PARLIAMENT
OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

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OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

Fourth Meeting of the 2023/2024 Session

Third Sitting

Wednesday
24 July, 2024
(Pages 1-26)

Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin
Speaker

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PRESENT WERE:

Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin, KCMG, MBE, KC, JP, MP
Speaker

MINISTERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP	*Acting Premier*, Acting Minister of Finance and Economic Development, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce and Investment, Innovation & Social Development
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, MP	*Acting Deputy Premier,* Minister of Tourism & Ports
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, MP	Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure and Transport & Development
Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, MP	Minister of Health & Wellness and Home Affairs
Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, MP	Minister of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency
Hon. Isaac D. Rankine, JP, MP	Minister of Youth, Sports and Heritage
Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, OCI, JP, MP	Minister of Border Control & Labour and Culture

EX OFFICIO MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

Hon. Franz I. Manderson, MBE, Cert Hon, JP	*Deputy Governor*, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of the Civil Service
Hon. Samuel W. Bulgin, KC, JP	*Attorney General*, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of Legal Affairs

ELECTED MEMBERS

GOVERNMENT BACKBENCHERS

Hon. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP	*Deputy Speaker*, Parliamentary Secretary to Tourism *and* Social Development, Elected Member for Savannah
Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, JP, MP	Elected Member for West Bay West
Mr. Bernie A. Bush, MP	Elected Member for West Bay North

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, JP, MP	*Leader of the Opposition*, Elected Member for George Town East
Mr. Joseph X. Hew, MP	*Deputy Leader of the Opposition*, Elected Member for George Town North
Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, OBE, JP, MP	Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman
Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, JP, NP, MP	Elected Member for George Town South
Mr. David C. Wight, JP, MP	Elected Member for George Town West

INDEPENDENT OPPOSITION MEMBERS

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, MP	Elected Member for Bodden Town West
Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP	Elected Member for Newlands

APOLOGIES

Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP	*Premier* and Minister of Finance, Education and District Administration & Lands

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
FOURTH MEETING OF THE 2023/2024 SESSION
WEDNESDAY
24 JULY, 2024
11:13 A.M.

Third Sitting

[Hon. Alden McLaughlin, Speaker, presiding]

The Speaker: Good morning. Parliament is resumed. I will ask the Honourable Minister for Planning to grace us with prayers.

PRAYERS

Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure and Transport & Development, Elected Member for North Side: Let us pray.

Almighty God, from whom all wisdom and power are derived, we beseech thee so to direct and prosper the deliberations of the Parliament now assembled, that all things may be ordered upon the best and surest foundations for the glory of Thy name, and for the safety, honour and welfare of the people of these Islands.

Bless our Sovereign, King Charles, III; William, Prince of Wales and all the Royal Family. Give grace to all who exercise authority in our Commonwealth, that peace and happiness; truth and justice; religion and piety may be established among us. Especially we pray for the Governor of our Islands, the Premier, the Speaker of Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, Ministers of the Cabinet, ex-officio members, Members of Parliament, the Chief Justice and members of the Judiciary, that we may be enabled faithfully to perform the responsible duties of our high office. All this we ask for Thy great name's sake.

Let us all say the Lord's Prayer together: *Our Father who art in heaven Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass us against us; lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, forever and ever. Amen.*

The Lord bless us and keep us. The Lord, make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us. The Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and give us peace now and always.

Amen.

The Speaker: Amen. Please be seated.

ADMINISTRATION OF OATHS OR AFFIRMATIONS

The Speaker: None.

READING BY THE HONOURABLE SPEAKER OF MESSAGES AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Speaker: Honourable members, I have two very short announcements this morning.

The first is what I consider should be accepted as good news. The Standing Orders Working Group is nearing the end of its consideration and drafting of new Standing Orders. We are at Standing Order 82 of 91, and I am very hopeful that by the time this House next meets, and I am assuming that's going to be September, we should be in a position where the House can decide what the new Standing Orders will look like.

[Desk thumping]

The Speaker: The second is this: I wish to express my concern, again, about the fact that this Parliament has not yet agreed a Code of Conduct which all Members would be required to be subscribed to. I understand from a brief discussion with the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier, that we are close to agreeing a Code which all Members will be prepared to subscribe to. I really believe it would be an important legacy of this term of this Parliament for us to leave behind a Code of Conduct.

The issue which has kept it from being agreed all along is the question of who should deal with complaints and give judgment on them. I understand through the Honourable Attorney General's Office, that the Standards in Public Life Commission has agreed to accept that responsibility. If that does transpire, I think it should allay any concerns that Members may have about the majority using the Code of Conduct to beat the minority, because then everyone should be satisfied that there will be an independent Body that looks at complaints that are received.

The other point I want to make, and this is just my thinking, is that I believe it is important, if and when, prayerfully, a Code of Conduct is agreed, that it is given the force of law. Obviously, any other Parliament may

change any law, but I do not believe that some voluntary code is going to be sufficient. I think whatever we agree needs to have the force of law behind it, and I ask the Honourable Premier— who I know is listening— and the Honourable Acting Premier to bear that in mind, as well as the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, with whom I have already spoken about this matter.

I hope that by saying those few words we will get some impetus, and that we can get this done and dusted by the next time the House meets as well.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, Elected Member for West Bay West: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Honourable Member for West Bay West.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: For my information, at least, didn't we sign some Code of Conduct, and it was the Opposition that did not sign it, so where is anything outstanding at this time? I certainly don't have anything new. If something was passed around, I don't have anything new and I would certainly ask you, Mr. Speaker, to see that Members get something because I certainly don't know, I don't know of any other Member from what I'm hearing.

The grumbling is that it doesn't seem that anybody has any paper to see, so I don't know what the situation is, but I know [that while I was] sitting in that chair, something was signed. From what I recall, I don't think the Opposition agreed on everything so I don't think the Opposition signed, but I know something was signed by Members.

The Speaker: Honourable—

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Mr. Speaker, if there is something new— and I hear your call; if there's something new, I would like to see at least some kind of paperwork to know what's happening.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker for allowing.

The Speaker: Honourable Member for West Bay West, you're right. The Government Members at the time signed a Code of Conduct voluntarily. The terms of it were not acceptable to the Opposition simply because of the issue I just raised— who would sit in judgment over complaints.

As I indicated, that issue, I am being told through the auspices of the Honourable Attorney General's Office, is close to being resolved with the Standards in Public Life Commission having agreed to assume that role. So my urging today is simply hoping that by what I say, the parties who seem close to agreement can finalise it so this House, at a very soon Meeting, can adopt it.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush: Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Now, I understand that you are at some distance from it; as a Member of the House, I still have not seen any kind of paperwork, and I am hoping that it's not going to be decided just between the Leader of the Opposition and the Premier. I would suspect we sit and go through it, to ensure that it is something that we can all live with.

The Speaker: Absolutely, Honourable Member. I think, as I said, the only real issue has been the question of who should entertain the complaints.

Once that hurdle has been surmounted, hopefully there will be a draft that all Members can consider and, as you say, we can go through it line by line and agree; because as I said, I think it would be an important and lasting legacy of this term in Office.

Madam Clerk.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

The Speaker: None.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

The Speaker: Many.

Cayman Islands National Energy Policy 2024-2045 - *Enhancing and embracing a sustainable lifestyle through responsible, affordable, and innovative energy supply and consumption* - Approved by Cabinet 16 April 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, Minister of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency, Elected Member for West Bay Central: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good morning.

I beg to lay on the Table the Cayman Islands National Energy Policy 2024-2045 - Enhancing and embracing a sustainable lifestyle through responsible, affordable, and innovative energy supply and consumption.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Yes, Mr. Speaker briefly.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present to the Members of this honourable House, the updated National Energy Policy 2024-2045, along with the accompanying implementation and monitoring plan, as well as the public consultation report. Mr. Speaker, this is the first update to the National Energy Policy since its initial approval by the government in 2017, and includes revised targets, new definitions and strategies to ensure market fairness and consumer inclusion.

The journey to renewable energy officially commenced in 2017, with the approval of the initial energy policy setting the foundation for our exploration into renewable energy sources for our Cayman Islands. In accordance with the 2017 policy, a five-year review began in 2022. The Energy Policy Council, with support from the Ministry of Sustainability, embarked on this review, which was an extensive 19-month collaborative effort with the Cadmus Group, leveraging their high-quality technical expertise to update the policy.

This comprehensive process involved engaging a diverse array of public and private sector stakeholders through various channels including focus group meetings, one-on-one consultations, a virtual Town Hall meeting, and a public engagement survey to gather written feedback. I want to put on record that all of that was done under the former Minister, the Honourable Wayne Panton.

The updated policy, which has been refined through multiple drafts to incorporate all stakeholder input, sets forth ambitious new targets for 2045 underscoring our Government's unwavering commitment to advancing renewable energy. This updated policy is the culmination of significant collaborative efforts guiding us towards a more sustainable future. The implementation and monitoring plan provide a breakdown of the actions that the Government has chosen to undertake to achieve these ambitious new targets.

Mr. Speaker, everyone is feeling the pinch of increased energy costs, and a quick look at our electricity bills highlights the increasing challenge that every consumer is facing. A significant portion of these bills is related to the cost of fuel. This is a long-standing issue presenting significant economic, environmental, and social challenges; the urgency to transition to sustainable energy sources has never been greater.

The implementation of the National Energy Policy is driven by actions aligned with strategic goals and overarching vision of enhancing and embracing a sustainable lifestyle through responsible, affordable, and innovative energy supply and consumption. These actions are detailed in the accompanying plan, which outlines responsible parties and entities, resources, and timelines. The updated policy also introduces several notable changes that reflect a strategic shift in our energy landscape. Under this updated policy, consumers will be granted the explicit right to install and self-consume up to 20kW (kilowatts) of solar energy paired with battery storage, fostering individual empowerment in energy consumption.

Making renewable energy accessible to all residents of the Cayman Islands is pivotal for the policy to be successful; furthermore, the policy now formally defines utility scale as energy generation facilities with a capacity of 5MW (megawatts) or greater, bringing clarity to regulatory frameworks; and, in an effort to uphold fairness and equity in our energy market, the new policy states that larger utility companies cannot directly compete with small-scale or domestic companies, or using any unfair advantages within the industry. This measure is designed to protect the interests of both utility companies and private sector solar providers, ensuring a level playing field.

The National Energy Policy is crucial for maintaining the Cayman Islands as a sustainable and competitive economy engaging all citizens in transforming the energy landscape. It proposes a structured framework for implementation which includes continuous monitoring, carrying out periodic reviews, and performance evaluations with mechanisms for adjusting strategic aims as necessary. This new Energy Policy will undergo a mandatory review in two years to assess the progress made towards the main goals, and to re-evaluate priorities and strategies as necessary.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, the National Energy Policy 2024-2045 is a transformative blueprint for our energy independence. It aligns our country's energy strategy with global sustainability goals, and addresses the pressing need for climate action; by embracing increased renewable energy, enhancing efficiency, and fostering innovation, we are safeguarding our global economic status, maintaining our precious environment and ensuring a brighter and more promising future for everyone in our beloved Cayman Islands.

