

PARLIAMENT OF THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

First Meeting of the 2024/2025 Session

Third Sitting

Thursday
10 October, 2024
(Pages 1-12)

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. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, JP, MP	*Premier*, Minister of Education, District Administration & Lands and Finance & Economic Development
Hon. André M. Ebanks, MP	*Deputy Premier*, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce *and* Investment, Innovation & Social Development
Hon. Johany S. Ebanks, MP	Minister of Planning, Agriculture, Housing, Infrastructure and Transport & Development
Hon. Kenneth V. Bryan, MP	Minister of Tourism & Ports
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. Eric Bush, JP	*Acting 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. W. McKeeva Bush, JP, MP	Elected Member for West Bay West
Hon. Heather D. Bodden, OCI, Cert. Hon., JP, MP	*Deputy Speaker*, Parliamentary Secretary to Tourism *and* Social Development, Elected Member for Savannah
Mr. Bernie A. Bush, MP	Elected Member for West Bay North

OPPOSITION MEMBERS

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

APOLOGIES

Hon. Franz I. Manderson, MBE, Cert Hon, JP	Deputy Governor, ex officio Member responsible for the Portfolio of the Civil Service
Hon. G. Wayne Panton, JP, MP	Elected Member for Newlands

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT
FIRST MEETING OF THE 2024/2025 SESSION
THURSDAY
10 OCTOBER, 2024
11.22 A.M.

Third Sitting

[Hon. Sir Alden McLaughlin, Speaker, presiding]

The Speaker: Good morning. Parliament is resumed. The Honourable Minister of Labour to lead prayers.

PRAYERS

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour, Minister of Border Control & Labour and Culture, Elected Member for Bodden Town East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

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 the Parliament, the Leader of the Opposition, Ministers of the Cabinet, ex officio Members, Members of the 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 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 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: None.

PRESENTATION OF PETITIONS

The Speaker: None.

PRESENTATION OF PAPERS AND OF REPORTS

The Speaker: None.

Suspension of Standing Order 23(7) and (8)

The Speaker: Madam Premier, may I invite you to move the suspension of Standing Order 23(7) and (8) so that questions may be asked of Ministers after the hour of 11 o'clock?

The Premier, Hon. Juliana Y. O'Connor-Connolly, Minister of Finance, Education and District Administration & Lands, Elected Member for Cayman Brac East: Good morning and thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I move the suspension of Standing Order 23(7) and (8) to allow questions to go on beyond the hour of 11 o'clock.

The Speaker: The question is that Standing Order 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: I believe the Ayes have it.

Agreed: Standing Order 23(7) and (8) suspended.

QUESTIONS TO HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

QUESTION NO. 5
WILL THE OLDER PERSONS ACTIVE AGEING CENTRE BE REOPENED?

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

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town South: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the Honourable Deputy Premier Question No. 5, standing in my name.

Can the Honourable Deputy Premier advise the House whether the Government intends to reopen the Older Persons Active Ageing Centre, formerly located on MacLendon Drive, which was closed following the 2021 general elections?

The Speaker: The Honourable Deputy Premier to answer.

Hon. André M. Ebanks, Deputy Premier, Minister of Financial Services & Commerce and Investment, Innovation & Social Development, Elected Member for West Bay South: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'll just wait for the copy of the response to be provided to Members of the House.

Thank you for the question. The answer: the Older Persons Active Aging Centre (OPAAC) was established as a multi-agency centre where particularly the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) and the Needs Assessment Unit ((NAU) at the time) were to offer services to older persons in the Cayman Islands.

Following the 2021 election, the DCFS and NAU advised of several challenges with the facility, such as lack of access to confidential spaces due to open ceilings and thin inner walls; the lack of accessible washrooms; and challenges from a human resource perspective to keep facilities staffed when there was not a significant uptake of the service. Additionally, there were concerns with meeting building codes and ensuring the safety of older persons, as emergency exit areas were blocked by air conditioning units. Further, older persons accessing these services prefer to access them locally in their districts or even in their homes.

At the time, the aforementioned challenges rendered the space unsuitable for service delivery through DCFS and NAU. The Ministry then considered a number of options regarding how the premises could best be utilised. The two leading options were:

1. An interested private sector business that offered to sublet the premises, which would have allowed the Ministry to conserve its operational budget with respect to spending to rent the premises. Then, at the end of the sublet, the Ministry would be returned an improved rental property; or
2. The opportunity to collaborate with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Heritage, which offered to become a sub-tenant as it had sufficient funding to renovate the premises, resolve the structural issues and work in partnership with my Ministry.

Accordingly, in the spirit of working as one Government, then Minister Bernie Bush and I agreed that the premises which was previously named OPAAC would be transitioned to the then Ministry of Youth, Sports, Heritage and Culture. We worked in partnership with them to ensure that the space would be used to deliver programmes for older persons. As a result, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Heritage successfully rebranded and developed the space as the Intergenerational Hub, now known as The Hub. As publicly reported, The Hub was reopened by this Government on 20th October, 2023 with a beautiful and soulful launch event, as a space for older persons and youth to learn from each other and further enshrine Cayman's heritage in the community.

