

# RESPONSE TO THE THRONE SPEECH 2022

Delivered by

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NOVEMBER 18<sup>TH</sup> 2022



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**Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, and Honorable Members,**

It gives me great pleasure to deliver the official response to the Government's Speech from the Throne, which outlines the PLP Government's plans for the coming Parliamentary year.

**Mr. Speaker:**

As Catherine De Vere, the former Countess of Warwick, once said "Like tiny seeds with potent power to push through tough ground and become mighty trees, we hold innate reserves of unimaginable strength. We are resilient, "but for it to work, for Bermuda to go on and do great things during these challenging, times, there must be a plan.

The same applies to Bermuda and her people, and we know that in the middle of economic and social difficulties, we will see and grasp real opportunities as they arise.

**There must always be a vision. There must always be a well-documented plan, and there must always be economic support. Without these key elements, there is no future for Bermuda and our people. The PLP have not delivered.**

#### **THE GLOBAL ECONOMY:**

According to the OECD Economic Outlook Interim Report for September 2022, the world economy is paying a high price for Russia's unprovoked, unjustifiable, and illegal war of aggression against Ukraine. With the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic still lingering, the war is dragging down growth and putting additional upward pressure on prices, for food and energy. Global GDP stagnated in the second quarter of 2022, and output declined in the G20 economies. High inflation is persisting for longer than expected, and in many economies, inflation in the first half of 2022 was at its highest since the 1980s. With recent indicators taking a turn for the worse, the global economic outlook has darkened.

Despite a boost in activity, and as COVID-19 infections drop worldwide, global growth is projected to remain subdued in the second half of 2022, before slowing further in 2023 to an annual growth of just 2.2%.

#### **THE DOMESTIC ECONOMY**

**Mr. Speaker:**

**The biggest and most challenging issue faced today by the people of Bermuda is Inflation.**

Moreover, the escalating cost of living, which is around 9-10%, is the highest it has been in 40 years.

Recently, The Federal Reserve increased the US base rate by seventy-five basis points, with the hope of arresting inflation and decreasing the cost of living. It is their best hope.

While this rate increase only works positively for the few who have savings or little or no debt, most families already have stretched budgets, and will face higher mortgage and credit card payments.

It also means that many business owners will be faced with making tough decisions to keep their businesses open and afloat.

**Mr. Speaker:**

For those wishing to purchase a home, it will become more out of reach for them than ever before, as the cost of financing continues to escalate with no end in sight. As long as we have the Ukrainian war, increased energy bills, the disruption of the supply chain, the remnants of the Covid 19 challenges and the cost-of-living increases, we will all have to brace ourselves for further impact. This could also mean that Bermuda **may** be faced with weak growth, low productivity, underinvestment, and a widening gap in inequality.

**Mr. Speaker:**

The continued increase in interest rates will drive our workers into more debt and other financial hardships, especially if they have mortgages and credit card debt. These same workers will continue to find themselves in increasing difficulties when paying their bills this year.

**To remedy this situation, local banks must do their best to help people in financial stress, because of international influences which are beyond their control. This could take the form of payment deferrals, interest only offerings, and the reduction of fees and charges.**

**Mr. Speaker:**

The Minister of Finance must lay out a plan to help people, especially if the local banks interest rates continue its current path of between 6.25% and 6.75% and rising. Bermuda needs a plan to help homeowners who are at the end of the line financially.

**Mr. Speaker,**

People are making difficult choices. They must choose between, food, healthcare and electricity as their income is not stretching far enough to cover their living expenses.

**The One Bermuda Alliance believes that the priority of the PLP Government's should be to grow and strengthen the economy, and to continue to help ease the cost of living for families.**

**Mr. Speaker:**

Considering this, Bermuda is in a tailspin and this year's Speech from the Throne has given the people of Bermuda truly little hope or aspiration for a brighter future.

We were all expecting a clear indication from the Throne Speech, that Bermuda and our people are well on our way to a healthy economic recovery. Instead, we received a disheartening economic speech, which lacked substance, and with no recovery plan to shed light on a progressive path forward.

**Premier Burt's 2022 Throne Speech lacked new and innovative direction. It was more of the same. Premier Burt was at his best, providing a lot of talk, with truly little action.**

**Mr. Speaker:**

Bermuda must grow her economic pie, and handouts will not help the process. The cannibalization of the farming, fishing and courier package industries will not help to grow our economy.

