His Excellency Mr Martyn Keith Roper, OBE

Throne Speech

26 November 2021

Honourable Speaker, Members of Parliament, it is a great honour for me to stand before you today to deliver my third Throne Speech as Governor of the Cayman Islands, and my first since this Government's formation following their success in the 2021 General Election. As I have done since arriving, it will not be the traditional Throne Speech setting out the Government's agenda. That is properly a matter for the elected Government in line with our modern and mature constitutional relationship. I will focus my comments on how we are handling the global pandemic, on climate change after COP 26 and on the excellent state of the UK/Cayman partnership.

The months since the formation of the new Government, with Premier Panton at the helm, have seen great challenges but he and his colleagues in Cabinet have ably steered Cayman through these and set the jurisdiction on a clear path of recovery from the worst health crisis in a century. It is a fact that every government in the world has found this an incredibly difficult time in which to govern.

In recent weeks, we have had to deal with widespread cases of community transmission of Covid. My thoughts and prayers are with those in hospital and their families. Let me also pay tribute to our brave nurses, doctors and support staff at HSA and public health.

I understand why the spike in cases feels unsettling for our community that had lived for so long in one of the safest bubbles anywhere in the world. Yet the outstandingly high vaccine take up gives us confidence and is a major achievement of this Government. It has enabled significant numbers of people to take not only first and second doses of the vaccine but also boosters, and together with implementation of lateral flow policies, will help us all live as normally and safely as possible whilst the virus moves among us.

The Government has worked tirelessly and effectively with the civil service under the Honourable Deputy Governor's leadership, and with industry representatives, to prepare for the reopening of our borders to tourists on 20 November. I understand how difficult a decision that was. But it was the right decision as we learn to live with covid. It is a significant step forward on the road to recovery, and I want to pay tribute at this point to Travel Cayman in its various guises for successfully enabling travel and keeping us safe. The revenue tourists bring, and the jobs their presence creates, will be a relief to many. The Government's plan to test Covid protocols for a one-off cruise ship visit on 28 December is also a welcome development.

Of course the news yesterday of a new variant in Southern Africa is a great cause for concern. The UK has already temporarily suspended flights from the countries affected. There is still much we do not know so we should not yet be overly alarmed.

I am pleased to confirm that the UK commitment to support Cayman and other OTs during this global pandemic remains steadfast. The UK will continue to provide Cayman with vaccines against Covid, including boosters for everyone currently eligible to receive the vaccine (including soon to all adults not just those over 40). I am pleased to announce that two UK Health Security Agency (formerly Public health England) epidemiologists will shortly visit Cayman for 2 weeks to support us on health data and statistics. The UK is also committed to providing Cayman with access to the UK's limited supply of Covid 19 therapeutics and anti-virals, exciting new developments which will help us better protect people who get covid 19 and key tools to enable us to live with this terrible disease.

As many of you are already aware our excellent Chief Medical Officer, Dr John Lee, will soon be vacating the post he has filled most effectively throughout the pandemic. I would like to pay tribute to him for his outstanding service, for which I know he will always be fondly remembered in Cayman.

His voice of calm and reason was reassuring to many of us during the pandemic, and Government has continued to benefit from his sage advice throughout. I am delighted to have supported Cayman in recruiting Dr Autilia Newton, previously the UK Health Security Agency's Overseas Territories' advisor, to take on the CMO role temporarily until a permanent successor can be identified. She visited Cayman in March 2020. She brings a wealth of experience and expertise.

Two weeks ago the Honourable Premier represented Cayman at the 26th Conference of the Parties on climate change in Glasgow. By prioritising his time to attend this event the Premier demonstrated leadership to show the world that he is dedicated to doing what he can to tackle the issues around climate change - of particular significance to low lying islands such as ours. That he has created a Ministry for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency, with himself as responsible Minister, shows that, domestically too he means business. Although our global impact is small, I salute the Premier's and this Government's intention to ensure Cayman can put its own house in order and set a good example in the region.

In Glasgow, the HRH the Prince of Wales personally congratulated the Premier on Cayman's newly established Commonwealth Climate Growth Fund. The Prince has taken an interest in the fund since his highly successful visit to Cayman in 2019. The fund will contribute to raising private sector climate finance for the region and the Commonwealth for investment in Blue/Green projects.

Through the projects financed by the fund Cayman has the potential to make a significant global contribution to combatting climate change. That is potentially quite an achievement for these islands and one that should be applauded.

In addition to the Honourable Premier, it was wonderful to see how well Cayman was represented at COP including with youth delegates such as Caymanian Dejea Lyons who spoke on the global stage about our ocean health during the Nature Day panel. A real moment of pride for Cayman.

Continuing to strengthen OT/UK Cayman cooperation post-COP 26 will remain a top priority for my office. We have a number of Cayman/UK projects underway. As part of the Cayman Islands/UK partnership agreement on climate change and the environment, the Cayman Islands will benefit from the UK Government's Seabed mapping programme - this aerial survey of the waters around all three Cayman Islands is currently ongoing. The information provided by this £1Million cross-OT project will enable policy makers to reduce risk to the environment, life and vessels, support compliance with international maritime obligations and support development of blue economies. The UK will also fully fund, to the value of £110,000, a Cayman specific climate change risk assessment. This important initiative, led by the Honourable Premier, will provide the scientific analysis needed to update the 2011 National

Climate Change Policy. Both projects will help this Government design and implement policies to build climate change resiliency for the Cayman Islands.