My Ministry has been working closely with the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Heritage using the space to deliver programmes to bring people together and enhance the spirit of the community. The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Heritage has confirmed that activities for older persons are offered frequently, sometimes weekly, in a particular month.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Deputy Premier. Are there any other Supplementaries?

Madam Clerk, next question please.

QUESTION NO. 6
GOVERNMENT'S AGREEMENT WITH R3 AND REPAIRS COMPLETED TO DATE

The Speaker: I recognise the Honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders, Elected Member for Bodden Town West: Morning, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask Question No. 6 standing in my name, and the question goes as follows: Can the Honourable Minister say:

(a) What is the total amount distributed to R3 to date;
(b) What agreement, if any, did the Government sign with R3;
(c) How many homes have been repaired to date by R3 with the funds given by Government; and
(d) What is the breakdown by electoral district and amount, of where the funds were used?

Thank you.

The Speaker: The Honourable Deputy Premier to answer.

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

Answer: By way of brief reminder, the Ministry of Investment, Innovation and Social Development answered a substantially similar Parliamentary Question posed by the Member for George Town West during the Third Meeting of the House in the 2022-2023 session.

Acknowledging, however, the importance of this information to the public, we are minded to provide responses once more in relation to (a), (c) and (d) hereof. The only question that was not specifically posed previously is (b).

As such, in response to the Parliamentary Sub-Question now posed:

(a) The total amount distributed to the R3 Cayman Foundation was $1.5 million for housing repairs;

(b) The aforesaid amount was distributed pursuant to a donation agreement between the Ministry and the R3 Cayman Foundation on the 30th December, 2021, which was supported by Caucus and approved by Cabinet prior to execution, which the Member for Bodden Town West was a part of at the time. The resulting arrangement between R3 and the Ministry was publicly reported in Q1 of 2022;

(c) The total number of homes repaired by the R3 programme was 41; and

(d) The breakdown of the 41 projects are as follows. The recording of project locations completed under the R3 programme was tracked by R3, by traditional district boundaries rather than electoral boundaries.

District	Count of Projects	Total Spend
West Bay	15	385,616
George Town	2	75,749
Bodden Town	15	552,750
North Side	1	45,102
East End	8	323,078
Project Total	**41**	**1,371,084** *[sic]*

There were some inspection cost that ran just over $23,000; and the administration of their work was just $105,000, with a grand total of $1,499,990.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Minister.

Are there any Supplementaries? The Honourable Member for Bodden Town West.

Supplementary

Mr. Christopher S. Saunders: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Through you, Mr. Speaker, to the Honourable Minister: Can we get a breakdown between Bodden Town East, Bodden Town West, Newlands and Savannah, because I'm looking at Bodden Town's 15 projects, and I still have several outstanding.

The Speaker: Honourable Deputy Premier, do you have those details?

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

I wondered about that when the staff served the answer because I believe R3, as a private organisation, may not have been as attuned to the electoral districts, and tracked them in the traditional districts. It'll take staff a little time to look at those addresses to give that [breakdown], but I undertake to give it to him in writing.

The Speaker: Thank you, Honourable Deputy Premier. Any other Supplementaries?

Madam Clerk, next question please.

QUESTION NO. 7
POINCIANA MENTAL HEALTH FACILITY

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

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to ask the Honourable Minister Question No. 7, standing in my name. Can the Honourable Minister update the House on the building and fit-out costs to date for the Poinciana Mental Health Facility?

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

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

The total building and fit-out costs to date for the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre (PRC) is CI $22,960,000.

The original project cost was estimated at CI $16,241,000 at the Outline Business Case (OBC) stage, in 2016, meaning, there is a change of $6,400,000 to date, for building and fit-out costs.

The modification is largely attributed to changes in scope, which improved and increased capacity at the Centre. The original Outline Business Case expected the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre to be constructed to residential facility building standards.

It was later agreed to increase construction standards so that the structures will gain higher hurricane ratings than would normally be required for a standard residential facility.

This also saw an increase in the size of the administration building of approximately 200 feet: from 19,216 square feet to 19,410 square feet.

Additionally, specialised equipment and custom fit-outs were required to increase operational capabilities and efficiencies. With regard to the cottages, the original OBC in 2016 called for seven cottages. It was later agreed to build nine to increase the number of patients the Centre can care for. The cottage size was also increased by approximately 200 square feet from 3,725 square feet to 3,948 square feet.