In fact, nothing in this year's Throne Speech speaks to how the Burt Government is going to grow the economy.

There is no real stimulus package in sight. What does the PLP Government's thriving economy look like, and how will it be achieved? Where are the real solutions for reducing the cost of living? Where is the PLP's road map to arrest the crippling escalation of our energy bills, healthcare costs, and our food costs?

**Bermuda needs a creative and workable economic recovery plan, which does more than 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:**

**This PLP Government should also drive economic growth to improve living standards and fund sustainable investment in public services. This should be supported by a responsible approach to the public finances, and reducing debt, while also reviewing the adequacy of our tax structure.**

#### **BERMUDA'S TAXATION SYSTEM:**

In fact, the PLP's 2020 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. However, just like the SAGE Report, the Fiscal Responsibility Panel's report, and other similar reports, this Administration has not put into practice meaningful or substantial recommendations made by these commissions.

**Finally, Bermuda's national debt currently stands at \$3.5 billion dollars. Where is the PLP Government's debt reduction and debt management plan?**

This PLP Government does not have any regard or concern about the trajectory of Bermuda's debt. Instead, they are passing the burden of debt onto our children and grandchildren, and they are not having it. Considering this, our young people are voting by leaving the island.

#### **TOURISM:**

**Mr. Speaker:**

Bermuda desperately needs to revitalize its lagging tourism industry and products. Further, the Bermuda Tourism Authority ("BTA"), must be given the economic and human capital to get on with its job, with minimal interference from the Government and politicians.

Speaking of human capital, if the BTA is going to revitalize tourism, it must start at the top of the organization. There is no clarity as to where things stand with the appointment of its Chief Executive Officer. Considering this tenuous situation, the Acting Chief Executive Officer and the Chief Operating Officer are doing the best that they can with the hands that they were dealt, given that the organization has been operating at a less than optimal standard for over two years.

**Mr. Speaker:**

A lot of confidence has been placed on the opening of the Fairmount Southampton Hotel. Many people see it as the rebirth of Bermuda's tourism industry, even though the status of the development's contract has yet to be confirmed.

Despite this, the BTA is not waiting for the opening of the hotel. They are reviewing and refining Tourism's Strategic Recovery Plan. We understand that Bermuda is nowhere near 'top of mind' for international tourists. In fact, Bermuda is near the bottom of the list. We as a tourist destination, we have lost our competitive advantage, as our sales team has not focused on the US East Coast, Canada, the UK, and Western Europe. In fact, in recent years, we have lost market share in most areas.

Despite our repeated efforts and public outcry, the PLP Government's insistence on maintaining the Travel Authorization Form, caused a deep scar on our reputation as tourism destination.

**Mr. Speaker:**

It appears that under the Progressive Labor Party Government, its tourism team became comfortable with focusing on the traditional US East Coast market, while our competitors to the south took a more aggressive marketing approach. Today, they enjoy more positive results which reflect their marketing approach.

**Mr. Speaker:**

When it comes to service levels and standards, we take the view that Bermuda should reintroduce, or revisit its tourism appreciation and training programs, as this has proven to be successful in the past.

On the matter of new inward tourism investment, except for the \$365-million-dollar renovation of the Southampton Princess, the pipeline for future investment prospects is dry. Consequently, Bermuda's 600 Airbnb accommodations have played a vital role in supporting Bermuda's tourism industry, and now they have begun to enjoy the green shoots of success.

**Mr. Speaker:**

Bermuda must do a better job of managing Bermuda's narrative. We must not allow overseas agencies and jurisdictions to define our message for us. In addition, the BTA and the Department of Tourism should implement a local campaign to encourage both Bermudians and guest workers, to become sales ambassadors for Bermuda's Tourism industry, when on holiday or when travelling on business.

**Mr. Speaker:**

When it comes to inward tourism investments, we believe that the Government does not need greater discretion in granting relief to developers and investors in attractions, restaurants, and hotels. Instead, we believe that the Tourism Investment Act is currently adequate as is, as it provides transparency and full oversight by our parliament.