Before I sit, Mr. Speaker, I want to thank all of the Ministry staff and the consultants, as well as the National Energy Council, who worked very hard to get this policy to where it is today.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Madam Clerk.

Cayman Islands National Energy Policy 2024-2045 – Implementation and Monitoring Plan – Adopted by Cabinet 16, April 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to lay the Cayman Islands National Energy Policy 2024-2045 Implementation and Monitoring Plan.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: No, Mr. Speaker, I just spoke to it. Thank you.

The Speaker: Very well.

Cayman Islands National Energy Policy 2024-2045 - Public Consultation Report – 16 April 2024

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I wish to lay the National Energy Policy Public Consultation Report 2024-2045.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: No, thank you,

The Speaker: Very well. Madam Clerk.

Ministry of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency - Cayman Islands Government Annual Report 2023

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to lay the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency Annual Report 2023.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Briefly, Mr. Speaker, just to say, that since taking on this role as Minister for Sustainability whilst this Ministry might be small in stature, it has a very heavy and busy workload. The staff at both the Ministry and Department of Environment work very hard and, as Members look through the report, you will see that the team was very busy for the year 2023.

Whilst I was not the Minister for most of that year, I want to thank them for all of their hard work; as well as the former Minister for what he did along with the team during this time.

Thank you,

The Speaker: Madam Clerk.

National Conservation Council - Cayman Islands – 2022 Annual Report

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to lay the National Conservation Council Annual Report 2022.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Again, just briefly. This is the 2022 Report. I wasn't the Minister at that time but, again, just to thank the National Conservation Council for all of the work that they do with providing feedback in relation to any projects that are being considered.

National Conservation Council - Cayman Islands – 2023 Annual Report

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to lay the National Conservation Council 2023-2024 Annual Report.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Just to add, I should have said it earlier when I said hard work, it says it here in the cover— promoting and securing biological diversity and the sustainable use of natural resources in the Cayman Islands; again, just to thank the team for all of their hard work.

National Trust Cayman Islands – Annual Report 2022-2023

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Getting my exercise this morning.

I wish to lay the 2022-2023 Annual Report for the National Trust of the Cayman Islands.

The Speaker: Does the Honourable Minister wish to speak thereto? Just

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Again, briefly, to thank all of the members of the National Trust for their hard work and partnership. Something that I've discovered since becoming the Minister is how closely the National Trust works with the Ministry of Sustainability as well as the Department of Environment.

We thank them for all of their efforts to continue our aim to keep the environment safe and protected.

The Speaker: Very well.

2022-2023 Annual Report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable Parliament, the 2022-2023 Annual Report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Leader wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Very briefly, Mr. Speaker, just to report that this report documents the meetings of the Committee that took place during the past year; the public hearings that we held on reports and documents that were considered by the PAC and those that have been Tabled in the House.

Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Thank you.

Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands – Financial Reporting of the Cayman Islands Government: General Report 31 December 2022 (October 2023)

Report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee on the Report of the Office of the Auditor General - Financial Reporting of the Cayman Islands Government: General Report 31 December 2022 (October 2023)

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, with your permission, sir, may I also Table the report that immediately follows this one, which is the report of the committee on this report?

The Speaker: Absolutely.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Okay. Thank you, sir.

Hence, Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable Parliament the report of the Auditor General entitled Financial Reporting of the Cayman Islands Government: General Report 31st of December 2022; together with the Report of the Standing Public Accounts Committee on the Report of the Office of the Auditor General - Financial Reporting of the Cayman Islands Government: General Report 31st of December 2022 (October 2023).

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Leader wish to speak to the two reports?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: No, thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think all the information therein is self-explanatory.

The Speaker: Very well.

Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands - Remuneration of the Cabinet, Judiciary, MPs and Key Management Personnel within the Civil Service (November 2023)

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you again, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable Parliament a report from the Office of the Auditor General entitled Remuneration of the Cabinet, Judiciary, Members of Parliament and Key Management Personnel within the Civil Service.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Leader wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, just to mention that the Public Accounts Committee did not hold any hearings with respect to this report. It's more of an information report only for the benefit of third parties and anyone who is interested in the subject matter.

The Speaker: Very well.

SAI Performance Report – Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands – Final Report (9 November 2023)

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable House the report on the Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands, the SAI Performance Report dated November 9th, 2023.

The Speaker: Honourable Leader. What does SAI stand for?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: I can explain to everyone right now, Mr. Speaker, as I would like to speak to the report.

The Speaker: I think we are all blissfully ignorant.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, it stands for Supreme Audit Institutions—

The Speaker: Wow.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Which is a term that refers to Government Auditor General's Offices.

They are regarded as what is called Offices or Supreme Audit Institutions; so, Mr. Speaker, what we have here is an audit that was performed by persons from other Auditor General's Offices on the Office of the Auditor General here. It's the first time, to my knowledge, Mr. Speaker, that an exercise like this has ever been conducted on the Office of the Auditor General here in Cayman. Mr. Speaker, they weren't necessarily looking at the financial audit, but at the performance of the Office of the Auditor General and whether the Office is conducting itself in accordance with required international and professional standards.

There are six key areas that they assessed the Auditor General's Office on. I'll briefly mention them:

1. Independence and legal framework;
2. Their internal governance and ethics;
3. Their audit quality and reporting;
4. Financial management, assets and support services;
5. Human resources and training; and, finally,
6. Communication and stakeholder management.

I have to say the outcome of the findings was very positive for the Office of the Auditor General. I think it's something we as a country can be proud of because in terms of size, the Office of the Auditor General here, is very highly regarded in the region as providing real value for the services they provide to the people and Government of the Cayman Islands.

I am, therefore, really pleased with this report they have received and I commend it both to Members of this honourable House and to anyone who might have an interest in the work of the Office.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you for the explanation, Mr. Leader.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: I think so— Mr. Leader, we can't recall whether I ordered it to be laid on the Table.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Mr. Speaker, I don't think you did.

The Speaker: Okay. Well, even if I did, there is no harm in doing it twice— so ordered.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, sir.

Office of the Auditor General Cayman Islands – Annual Report – 31 December 2023 Providing Value to the People of the Cayman Islands (April 2024)

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker. I beg to lay on the Table of this honourable Parliament, the Annual Report and Audited Financial Statements of the Office of the Auditor General for the year ended the 31st December, 2023.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the Honourable Leader wish to speak thereto?

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: No, sir. I think the report is completely self-explanatory. Thank you

The Speaker: Very well.

Own-Initiative Investigation Report - FOI on Government Websites – December 2023

The Speaker: I recognise the Elected Member for West Bay North.

Mr. Bernie A. Bush, Elected Member for West Bay North – Chairman of the Select Committee to Oversee the Performance of the Office of the Ombudsman: Mr. Chairman, I beg to lay it on the Table, sir.

The Speaker: Sorted. Does the honourable Member wish to speak thereto?

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: No, sir. It's self-explanatory, sir.

The Speaker: Very well.

Office of the Ombudsman – Annual Report 2023

The Speaker: I recognise the Elected Member for West Bay North.

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Mr. Chairman, I beg to lay on the Table the Annual Report for the Office of the Ombudsman, 2023.

The Speaker: So ordered. Does the honourable Member wish to speak thereto?

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Yes, sir.

The Speaker: Please proceed.

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Mr. Speaker, as you and the public will see from the Office of the Ombudsman's Annual Report, the office responded to just under five-hundred inquiries during 2023. This is a 50 per cent increase in complaints received over the previous year with no increase in the number of staff and to the Members of this House, it has to be addressed. It is a well-run office in spite of the pressure that it has been under.

The Office prides itself on its integrity and the high standard of service it provides to the Caymanian public. The value of this service cannot be overstated; as an alternative system of justice, the Office of the Ombudsman handles complaints by the public free of charge, by impartially, confidentially and independently investigating complaints made against the Government, the Police— and in some cases, the private sector. Without this important independent office, recourse for wrongs would be limited or impossible. I repeat: it would be impossible, without the means to afford recourse through the court and worse, it would widen the door of corruption.

In this regard, Mr. Speaker, the independence of the Office of the Ombudsman must be respected and allowed to carry out its function free of interference by any person or authority. It is a unique creature in all of Government; reporting only to its Parliamentary Oversight Committee—that I proudly Chair along with the Honourable Jay Ebanks, Mr. Chris Saunders, Mr. Joey Hew and others— and the Governor.

It's important to guard against governmental abuse of power, corruption and other ills. That cannot be overstated. The Cayman Islands is on a world stage. Any interference by any person or authority with this independent office is a black eye to this country, and a contradiction to principles to which we subscribe such as accountability, transparency and upholding the rule of law. This office must be left to carry out its important functions to guard the public against overreach by its government in a fair, independent and impartial process.

Any person who believes in the virtue of an accountable government, must respect and support this important office.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Speaker: Thank you, honourable Member.

2022-2023 Annual Report of the Standing Select Committee to oversee the performance of the Office of the Ombudsman

The Speaker: I recognise the Elected Member for West Bay North.

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I beg to lay the report on the Table, sir.

The Speaker: Does the honourable Member to wish to speak thereto?

Mr. Bernie A. Bush: Yes, sir.

Mr. Chairman, on behalf of the committee that oversees the Ombudsman's office, I would like to publicly thank her, and her staff, for performing under much undue pressure that the public will soon, I'm sure, be aware of. We wish them well, and we thank her and her staff so very much for doing an outstanding job.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you. Madam Clerk.

QUESTIONS TO HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Speaker: As we have passed the hour of 11 o'clock, in order for questions to be asked of Ministers, we need the Suspension of Standing Order 23 (7) and 23 (8).

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce and Investment, Innovation & Social Development: Thank you, and good morning, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Acting Premier.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: I move the Suspension of Standing Order 23 (7) and 23 (8) in order for questions to be asked beyond the hour of 11 a.m.

The Speaker: The question is that Standing Orders 23 (7) and (8) be suspended in order that questions may be asked of Ministers after the hour of 11 o'clock.

All those in favour. Please say Aye, those against, no.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it.
Agreed: Standing Order 23 (7) and (8) suspended.

QUESTION N0. 19
UPDATE ON OPENING OF POINCIANA MENTAL HEALTH FACILITY AND REPATRIATION OF CAYMANIAN PATIENTS

The Speaker: I recognise the Elected Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Elected Member for George Town South: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to ask question number 19, standing in my name to the Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness and Home Affairs.

Question: Can the Honourable Minister update the House on the timeline for the opening of Poinciana, the new long-term residential mental health facility, and confirm what plans have been put in place for the safe repatriation of Caymanian patients currently being treated in overseas facilities to the new facility?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Health and Wellness to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner, Minister of Health & Wellness and Home Affairs, Elected Member for Prospect: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The answer: Mr. Speaker, with the utmost respect to the Honourable Members of this House and the wider public, I will not provide yet another estimated timeframe for the completion of Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre as that remains beyond my control and the remit of my Ministerial team; thus, I cannot provide a timeline for the grand opening of the facility, as that will only happen once it has been fully handed over to the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

What I can say, Mr. Speaker, is that my Ministerial team was informed that on Monday, July 22nd, the Department of Planning issued a Special Permission to Occupy (SPO) for three buildings within Poinciana. These are the Administration Building, Cafeteria and Activity Centre, Mr. Speaker.