Mr. Speaker, it is also important to remind everyone listening to these remarks, of the impacts to this project caused by COVID-19. The Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre broke ground in October 2019. In March 2020, the entire construction sector stood down in response to the pandemic. The sector did not resume for months, thereby pushing out the deliverable date, as work could not continue. When the sector resumed, there were significant challenges with supply chains, re-importing labour, and pressures caused by the industry-wide backlog. COVID-19 also triggered large inflation and price increases globally.

Mr. Speaker, the Government believes in the benefits that the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre will bring to our community, and continues to do all it can to not only support its opening, but also ensure that the Centre is built for purpose to meet current and future needs.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the response provided to the specific Parliamentary Question that was posed, I seek your indulgence, please, to give further clarity to the Poinciana Rehabilitation Centre, if you will allow.

[Pause]

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Thank you.

There are a number of factors at play, Mr. Speaker, that must be explained, as I am constitutionally bound to do in my role.

The funding of this project has been shared between two Governments, that means it has a root, and that root is not me; not this Ministry. I can also state that it has noted the nexus or the connection with other Ministries and entities involved in that process; that too, Mr. Speaker, has a root and that root is also not me; not the Minister. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Health and Wellness is one thing, but the completion and occupancy of that building relies on the successful passing of all planning inspections conducted by the Department of Planning. This calls for a project manager or a project management team, and for this project it is not [and] never has been the Ministry of Health and Wellness' responsibility, nor has it been my responsibility as the Minister.

Mr. Speaker, as I alluded to, any project [needs] a project manager or managers, and during my time in this role, and becoming aware of the project, I quickly found out that instead of having one single contractor, the project went out to multiple contractors. Anyone should know what happens when you have too many hands in a pot; the more complex and more involved and challenging things can become, which can also convey or yield delay factors.

As stated before, it is not one single contractor that we're dealing with for this facility, and looking out for works to be carried out just because this facility was done by multiple hands, a decision was made under a previous administration to go this route. That said, Mr. Speaker, you will only get multiple variances in levels and quality of work, which would be all subject to inspections carried out by the Planning Department, prior to the Ministry of Health being able to take over the facility from [the] Public Works [Department] and a Certificate of Occupancy being acquired.

The elephant in the room, Mr. Speaker, is who has the responsibility for the overall oversight of the entire project? Please let me make it clear, Mr. Speaker: It is *not* the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

Mr. Speaker, when you have a project, you will have a project manager; if you have multiple entities dealing with it, the project manager is responsible for giving timelines [and] leading updates for the completion of the project. The point that the facility is much needed is not in question, Mr. Speaker. Nowhere can it be identified that anyone is disputing the fact that the facility is needed, because the project was actually started, but the crux is, *where and why has it taken so long?* This is a reasonable question to be asked of the patients and families, and the public, but again, where does it fall?

Poinciana continues to be a primary focus area for the Ministry. The asset remains in the hands of the Public Works Department (PWD) as construction continues to head towards completion.

At no time, Mr. Speaker, have I withheld information or shunned answering questions. I've reported what I've been told by the operational arm of the entire project, namely, PWD. However, may I repeat, that the Ministry of Health is the end user. The opening of this facility, project management and responsibility for its completion have always been in the hands of PWD, and not the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

It is not a matter of the blame-game. It is a matter of stating the facts, and it is my duty to inform the public because this is the public's money we're talking about here; and I, too, am very concerned at this time.

[Crosstalk]

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: My colleague, please allow me my time. Thank you.

The Ministry and Poinciana teams continue to work to prepare the Centre for its opening so that it is

ready to receive patients when the facility is handed over.

Mr. Speaker, as per reports from Public Works Department's Project Manager, the construction of both the main buildings and cottages have been completed, and are progressing through final building inspections and the handover phase.

A Special Permission to Occupy (SPO) was granted for the main building on July 22nd, 2024 and the PRC staff have since occupied its facilities. The SPO has enabled PRC staff to access the buildings in order to commence preparation work to receive residents including, but not limited to, setting up offices and equipment, conducting training, and onboarding.

Mr. Speaker, for the sake of clarity, the Certificate of Occupancy (CO) and the Special Permission of Occupancy (SPO) are both official permits related to building occupancy that serve different purposes and have distinct conditions.

The CO is the final approval that will allow full, permanent occupancy of the building. It confirms that the building is in full compliance with all building code requirements and any planning conditions imposed by the Department of Planning.

On the other hand, the SPO is a temporary authorisation that allows occupancy of the building or a portion of it before the CO is issued. It is typically granted when the building is substantially complete but some minor, non-safety related work remains. According to the Department of Planning, an SPO may be issued prior to a CO. For instance, while the main building may be fully complete and code compliant, external landscaping may still be pending. Similarly, if there is an issue with one restroom, but alternative facilities are available, an SPO can still be granted. The permit remains open until all outstanding conditions are satisfied and a CO is obtained.