**The Premier indicated that Bermuda is not competitive when it comes to attracting hotel investment. The One Bermuda Alliance asserts that this challenge lies squarely at the feet of the PLP Government, who has been in power for twenty of the past twenty-five years. During the five-year period, when the One Bermuda Alliance ran the government, we were extraordinarily successful in attracting tourism investment capital. The St Regis Hotel, the Loren and the Azura hotels are a testament to our success.**



**Mr Speaker:**

**Let us be clear, the PLP Government should not, and must not compromise the BTA's mandate and authority. As you will recall, a former PLP Tourism Minister said that he was going to rip out the engine of the BTA, and he did.**

As mentioned, other than the promised refurbishment of the Fairmont Southampton, **the Progressive Labor Party has made no recent substantive contributions to Bermuda's tourism product.**

In contrast, the One Bermuda Alliance Government set the pace in attracting new investors to the island. Without question, the initiatives we planted are still keeping Bermuda's economy afloat today.

The One Bermuda Alliance placed tourism in the hands of tourism professionals, with the creation of the BTA. As a result, the country saw almost immediate benefits, such as:

- The five-star St. Regis Hotel which now graces the town of St. Georges. The seed was planted and germinated because of the One Bermuda Alliance administration and management.
- The five-star Loren Hotel: This boutique hotel was developed and birthed under the auspices of the One Bermuda Alliance Government.
- The new Azura hotel complex, which is currently in the last stages of completion on the South Road in Warwick.
- The new L.F. Wade Airport, which was attributed to the One Bermuda Alliance and the Hon. E.T. Bob Richards and his cabinet colleagues.
- Again, this world acclaimed airport provided a great needed boost to employment, our economy, and our tourism infrastructure and product.
- And finally, Bermuda's America's Cup in 2017, which is widely thought of as one of the greatest sporting events ever hosted in Bermuda as it brought much need employment and economic benefits to the island.
- In fact, because of this OBA brainchild, Bermuda continues to host Sail GP five years later.

It is because of the solid foundation laid by the One Bermuda Alliance during its years as the Government, that Bermuda's tourism sector is afloat today.

**Mr. Speaker:**

Bermuda's tourism cannot thrive without dependable airline carriers. Therefore, the Tourism Redevelopment Plan must also include increasing our airlift and getting Bermuda's airline carriers and partners sorted out.

The government knows that the loss of our Boston route deeply affected our core eastern seaboard markets, and those who rely on the direct flight for overseas medical treatment.

Other key air links to experience drastically reduced service, includes New York, Miami, and Toronto, which for months, has been a hit or miss as far as flights are concerned.

**Mr. Speaker:**

When it comes to the development of an airline strategy, all stakeholders should be involved. That includes the Airport Authority, the Bermuda Tourism Authority, Bermuda's Airline consultant, Skypoint,

Bermuda Hotel Association and the Ministry of Transportation. This stakeholder team should find a leader who will guide the initiative to ensure that Bermuda has dependable air services. They must continue to court and build positive relationships with airline network planners. If we are going to increase concessions for hotels, it must correspond with investments in our airline strategy.

They should also ensure that Bermuda has a highly visible presence at the famous “Route World” conferences where Bermudians can reinforce the strength of their relationship with existing carriers that currently service Bermuda and extend a welcoming hand to potentially new carriers who want to extend their footprint and network.

**Mr. Speaker:**

In 2022, the Opposition asserts that the BTA is on the correct path by focusing on sports tourism, super yachts, the UK market and developing and launching a new branding campaign.

**SMALL BUSINESS:**

**Mr. Speaker:**

Throughout the past 24 months, a number of small businesses have been absolutely decimated. Local businesses which have been around for decades were forced to close or dramatically downsize. Many of the surviving businesses have had to reconfigure their business model.

It appears that the island is systematically shutting down. What is this government doing to remedy this?

**Mr. Speaker:**

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

This government must do all it can to encourage 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 between one to three months, to enable retailers to pay their Customs duties *after* their products are sold, 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 told me that he is trying to get one expat guest worker for his workforce of 15 Bermudian employees, but the application continues to be 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 the local banks. These small business entrepreneurs feel that they are unacceptable, or unwelcomed when they go to the banks to 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.

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

## **INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS:**

### **Mr. Speaker:**

As stated in last year's Throne Speech Response, regarding 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 area status in the US.

For this reason alone, Bermuda must continue to support International Business. We must continue to collaborate 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 economically and socially.

## **IMMIGRATION AND LABOUR:**

### **Mr. Speaker:**

From an economic perspective, Bermuda will not improve without a larger and stronger work force. Bermuda needs more job creators and more people paying taxes and consuming services.

### **Mr. Speaker:**

As you may or may not know, the Burt Government has spent the people's money on a software system to manage the work permit processes, but we have yet to hear about its progress.