While I appreciate that this is not the update that we had all hoped for, this is a step in the right direction, Mr. Speaker. By being able to move into the facility, Poinciana employees— of which we now have 22— will be able to begin important preparations to receive clients. Up until now, Poinciana employees have focused on policy development, procurement of equipment, training, orientation and skills development. Once on the grounds of the facility Poinciana staff will be able to set up administrative functions, conduct site orientations, and complete site-specific training and drills, among numerous other things.

For the benefit of the listening public, Mr. Speaker, the issuance of an SPO from the Department of Planning means that the structure satisfies all life-safety requirements, such as mechanical, electrical and fire. Being granted an SPO allows approved personnel, such as staff, safe use of the building while the inspection process continues and until the final Certificate of Occupancy is issued. Receiving the SPO is a project milestone and it brings us one step closer to opening our doors.

At the location, the Director of Poinciana will be finalising the internal procedures and activities needed to accommodate the facility's residents. Once these procedures are in place, and the necessary building approvals have been granted for the residential sections of the facility, phase two will focus on repatriation and admission of residents.

This brings me to the repatriation of Caymanians being treated overseas, Mr. Speaker. In the first instance, arrangements will be made for the return of those who currently reside in the Jamaica group home as Poinciana's Director has visited those residents on more than one occasion, and assessments of their needs and immigration status have been completed. By immigration status, Mr. Speaker, I mean that some residents require travel documents, and as such, further discussions have been held with the Passport and Corporate Services to assist in preparing relevant paper work.

When an admission date is in fact confirmed, the Director of Poinciana and her team will make the appropriate arrangements, including those related to travel. It is expected, Mr. Speaker, that residents will be accompanied by Poinciana's staff throughout their return journey, to ensure a safe transition and a positive experience as they return home.

Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Supplementaries? The honourable Member for George Town South.

Supplementaries

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Honourable Minister mentioned that 22 employees have been recruited. Are they being paid while they wait for the facility to be opened? Can you give some indication of where these twenty-two people are at just now?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, I have been reliably informed, and based on what I stated in the original answer, that they are a part of the whole preparation process and yes, from what I'm understanding, they are being paid.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister. Any further Supplementaries? the honourable Member for George Town South.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think we have waited far too long for this facility to be opened and I think we, all the Members of this House, have constituents that are waiting to occupy this facility. There has to be some urgency.

The Speaker: Honourable Member, can you turn that into a question?

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: No. I'm getting there, Mr. Speaker; this is a little preamble.

I think we need to know. We need to have some sort of time frame in place as to when our people will be able to occupy this facility. What is the urgency? *[sic]* I, we, need some undertaking that this facility will be open sooner rather than later, so my question is we need a timeframe.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer. I think the question is, when will the facility open? What is the time frame? Those are the questions I extracted.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, again— as I've stated in the original response given: The project remains in the hands of Public Works and until a Certificate of Occupancy is given to the Ministry of Health and Wellness, I am unable to say what that time frame is. I am so grateful for the latest update that was provided just Monday, stating that this temporary occupancy has been approved. That is a huge milestone.

I am aware, as so many in my Ministry are, that the operational arm, the project management for what was inherited by this Administration, falls outside the remit. There are some issues with licenses and being up to speed with mechanical, electrical and plumbing (MEP). There is a plethora of problems from what I have been advised, that has been found in hindsight, and they're trying to rectify that before we can— being responsible— safely put patients in that facility.

I hope that satisfies the Member.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister. Madam Clerk.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: I'm not sure the Minister can take this any further, honourable Member.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Well, I think I still have an opportunity to ask a parliamentary question, Mr. Speaker?

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Please ask a question, and no long preambles.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Can the Honourable Minister say how many of the 22 employees' spots have been filled by Caymanians?

The Speaker: Honourable Minister.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, thank you.

I have been reliably informed that two Caymanians are on staff currently; all others are non-Caymanian. Within the next two months, this will change to reflect 50 per cent Caymanians. The Trainee Psychiatric Nursing Programme will add a further 18 Caymanians to the staff at Poinciana, and the recruitment for this is being finalised with the commencement of the training programme expected to be by September of this year.

The Speaker: Madam Clerk.

QUESTION NO. 20
UPDATE ON ARRIVAL OF THIRD TWIN OTTER and TIMEFRAME FOR UPGRADE OF CAYMAN BRAC SAAB

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Member, for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell, Elected Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question number 20, standing in my name, to the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Ports. It reads: Can the Minister provide an update on when the third Twin Otter aircraft will be received in Cal's fleet as an interim measure to improve the airlift into the sister Islands; and when the SAAB aircraft which services Cayman Brac, will be upgraded?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister of Tourism and Port to answer.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, Acting Deputy Premier, Minister of Tourism & Ports: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the answer is: Following a comprehensive tendering process, the additional aircraft was selected and purchased— I am happy to announce. It is currently being customised to meet Cayman Airways' technical specifications and achieve the required maintenance status. The aircraft is currently scheduled to be delivered in August, 2024.

To the second part of the Member's question, Cayman Airways has enlisted an aviation consultancy firm, (following the required tendering process) to conduct the thorough research and analysis necessary for identifying the optimal replacement for its Saab aircraft fleet. A draft consultancy report has recently been

received and is currently under evaluation by Cayman Airways.

The airline expects to present replacement aircraft (type and model) options and recommendations to the government within 30 days. This will then facilitate government decisions on initial and future funding, as well as the establishment of realistic timelines for the procurement process and the various operational preparations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank the Honourable Minister.

Supplementaries? The honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman.

Supplementaries

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, let me take the opportunity to thank the Honourable Minister for the comprehensive answer, which is certainly good news.

Mr. Speaker, my next question is really as a result of a [*Cayman*] *Compass* article on the 21st July, 2024, which outlines that the exemption under which the Twin Otter aircraft fly into Little Cayman is being suspended. It says, "**however, it has been temporarily extended to the end of September, the *Cayman Compass* understands."**.

That the exemption will no longer be in place, obviously would mean they can't fly into Little Cayman. If the Minister could give us an update on that?

The Speaker: It's a bit outside the scope of the question, but if I were the Minister, I would try to answer it.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, but that's why you're not the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, I would encourage the Member to leave that for Finance Committee, where the scope of questions could be wider. I do understand where you're going with your line of questioning, because it has to do with the Airports Authority and the approvals for the types of aircraft that we are buying. So any direction on where we are going with the Saab aircraft obviously has to do with the airport and what kind of an airport are we going to have in Little Cayman. I think that's fundamentally what you're trying to get at.

Mr. Speaker, I would advise this honourable House that while we're going through the comprehensive decision as to what's going to transpire in our beloved Little Cayman, and how a decision on that airport will affect the purchasing of any upgraded fleets, will happen in due course. Obviously, the comprehensive report done by the Airports Authority on their expansion indicated the development of a new airport in Little Cayman. I'm also cognisant that the Member would be aware of persons' positions in Little Cayman, about what type of airport; whether it should be in the same location; whether it should be expanded at the current location...

There has to be a Government position with full clarity as to what our decision will be in respect to the location.

Mr. Speaker, I would advise this honourable House that the Little Cayman situation is a very delicate one. We are trying to preserve the uniqueness that Little Cayman offers by way of its culture and its tourism product, while at the same time having an advanced infrastructure and transportation system that can deliver the top-level quality that we deliver to the world.

Mr. Speaker, delivering that, while understanding our international transportation obligations— the unique balance… is challenging. I can give this honourable House the commitment that we will find that balance appropriately and have further announcements, and those announcements will obviously give our national flag carrier, Cayman Airways, enough direction on the necessary purchases of the upgraded Saab aircraft. The Member would also be aware that it is Cayman Airways' vision to ultimately reduce to just two aircraft types, therefore reducing the cost of maintenance as well as the servicing parts necessary for them.

The Government's job is to ensure that we get that balance correctly while at the same time meeting both travellers' needs and aviation obligations; there's many moving parts. As you know, we are regulated by Cayman's Airports Authority— the Honourable Acting Deputy Premier being in charge of that; and we do have to answer to international regulations on which we report to Her Excellency the Governor.

I can only say that we can't give you a comprehensive answer on the purchase of those until that is solidified. I hope to be able to update this honourable House in the next Sitting which has been indicated to be, potentially, in September, with a more comprehensive approach as to what Cayman Airways will do, once there is a clearer position as to what will happen in the Little Cayman airport operations.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The honourable Member for Cayman Brac West and Little Cayman.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Thank you, Mr. Speaker,

Mr. Speaker, again I thank my good friend, the Minister, for taking the question and providing an answer; and I know you will appreciate this: When your constituents call and say, "*at the end of September the regulatory body is going to stop the ability to fly into Little Cayman's airport— what are we going to do?"* Right?

The answer I'm looking for is an update or some guidance. Does the Government feel comfortable [that] by the end of September a solution will be found, that the actual Twin Otter aircraft— the new, third Twin

Otter that is being purchased— will be able to fly into Little Cayman October 1st?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Again, I thank the honourable former Minister for that question because it's a very important one. It is important that we give comfort to those within the parameters of Little Cayman.

I can give you the commitment that services will not cease. Many people depend on tourism for their livelihoods in Little Cayman, but also for in/out transportation/domestic travel. I am confident, after conversations with Her Excellency, as well as the person in charge of the Cayman Aviation Authority (CAA), Mr. Richard Smith, that there will be a solution that allows him to continue the extension.

I think it's fair that I can leave here today— and for the public hearing: the concern is the Government's confirmed position as to what it is going to do with the airport operations; as it is now, we recognise it's an exemption, and that exemption cannot go on infinitum. We have to decide how we are going to address that but, as I said before, the complexities of that are upgrading the current airport at its location, with many homes close-by; road infrastructure, costing and purchase of properties of those who own... There are many complexities.

The Government, both the former and current, has in its possession, properties in a different location, that have been earmarked for a new airport but it comes with other complications from an environmental perspective. We know that we're going through challenging times with strong positions as to the environment; so it's an obligation on me, as Minister, to work with the Airports Authority to ensure that the only option we have is to go to the new location and we have to determine that by eliminating the current option as no other way forward.

My initial position is that the current location would not be feasible for a number of factors, from financing to legal challenges to property ownership; from moving communities to road infrastructure and so forth; but it's not for me to determine that just based on opinion but facts. I can give this Honourable House the position that we will be bringing a report back to Caucus to confirm the Government's position if the data indicates that it will be too onerous on the government, or any government in fact, to try to upgrade the current location and therefore we must go to the new location, which will have its own challenges by way of environmental concerns, but ones that can be mitigated by a proper Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

In the interim, however, to answer your question, I can give the commitment to the members of the local community that their transportation in and out, for their businesses and their personal transport, will not be affected based on the communications with CAA.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister. One final Supplementary.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I'd like to take the opportunity to thank the Minister for the answer; it's certainly good news that the airport will not have any type of transportation interruption at the end of September/early October. I think the Minister already knows, but if I can help in some way, you know I am more than available.