Regarding the cottages, the focus is on a phased handover to minimise further delays, rather than handing over all cottages at once. Progress is being made with final inspections to move this process forward.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to delays caused by COVID-19 and other unforeseen factors, the project has recently encountered challenges in securing occupancy permits due to a prolonged inspection process. During this process, issues identified by the Building Control Unit (BCU) required rectification by the contractor, and in some cases overseas procurement was necessary, leading to further delays in completion.

However, according to the Project Manager, all concerns related to main buildings namely: the administration, cafeteria, and activity centre have been resolved, with a few remaining matters for the cottages still being addressed.

Mr. Speaker, the cottages are currently in the inspection phase, and significant progress has been made over the past month, with all inspections for the key disciplines—Mechanical, Electrical, Plumbing, and Fire—now completed. Approvals have been granted for the plumbing and fire contract works, however, the contractor is currently addressing an issue identified during inspections for the remaining discipline, that is, Mechanical. Once this is resolved, a request to the BCU will be issued for consideration to grant an SPO.

The project team at PWD aims to hand over the first cluster of cottages, that is, three cottages, to prioritise the repatriation of overseas persons by 15th December, 2024. This is dependent upon continued engagement and quick turnaround by BCU and no severe inclement weather. Mr. Speaker, you may recall that the PRC project is comprised of nine cottages of six rooms/units per cottage. The Ministry continues to work closely with the Project Manager to ensure that all necessary activities are being completed for final inspections. A total of nine residents are currently waiting to be repatriated to Cayman.

Mr. Speaker, staffing at the facility is now at 43 persons, with the majority of staff, that is, twenty-one persons, taking up posts in September, 2024. The updated headcount includes the 14 persons selected for the Trainee Psychiatric Nursing Assistant (TPNA) programme, who are all Caymanians. As such, 51 per cent of all staff at PRC, is Caymanian. An additional six members of staff are slated to join during the month of October, five of whom are Caymanian. The TPNA programme's orientation started in September, with the full training programme expected to begin this month, should there be any mitigating circumstances that cause any delays.

Qualified staff are continuing their orientation process by undertaking a rotation at different facilities across the Island to gain a better understanding of the Cayman Islands' mental health landscape. They also continue to assist with preparatory work, for example, development of operational policies to receive residents once the facility opens.

Mr. Speaker, just this morning, I received an update from the Project Manager.

The contractual work and obligations for both the main building and cottages were completed over a year ago. While various challenges, including the global pandemic, supply chain disruptions, contractor's financial issues, and procurement delays have impacted the project timeline, the primary cause of the delayed handover over the past year has been a prolonged inspection process, and issues identified by the BCU which required rectification by the contractor. In some cases, such rectifications, as I stated, included procurement from overseas.

I hope this satisfies the House, answers the question, and informs the public as to where the Centre stands.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you, Madam Minister.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition? Supplementaries?

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition, Elected Member for George Town North: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, I dared not break the Minister's stride, but for such a detailed and important statement it would have been good to have had a copy on this side, and we would still like to receive one. It's going to be a little difficult at the minute to pull supplementaries for it right away.

The Speaker: Yes, Honourable Leader, it occurred to me as well, but I had no idea how long the statement would go. You will just have to do your best.

Hon. W. McKeeva Bush, Elected Member for West Bay West: Mr. Speaker, can we ask that we get the *Hansard* as quickly as possible?

The Speaker: Yes, we certainly can. It won't assist with question time now, but we can certainly do that, yes. Honourable Members, you should have to do your best if you wish to ask questions.

[Pause]

The Speaker: I'm listening to the Premier's advice. Perhaps we can suspend and have copies of the statement made, then Members can have the opportunity to consider it and decide whether they wish to ask supplementaries.

We have the relative luxury of time today. We're not really pressed, so I'll take a 15-minute suspension. We can have the copies made, and conclude this.

Proceedings suspended at 11.56 a.m.

Proceedings resumed at 12.51 p.m.

The Speaker: Parliament is resumed.

Honourable Members, it is almost time for the usual luncheon adjournment. I understand there are still discussions being had and that Members are feeling a bit hungry, so I propose that we have the luncheon suspension now, and resume at 2.30 p.m.

Proceedings suspended at 12.52 p.m.

Proceedings resumed at 2.47 p.m.

The Speaker: Good afternoon. Parliament is resumed.

Honourable Members, I have two apologies. One received late, the other I forgot to mention this morning— Members who are not here. The honourable Member for Newlands has sent apologies, and the honourable Member for George Town West is ill today.

When we took the initial suspension, it was to allow the opportunity for copies of the *Hansard* of the statement by the Minister of Health and Wellness which followed the answer to the question about the Poinciana Mental Health Facility. I am told all Members now have a copy of that *Hansard,* and so we may resume where we left off, which was at the point of entertaining Supplementaries in relation to question number 7.

The question, just so everyone can remember: Can the Honourable Minister update the house on the building and fit-out costs to date for the Poinciana Mental Health Facility? Members should have a written copy of the answer as well as the statement which followed. On that basis, I will allow Supplementaries.