Work permit approvals are still taking a considerable amount of time to process and receiving documentation once permits have been approved is taking months. There are instances where people have arrived on island without work permit documentation. As a result, they are hamstrung by their inability to settle here and do things like opening bank accounts and renting properties, as work permits are often required. Bermuda must do better. Having new residents receive approval for a work permit, then having to wait for months for the work permit documentation to be approved is embarrassing, especially for a country that wants to continue to attract residents to come and work and live on the island. This is costing Bermuda financially.



**Mr. Speaker:**

We in the Opposition support the Government's current efforts, including the Economic Investment Certificate & Residential Certificate Program.

This government needs to address the tough questions such as what should a transparent, equitable route to achieve full Bermuda status looks like?

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

On the issue of the new Department of Labor, which is being established to ensure that workers' rights are protected, and employers have certainty in the application of Bermuda's labor laws, we the Opposition reserve our judgment on that development and would like to ensure that women and gender affairs are covered. In addition, we would like to see what will be done to support the employment of people with disabilities.

**Mr. Speaker:**

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

The enforcement team at the Department of 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.

**EDUCATION:**

The Government should continue with the implementation of the educational reforms with the participation of our parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. The Department of Education must ensure that our students have the required prerequisite skills to enable them to successfully transfer from Parish Schools to Middle Schools and our Senior Signature Schools. The current reforms in education must help every child to fulfil their potential, raise standards, and improve the quality of schools and higher education.

**Mr. Speaker:**

The One Bermuda Alliance and the Bermuda First Group promoted an education authority for several years.

Recent reports from Bermuda First, indicated that the realities of today's education underline the need for the creation of an independent authority for public education, to be responsible for the performance management of educators. It would also be responsible for researching and implementing a holistic public education system, be appropriately sized and structured, and develop a learning environment to facilitate optimal student success.

In fact, the Minister of Education made a commitment to deliver on an Education Authority-this was a promise not kept. When will this Government deliver an Education Authority?

**Mr. Speaker:**

Like most sciences, global education always evolves. Now, more than ever, we need to view education through a different lens.

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.

**A good teacher produces talented students.**

As stated last year, another significant issue which must 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. These results should be used to judge the performance of our students, our teachers, our principals, our schools, and our school system.

**Mr. Speaker:**

**YOUTH AND SPORTS:**

Conspicuous by its absence in the PLP's Throne Speech, is their commitment to Youth and Sports.

**Mr. Speaker:**

Recently, Bermuda hosted the World Triathlon Championship Series, and Dame Flora Duffy OBE, walked away with a convincing gold medal performance in the Elite Women's Race. Thousands of Bermudians came out to support our Bermudian Flora, and the other Bermudian Athletes, who participated on the international stage with other Olympic and World Championship medalists.

We wonder, how many other future international young athletes there are? With the proper training and the support of the Bermuda Government, their families, and support teams, our young people can reach this pinnacle of success, whether it is track and field, soccer, tennis, cricket, golf, or equestrian sports.

If we invest earlier, we may be able produce more athletes like Clyde Best, Clarence Hill, and Flora Duffy. The Bermuda Government must demonstrate more commitment to Youth and Sports. They should have had a more prominent role in the Throne Speech. The recent introduction of the Sports Policy was followed by changing the Minister, who spent an inordinate amount of time to develop the policy. We all know the positive impact that sports can have on young people. Sadly, Sports was ignored in the PLP's Throne Speech.

## **FAMILIES AND CHILDREN:**

Many families are in crisis, and we see evidence of this manifest in all forms of abuse, health outcomes, violence and in several other ways. The Burt administration must establish clearer pathways for families to get the support they need early- before problems elevate to crisis level. Early intervention is critical to provide the support needed to address some of the issues they face.

As part of the Department of Child and Family Services' Psychoeducation Programme, millions of dollars have been spent over the years to send Bermuda's children to overseas treatment facilities, with varying results. A report on the feasibility of establishing a local treatment facility should be commissioned by the Government to determine the cost of establishing it, and whether it would be more beneficial to the children to receive treatment locally, in familiar surroundings with supportive networks rather than being sent overseas. A comprehensive review of protocols surrounding children that are in the care of the Department of Child and Family Services should also be conducted.

## **EXODUS OF FAMILIES AND YOUNG PEOPLE:**

### **Mr. Speaker:**

Other growing concerns are the challenges faced by our young people who fall between the ages of 20 to 35 years old.

