to know what the government's plan is to address our shrinking population, which is driving costs up and resulting in increased taxes and slower services?

As a reminder, here's what we know about Bermuda's current healthcare landscape:

- Over the past 15 years, the cost of healthcare in Bermuda has increased a whopping 193%;
- Per capita, the cost of healthcare in Bermuda ranks in the top two countries on the planet;
- Despite the high spending, our current healthcare doesn't provide coverage for the entire population – approximately 10% of people have no insurance and due to the economic impact of the pandemic, that number is constantly rising, whereas most high-income countries spend far less than we do on healthcare and does provide cover for everyone;
- The present system has not been able to slow down the rise in costs, and it is unaffordable for people with low earnings, which has now been exacerbated by increased unemployment;
- The Standard Health Benefit (SHB) only covers sick or chronically ill people, but does NOT cover preventative medical care;
- The general population is on the decline due to our low birth rate;
- Over the next 50 years, Bermuda's senior population is set to grow by 68%; and
- With an increase in the aging population, there is an exponential increase in the demand for personal at home caregivers.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The One Bermuda Alliance supports the recommendations made by the Bermuda First 2019 Reform Report, wherein they state that "Given the clinical partnership we are currently negotiating with Johns Hopkins' Medicine, we should utilize this relationship with Johns Hopkins University to access Johns Hopkins' Bloomberg School of Public Health, a world-class expert in advising on the design of health care systems. Ignoring the advice of best-in-class experts, in this instance, would be pure folly and would certainly lead to under-informed choices. Bermuda cannot afford to delay leveraging this and other similar, influential resources."

Given that Health Care represents the largest expenditure of the Government, getting control of this cost and implementing a sustainable long-term solution is a high priority. We must also ensure that the regulatory oversight is best in class and mirrors the reputation, resources and quality found in the Bermuda Monetary Authority. Bermuda deserves nothing less. Further, regulatory oversight of physician and medical practices and accountability should be the responsibility of the Bermuda Medical Council.

**Moreover, the OBA recommends that the PLP Government should:**

- Develop a National Health Care plan to ensure that every Bermudian has health insurance coverage, one that is evidenced-based, managed by independent professionals;
- Each patient would have a “Unique Patient Identifier” (UPI). This will ensure that everyone has coverage, reduce duplication of services, and drive down the cost of healthcare for all. It will assist in services being streamlined and produce a true number of those that are uninsured or underinsured to develop solutions to reduce this figure;
- Create a National Physical Fitness Program to encourage well-being, sound health, exercise, and good personal diet, from primary school throughout life;
- Work with healthcare providers to ensure that healthcare reform results in improved population health and more affordable healthcare;
- Legislate that insurance plans that offer mental health coverage must cover it in the same way as medical coverage and not discriminate or offer lesser coverage for mental health services; and
- Provide additional assistance to those who, for whatever reason, simply cannot afford insurance.

**In essence, the focus should be on the provision of patient-centric services, giving the patient more options to be in control of their own healthcare choices, which are not defined by the practice of socialized medicine.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Opposition believes the protection and support of our vulnerable should go one step further. There should be a combination of qualified legal services, direct support, community interaction, training, and partnerships with the aim of providing practical and emotional support to advance the well-being of our community.

Services such as the Office of the Public Guardian should be embedded in a broader Community Resource Centre to support issues of stress management, domestic violence and ageing at home. Costs and resources could be controlled by working in partnership with the Third Sector including charities, churches, and social entrepreneurs.

The Opposition further recommends the enhancement of the work on reforming seniors’ care, to urgently review the structure, funding, and regulations of the sector. This will ensure sustainability and quality going forward. The review should address workforce issues, and care including acknowledgement of the contributions of unpaid caregivers.



## **NATIONAL SENIORS' STRATEGY:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Seniors are Bermuda's national treasures. Statistics show that while this demographic are living longer, health concerns and the challenges stemming from Covid-19 highlights a need for a National Seniors' Strategy to help seniors navigate through the ageing process.

An effective strategy must consider the early stages of ageing, helping seniors to retain their independence and retain or improve their health.

Seniors have significantly contributed to the community and yet still find themselves having to make the very difficult choice between food, medicine and housing. **We must do more to honour their societal contributions by improving their income security, through reducing financially burdensome items such as car relicensing fees and land taxes that drain the resources of those on fixed incomes.**

In addition, all seniors diagnosed with debilitating diseases like Dementia and Alzheimer's should have access to dedicated caregiver support.