The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Supplementaries

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, the Honourable Minister in her statement mentioned "the elephant in the room", which is who has responsibility for the oversight of the entire project.

In that context, as a former Minister of Works who had responsibility for the Major Projects Office, in these circumstances, as my memory serves me, there were several options that happened. If the project was big enough, the Ministry that had responsibility for the project would second a project manager into their Ministry; otherwise, a project manager at the Major Projects Office would be appointed to the project to work for the Ministry.

My question, Mr. Speaker, to the Minister: Can the Minister say if a project manager has ever been appointed to this project on behalf of the Ministry?

The Speaker: The Minister to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, I can advise that that project manager was appointed through the project management team. At no point did the Ministry of Health actually hire a project manager for this team; [and] this predates me.

The Speaker: Are there any further supplementaries? Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. That means there is a project manager, but who is the project manager reporting to? Who has responsibility for the project ultimately, that the project manager would report to?

The Speaker: The Minister to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, what I am made to understand is that this project manager would update the Chief Officer. In understanding that this Administration placed a heavy emphasis on mental health and actually getting this facility open, it was only as we got into and got out of opening, that the Ministry was able to

focus our attention on this facility and ramped up asking for updates.

My Chief Officer and I received an email around 1:48 this morning containing information that, just looking at it, dates back as far as 2016 to today, which was asked by my Ministry's Chief Officer and myself. I'm not able to go into the full details of it as yet, because I've received it just this morning— something I've been asking for 3.5 years to make it all make sense. I'm more than able to give a report to the public once the information that was received around 1:46 this morning is processed, because I have to go through it with my ministerial team to make sure everything contained therein makes sense.

The Speaker: Are there any further supplementaries?

The honourable Member for George Town East.

Mr. Roy M. McTaggart, Elected Member for George Town East: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Through you, to the Minister: Can the Minister tell us who held the budget? Which Ministry had the budget for this project?

The Speaker: The Minister to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, the budget is held by the Ministry and we go back for funding; but again, this is a continuation of the hand I was dealt with, so it continued.

The Speaker: Any further supplementaries? The Honourable Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Ms. Barbara E. Conolly, Deputy Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Can the Minister confirm if her Ministry has sufficient funding in place to complete this project at this time?

The Speaker: The Minister to answer.

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

Based on funding for this project, it looks as though every time there's an inspection, something else is needed. Only at such times within the budget allocated— which we know is usually always short— we will come back to my colleagues or reallocate funds as needs be; but to specifically answer: this all hinges on the ongoing inspections that are happening, as stated in my statement earlier.

The Speaker: Any further supplementaries? 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'd like to ask the Minister, if I understood what you just said, the project manager sent you answers at 1:46 in the morning, and the answers were for 3.5 years of work?

The Speaker: Minister to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, through you: For full clarity, it is a chronological breakdown from 2016 to the end that I have to go through, because much of this predates me. From just grazing over it, there is key information contained in there that I've been asking for, for clarity and to see why there have been so many delays. So now I have to sit down with the Ministry team to process it all for it to make sense. I hope that helps.

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

Mr. Moses I. Kirkconnell: It helps a little bit. You're holding the budget for it, and the person who is the project manager reports to you. What I'm understanding is that they don't report to you in a timely manner, so I don't understand how they would continue to get funding if they don't report.

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Chair, through you: accountability has been a huge topic. To be honest, I can only trust when I get reports, and I report to the public which is something I have continued to do… What we need to make clear and understand is that, even though the funding and budget is the responsibility of the Minister, we can only hope that the expertise and turnover of the operational arm are done in a timely manner. That is what complicates the role of a Minister.

We don't have control of operational arms or holding the operational arm accountable, which complicates things. We're in this role, we have this constitutional responsibility and the public is holding us responsible for deliverables. We can only work cohesively with the Civil Service arm and hope that they can deliver our broad outcomes in a timely manner.

The Speaker: The Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Not to drag this on, but on this side we're drowning in search of answers because the public is asking us. The public wants to know why it is taking so long and who is responsible.

Minister, what would normally happen is that [you would have] the Chief Officer of the Ministry responsible for the project along with the project manager overseeing the project. Having multiple subcontractors

or contractors on one site is not unusual— it happens at the National Housing Development Trust (NHDT) and all over the place; but normally, the overall project manager would have the responsibility to update the Chief Officer and the Minister on a regular basis. My question now is: Can the Minister say whether or not this happened?

The Speaker: The Minister to answer.

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

The timeliness and response time have been delayed at times and just getting information has proven challenging. We have gotten more support now that, obviously, the pressure is on and— it has really gone on too long!

To say that that communication and response have not improved would be an unfair statement; but understanding that the first half of this Administration was grappling to try to get our country reopened, technically we have had one year to look at other things. To answer directly, communication has improved, and I will hope and pray that it will continue so we can get a delivery date sooner than expected.