Candidly, 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 follow their passions.

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

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

### **Mr Speaker:**

Again, the exodus of young human capital and brain drain was recently reaffirmed by Ms. McKenzie Kohi Tuckett, one of Bermuda's many shining stars, when she recently delivered a speech in the UK House of Commons. She indicated that one of the top significant issues in the Government's National Youth Policy was the exodus and relocation of our young people. She went on to indicate that the primary reason for this flight is unemployment, and the unemployment of degree holders. She indicated that these young people were struggling to feel at home post university, and they felt that there was a lack of opportunity for them here in Bermuda.

She also warned that the Island suffered from a brain drain and a loss of qualified talent.

### **Mr. Speaker:**

This government must also 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 continue to establish more tech fairs to expose our young people to the forefront in robotics, coding, and animation skills.

## SENIORS:

In the 2020 Throne Speech, Progressive Labor Party Government promised a National Seniors Strategy and a Prevention Plan for Seniors' Abuse, and it still has not fully materialized. Bermuda's seniors have contributed to the country and paved the way for future generations. They should be valued.

The One Bermuda Alliance takes the view that when it comes to seniors, the government should:

- **Keep them healthy** - There should be a recreational center dedicated for senior's use and that promotes regular physical activity, community, and social engagement. Soon to be vacated primary schools could be utilized for such a purpose.
- **Help them get around** - Transportation is an issue for many seniors given the unreliability and expense of bus and other public transport services, and disrespect that some seniors experience. There should be a free or subsidized minibus service or register of taxi drivers who could transport seniors to grocery stores, to attend doctors' appointments, banking, and other errands.
- **Protect them** - there needs to be a higher standard and caliber of oversight for independent caregivers.
- **House them** - Most seniors in Bermuda are living solely from their pensions. For those who do not own their own homes, a substantial portion of their funds are spent on rent. There should be affordable housing units specifically designed to accommodate seniors' needs.
- **We should be giving tax relief** for seniors care and other personal care items to help them lower their overall costs.

We recommend changes to the National Social Insurance Reform, which will also impact our seniors. We also acknowledge the Government's intention to move towards a sliding scale model which will be similar to the UK model. We agree that contributions based on salary earned is reasonable. On the other hand, how will the benefit payments will be determined and paid? The devil will be in the details. In light of this, the One Bermuda Alliance will reserve judgment on this proposal until all the details and the infrastructure are defined.

## Mr. Speaker:

### NATIONAL HEALTHCARE:

Bermuda has the unenviable reputation of having the third highest rate of diabetes amongst OECD countries. Thirteen percent of our population are afflicted, and 50% of our residents have at least one of the following chronic diseases, such as diabetes, heart diseases or kidney diseases.

According to the Ministry of Health, one in three residents have high blood pressure and/or high cholesterol. In addition, \$29 million dollars are spent every year on dialysis and demand for these services grows a minimum of 10% per year.

On the matter of uninsured residents, approximately 12% of Bermuda's residents are uninsured, and 23% of our population takes the view that health insurance is unaffordable, and there are those who are underinsured.

From a cost perspective, 11.6% of Bermuda's GDP is spent on healthcare, which is the third highest in the OECD. In addition, **my research in the Ministry of Health also indicates that healthcare expenditures grew by an astronomical 92% between 2006 and 2017.**

**The Ministry of Health must finalize Bermuda's Health Strategy.** This strategy should address the promotion of healthy living, preventative care, and mental health. It should be patient focused, with individual patient id numbers. It must utterly understand patient needs and provide universal healthcare

coverage. It should also harness healthcare technology for better efficiency and patient outcomes.

In addition, KEMH must clearly define its operating model. Is it a for profit hospital or is it a not-for-profit community hospital, which can make it more affordable? Whatever model is being used; the Government continues to inject money into Bermuda's Hospital Board. These are unbudgeted funds, and this option of financing is unsustainable

**Mr. Speaker:**

When it comes to national healthcare, the OBA recommends that the PLP Government should:

- Develop a National Healthcare plan to ensure that every Bermudian has health insurance coverage. It must be evidenced-based, and managed by independent professionals;
- Ensure that each patient has 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.
- Explore possibilities of allowing fully dependent elderly parents to be covered on their children's health insurance plan.

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.