The Third Sector has experienced increased demand for support for seniors with Alzheimer's and Dementia. There must be increased support for family members and caregivers who either dedicate themselves to look after their loved ones afflicted with these diseases, while balancing work and family responsibilities or are fortunate enough to be able to afford to engage external caregiving support.

Family and non-family caregivers are sometimes overlooked as needing support, but the mental and physical toll of taking care of loved ones places a heavy burden on them and also places the primary caregiver at risk for developing physical and mental health problems themselves.

## **TRANSPORTATION:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Bermuda is clearly at the precipice of a new era in transportation. This is an opportunity for Bermuda to positively impact climate change and demonstrate how our small landmass can take a leadership role in transforming transportation into an environmentally efficient beacon for the rest of the world.

Presently, Bermuda's public transportation includes an aging and inefficient fleet of ferry boats. Our buses and their maintenance have reduced services to unreliable at best and private cars and bikes on our roads are increasingly dangerous and environmentally inefficient.

**Is it time to consider the privatization of our local public transportation systems as is done in other jurisdictions?**

This move will result in economic efficiencies and better value for service to the people of Bermuda.

Having recommended this, we also note that our public transportation services are primarily used by people with limited incomes to go to school, work, shop or visit friends, namely seniors and students. Any increase in ferry and bus fares will have a dramatic impact if these people are residents of either Somerset or St. George's.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Legislation must be re-visited to include and enhance support for victims of road traffic accidents. Too many are falling into this category, through no fault of their own, yet receive little to no financial support for expensive, long term health care expenses. There is community and judicial support for amendments to the Motor Car Insurance (Third Party Risk) Act 1943 to increase compensation to \$125,000 for victims.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Careers in aviation continue, from its inception twenty-six years ago, when Bermuda's first Air Traffic Controller, Patricia Peets, welcomed USAir in conjunction with the U.S. Navy handover of the Base lands in 1995. This year, the Bermuda Airport Authority welcomed three new Bermudian Air Traffic Controllers to the team. Following extensive overseas training the young men have returned home to take their rightful place in the air traffic tower, firmly extending the professional aviation history for Bermuda. We offer our congratulations to these young men, their families and support systems.

**UPDATING OUR TAXATION SYSTEM:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Last year's Throne Speech proposed that the Tax Reform Commission of 2018 update its recommendations "*in light of the new economic realities created by the Pandemic*".

Our question to this Government is why has this not been delivered? When does the Government intend to re-embody the Tax Reform Commission? Have they refreshed themselves with the 2018 report? And what has been done thus far to implement any of the recommendations?

**We submit that there are recommendations found in that report which are fair, equitable, do not place undue burden on the lower paid workers of this country, and do much to effectively broaden the tax base without stifling the economy.**

But just like the SAGE report, the Fiscal Responsibility Panel's report, and other similar reports, this Administration has not put into practice recommendations made by these commissions-

## **BERMUDA'S NATIONAL DEBT:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the comments recently made by Bermuda's Auditor General about Bermuda's national debt. She underscored her concern by stating that, as in her previous annual reports, the Government continues to make decisions without knowing the combined financial position of all the organizations that make up the Government reporting entity.

She further added that there are no effective, comprehensive long-term plans for reducing the annual and accumulated deficits or the associated debt, the unfunded liabilities of its major pension plans or the size of taxpayer indebtedness, all of which continue to grow unsustainably.

This continued behavior must end, and fiscal prudence should and must be implemented if we are going to bring our national \$3.5 billion dollar debt in check. **We cannot pass this \$3.5 billion dollar burden on to our young people and generations to come.**

## **PARLIAMENTARY REFORM:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

You will recall in last year's Speech from the Throne the current government indicated that they were examining constitutional reform, which has yet to be defined.

As stated in last year's response, we, in the Opposition would like the Government and this Parliament to take further action to ensure that Bermuda's Legislature meets the standards prescribed in the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's benchmarks for democratic legislatures.

**Mr. Speaker,**

You may recall that after much deliberation, a Parliamentary Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Governance and Reform presented its final report to Parliament on March 23, 2014, which was unanimously approved by the House at that time.

**Mr. Speaker,**

That report recommended that Parliament establish an independent body known as the Management Commission, which would be responsible for the administration of the Legislature.

This initiative will truly support fundamental principles of democracy, with the true separation of powers between the Executive, the Judiciary, and the Legislature.