The Speaker: I'll allow two more supplementaries, including this one.

Hon. Joseph X. Hew, Leader of the Opposition: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

I thank the Honourable Minister for her candidness and willingness to answer the questions. The Honourable Minister said that she's now getting the kind of response that she needs. Can I ask the Minister whether she now feels confident that she has a grasp and is getting the response she needs to see this through to the end, as soon as possible?

The Speaker: The Honourable Minister to answer.

Hon. Sabrina T. Turner: Mr. Speaker, through you: I give this House and this entire country my word that I am comfortable that I will.

I am getting the response that I'm satisfied now at this juncture to be able to at least deliver a certificate of occupancy date.

The Speaker: Any further Supplementaries?

Madam Clerk next question.

QUESTION NO. 8
UPDATE ON PROGRESS OF THE DRAFT ANTI-SEXUAL HARASSMENT BILL

The Speaker: As I indicated earlier, we have apologies for absence from the honourable Member for Newlands.

In fairness to the Minister, I should indicate that the Minister has indicated, by submitting a written answer, her readiness to answer question No. 8: Can the Honourable Minister provide an update on the progress of the draft Anti-Sexual Harassment Bill, in light of the passage of five months from the last reported consideration by Caucus?

However, as far as I have been apprised, no Member has been deputed to ask the question.

Madam Clerk, we can go on to the next question.

[Inaudible interjection]

The Speaker: Madam Clerk.

The Minister is indicating she wants to say something.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks, Minister of Sustainability & Climate Resiliency, Elected Member for West Bay Central: Mr. Speaker, for the listening public as well, I would be guided by you.

I know the process and as the Member isn't here, and I have prepared an answer, I'd be happy to state it on the Floor if… Well, I see the Member's gotten away from his seat. We were speaking across the aisle earlier.

The Speaker: I'm sorry, Minister, I haven't understood what you were saying.

Hon. Katherine A. Ebanks-Wilks: Mr. Speaker, I will submit the answer in writing as you previously indicated.

The Speaker: Thank you.

QUESTION NO. 9
HAS GOVERNMENT MADE IT A PRIORITY TO CONSIDER THE DRAFT NATIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY

The Speaker: Members, as you would expect, this is a similar situation but, as I say, because I know it is often represented that Ministers aren't ready to answer questions— not just this term but ever since, as they say— when a Minister is ready to answer questions, I think they should have the credit.

The question is No. 9: Can the Honourable Minister say whether the Government has made it a priority to consider the critically important draft national climate change policy with a view to its formal adoption to protect the social, economic and environmental future of this country.

Again, the answer has been submitted in writing, but no Member of this House has been deputed to ask it, so we'll have to move on to the next question.

QUESTION NO. 10
UPDATE ON THE NATIONAL HOUSING TASK FORCE REPORT CONSIDERED AND ADOPTED BY CABINET IN 2023

The Speaker: Again, the same situation. The answer to the question has been submitted in writing, but no Member of this House has been deputed to ask it. For the record, I'll read question No. 10.

Can the Honourable Minister say what has happened with the National Housing Task Force Report that was considered and adopted by Cabinet in 2023, and why no strategic actions have been taken to address the housing crisis in the country other than the existing National Housing Development Trust functions which are inadequate?

That brings us to the end of question time.

STATEMENTS BY HONOURABLE MINISTERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

The Speaker: As I indicated, I have a number of statements. The first is from the Honourable Premier.

The Honourable Premier
5% COLA increase for the Civil Service with effect 1st January, 2025

The Premier, Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon.

Mr. Speaker, it is indeed with great pleasure that I announce today that the Government has approved a 5 per cent Cost of Living Allowance (COLA) increase for the Civil Service, which will take effect on the 1st day of January 2025.

The Government took this decision, Mr. Speaker, to address the widening gap between the civil service salaries and the rate of inflation in the Cayman Islands. Additionally, the Government is cognisant that civil service salaries require an uplift to ensure that they remain competitive in both the local and global talent markets; hence, this increase duly serves to bolster the civil service's overall compensation package.

Mr. Speaker, as you and Honourable Members are aware, civil servants work tirelessly to deliver government services to the public. Each day, they ensure the smooth and effective running of their respective entities. The government relies on them to fulfil policy objectives and mandates for the betterment of these beloved Islands that we are proud to call our home. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, it is imperative that the Government ensures that civil servants are not at a disadvantage in terms of their salaries, and that they can live comfortably in the same community they serve.