In the meantime, the excessive cost of healthcare in Bermuda, and the fragile and worsening financial position of our only hospital and the Bermuda Hospital Board must be addressed. **Government cannot continue to inject unbudgeted capital. This model is irresponsible, and unsustainable.**

**MENTAL HEALTH:**

Bermuda has a small population of people who sleep and beg on the streets. A simple stroll through town shows evidence that the numbers are increasing. We must focus on homelessness, untreated mental health, and related behavioral problems.

Bermuda needs a central facility where people with drug, and mental health issues can get to without the need for transportation, as getting to MAWI is not on a bus route and is challenging for some people to get to.

**Mr. Speaker:**

The One Bermuda Alliance would ensure the police are visible in Hamilton and that they have specialists' mental health training to appropriately deal with people with mental health issues and other crises (e.g., domestic violence).

Untreated or unaddressed mental and related behavioral issues add financial, human, and other resource

burdens on the hospital, police force, courts, and prisons. It does nothing to help the individuals, potentially puts the public at risk and is not good for the tourist experience (crime against tourists will be more of an issue if not addressed). It is a situation that should not be ignored.

#### **DOMESTIC ABUSE:**

The PLP Government must proactively address domestic abuse. This is a complex matter and there is no one thing that can be implemented to prevent it. However, we believe that an action plan should be created. It must be collaborative, with a focus on education, training, safety, and the security of victims of abuse and interventions for abusers. Bermuda should also have a specialist Domestic Violence Court to function like the mental health court, which would specifically address the needs of both the victims and abusers.

#### **NATIONAL SECURITY:**

The lack of mention and attention to National Security in the Throne Speech is a worrying sign. While the services within the Ministry of National Security served the island well through the Covid Pandemic. Perhaps this government has forgotten the challenges they faced, such as manpower and working conditions in the Department of Corrections, manpower, perhaps at its lowest level in years currently, and budget constraints within the Bermuda Police Services.

While significant funding is tied up in violent crime and corruption investigation, community policing is being scaled back.

#### **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, instead of disrespecting them, by providing the best possible conditions of service and physical environment. It also requires vigorously confronting the causes of crime as well as being tough with perpetrators of the crime itself.

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

The PLP government has been defunding the police by slashing their budget. They have also not provided our firefighters with the necessary equipment and have allowed conditions at the prisons to fester.

The One Bermuda Alliance believes in law, order, and we value the demanding work of our uniformed service men and women. 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 men and women 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 Bermuda's prisons to ensure that 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 programs 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.

## **GANG VIOLENCE:**

### **Mr Speaker:**

Unfortunately, there have been reoccurring spates of violence in Bermuda. The sad reality is that our community appears to have become numb to this anti-social behavior and have accepted it as new way of life.

Alarming, there have been eight murders this year, with many more shooting incidents, violent attacks, and brawls. This is unacceptable and says that gang violence is alive and well, and that we have real social problems which need to be addressed as a matter of urgency.

As for the scale of the gang challenge in Bermuda, the Minister of Security indicated at a recent Gang symposium in October that the island is facing a "crisis" in gang violence and "candid discussions" need to be held with stakeholders to resolve the problem. He stated-quote "it poses a grave threat to our young people, our peace of mind, our schools, our societal expectations of normal behaviour, and the very fabric of our Bermudian culture. I find it utterly unconscionable that around 1,000 people actively involved in gangs can cause this much disruption and devastation to a population of just over 60,000 people on a twenty-one square-mile/four square-mile wide island." end quote.

### **Mr. Speaker:**

As a country, 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.

Gang violence reflects 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:**

The Premier and the Progressive Labor Party Government has once again placed independence on the parliamentary agenda. They have sanctioned and produced a report entitled "Assessment of Self Governance Sufficiency in conformity with internationally recognized standards. Collectively, we ask: **Why now?**

- when Bermudian families are trying to figure out how they are going to eat and pay bills and are concerned about their future?
- when are our young people are moving to the United Kingdom in droves?

- when as we speak, increasingly more of our Bermudian residents are securing UK passports?
- when are our young people are getting home fees when attending UK, and universities?

**To raise independence now is yet another stark reminder that Premier Burt and his Government has utterly lost touch with the people.**

## **TRANSPORTATION:**

### **Mr. Speaker:**

The current state of Bermuda's roads is a direct reflection on the state of our economy. If anyone wishes to understand recession, notice the inability of the PLP government to afford repairs and improvements to our roadways. Clearly, the PLP Government does not have the funding, nor the desire to address the severity of our hazardous roads which its citizens are subjected to on a daily basis, not to mention our tourists.