My final question, Mr. Speaker: Thank you for the update on the study being done by Cayman Airways management on the two types of planes you want to settle with for the Sister Islands. We had a long discussion in Finance Committee about the funding. Are you comfortable that once the study is completed, funding will be available?

The Speaker: The Minister to answer.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I can say that the Government is in a good financial position based on its budget projections. I don't see any hurdles that would stop us from getting the money that we would need within the period of time, and I preface that, Mr. Speaker, on the basis of when the money would be needed. The truth is [that] for us to transition into a new aircraft would take a long time based on the airport development; the decisions as to what the airport would be like and aircraft procurement.

Anyway, in all honesty, before we even get to slimming down to just two types of aircraft, particularly that of the new Saab option we are intending to use, you're possibly looking at two to five years before that completion, and the Government of the day would be potentially a different one, or in a different financial position. So to say to you today that we are okay to give the affordability, I don't think would be called for within this budget.

However, I'm certain that any government that is selected in the next Administration, and hopefully, I will be a part of that with my team that is here today because we've proven to the people that we are effective in our delivery, will be able to give the necessary funding to continue transportation to the vital island of Little Cayman, which offers a very unique tourism product different from Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: A final question?

The Speaker: Final, final.

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: Final, final— thank you, Mr. Speaker.

If I understand what you just said, the upgrade from the Cayman Brac Saab aircraft is two to four years out?

[Pause]

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I think it's only fair to the listening public— and particularly for the media, because I know they will quote the timelines. I'm only giving you a common man's estimation. I have no research data to give on that; but I know, just on the basis of going through this procurement on one Twin Otter. Also, transitioning a maintenance department within an airline will take some time. So, I'm only giving you a guestimate based on my history as a Minister, how long government takes, how long the procurement takes, as well as depending on the government's progress with the development of the new airport is what will factor in, in respect to the timeline. I am not confident, honourable Member, that such a timeline will be within this administration or within the next three to five years because of the timeline.

If you think about the airport development, hypothetically speaking, if we were to agree tomorrow that we are going to build a new airport that would allow for the ATRs to be done, the building of that airport would have to be completed before we go into purchasing those aircrafts. So, we are far out; but the journey has to start with the first couple of steps and this is where we are today. I'm certain that, regardless of which government is in they, too, will prioritise this more efficient, cheaper, more reliable approach for transportation into Little Cayman while at the same time keeping its unique culture and presentation product.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Madam Clerk.

QUESTION NO. 21
DELAY ON ADOPTING THE NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

The Speaker: I recognise honourable Member for Newlands.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton, Elected Member for Newlands: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask a question under my name in the Order Paper, which is: Can the Honourable Minister say why the draft National Climate Change Policy, which has been completed for some ten months now— of course, this question was filed more than a month ago, so we are closer to a year now— has not been adopted and published as a guide to long term planning, in light of the recognition of the severe risks to our economy, to the lives of our people, and to our national environment identified by the National Climate Change Risk Assessment completed in 2022?

The Speaker: Thank you, the Honourable Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency to answer.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, in relation to the Member's question, I can say that following an extensive 60-day public consultation period last year, the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency presented a revised draft of the Cayman Islands Climate Change Policy to Cabinet in October of 2023. The revised draft incorporated feedback from the hundreds of comments received from members of the public, relevant industry groups, and government stakeholders during the public consultation period. The Member would know this, as he was the Minister [at the time].

Since November of 2023, additional edits from the elected leadership have been incorporated into the document. The Ministry submitted the updated draft policy to Cabinet for approval, but it has not yet been placed on the agenda for consideration. The Ministry has continued to progress related work such as public awareness of the severe risk that climate change poses to our beloved Islands.

The Speaker: Thank you. Honourable Minister. Supplementaries?

Supplementaries

Hon. G. Wayne Panton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and I thank the Honourable Minister for her response,

Mr. Speaker, given the time that has passed, and the reality that we have just experienced a record hurricane, in terms of the timing [and] where it originated; in terms of impacts within the Caribbean and how lucky we were that its intensity reduced significantly, I'd like a confirmation from the Minister that the Government appreciates the severity of the risk that we are facing in relation to climate change issues and—

The Speaker: Ask a question.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton: I'll leave it at that, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Yes. The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Speaker, what I can say to the honourable Member is that the Ministry of Sustainability will continue to work on the policy and any other initiatives in relation to climate change [and], climate change awareness. The matter has been sent

to be placed on the Cabinet agenda and we will continue to press forward.

I can't really speak on behalf of the Government because it has not yet been reconsidered since it was seen by the last Caucus. I hope that offers some clarity, but I really can't give a definitive answer on that at this stage.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister, for the supplementary.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton: Mr. Speaker, thank you. Just to thank the Minister and say that I certainly appreciate her efforts, the Ministry's efforts, and the challenges of addressing this issue. Thank you, sir.

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Clerk,

QUESTION NO. 22
DELAYED DRAFT ANTI–SEXUAL HARASSMENT BILL

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Minister, the honourable Member for Newlands.

Hon. G. Wayne Panton: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise again to ask the question under my name on the Order Paper which reads: Can the Honourable Minister say why the draft Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill, which has had nearly a year of public consultation, has not been approved by Cabinet to be published in order to be presented to Parliament?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resilience to answer.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

To answer the Member's question: As you rightfully said, this Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill has gone through multiple rounds of public consultation since Cabinet initially approved the issuance of the drafting instructions which was back in 2022.

Following the public consultation that took place in 2023, the draft Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill 2023 was completed and submitted to the office of the Premier in October, 2023. The Gender Affairs Unit was transferred to the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency in January 2024. The Bill was considered by Caucus in April 2024, and the Gender Affairs Unit has been requested to explore additional options for reporting and adjudicating sexual harassment cases. As soon as the Ministry has completed the requested task, the Bill will be returned to Cabinet for consideration.

I would also like to say to the Member [that] he might recall that while I was a Parliamentary Secretary I was passionate about this particular draft Bill. It's something that the Youth Parliamentarians worked very studiously on, and I wanted to ensure that our young people felt their voices were heard.

As the Minister responsible for gender affairs as well as being a female, being a mother [and] having sisters, it's certainly something that I would be very proud to get to the finish line.

The Speaker: Thank the Honourable Minister. Supplementary.

Supplementary

Hon. G. Wayne Panton: Mr. Speaker, just to thank the Minister for her response; and say that I will certainly share her pride when this Bill gets presented and we are able to put it in place and reflect the interests of women in the country.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

QUESTION NO. 23
IS THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE MEETING TARGETS

The Speaker: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Roy M. McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask question number 23 standing in my name which reads: Can the Honourable Minister state whether the new Department of Financial Assistance is meeting the performance targets which the Minister told the House he had set for it?

The Speaker: The Honourable Acting Deputy Premier to answer.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Good morning, again; thank you Mr. Speaker, and thank the Member for the question.

The answer: The Department implemented Zendesk in February, 2024 to better support the new Client Care Team ("CCT"). This launch marked a new era for our client service capabilities, enabling the CCT, with a staff complement of four persons within that unit, to operate with optimal efficiency. The CCT was launched in August 2023 to facilitate seamless interaction between clients and Financial Assistance Officers; by processing requests and facilitating timely responses, the team ensures effective resolution of client concerns. Zendesk has provided the Department with the tools necessary to ensure that our client interactions are seamless, efficient, and satisfactory.

Zendesk is a cutting-edge Client Relationship Management ("CRM") system that revolutionises the way the department manages and optimises call centre operations, e-mail communications, and online interactions, including through its instant chatbot feature.

Utilising advanced Artificial Intelligence ("AI"), Zendesk instantly comprehends common client concerns, efficiently routes tickets— those are created every time there is a client inquiry— and provides our team with actionable insights and suggestions.

This sophisticated platform comes equipped with AI-powered tools designed to streamline service workflows, empower officers to resolve issues more quickly, and effortlessly scale our knowledge base. Implementing this system, we now have comprehensive data, for the first time, to analyse client interactions and feedback; and by reviewing the data, we can continually refine our processes, achieve targets for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and ensure that the Department meets and exceeds client expectations. This represents a significant investment in improving the client experience for those who are accessing financial assistance.

Outlined below are the key performance indicators ("KPIs") being measured by the Department in the implementation of Zendesk— which is the root of the question, Mr. Speaker:

1. Initial Response Time: Respond to at least 90 per cent of urgent inquiries within 24 hours, and less urgent enquiries within 48-72 hours;
2. Resolution Time: Establish a first-contact resolution rate of 70 per cent or higher to minimise client follow-up needs; and
3. Wait Time for Support Agent: Maintain an average hold time of less than 5 minutes while taking account of the sensitivity and urgency of client inquiries, and target at least 80 per cent of calls to be answered within a hold time of 3 minutes or less.

Between February and June 2024, the CCT successfully resolved 5,513 tickets. In resolving these tickets, they were able to achieve the first two targets set, and continue to work towards achieving the third.

The first target was to ensure that 90 per cent of urgent inquiries were answered within 24 hours, and less urgent enquiries within 48-72 hours. The Department has surpassed this target significantly. On average, from February to June, 91.4 per cent of all tickets were answered within one business day. This demonstrates the Department's commitment to providing timely assistance and addressing urgent concerns with efficiency and dedication.

The second target was to establish a first-contact resolution rate of 70 per cent or higher. This metric is crucial, as it measures the Department's effectiveness in resolving issues during the initial interaction, thereby enhancing client satisfaction and reducing the need for follow-up communication. The Department has excelled in this area as well, achieving an impressive 96.5 per cent first-contact resolution rate. This means that clients who are enquiring about financial assistance are able to be supported and have their concerns resolved without having to speak to multiple people and continue to follow-up.

The third target focused on reducing the average hold time to under three minutes for 80 per cent of calls received and answering all calls within 5 minutes— by gathering this data, we were able to determine that the Department receives an average of approximately 350 calls per week. The Department has achieved an average response time of 1.13 minutes when answering calls; however, calls that are in the queue while the CCT is occupied with other clients are abandoned in an average hold time of 3.19 minutes.

Further, they are receiving the most calls between 10a.m. to 1:00p.m. During this time, the Department is receiving more calls than they are able to answer within the targeted timeframe; by integrating innovative solutions into social development, we are now able to make data-driven decisions and develop solutions instead of relying on estimations— by gathering this data, the Department is considering staggering lunch times for the CCT, and is also encouraging clients to contact them outside of those peak hours for faster service. The Department remains committed to minimising wait times for those seeking assistance [and] will continue to evaluate options to ensure timely response, including encouraging more online applications.

An additional target that the Department captures is client satisfaction, which speaks volumes about the effectiveness of our services and the dedication of our team. An impressive 93 per cent average in the "Happy or Not" rating from January to June 2024 reflects the positive experiences and high level of satisfaction amongst those we serve. This remarkable rating is a testament to our continuous efforts to enhance service delivery, address client needs promptly, and ensure that every interaction contributes to a favourable outcome. It underscores the success of our initiatives, such as the implementation of Zendesk— which is partly and AI tool, as I mentioned— and the full staffing of the CCT, in achieving and maintaining high standards of client care.