In addition to the 5 per cent COLA adjustment, in the coming months the government, along with the senior leadership in the civil service, will be reviewing additional pay strategies to address the salaries of those civil servants on the three lowest pay grades, namely, grades R, Q and P. The aim of this future project is to uplift those pay grades, Mr. Speaker, so that the minimum pay that any civil servant can receive, will be $3,000 a month. A further announcement will follow once the review is complete.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to sincerely thank the Members of my Government for their unanimous support of this initiative, as well as the Deputy Governor and the team in the Portfolio of the Civil Service for undertaking the work necessary to bring the proposal forward. Together, we have worked to address this important matter, so that our hard-working and invaluable civil servants are properly compensated for making the lives they serve better each day.

I also thank the Opposition in anticipation; knowing their performance, Mr. Speaker, having served with them before, they would be hard-pressed not to agree, and I'm sure that they will.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: Thank you Madam Premier.

I also have a statement dealing with Supplementary funding under section 11(5) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) to be made by the Honourable Deputy Premier.

Minister of Investment, Innovation & Social Development

Supplementary funding under Section 11(5) of the Public Management and Finance Act

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

Mr. Speaker, I wish to make a statement as to the circumstances and reasons why I, as Minister for Investment, Innovation and Social Development, had to request an increase in expenditure in the 2024 budget, under section 11(5) of the Public Management and Finance Act.

Mr. Speaker, TP 60 – Housing Repairs Assistance, provides for housing repair assistance to Caymanians who are either older persons, persons with a disability, or who have children in need of care as per section 19 of the Children Act (2020 Revision), who own and/or occupy their residential property, and have been assessed as financially indigent. There was, and is, an urgent need to increase the Appropriation in the 2024 financial year, as the Ministry has already exhausted the allocation of $375,000 as a result of housing repair projects. Mr. Speaker, there are still well over 50 pre-existing cases on the Ministry's waiting list that are in desperate need of repair.

I'm most grateful for my colleagues' full support in Caucus and Cabinet to approve this Supplementary funding. The cases are real are urgent. In many cases,

I personally have been in some of these houses, not just in my constituency, and they truly cannot be afforded by the vulnerable Caymanian homeowners who reside there. It should also be recognised that deterioration continues weekly, if not daily, during the rainy season and in a very active hurricane season, Mr. Speaker. Therefore, the Ministry, received an increase in the amount of $1 Million to TP 60.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, we have strong indication that the private sector shall observe that— as the Government has supplemented its own home repair programme for the most vulnerable— private donors may in turn contribute to non-profit organisations that are interested in assisting with home repairs; and thereby replenish their respective home repair funding, so there will be a concerted effort to address these needs.

Mr. Speaker, the aforementioned exceptional circumstances transaction, which was approved by Cabinet for the Ministry for the period of 2024 fiscal financial period, did not cause any non-compliance with the principles of financial management.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

The Speaker: I have a statement from the Minister of Border Control, Labour and Culture regarding Supplementary funding for community development initiatives, namely, Pirates Week.

Minister of Border Control, Labour and Culture

Pirates Week

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: Boy scouts are always ready.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I wish to speak to the Cabinet's approval given for Supplementary funding of $574,000 under section 11(5) of the Public Management and Finance Act (2020 Revision) for the production and execution of Pirates Week, 2024.

Pirates Week, initiated in 1977, has become a pivotal event in the Cayman Islands cultural and tourism calendar, and offers a vibrant celebration of pirate legends and cultural heritage that has historically featured historical re-enactments, music, parades, floats, local food, street dances, district celebrations, historical displays, friendly competition and fireworks. Since 2022, the management of this festival has existed at the core government level; and this year, my team in the Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture has the pleasure and responsibility of delivering this important national festival.

Despite Pirates Week being an annual event, budget funds were not transferred to the Ministry of Border Control, Labour and Culture; therefore, members of the team conducted a comprehensive budget exercise and calculated that $574,000 would be necessary to deliver Pirates Week 2024 at a standard that is not only high, but would bring back many of the feelings of nostalgia for Pirates Week gone by. The budget will cover the following key areas:

- **Cultural events**: organising heritage days, cultural demonstrations and historical re-enactments that celebrate Caymanian culture and history, and historical exhibitions: $100,000;
- **Entertainment and performances**: hiring local and international artists and performers to provide diverse entertainment options along with firework displays: $100,000;
- **Event planning vendor:** contracting a professional event planner vendor to pursue seamless execution of the festival: $50,000;
- **Infrastructure needs:** setting up stages, sound equipment, lighting and necessary infrastructure: $150,000;
- **Marketing and merchandising needs:** promoting the events locally and internationally to attract tourists and ensure high attendance, branded collateral, media buy and production for marketing and merchandise to be sold: $75,000
- **Committee Member honorariums**: compensating committee members for the first time and effort in planning and organising the event: $40,000.

There is a built-in contingency of around 12 per cent to buffer any actual costs that do not align with what was budgeted.

Ensuring that this national festival is adequately funded and delivered is in alignment with the Government's Strategic Broad Outcome Five – Protect and Promote Caymanian Culture, Heritage and Identity. Mr. Speaker, the Cabinet found it necessary to favourably consider this request for Supplementary funding because it agreed that the need facilitated an exceptional circumstance.