A year ago, under the previous Government, Cayman expanded our Marine Park Area to just under 50% of our coastal waters and I am delighted that the Premier has indicated to Ministers in the UK his desire to join the UK's Blue Belt programme which will help Cayman protect and sustainably manage our marine environments.

As follow-up to COP 26, I believe Cayman should set ambitious climate change targets – I know the Premier is committed to that and I offer my full support and that of the UK.

Just last week I was in the UK for the 9th Annual Joint Ministerial Council, where Cayman was very ably represented by Minister Andre Ebanks. This Joint Ministerial Council (JMC), the first in person since 2018, celebrated the UK-OT partnership and your place in the UK family. The Duke of Cambridge and the Foreign Secretary both attended. In a pre-recorded address by the Prime Minister, he reiterated unequivocally his strong commitment to the Overseas Territories and I quote – '*we will stand with you, now and through whatever comes our way'*. Over the ensuing two days the discussion covered the impact of climate change and safeguarding biodiversity; the UK-OT relationship; building resilient economies; policing and law enforcement; COVID-19 response and mental health; domestic violence and children's rights and inclusive societies. The resulting joint communiqué highlighted the breadth of the relationship and committed the UK to champion OT interests.

Another tangible example of the UK's support for the Overseas Territories has just been announced. OT students starting their studies in England in the 2022 to 2023 academic year will be eligible for tuition fee loans, just like British students.

Caymanian students studying in the UK already benefit from being charged the same as British students for their tuition, as opposed to the more expensive overseas student fees. Now they will also be eligible to apply for a loan to help them pay those fees, which could benefit those from lower income families. This decision makes it even more attractive for Caymanians to further their education in one of the great English Universities, and in doing so strengthen the UK's links with Cayman. There are currently 300 Caymanian students in UK. I hope to see many more.

The UK continues to offer support to the Cayman Islands Regiment. A mere 18 months since the start of their first recruitment campaign they are now over 90 men and women whom we have already come to rely on to augment our crisis response. I feel certain that you will have seen these young men and women in action, for example distributing food to those in need whilst in isolation, helping rebuild the field hospital for Covid patients, or clearing debris from the Queen Elizabeth Botanic Park and Mastic Trail after Tropical Storm Grace. Despite some naysayers, the Regiment is already a great asset to these islands. Next summer the UK will once again send a team of trainers to put the newest batch of recruits through their paces and we are exploring what additional UK support we can offer to help ensure the Regiment can thrive.

I would also want to commend all the uniformed services of the Cayman Islands. The brave men and women of our Royal Cayman Islands Police force continue to do their utmost to keep us safe from the scourge of organised and violent crime. Our hard-working officers at Customs and Border Control who secure our border. Our relatively new, yet increasingly impressive Coastguard, operating now under the Coastguard Act of 2021, works hard to protect our maritime boundaries from unlawful incursions, and save lives at sea. The Fire Service put their own lives at risk unflinchingly when tackling blazes and extricating people from the far too frequent car crashes we see on these islands. Prison Service staff strive every day to work with offenders, not only to keep them safe in Prison, including dealing with a serious covid spike in the prison, but to try and show them a different path to follow upon their release. I would like to offer my heartfelt thanks to our outgoing and outstanding Prison Director Steve Barrett for all he has done during his time here to build a strong and dedicated team. He is a model civil servant and we have much to thank him for.

On the subject of departing public servants I would also like to acknowledge the work of the Ombudsman, Sandy Hermiston, who has done excellent work to support the public in ensuring fairness when dealing with government agencies, and assisting the jurisdiction in upholding high standards of transparency and accountability. She will be much missed. I wish her well on her return to Canada.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, next year will mark the 70th Anniversary on the throne of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II. I am sure we can all agree that Her Majesty is a truly extraordinary Monarch admired throughout the world for her selfless service. I know there is great affection for Her Majesty in Cayman. The UK, Commonwealth countries and the Overseas Territories will mark Her Majesty's Platinum Jubilee next year. I am therefore delighted to announce that Cabinet has agreed that we will have a long holiday week-end next June with public holidays on Friday 3rd and Monday 6th June to hold a wide range of activities to celebrate this remarkable milestone. Amongst other activities, a Committee established by our excellent Cabinet Secretary is already planning a concert, firework display, district events, a beacon lighting for Her Majesty, the return of the much loved air show and a car show. I will host the Queen's Birthday Party and the parade will be outside Government House, a new innovation and great success last year. I am also excited that we will be 'planting a tree for the jubilee' across the islands, involving our schoolchildren. I know that you too Mr Speaker want to ensure Parliament marks this occasion in a suitable manner. I feel confident that we will enjoy a wonderful long week-end and show our respect and admiration.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members, let me end by saying that I have the utmost respect for Cayman, its people, its rich culture and heritage. It remains a truly inspiring privilege to be your Governor. As I enter what will be my last full year as Governor, I will continue to do my utmost for the people of these wonderful islands that I have come to greatly admire. I will fight your corner to the best of my ability.

The Government has an ambitious agenda to deliver on its promises to the electorate. As you examine this programme in detail in the coming days, let me welcome this government's unflinching commitment to the Framework for Fiscal responsibility. The pandemic is not over. Prudence and caution is very sensible. We must strive to maintain Cayman's hard won reputation in recent years for fiscal responsibility.

For my part, I look forward to working closely with Premier Panton and his team in the time I have left as Governor. They have my full support and that of the UK. Cayman has so much to be proud of. It has a well deserved and strong reputation regionally and in the UK. I am convinced the future is incredibly bright as we come out of the global pandemic.