While the Department has achieved remarkable success, there always remains room for improvement. Leveraging technology allows us to identify deficiencies and address them proactively. For the first time in the Department's history, we have access to comprehensive data that empowers us to analytically determine the best strategies for improvement. This shift marks a significant milestone in our ongoing commitment to optimising service delivery and meeting the needs of our clients more effectively.

In summary, the Department's implementation of the CCT and Zendesk have continued to be successful. We commend the Department's achievements in answering urgent inquiries, resolving issues at first

contact, and working towards maintaining a swift response time. These accomplishments reflect their dedication to providing exceptional service and support to the public when delivering financial assistance.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister. Supplementaries? I didn't think so well.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: Madam Clerk.

QUESTION NO. 24
IMPLEMENTATION OF AMENDMENTS PASSED UNDER PRIVATE MEMBER'S MOTION 7/2023-2024

The Speaker: I recognise the honourable Member for George Town West.

Mr. David C. Wight, Elected Member for George Town West: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I rise to ask the Honourable Acting Premier question number 24 standing in my name. Can the Honourable Premier provide a timeline for the implementation of the amendments passed under Private Member's Motion 7/2023-2024 in September 2023, which include increasing the ex-gratia Financial Assistance to the elderly, seafarers and veterans, as well as raising the Civil Service Pensioners monthly payments to CI$1500?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to the Member for the important question.

I have been instructed on behalf of the Premier with an answer, Mr. Speaker, which I received this morning and submitted. The answer:

The Private Member's Motion 7/2023-2024 which was passed in the House resolved that Government *considers* further increasing the monthly ex-gratia stipend paid to older persons and adults living with permanent disabilities who receive financial assistance, retired seafarers and veterans and their surviving spouses and Civil Service pensioners to at least $1,500 per month, effective 1st January, 2024.

The Government has considered the suggested increase in the ex-gratia stipends, that is, $1,250 per month to $1,500 per month, and has concluded that it is possible—and I believe there is a typo in this draft— *it is not possible*— to readily agree to the suggested increase until further financial analysis is carried out to assess its affordability.

The following points make it clear that the Government has made reasonable effort to assist financially challenged individuals:

1. long-term financial assistance and the seafarers' and veterans' ex-gratia benefit was increased in August 2023, retroactive to July 2023, which was a $300 per month increase;
2. approximately 130 individuals receive both long-term financial assistance via the Needs Assessment Unit (NAU), and the seafarers and veterans' ex-gratia benefit, therefore, these 130 individuals have benefitted from a $600 per month increase;
3. in the majority of cases, through the increase that was provided in August 2023, recipients are often left with a residual amount of approximately $200 to $300 per month to cover un-anticipated incidental expenses. Accordingly, data available to NAU reflects that most recipients of financial assistance are able to meet their basic expenses and therefore, the current financial assistance level is considered sufficient;
4. in a minority of cases where persons' expenses exceed the present $1,250 per month assistance level, those persons are eligible to, and are receiving, additional forms of financial assistance, such as food. Since June 2024, recipients of long-term financial assistance whose shortfall in their monthly financial needs is greater than $1,250, such persons can also receive a further financial assistance amount to help with the purchasing food— and other items such as utilities. The current approved amount of financial assistance for food, for one person, is $400 per month; and
5. the increase in the ex-gratia pension paid to eligible Civil Service pensioners, who completed at least 10 years' pensionable service was carried out, and paid, from December 2023. The effect of the ex-gratia payment to such eligible pensioners means that they, too, receive $1,250 monthly.

Therefore, the Government has considered Private Member's Motion 7/2023-2024 and has made significant progress in implementing the requests therein.

The final step of increasing the stipend from $1,250 per month to $1,500 per month will be carried-out when the Government is absolutely certain that such an increase can be sustained indefinitely into the future.

The Speaker: Thank you. Honourable Minister. Supplementary? No supplementaries; that concludes question time.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, if I could make a brief comment on behalf of the Honourable Premier.

She has additional outstanding Parliamentary Questions, and my understanding is that she has an agreement with the Leader of the Opposition to provide answers in writing, since she's unable to be here for any follow-ups. For this particular question, since the substantive underlying data falls between myself and the Acting Deputy Governor, I offered, and she agreed, that we [answer] it on the Floor; but please excuse the rest of her questions as she remains ill.

The Speaker: Yes, she sent me a similar message.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

STATEMENTS BY HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I have received a current of statements for approval since yesterday.

I have concluded that it is unreasonable to expect people to listen to that many statements in the course of a day, so I have approved six for delivery today and, assuming we don't receive any more, tomorrow we should be able to conclude the balance then.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: The first statement is by—

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: I am standing on a procedural matter, if you would allow.

The Speaker: What is the procedure matter?

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Speaker, you just informed that— and please forgive me, I'm not trying to be confrontational in any way, but just understanding as per the Standing Orders.

The Government does have many statements to deliver. A number has been submitted, and we also have the considerations of the Opposition. Tomorrow is their day, and we're trying to use our time as wisely as we possibly can, to get as much of the Government's business dealt with today, to give the affordability to the Private Members' Motions.

I heard you say that you've considered the reasonable amount of time for people to consume information. I am trying to understand under what procedure— I know that you're the head of this honourable House, but it is of my view, I could be wrong, that it is Government Day and we have agreed to continue as long as it is needed to get the government's matters resolved and we were hoping to deal with more than six statements today.

Obviously, we have to adhere to your decisions, but I was just wondering if you can identify under what section of the Standing Orders do you determine how many statements can be given as per the Government's business?

The Speaker: Approval of any statements rests with the discretion of the Speaker.

It is unreasonable in the extreme, I believe, to expect to deliver 14 statements at quarter to one in the afternoon. It would take, in my estimation, 2.5 hours.

I have, therefore, divided them so that those that will affect the Finance Committee's consideration of the 2023-2024 budget year are dealt with. In that case, I was specifically asked by one Minister to ensure that it occurred; and I have included four other Ministers'– I received six from your office this morning, Honourable Minister.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Speaker, I think it would be important to clarify to this Honourable House—

The Speaker: Honourable Minister, would you please sit? I received six from your office this morning—

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: You will not tell me when I received them, I received them this morning. I have included two of them in the six.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: I am not going to take this any further, and I am not going to entertain any more from you, Minister.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: The first statement is from the Honourable Premier.

I know the Honourable Acting Premier is capable of delivering it because it deals with exceptional circumstances which occurred during the 2023 financial period— one of the usual statements that are given so that we can get through Finance Committee with the information; so, Honourable Acting Premier, I would invite you to deliver those two, and then we proceed to the next statement.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Just to clarify, you have two on behalf of the Premier or…

The Speaker: Yes. One deals with the 2024-2026 Government Broad Outcomes.

[Pause]

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Just a moment to clarify, Mr. Speaker.

[Pause]

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Mr. Speaker, these are duplicates, so it's only one.

The Speaker: Okay.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier
Exceptional circumstances (Cabinet Office)

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: To start, thank you, again, Mr. Speaker, for allowing this Statement by the Honourable Premier on the exceptional circumstances that occurred during the 2023 financial period for the Cabinet Office Portfolio, as it is important for facilitating completeness in Finance Committee today.

"Mr. Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to make this statement in accordance with Section 11 (6) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) regarding a Cabinet decision under Section 11 (5) of the Act to reallocate Supplementary funding between the equity investments for the Cabinet Office. This reallocation of approved funding was to cover the cost related to capital projects within the Cabinet Office.

Mr. Speaker, during the 2023 Financial Year, the Cabinet Office had limited funds to progress a number of critical capital projects. These projects largely aligned with the Government's 2024-2026 broad outcomes by modernising government to improve public sector performance and to protect and promote Caymanian culture, heritage, and identity. In order to achieve these outcomes, the Cabinet Office made a request for an increase in Supplementary funding for Appropriation EI 36– Equity Investments to the Cabinet Office, in the amount of $300,000.

Mr. Speaker, the majority of the reallocated capital funds were used to upgrade outdated computer systems and equipment. With the growing demand for accurate, timely, and reliable communication, the Cabinet Office replaced deteriorating, obsolete and failing equipment in both Radio Cayman and the Department of Communications.

Mr. Speaker, this Supplementary funding helped to improve performance capabilities with significantly boosted productivity among staff. The modernised equipment and upgraded computer systems increased portability, business continuity and staff resilience in the Cabinet Office teams, leading to reduced downtime, quicker execution of tasks, smoother multitasking, improved engagement, and increased efficiency in delivering the government's objectives.

Mr. Speaker, the Supplementary Appropriation also included funding for the redevelopment and enhancement of the Cayman Islands Seafarer Registry which was originally launched in 2021.

The enhanced website is set to simplify the process of submitting, amending and maintaining the data, allowing members of the general public to submit historical data— including photos, videos, and audio recordings related to Cayman's seafarers— in a user-friendly format for their desktop and mobile devices; to search through seafarer records contained within the registry, and to view the status of all current submissions. The registry will [also] help to establish relationships between seafarers based on historical data provided— for example, seafarers who sailed together on the same vessel, as well as safe-guarding a wealth of historical information for future generations of Caymanians.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, the above exceptional circumstances and reallocation of funds to the Cabinet Office during the 2023 financial period did not result in an increase in the government's overall budget nor increase any risk of non-compliance with the principles of responsible financial management."

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Acting Premier.

I recognise the Minister for Sustainability and Climate Resiliency. Supplementary funding to cover additional professional services.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks
Supplementary funding to cover additional professional services

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to make a statement for completeness in accordance with Section 11 (6) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) regarding Cabinet decisions taken under Section 11 (5) of the Act to allocate Supplementary funding largely prior to my appointment as Minister. The Supplementary funding previously decided upon was to support the Green Iguana Culling Programme, and the fees associated with the Integrated Solid Waste Management System, otherwise known as the ISWMS, or Re-Gen Project.

Mr. Speaker, as well known to Members, invasive alien species are a threat to the security of our Islands. These are animals and plants that have been introduced to our Islands, either intentionally or accidentally, and pose a significant threat to our native species. Green iguanas are a prime example. They reproduce faster than our native Blue Iguana and Sister Islands' Rock Iguanas. The Iguana Culling Programme began in 2018 in an effort to control this highly destructive invasive species, while providing a source of income for the network of trained licensed cullers. Over the past six years, this programme has successfully

removed more than 1.5 million Green Iguanas across the Cayman Islands.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: The total estimated expenditure for the programme in 2022 and 2023 was $1,550,071. This left a shortfall over the 2022 and 2023 budget periods of $387,500 required as additional funding.

Mr. Speaker, part of the purpose of this statement is for me to outline the exceptional circumstances that arose, and led to the need for this Supplementary Appropriation. Those exceptional circumstances lie in the ability of Green Iguanas to reproduce exponentially. When no control measures are in place, the Green Iguana population can double within a single calendar year. As a result, there arose the exceptional circumstance and the associated need, for the Cabinet's approval of the Supplementary funds to make up the shortfall, and enable this incredibly successful culling programme to continue uninterrupted.