The Ministry responsible for Culture did not have funding allocated for this critical national festival after the most recent Cabinet reshuffle, and we are aware that under the previous Ministry, Pirates Week required at least $300,000 to deliver.

In addition to the base expenses, this Ministry also did not have the human capital allocated to deliver this event. Therefore, the addition of a sound committee structure, that is a steering committee, to govern strategy an integrated planning committee to action decisions and plan the actual events, and the use of an event management vendor to ensure operational delivery, have contributed to an increased amount required to deliver this event at the highest level yet.

Mr. Speaker, I must put some clarity into where the funding and the Culture Ministry came from, in terms of the now Minister of Heritage, and it is through no fault, as to the structure that they had in place, that no funding was transferred over to the Ministry of Heritage. There was no funding.

[Inaudible interjection]

Hon. Dwayne S. Seymour: The structure that they had in place before was based mainly on sponsorship and other income sponsored for the event. Hence the reason we decided, from some of the information that both the Minister of Heritage and I know— especially the district days… That was really underfunded and the districts always suffered to try to pull off a good event and it was almost like persons were just going to the districts for food, so we had to try to up that experience.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, it is evident that this request for Supplementary funding was necessary in order to deliver a national festival that not only boosts the economy, but boosts tourism while fostering local pride and community spirit.

I thank you, God bless.

The Speaker: Honourable Members, all remaining statements submitted have either been withdrawn, or deferred until the next Meeting.

I believe that the Honourable Acting Deputy Governor would like to say a few words.

Acting Deputy Governor, Hon. Eric Bush: Mr. Speaker, thank you for allowing me to say a few words in response to the most welcome announcement of the Government's support of a cost of living adjustment for the civil service.

I rise today on behalf of the Honourable Deputy Governor and indeed, the wider civil service, to express our profound gratitude to the Premier and all Members of the Government in announcing a 5 per cent Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) which will take effect on the 1st January, 2025. This decision is both timely and necessary, reflecting a deep understanding of the pressures faced by our civil service, and the Government's commitment to providing targeted support where it's most needed.

I also wish to thank the Opposition for their constructive engagement in this matter, which demonstrates a shared resolve to uphold the welfare of our public servants and the broader community they serve.

Mr. Speaker, as civil servants, we are acutely aware of the economic challenges that confront our workforce. The rising cost of living has a tangible impact on the lives of our civil servants, and by extension, the fabric of our society. By addressing this through the carefully considered COLA, we affirm our responsibility to ensure that our civil servants can meet these challenges with dignity and security.

This adjustment is not merely a response to economic pressures but a testament to the value we place on our workforce's contribution to the public good. Moreover, Mr. Speaker, it is important to highlight that the ability to implement this adjustment is a direct outcome of our commitment to financial prudence. The rigorous planning and responsible financial stewardship exhibited by our civil service has enabled us to allocate resources where they can be impactful, without compromising our overall budgetary objectives. Such judicious management, not only fortifies the foundation of our public service, but also enhances our capability and capacity to sustain and strengthen the delivery of essential services to the Caymanian people and the wider public.

In conclusion, Mr. Speaker, I wish to once again thank the Premier and the Government for their steadfast support, and express my sincere appreciation for the dedication of our civil servants. Their unwavering commitment to the public service exemplifies the very best of our nation's values. Together, we are building a resilient, world-class civil service that can adapt to evolving needs while steadfastly upholding the principles of accountability, service, and integrity that are essential to our democracy.

Thank you once again, Mr. Speaker,

The Speaker: Honourable Members, that concludes the business on the Order Paper for today. Before I say that, let me check with the Premier.

[Pause]

The Speaker: Sorry— better to be safe than sorry.

That brings to end the business of the Parliament except for Finance Committee, which is slated to commence at 9a.m., tomorrow morning.

Madam Premier, I invite you to move the adjournment of this honourable House until the conclusion of Finance Committee. I presume Finance Committee will report back to the House?

ADJOURNMENT

The Premier, Hon. Juliana O'Connor-Connolly: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker, before I move the adjournment I want to thank you most sincerely for the exercise of your well-known patience, and excellence in the execution of the proceedings of Parliament, yet once again, for these series of meetings. With that, I gleefully move the adjournment of this honourable House until after Finance Committee which commences at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning.

Out of an abundance of caution, and in the midst of my excitement, may I move the Motion for the adjournment of this honourable House until the completion of Finance Committee.

The Speaker: Madam Premier, I have some sense of the challenges it takes to sit in that chair.

[Laughter]

The Speaker: You are completely forgiven.

The question is that this House do now adjourn until the conclusion of Finance Committee.

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

AYES.

The Speaker: I believe the Ayes have it.

At 3.25 p.m. the House adjourned until the conclusion of Finance Committee.