This independent parliamentary commission would also give our Parliament more independence, allowing it to operate more efficiently, reducing the influence and interference by the Executive Branch of government.

You may also recall that the Joint Select Committee on Parliamentary Reform also crafted draft legislation which summarized details on the Commission's mandate, its functionality, and its structure. It was submitted to your chambers for review and approval so that it could be presented as a Private Member's Bill. Yet **six years later, the legislation has yet to see the light of day, even though the legislation was sanctioned by Parliament in 2014.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

We in the Opposition take the view that it is time to resurrect and effect this legislation.

Let us make this parliamentary Management Commission a reality in this session. It could be our gift and our legacy for generations to come.

#### **NATIONAL SECURITY AND POLICING:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

As mentioned, with over 100 Covid related deaths, and the pain experienced by the affected families and friends of the deceased, unfortunately, many people in Bermuda have also become desensitized to the increase in Bermuda's road traffic deaths. Sadly, this state of indifference has had a detrimental effect on our road use and now places many road users at risk. There is an increase in a series of bad behaviours on our roads, such as road rage, driving under the influence, and other irresponsible driving habits which are totally unacceptable and, in most cases, illegal.

Yet these examples continue while the Bermuda Police Service ("BPS") constantly face enforcement and funding challenges.

This dilemma has been going on long enough and must become a priority. We need a more robust police presence on the roads if we are to deter traffic fatalities. In addition, the community is urged to play their part. If members of the community see something, then they must say something.

#### **GANG VIOLENCE:**

**Mr Speaker,**

Unfortunately, we have had reoccurring spates of violence in Bermuda and the sad thing is that our community appears to have become numb to this type of behaviour and has begun to accept this behavior as new way of life.

We have had seven shooting incidents so far this year. Just last week we had two young people lose their lives as a result of gang violence at a popular local restaurant in Hamilton. In addition, there were also brawls and youth violence at one of our South Shore tourism properties. **This must stop.**

We must also stop living and believing that we live in a dream land. When it comes to youth and gang violence, we must stop saying that this is not who we are, and this is not who we want to become.

**Sorry Mr. Speaker,**

***This is*** who we are, and ***this is*** who we have become. It is clear that we are killing our own brothers and sisters and our leaders must retire from that state of denial, because youth violence is here, and it appears that it is here to stay as we are unable to arrest this scourge.

As a community we have failed some of these young people. We have failed them in education, we have failed them when it comes to employment and in some cases, we have failed to parent them properly.

As parents, we must hold our young people accountable for their behavior, and not enable or support bad and antisocial behavior.

If our son or daughter comes home with unaccounted amounts of money every week, and they are not working, we must really question those children to see where these funds are coming from. We cannot and must not allow our families to survive on illicit means of income. If we do, those family members are complicit in these nefarious activities, especially if members of the family benefit from these illicit earnings.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Gang violence is a reflection of our society and how society has managed its young people. We all must take ownership of this problem and we all have a role to play in addressing this problem.

**Mr. Speaker,**

One of the fundamental responsibilities of any government is the security of its citizens and ensuring a safe environment in which all can thrive.

This begins by valuing all our uniformed personnel by providing the best possible conditions of service and physical environment, but it also requires vigorously confronting the causes of crime as well as being tough with the perpetrators of the crime itself.

**Mr. Speaker,**

This Government has disrespected our uniformed services. They have slashed the police budget; they have not provided our firefighters with the necessary equipment, and they have allowed conditions at the prisons to fester. They also failed to provide some frontline workers with the necessary PPE during the Covid lockdown.



We believe in law and order and value our uniformed services. Their performance during the Covid-19 crisis underscored their commitment and diligence and we all owe them our gratitude for their service. They worked above and beyond anything we could have asked.

**Therefore, Mr Speaker,**

The One Bermuda Alliance recommends that the PLP government:

- Fully invest in our Uniformed Services by ensuring they do not lack for basic needs such as clothing and equipping them with modern technologies to better ensure safety and crime prevention, including body cameras for police officers, updated fire equipment and emergency ambulances;
- Address the serious facilities deficiencies at our prisons to ensure our prison officers work in a safe and healthy environment;
- Ensure our Uniformed Services are fully staffed, so that services are routinely provided, with reduced reliance on overtime pay and the promotion of well-being for those who give service to our Island;
- Provide clerical support to our Uniformed Services so that they are free to concentrate on their important core tasks and not be bogged down by non-critical duties; and
- Provide on-call mental health and social workers to support the police in responding to non-criminal calls to provide de-escalation or crisis assistance

The OBA believes that strong preventative and rehabilitation programmes are important in maintaining safe communities, to provide ongoing support to victims' families, to support and guide at-risk youth and to give offenders a second chance.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Tacit support also should be given to the formation of a Police Authority. After all, we all should support the Police with greater community involvement.