Mr. Speaker, the other focus of the Supplementary funding related to the Re-Gen project. As Members will know, in 2017 the Government selected a Dart-led consortium as a preferred bidder to design, build, finance, operate and maintain the facilities.

In 2021, the previous administration signed a project agreement with the Dart led consortium, however, there were still a number of substantial issues left to be negotiated; as project negotiations continued from the start of this Administration up until 2023, the Ministry encountered higher than budgeted costs for the professional services being rendered. The estimated total 2023 expense for the project was CI$ $4,440,000 leaving a shortfall of CI$ $2,949,000 required as additional funding.

Equity Injection (EI) 84's budget of CI$ 25,113,847, was allocated to the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency for the 2022 and 2023 Fiscal Year. While these funds were expected to cover a number of capital works, the Ministry determined that some of these funds could be used to offset the additional professional fees that would be incurred by the culling programme and the Re-Gen Project. Additionally, the Ministry determined that unused portions of the Ministry's transfer payment budget could be used to offset the additional professional fees that would be incurred by the Re-Gen project. Accordingly, the Ministry sought Cabinet's approval to transfer a portion of these appropriations, and Cabinet authorised to increase the 2023 budget appropriations via Section 11 (5) as follows:

A decrease in funding for EI 84 Equity Injection in the Ministry of Sustainability and Climate Resiliency for the 2023 fiscal year appropriations, by CI$ $3,164,500.

A decrease in funding for TP 110, Sustainability Programme Support for the 2023 fiscal year appropriations, by CI$ $115,000.

A decrease in funding for TP 111, Climate Resiliency Programme, Public Sector Buildings and Efficiency for the 2023 fiscal year appropriations by CI$ $348,000.

An increase in funding to SCR 1 - Policy Administration and ministerial advice, for the 2023 fiscal year Appropriation by CI$ $2,940,000.

An increase in funding to SCR 3 - Environmental Services and Research, for the 2023 fiscal year appropriations by CI$ $387,500.

An increase in funding to EI 36 - Cabinet Office, for the 2023 fiscal year Appropriation by CI$ $300,000.

In considering these allocations, Cabinet advised the Ministry of Finance and Economic Development to include these allocations in the 2023 Supplementary Appropriation Bill for Parliament to consider.

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Members for their attention and consideration of this allocation.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

I recognise the Minister of Border Control, Labour and Culture to make a statement on the status of changes to the Minimum Wage regime.

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour
Status on changes to the minimum wage regime

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, Minister of Border Control & Labour and Culture, Elected Member for Bodden Town East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker, for being so gracious and allowing me to [present] one of the six [out] of fourteen [statements].

Mr. Speaker, I really want to thank the Member of George Town East, the Honourable Leader of the Opposition for being so gracious in my response to the PQ session on Monday, as he seems to understand the financial impact by the implementation of such a policy. The matter of minimum wage is and has not been an easy topic to address, as it affects various sectors of our society; therefore, it is not just a matter of accepting a report.

While the intention behind the goal of uplifting the earnings of our lowest-paid workers is indeed noble, it is crucial to thoroughly consider the broader implications this change may have on our economy, particularly on employers. We understand the concerns, for example, of Caymanians who employ domestic helpers, and therefore stand to be significantly impacted— and we all saw what happened in 2015; the unintended consequences when domestic helpers' salaries doubled overnight, the impact that it had on persons who employed them.

Mr. Speaker, as detailed in the Minimum Wage Report, some 2,424 persons are employed within

households, of which 133 were Caymanian and 2310 were non-Caymanian. These household employers are predominantly Caymanian, and we have heard their cries of concern for their ability to support themselves and their families and afford the domestic help that allows them sometimes to work two or three jobs to keep their heads above water.

Mr. Speaker it must be noted that the majority of people we are increasing the minimum wage for are transient workers, in that 78 per cent of the people who stand to benefit are not Caymanian. This fact is not lost on Caymanian employers who are demanding that we politicians recognise this, and further demand that that we balance the minimum wage with their ability to pay increased labour costs.

Mr. Speaker, it is therefore imperative for those following this matter to understand that a significant increase in the minimum wage poses considerable financial challenges to many employers, especially Caymanians, who employ domestic helpers and who own and manage small and micro businesses, after so many years of no adjustment to the wage level. These businesses often operate on slim profit margins, and any sudden increase in labour costs can severely affect their financial stability. Those who employ domestic help are likely already grappling with high energy costs, high inflation, and stagnant salaries themselves.

Another critical concern is the potential for job losses. Employers may be forced, Mr. Speaker, to reduce their workforce to manage costs when faced with higher wage bills. An across-the-board minimum wage increase could well be counterproductive, as it could result in a lack of care for our most vulnerable: the elderly, shut-ins, and children.

Mr. Speaker, we need look no further than California. Last September, just a few months ago, Governor Gavin Newsom signed California's Assembly Bill 1287 into Law, which includes a $20 per hour minimum wage for fast food workers and a Fast Food Regulatory Council which has the authority to raise the industry's minimum wage annually; but between last Fall and January, California's fast food restaurants cut about 9500 jobs, representing a 1.3 per cent change from September 2023.

Mr. Speaker, since the release of the Minimum Wage Advisory Committee's Final Report, the Members of Cabinet have been deep in debate regarding the various approaches to making changes to the existing minimum wage regime while carefully considering the implications for Caymanians, as well as general economic concerns. It is also no secret, Mr. Speaker, that we as a country have noticed that for many years, visitors to our shores often arrive and depart having never interacted with one of our own. One of the major driving forces behind the lack of Caymanians in the hospitality sector is that, despite the opportunity for high earnings through gratuities, the base pay is and has remained low for quite some time.

My colleagues in the Government and I debated tirelessly about the role we play, and the role minimum wage plays in the strategy of increasing the number of our own familiar faces in this sector, and subsequently increasing employment opportunities for our own in this sector that has such high earning potential, all alongside ensuring economic viability.

Mr. Speaker, when I was given the privilege of becoming Minister for Labour and learned that a minimum wage review was underway, I was and remain concerned that one fixed minimum wage across all sectors would be problematic. Considering the sector-specific impacts of a minimum wage hike is critically essential. Industries that rely heavily on low-wage labour, such as domestic services, retail, hospitality and agriculture, would be disproportionately affected. These sectors might experience significant disruptions, leading to a ripple effect throughout the economy.

Mr. Speaker, I acknowledge that adjusting the minimum wage is a tough decision, especially given high inflation, high interest rates, and the prolonged period of stagnation since the last minimum wage was set. As such, the decision becomes even more complex and challenging as my colleagues and I wrestle with cause-and-effect relationships. While the lack of incremental adjustments over time can create a pressing need for a substantial hike, the sudden impact of such a change can be severe. Employers have adjusted to a lower wage structure for an extended period. Many will struggle to adapt quickly, leading to unintended negative consequences such as job cuts, reduced hours and, in extreme cases, business closures. Therefore, it is crucial to consider the phased implementation of a sectorised approach to wage increases and supportive measures for businesses to mitigate these adverse effects.

Mr. Speaker, after taking much time to debate and consider the various options and scenarios against the information available, my colleagues and I made the decision to initiate the reactivation of a new Minimum Wage Advisory Committee with specific instructions to investigate and recommend a sectoral approach to minimum wage for the Cayman Islands, which we believe to be a better fit for our Islands than the existing blanket national minimum wage. Different sectors of the economy have varying cost structures, profitability margins and economic realities; by setting minimum wages according to sectors, we can ensure that wage regulations are more in line with the financial capabilities and realities of each industry, avoiding a one-size-fits-all approach that is not consistently practical across our dynamic economic landscape.

Our cursory research also indicates that sector-specific minimum wages can contribute to economic stability by aligning wages more closely with sectoral productivity levels; and a targeted approach will likely help to maintain workers' purchasing power without causing adverse economic implications.

My colleagues and I also agreed on a proposed direction as an initial stage that, effective 1st July, 2025, employees of the Hospitality and Service Industry— the only sector that is currently treated differently under Minimum Wage— would receive an increase to $7.00 per hour. In addition to this increase to the base pay, it was decided that the current structure for this sector whereby 25 per cent of the minimum wage can be made up by gratuities will also be removed from the 1st July, 2025.

Mr. Speaker, I will also be seeking the support of my Caucus and Cabinet colleagues to add the construction, security services and other such industries, except domestics, to those who will have the $7 per hour minimum wage come into effect next year. These sectors can benefit from having more Caymanians employed and the increases in the minimum wage will help to make it more attractive and viable. An increase in the wage for these sectors also acknowledges the potential for increased risk to holders of positions in such sectors while executing their duties; however, as with any government proposal, we are open to additional dialogue, and possible additional adjustments.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: For the time being, Mr. Speaker, until the new Minimum Wage Advisory Committee completes their investigations, which we intend to get underway with urgency, all other sectors will remain at the current minimum wage of $6.00 per hour, which we trust will not be for an extensive period of time. For the avoidance of doubt, Mr. Speaker, it is expected that new minimum wages, in particular to sectors, will be introduced in the foreseeable future.

Mr. Speaker, while the goal of improving the livelihoods of our lowest-paid workers is commendable, we must carefully weigh the potential adverse effects on employers and the broader economy. I assure you we are committed to adopting a balanced approach that considers the interests of both workers and businesses; what we do not wish as a result is the knock-down effect of the proverbial cart catching the horse. It cannot be overstated that striking a balance amenable to both employers and employees is critical.

Before I close, Mr. Speaker, I would like to acknowledge the 2023 Minimum Wage Advisory Committee at this time and thank them for their dedication and their exceptional work, albeit I have already thanked them privately. They executed the duties they were prescribed to do and they fulfilled their remit. We will all recall that since their appointment, there have been multiple changes within the Government; with these changes also came an adjustment of how the Government views the role of minimum wage in being a tool for empowering Caymanians, for strengthening our economy, while also improving the livelihoods of those most vulnerable in our labour market.

I speak for my colleagues in reiterating that the Government is confident that our approach will prove to be strengthening to our economy, beneficial to our people, and sustainable for our country.

I thank you for allowing me this time, Mr. Speaker. Thank you.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Honourable Members, we have sorted out the slight confusion at the start of the statement deliveries, when two copies of the same statement by the Honourable Premier were handed to the Honourable Acting Premier. We have the correct one now, which relates to the exceptional circumstance of Appropriation changes resulting in the 2024 Supplementary appropriations of the Ministry of District Administration and Lands. I would invite the Honourable Acting Premier to deliver it.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier
Exceptional circumstances (Ministry of District Administration and Lands)

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Acting Premier: Thank you for that, Mr. Speaker; as you noted, this relates to the other Ministry under the responsibility of the Premier.

As instructed by the Premier, the statement in relation to exceptional circumstances Appropriation changes resulting in the 2024 Supplementary appropriations of the Ministry of District Administration and Lands is as follows:

"Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to bring to the attention of this Honourable House, the exceptional circumstances appropriation changes which have resulted in the Supplementary Appropriations initiated by the Ministry of District Administration & Lands for 2024.