Care and management of our roadways is dependent on the collaboration of national stakeholders, including Works and Engineering, Transport Control, the Bermuda Police Service, the Road Safety Council, internet providers and utilities. Very little effective activity has taken place to improve overgrowth, potholes, speeding and poorly repaired road paving, and the regretful road traffic accidents and fatalities.

## **TAXIS:**

The taxi industry is an iconic feature of Bermuda's tourism product, but they are fighting for their existence, as Transport seeks to consolidate the industry into one public service.

Taxi owners should not have to compete with other public service vehicles which offers a very different customer experience. Making changes without taking the welfare of our taxi owners' and their cultural significance to heart, is in direct contradiction to delivering the best Bermuda customer experience.

## **BUSES:**

Electrification

Electric buses, mini-cars, bikes, and scooters are a growing industry and with it comes growing pains. Residents are already reporting the irresponsible use of rentals, such as riding cycles on sidewalks, not wearing helmets, and using handheld devices. Government must work quickly to put legislation in place for responsible use and safety of users.

## **NATIONAL DEBT:**

With Bermuda's national debt approaching \$4 billion dollars, we must build a vibrant economy where jobs are created with a focus on equity, diversity, free trade, and real opportunities for Bermudians.

We must find investors to support small businesses and our local economy, and we must Buy Bermuda.

**To mitigate the rising cost challenges, the One Bermuda Alliance has called for the elimination of the Sugar Taxes, a reduction in the foreign currency purchase tax for one year, an amendment to customs duties that will allow our retailers to pay customs and import duties at the point of sale and not in advance. We would also consider the reduction of the cost of public transportation by 12.5% for one year.**

We support Government's recent reduction in customs duties payable for essential food items, and feminine hygiene products. We also would invite the Government to eliminate all "Pink Taxes" which will also include contraceptive products and **PLACE A MORATORIUM ON NEW HIRES IN THE CIVIL SERVICE**. We must encourage the Government to review our tax system for adequacy and economic sustainability.

**Mr. Speaker**

#### **GLOBAL WARMING AND CLIMATE CHANGE:**

On the matter of Global Warming and Climate Change, when is the Burt Government going to craft and develop a national Global Warming Adaptation Plan for Bermuda? What strategies are we going to share with the people of Bermuda to mitigate climate risks, which are threatening our families, our homes, and environment. Look at the frequency and intensity of our hurricanes, the ongoing calving of our coastal cliffs, the rise in temperatures in the Summer and the threat to our mangroves.

When it comes to reducing Bermuda's carbon footprint, the government should aim for more electric or hybrid vehicles for Bermuda's roads. Considering this, it is unconscionable that the current Transportation Minister is currently entertaining the thought of reintroducing customs duties on electric vehicles.

**If the Burt administration is serious about the lessening global warming, they must not move forward with the proposed taxation of electric vehicles.** They must reinforce the islands green agenda and provide the appropriate incentives and tools to make it happen.

#### **CONCLUSION**

**Mr. Speaker:**

**While the Throne Speech opened by stating that "Bermuda has been tested," we in the Opposition believe that the Government has failed the test miserably. They have not adequately supported Bermuda and her people.** Leaders in the Burt government are more concerned about political control, versus principled leadership. They have not and will not set the country up for success.

**This Government must remain focused on building Bermuda's social support programs, and initiatives. They must also continue to support the growth of Bermuda's Domestic Economy's Growth and that of the International Business industry. This PLP Government must deliver the Bermuda we all want, the Bermuda we all deserve!**

We deserve a Bermuda where we have equitable access to quality education and training. A Bermuda where we have efficient and reliable infrastructure and services. A Bermuda where we have access to timely and affordable healthcare. A Bermuda where our unique environmental and cultural assets are preserved. A Bermuda where small business, entrepreneurial and creative talents thrive. A Bermuda where we are safe and secure. A Bermuda where people consider us the destination of choice. A Bermuda where all our people are positive contributors to our society and love, nurture, protect and support each other.

Let us all ensure that the PLP Government do less talking and more positive action.

They must empower our people, secure their peace, provide them with opportunities and invest in their prosperity.

**Thank You Mr. Speaker**

The Hon. N.H. Cole Simons JP MP  
Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister of Finance