We also should support the BPS by building more confidence and trust in the organization; we commend the BPS for its stance in addressing standards of professional behavior.

Having said that though, it is disappointing that the Government has not mentioned the Police Complaints Authority in the Throne Speech. This body is important for public trust and public engagement. Its work should be supported and highlighted.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Community policing is critical for the BPS. We should support the Commissioner of Police and the entire Bermuda Police Service in their efforts to enhance community engagement and involvement.

Too often the Bermuda Fire Rescue Services, Corrections and The Royal Bermuda Regiment are the forgotten children of National Security. This must end. We look forward to the Government sitting at the table with them and addressing their outstanding concerns.

## **THE ENVIRONMENT:**

**Mr. Speaker,**

When it comes to the Environment, this Government must do more to preserve our Garden Paradise,

We agree with government that Bermuda is a treasure trove of environmental wealth, and a critical habitat for marine biodiversity. We also support the initiative that Bermuda must become a key player on the global stage of climate risk financing.

As far as the proposed Marine Development Act, we anxiously await further details given that the marine special plan has been in process for the past ten to fifteen years. From what I understand, this may be a re-branding initiative as it may have been formerly referred to as Bermuda's Blue Economy.

More must be done to protect, maintain and improve Bermuda's environment and manage our natural resources for sustainable results. We must also do so by managing our contributions to climate change and mitigating climate risks,

Bermuda must reduce its dependency on fossil fuels and its dependency on hydrocarbons. We must be more aggressive in defining policies which require the use of renewable energy fuels and low carbon fuels.

We believe that this government should transition the government's small vehicle fleet to electric vehicles within the next five years, and in addition the Government should provide incentives for the creation of energy charging stations throughout Bermuda.

The OBA would modernize and move our bus fleets towards the use of low carbon fuels.

We would also continue to build on current policies and programmes to control the proliferation of invasive species, protect our marine resources and to continue to protect our marine parks and marine protected areas.

When it comes to food security farming and fishing, we must commit ourselves to securing policies that support the environment and nature. It should also tackle climate change and support a sustainable agricultural industry and fisheries industry.

Our policies and legislation should provide fairness to our farmers and fishermen.

As we support other industries, it is time that this Government consider a Farmers and Fishermen Support Revolving Fund, which could be funded by Government with \$1 million dollars to allow our fishermen, livestock farmers and our vegetable and fruit farmers to enhance their capacity for increased production in a sustainable manner.

While on the topic of our fisheries, I want to invite this Government to meet with our fishermen to discuss the fisheries processing plant that the Government has proposed at Marginal Wharf in St.

David's. From my discussions with fishermen and marine scientists around the Island, there is no appetite for such a processing plant. They always raise the issue of the failed Sargasso processing plant, which was at Morgan's Point years ago.

In addition, the fishermen also question the logic of having the fish processing plant in St George's when the fishing grounds are primarily around Challenger Banks and Argus Banks, which are at the west and southwest end of the Island. Moreover, the main fueling and supply stations are in the west end of the Island, or in Hamilton. They are also interested in examining the benefits of having a fishing co-op.

#### **IN CLOSING:**

As Rahm Emanuel, the former Mayor of Chicago once said, "Never let a crisis go to waste. It is an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before."

**Mr. Speaker,**

Clearly, Bermuda is facing one of the most dire and unprecedented periods in its history, a time when all hands are needed on deck to chart the path through this turmoil, yet this is one of the most abbreviated Throne Speeches from the government I have ever seen in my 20+ years in politics. Incredible.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The One Bermuda Alliance's response to the Throne Speech is our rallying call to the government and the people of Bermuda to collectively shed the debris of the pandemic, rise to our feet as a united people, seize the ample opportunities outlined, and move forward together with confidence.

**Mr. Speaker,**

**We must look beyond the pandemic and breathe in a new life of optimism and opportunities for ourselves, our families, our businesses, and our country, if we are to create a vibrant Bermuda that works for everyone.**

Thank you.



One Bermuda Alliance