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet considered and approved the following requests for Section 11 (5) appropriations in accordance with the Public Management Finance Act (2020 Revision) by the Ministry of District Administration & Lands appropriation lines so as to satisfy the 2024 expenditure needs as follows:

EA 60 – Cayman Brac Bluff Playfield

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet approved the increase of EA 60 – Cayman Brac Bluff Playfield, in the Ministry of District Administration & Lands by One Hundred Eighty-seven Thousand Eight Hundred Ninety-six Cayman Islands Dollars and Ninety-seven cents (CI$187,896.97) via Section 11 (5) of the Act to facilitate the installation of a Mondo track in Cayman Brac.

The aforementioned increase in EA 60 – Cayman Brac Bluff playfield, by the said amount was the result of a decrease in EI 87 Ministry of District Administration and Lands Equity Injection by the same amount of (CI$187,896.97)

EA9 - Land Purchase Gazetted Claims

Mr. Speaker, Cabinet approved the increase of EA9 – Land Purchase Gazetted Claims, in the Ministry of District Administration & Lands in the amount of Six Hundred and Seventy-one Thousand Cayman Islands Dollars (CI$671,000) via Section 11 (5) of the Act to facilitate compensation claims received from landowners who are dispossessed by the National Roads Authority when constructing public road works.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to explain the exceptional circumstances which have resulted in the Supplementary Appropriations initiated by the Ministry of District Administration & Lands under Section 11 (5) of the Act for the 2024 fiscal year."

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Acting Premier.

I have approved for delivery today two statements received from the Honourable Minister of Tourism and Ports entitled the National Tourism Plan 2024-2025, and the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism. I now invite the Honourable Minister to deliver those statements.

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan
National Tourism Plan

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll start with the National Tourism Plan statement; I just want to hand copies to the Serjeant of Arms so they can be handed out.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in this honourable House to provide Members with an update on the development of the National Tourism Plan 2024-2025. The Ministry of Tourism has oversight for one of the country's key service sectors and economic pillars. Our goal is to ensure that the tourism industry not only generates sufficiently significant revenue for our economy, but also positively impact the lives of our residents, our workers and visitors alike.

Maintaining the strong tourism growth that has been achieved over the past decades requires focus, creativity and agility to stay at the forefront of global trends. The Ministry and the Department of Tourism (DOT), supported by a committed Government has worked tirelessly to build a tourism industry that is not only balanced but sustainable and also directly beneficial to our people.

It is therefore unfortunate, that the Leader of the Opposition recently saw it fit to make a public statement about the National Tourism Plan claiming that nothing is being done in tourism as far as the strategic plan development. This assertion is simply not true, Mr. Speaker. Moreover, it is grossly misleading, and appears to be an attempt to play politics by insinuating that the Ministry of Tourism is not delivering on its task.

The fact is, Mr. Speaker, the former National Tourism Plan, better known as the NTP, was commissioned by the then Ministry of Tourism, under the PPM-led administration, to cover the period of 2019 to 2023. It was developed by the same Department of Tourism as today, following a comprehensive consultation process involving stakeholder interviews, focused discussions, and workshops to garner feedback, concerns and ideas from a broad cross-section of stakeholders on three Islands.

When I became the Minister of Tourism in 2021, I ensured that the National Tourism Plan was updated to reflect the policies of the current government, which are outlined in the 2022 to 2024 Strategic Policy Statement, which I'll refer to as the SPS in my statement. The objectives pertaining to tourism were listed under Broad Outcome 10 in the SPS, entitled, *improving our tourism as an industry, product and economic driver* and we incorporated those efforts into the National Tourism Plan.

For Members' ease of reference, Mr. Speaker, those objectives included things like:

a) Expanding into emerging and secondary tourism markets, which we have accomplished through our Latin American strategy— sometimes referred to as *LatAm* by our hardworking staff in DOT;
b) Expand Cayman Airways' routes, which we have achieved with new services to Los Angeles, Panama, and Barbados;
c) Create a National Beautification Plan, which is led by my Parliamentary Secretary (PS), the Honourable Heather Bodden, on which she has been working so hard [and] which we have delivered through the creation of a beautification task force; and
d) Promote and grow sports and event tourism, which we have done, Mr. Speaker— and continue to do, by supporting events which showcase fashion, arts, music, sports and much more..

Mr. Speaker, both the National Tourism Plan and the Strategic Policy Statement are publicly available documents, so I don't need to go into much detail here on the other objectives; Members can review them for more detailed information should they desire to do so.

While it is true that my Ministry's Chief-Officer stated to the Public Accounts Committee that, *"Work on replacing the now-expired tourism plan has been put on hold until the 2025 General Election"*, his words were blatantly taken out of context, Mr. Speaker, and I wonder whether it was done so deliberately. I wonder, because he also went on to very carefully state that **instead, the Ministry and the Department of Tourism have decided to extend the former National Tourism Plan by developing a one-year plan**, better known as a Bridge Document Plan, if you like, to take the industry through to 2025.

Let me say that again, Mr. Speaker, my Ministry Chief-Officer stated in this honourable House— and I quote: “The Ministry and the Department of Tourism have decided instead to extend the former National Tourism Plan”, which the Opposition and the former Minister helped to develop, by developing a one-year plan to take the industry through to 2025.”.

For the avoidance of doubt, Mr. Speaker, the new National Tourism Plan 2024 is not, in any way, a sub-standard or deficient document. It is a rather robust 80-page report, and it is the result of extensive collaboration and consultation with stakeholders across the Islands. The plan outlined strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing visitor experiences, promoting environmental sustainability and driving economic growth.

Mr. Speaker, I'll expand by saying: you're damned if you do, you're damned if you don't; because I respected the former Honourable Minister's hard work and amended it just slightly, to continue with the hard research he and the DOT did— but now we are being accused of having done nothing, by continuing with the majority of what they had been doing.

As further evidence that this plan was updated with the current state of tourism in mind, it has also been updated to include this Government's most recently agreed-upon broad outcomes from 2024 to 2025 Strategic Policy Statement. These include objectives such as:

a. safety and regulatory oversight of airdromes’ meeting internationally-mandated standards that support the growing tourism sector— this has been accomplished by the completion of the airport's Master Plan, which covers the industry for the next decade; and was the genesis for the safety and security upgrades at both the Owen Roberts International Airport and the Charles Kirkconnell International Airport in the Brac, as well as the lengthening of the airport runway at Owen Roberts International; and
b. create a fund for small/micro tourism business development— which we have done through the development of our Visitor Experience Development Grant, which I'm advised will be ready to accept applications in the Third Quarter (Q3) of this year.

Mr. Speaker, this is not the time or place to go into every aspect of the 80-page plan, but I can assure you that each aspect of the National Tourism Plan for 2024, from its innovative marketing campaigns to investments in infrastructure and workforce development, have been crafted to ensure that our tourism industry remains on the path to recovery and future success. The plan is available on the Department of Tourism's website and can be downloaded from www.ourcayman.ky if Members or the listening audience would like to see it.

Hence, for the Leader of Opposition to declare to the country that the future of our tourism industry should not be “left hanging for another eighteen months”— implying that there is a void or a gap left since the expiration of the former plan, can only be construed as an attempt to mislead the public and cause unnecessary worry and concern for the tourism industry. There is no doubt, Mr. Speaker, our tourism industry has not been left hanging; and in my further statements to this House today, and hopefully tomorrow, I'll prove to you why.

All of us in the Ministry and the Department of Tourism take our responsibility to guide the development of our tourism industry very seriously. We work hard in partnership and collaboration with stakeholders to elevate the Cayman Islands as a Premier vacation destination in the Caribbean. We are deeply committed to the business owners in the Cayman Islands, the entrepreneurs in the Cayman Islands, the employees of the Cayman Islands, and all those whose operations provide ancillary services to the tourism sector. It is for those reasons, Mr. Speaker, that I could not, and would not, neglect this crucial industry until a new administration takes office. I have taken an oath and hold my constitutional responsibilities for the Ministry of Tourism very seriously.

I'm fully committed to fulfilling my promise to the people of the Cayman Islands, and I am doing everything within my power to ensure that the tourism industry continues to grow in a way that is socially, commercially, and environmentally viable.

Until the next administration is in place to drive the development of a new plan that reflects their policies and how they wish to direct the tourism industry for the future, this National Tourism Plan of 2024 developed by the Ministry and the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism— which also advised the last administration, in collaboration with our tourism industry stakeholders— will be in force to guide the continued growth and development of our tourism sector.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Cayman Islands Department of Tourism Update

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to read my second statement— the *Cayman Islands Department of Tourism Update*— as you have given me permission to do. I will hand copies of the document over to the Serjeant of Arms for distribution, [along with] a copy of the six-month destination snapshot report, so that every Member of the House can look at it as I'm going through the statement.

Mr. Speaker and honourable Members of Parliament, I rise to share a brief update on the achievements of the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism, and to highlight the significant contributions that have been made towards advancing the growth and the

development of our tourism industry. As we are at the halfway point of 2024, in my update I will report on the Department of Tourism's accomplishments and initiatives between January and June of this year, which have not only bolstered our economy, but also enhanced our country's global reputation as a premier travel destination.

Mr. Speaker, I will begin with an overview of the industry's financial performance: I am pleased to report that our Tourism Accommodation Tax (TAT) collections for the First Quarter (Q1) of 2024, have again exceeded expectations. Specifically, Mr. Speaker, TAT collections from January to May of 2024 amounted to a whopping $25 million which is 9 per cent above projections. This remarkable growth underscores the robustness of our tourism sector, and the effectiveness of the Ministry and the Department of Tourism's strategic initiatives.

In terms of stay-over visitor arrivals, I'm equally pleased to advise that the Cayman Islands are experiencing a steady uptick in visitation. To date, the country has welcomed 250,699 visitors for the period January to June of 2024, which is up 6.5 per cent compared to the same period of last year. The United States continue to be the largest source market for stay-over visitors in the Cayman Islands, contributing 84 per cent of our total visitation, while Canada remains the second largest source of visitors for the destination at 6.9 per cent, followed by Europe at 4.4 per cent, Mr. Speaker.

By comparison, since 2022, when cruise ships returned to the Cayman Islands in the wake of the pandemic, cruise passenger arrivals have significantly declined registering 743,394 for the nine-month period that the port was open in 2022; and 1.1 million for the full year of 2023, the lowest passenger arrivals in over two decades— now, Mr. Speaker, you are probably asking why I am talking about these negative numbers, but everything will come to light in due course.

Looking at 2024 cruise passenger arrivals for the period of January to June 2024, it amounted to 634,212 passengers which are 14.6 per cent *fewer* than 2023. Cruise passenger arrivals for the month of June 2024 total 54,114 persons, reflecting a decrease of 26.5 per cent compared to the same period of 2023. I'll repeat that, Mr. Speaker: Cruise passenger arrivals for the month of June 2024 totalled 56,114 *[sic]* persons reflecting a *decrease* of 26.5 per cent compared to June of 2023.

The aviation sector continues to be a crucial component of our tourism strategy, and Mr. Speaker, I'm excited to confirm that substantial progress has been made with respect to optimising seat capacity to our destination, particularly from key markets in the United States and Canada. Comparing June 2023 to June 2024, inbound airline seats from the United States, United Kingdom and Canada, grew by 15 per cent rising from 63,096 seats in June of 2023, to 67,224 in June of 2024.

According to the international Air Transportation Association, better known as IATA, there were 418 flights in June 2024, which is up 38 flights from June 2023. The most sizeable increase in inbound seats was from the United States, which saw an 18 per cent rise equating to 50,817 more seats into our destination from the United States compared to the same period in 2024.

Throughout the summer, American Airlines will continue its daily service from Dallas and have added a Saturday flight which will operate from the 4th of June to the 5th of August 2024; also, as of June 4th, 2024, Southwest Airlines launched its daily non-stop service between Orlando and Grand Cayman which will run through August 4th. Service will then shift to once weekly on Saturdays through till November 3rd, when daily services will resume for the winter season.

Looking ahead to the Third Quarter (Q3) of this year and beyond, JetBlue Airlines will add a second flight from Boston on Mondays, starting on the 28th of October, 2024 Mr. Speaker, continuing to add more and more flights, more and more visitors. This will provide visitors with the option to travel nonstop to Grand Cayman on Saturdays and on Mondays, which is in line with the average daily or weekly stay.

I'm very pleased to confirm that Sun Country Airlines are scheduled to begin offering twice weekly flights from Minneapolis to Grand Cayman from the 20th of December, 2024 to the 12th of April 2025. Also starting on the 20th of December of this year, just in time for the Christmas holidays, Delta Airlines will be offering three weekly flights from Minneapolis-Saint Paul, among the other destinations that are already coming from to Grand Cayman.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: With respect to the Canadian market, capacity between Toronto and the Cayman Islands effectively doubled, due to Air Canada increasing to twice-weekly service between April and October, Mr. Speaker; JetBlue followed suit, doubling its service from one to two flights per week during the same period as the competition continues—

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: —Making it easier for visitors from markets to access our Islands over the summer period. With airline connectivity being pivotal to the success of our tourism industry, I am sure you will agree with me, Mr. Speaker, that the increase in airlift into the Cayman Islands set a positive outlook for our tourism future.

Turning our attention now to room stock, Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that our tourism accommodation sector has reached a significant milestone. For the first time in our history, 8,000 rooms are

available to our visitors [from] across the world. This achievement was made possible through the successful launch of the two new hotels, namely, Vida Cayman Islands in Barkers, West Bay; and Hotel Indigo Grand Cayman located steps away from the Seven Mile Beach.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I'm going to pause for a second to say [that] by all means, it was not this administration that started it. Credit must be given for the hard work of the former Minister and the former Government, because these developments didn't start overnight so, much credit must be given— and I am happy to announce those successes on behalf of the people, in conjunction with the hard work of the former government, but we must continue positive things and not be criticised for it. These additions not only increase the bedroom capacity, but also enhance the diversity and quality of the types of accommodation available to our guests who come to the Cayman Islands.

Aside from visitation and airlift, the Cayman Islands Department of Tourism have also engaged in several transformative initiatives aimed at further strengthening our tourism infrastructure and services. Firstly, the tourism accommodation inspections and licensing process is being modernised, Mr. Speaker. This project will allow the Department of Tourism to collect tourism taxes and hotel fees online, thereby streamlining operations and enhancing the efficiency in being the top-quality jurisdiction that we are known for. The modernisation process will also allow the department to digitally coordinate the inspections and licensing process for the growing pool of Cayman Islands' accommodation properties.

The Department of Tourism have also onboarded new marketing agencies to elevate the Cayman Islands global presence, and deliver a more unified and streamlined approach to our global marketing and communications strategies. Grey, a New York-based global creative service agency, has been contracted, through an open procurement process, to develop a singular global brand strategy and creative platform for all of our source markets. This partnership will span over a five-year period, with the new brand platform scheduled to debut in the early part of next year— and I know the team is working hard to launch it.

Additionally, for public relations services, a company called Praytell PR has been appointed as the Department of Tourism's new US Public Relations Agency on record. Mr. Speaker, this five-year partnership— again, secured via a robust procurement process— continues to strengthen the Cayman Islands' position as a premier destination in the Northern American market, which is our main market.

Mr. Speaker, the Department's Destination-Wide Market Research Assessment Initiative is another cornerstone of our collective strategic efforts. Destination market research is vitally important to our tourism industry because it provides critical insights into the preferences, behaviours, and expectations of visitors to the country; by meticulously analysing key touch points within the visitor experience from arrival to departure, we are able to identify the strengths as well as the areas needing improvement and fix them.

This data-driven approach also allows the Department of Tourism to tailor our marketing strategies, enhance our customer service initiatives, and develop training programmes that directly address the needs and the desires of those who visit our beautiful country. The aim of identifying these key touch points and areas for improvement, is to ensure a superior visitor experience which translates into higher satisfaction and repeat customers, all of which ultimately reinforces the Cayman Islands' reputation as a world-class destination.

Mr. Speaker, [as] the tourism industry relies on partnerships and cooperation to be successful, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight the recognition that the destination and our partners have received recently.

As you may be aware, Mr. Speaker, my team and I were in New York last month attending the Caribbean Tourism Organisation's Caribbean Week. During this week-long celebration of all things Caribbean, the Cayman Islands had several events to promote our destination which showcased some great local talent, including Selita Ebanks, musician Mr. Stuart Wilson, and mixology by the amazing Maya Grant.

I had the pleasure of accepting an award from TripAdvisor on behalf of the Cayman Islands, its products and its people, as the Cayman Islands ranked number 8 nature destination in TripAdvisor's Travellers' Choice Best of the Best Awards. Now, Mr. Speaker, the average person may not know how significant that is, but— amongst the hundreds of millions of people who visit TripAdvisor, to be considered as the number 8 nature destination in the world?! I think Cayman, and this industry, has so much to be proud of.

[Desk thumping]

Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan: I also want to highlight one of our partners, Cayman Crystal Caves, which has been ranked the 5th Best Tourism Attraction *in the world*, Mr. Speaker, in the same TripAdvisor's Travellers' Choice, Best of the Best things to do— yes, Mr. Speaker, I did say 5th best in the world, which is a fantastic achievement, and I congratulate all concerned in earning this high accolade. TripAdvisor awards are voted by travellers worldwide, and are based on their direct experiences within the destination.

These awards are a testament to the strength of our tourism product, and I am incredibly proud of our industry, our tourism partners, and the employees within it. In the tourism context, Mr. Speaker, there's so much to celebrate.

It would be remiss of me, Mr. Speaker, not to take this opportunity to highlight our human capital development as it relates to the tourism and hospitality industry. I am pleased to report that both the Tourism Scholarship and the School of Hospitality initiatives continue to thrive and inspire young Caymanians to pursue careers within the tourism and hospitality industry.

Graduates from the School of Hospitality Studies have gone on to pursue careers in water sports and two students will be continuing training towards Professional Association of Diving Instructors (PADI) certifications. Four students have secured employment in reception services, and three others will be going abroad to pursue tertiary education in hospitality at Johnson and Wales University.

Mr. Speaker, these success stories are a testament to our young people's drive, and fill me with great hope for the continued development of our tourism sector and tourism product. I am confident, Mr. Speaker, that these courses will continue to get larger and larger.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, in relation to the strategic initiatives, I am very pleased to officially announce to Members that the Cayman Islands will host the Caribbean Tourism Organization's (CTO) State of the Industry Conference (SOTIC) this coming September. The major business development event is expected to attract over two hundred and fifty delegates from across the Caribbean, providing much-needed economic stimulation and confirmed bookings during the slowest month of the year for tourism. This conference is a testament to our commitment to regional tourism collaboration, and is being hosted in the Cayman Islands to mark the conclusion of my Chairmanship of the Caribbean Tourism Organization as I am prepared to pass on the baton to another member within the Caribbean.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I trust that you will agree with me that the Department of Tourism has made significant strides in enhancing our tourism infrastructure, optimising our market presence, and driving economic growth within the Cayman Islands tourism industry. Its achievements are a testament to our unwavering commitment to excellence and underscores my Ministry's Strategic Vision for the future, and this Government's strategic vision for tourism.

It is my hope, that as we continue to collaboratively build on our successes, our dedication to ensuring that the Cayman Islands remain a top-tier destination will be evidenced through the substantial benefits that tourism and the hospitality industry deliver to our economy on an ongoing basis. I invite Members to take a good look at the snapshot report, which gives a good idea of where we are from a tourism perspective.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Madam Clerk, we will stop at other business, but just clear those off.

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

The Speaker: None.

OBITUARY AND OTHER CEREMONIAL SPEECHES

The Speaker: None.

RAISING OF MATTERS OF PRIVILEGES

The Speaker: None.

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

The Speaker: None— or none further, I should say. Yeah,

OTHER BUSINESS
PRIVATE MEMBERS' MOTIONS

Private Member's Motion No. 11 of 2023-2024
Motion to Increase Fines and Enforce Road Safety

The Speaker: Honourable Members, I am proposing to suspend now, to resume at 2:30 to take the Private Member Motion. The House is now suspended for a belated luncheon adjournment until 2:30 pm.

Proceedings suspended at 1:56 pm

Proceedings resumed at 2:45 pm

The Speaker: Please be seated.

Honourable Members, when we suspended for lunch I indicated that we would proceed next with Private Members' Motions but, following a discussion with the Acting Premier, we will instead suspend the House and convene the meeting of Finance Committee to deal with the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2022-2023 which was referred to Finance Committee yesterday. Accordingly, I will now suspend the House pending the conclusion of Finance Committee.

Proceedings suspended 2:56 pm

Proceedings resumed at 7:05 pm

The Speaker: Good evening. Parliament is resumed. Please be seated.

Honourable Acting Premier, I would be grateful if you would explain the way forward before we adjourn,

so that Members and the broader public are aware of what tomorrow's proceedings will be like.

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Good evening and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

As the public may have seen, we had an extensive meeting of Finance Committee; so tomorrow the way forward shall be that, after we adjourn tonight, Finance Committee will resume at 9 a.m. tomorrow in the large committee room, finish the report and the Minutes, and report it back to the House. Once reported to the House, we will seek to resume proceedings in the House.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Premier. I will now entertain a motion to adjourn the House until your estimated time of start tomorrow.

ADJOURNMENT

Hon. André M. Ebanks: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

It may also be helpful for me to undertake to the Opposition that because Finance Committee was longer than anticipated, one Motion fell away today, but we will stay to complete the Motions tomorrow during the House.

With that, Mr. Speaker, I'd like to thank all of the Members who are in the Chamber, and those who may have departed already, for their very hard and collaborative work this evening; and with that, I'd like to move the motion that the House do stand adjourn until tomorrow morning at 10:30 a.m.

The Speaker: Thank you. The question is that the House do now adjourn until 10:30 tomorrow morning.

All those in favour, please say Aye. Those against, No.

AYES.

The Speaker: The Ayes have it. The House stands adjourned until 10:30 a.m. tomorrow morning.

At 7:08 pm the House stood adjourned until 10:30 am, Thursday, 25th July, 2024.