Her Excellency the Governor, Mrs. Jane Owen
State Opening and First Sitting of the
First Meeting of the 2025-2026 Session
Parliament of the Cayman Islands
25th June 2025

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Premier, Honourable Leader of Opposition, Honourable Chief Justice and all the Honourable Members of Parliament, ladies and gentlemen.

It brings me great pleasure to address this, the first session of our Parliament following the election in April this year. I would like to commend again the Honourable Mr. Speaker in his important role, and welcome again our new Premier, the Honourable André Ebanks, and his Government, as well as all parliamentary representatives gathered today in this Chamber.

Now is a good moment to join together with all of those watching these proceedings to celebrate the democratic processes that delivered our government who are sitting here today – The National Coalition for Caymanians. Our esteemed members of the Opposition will also play an important role in this, and every Parliament, as they contribute to the debate. I expect there will be some areas of consensus and, perhaps, some too of disagreement, but I know these debates will be carried out with our customary values of mutual respect as each side takes the floor.

Looking back on the election, as you know, we invited an International Observer Mission from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association as well as a Domestic Observer Mission to report on our election processes from all angles. Their observations so far give full credit to our Election Supervisor for the first-class management of the election and, in a wider context, both observer missions have raised again the need to update our campaign financing rules. I believe this is a gap worthy of consideration at an early stage of this Parliament, to reflect evolving international standards and to give our voting public more clarity on political funding. Decisions on this aspect, along with any future consideration of election boundaries are clearly devolved within the Constitution to our elected representatives and to this House.

As we enter this era of our new administration, we can be confident that we are members of a strong society and a growing economy. Government revenues continue to rise and benefit from some increases in fees to keep pace with inflation. The challenge for the future will be balancing and prioritising the needs of our community for both services and capital projects. The proposed change before this Parliament to align the Strategic Policy Statement (or 'SPS') process with the budget announcement in the autumn will, I believe, help us become more accurate and efficient in our forecasting.

And now, turning to some of the business of this Parliament, I believe it is clear to us all that there are a number of priority areas for action to protect and promote Cayman's success for the future.

The first is reform of our Immigration system. The Government is bringing a bill to amend the Public Service Management Act (PSMA) to introduce term limits for all non-Caymanian civil servants. These changes are intended to come into force from January next year, affording existing and new civil servants the same term limit and putting in place a 2-year "rollover" period at the end of the term limit. As we al know, Cayman's civil service, ably led by the Honourable Franz Manderson, has an excellent record of employing Caymanians who make up about 70% of the Civil Service workforce. We also continue to draw in specialist skills and international experience among the 1400 dedicated non-Caymanians who play crucial roles—for example, in our police, our prison, health and social services, teaching staff, and many other areas.

The Government has made clear its intent, in tandem with the civil service reform, to consider further changes to Cayman's wider Immigration Policy, including the rules for Permanent Residency, marriage, and Caymanian status. I welcome the Committee which the Honourable Premier and Honourable Minister Myles have established with the Chamber of Commerce, other private sector entities, and key government departments, to assist with developing a National Workforce Plan. We look forward to hearing the results of the debate in this Chamber on all of these important matters.

I know that education, training, skills development, and job opportunities are also a priority for this Government, and these go hand-in-hand with changes to our immigration rules. The Government intends to work within our public sector schools in

particular, to improve outcomes and opportunities for Caymanians. I hope we can encourage more young people to consider pathways in some of the fields where Cayman is growing fast - not just accountancy and law - though I am sure that our Chief Justice sitting here beside me here would commend those particular choices—but what about careers also in hospitality, IT, engineering, and social services. It is the intention of this Government that all Caymanian school leavers have a route to further education either at vocational or degree level, or indeed opportunities to take up internships and apprenticeships in the private sector and civil service, so that we can ensure in future that all our young people are employed at a level that fits their skills and abilities.

While I am on the topic of supporting our youth, and, indeed, supporting all of the residents of our wonderful Islands, I could not leave this platform without mentioning the importance of action to target mental health, and overall wellbeing within our communities. We know the modern world can put untold pressure on us all, and that includes our young people. Many non-profit groups are already making excellent interventions, but I believe we can do better to join up their work with Government initiatives, and to prioritise programmed that really make a difference. This means ensuring that Poinciana develops into a world-class residential facility; it means doing more to support special needs in our schools. It means coming together as a community to support those who might be facing personal challenges, or who are trying to get their lives back on track, perhaps after serving some time in prison or overcoming an addiction.

And, more generally, initiatives to support our health, our sport, our fitness, and wellbeing can not only create a happier population, but will also reduce our future costs for healthcare which have expanded exponentially in recent years. This is a challenge for me too—having done a very slow Flowers Sea Swim this month, I know I need to work on my ‘turtle breaststroke’ to try to go a little bit faster next year!

We must remember of course that the state of our economy will, in no small measure, determine the funding available to drive these plans and support our people. It is therefore very satisfying that, following a recent visit here, Moodys credit rating agency have reconfirmed Cayman’s standing as “AA3” – which is on a par with the United

Kingdom, France and Hong Kong. As we know, the financial and professional services industry remains the mainstay of our economy, and a key factor in Cayman's global reputation. Cayman worked hard to secure its removal in 2023 from the grey list under the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), and this Government is striving to ensure that our regulation continues to meet or exceed global standards. This is particularly important in the areas of sanctions, illicit finance and access to data on beneficial ownership. Our Honourable Premier met Minister Stephen Doughty in London last week and agreed a positive and forward-looking joint statement on this subject.

And, as we consider the many cranes on the skyline across our Islands, we are reminded that development is a necessity to improve housing, transport, energy and entrepreneurship for all our people. Development can also deliver improvements to our premium tourism product, widely known for its high standards in accommodation, food, service and experiences. But we also know that we need to balance development with steps to protect the environment and retain the natural beauty that has been the hallmark of Cayman for centuries. It is through working together and making decisions based on facts and on science that we can secure the broadest possible consensus for future sustainable growth.

As we enter the hurricane season again this month, we recall also the importance of "being prepared" in every sense. The National Executive Committee which includes all Cabinet members and the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, will assume strategic oversight of our response in the case of an emergency. We are grateful to all the staff in Hazard Management, to our emergency responders, our Regiment, our infrastructure teams, hospitals, shelters and volunteers across all three Islands, who are already making sure that we are ready to face what looks be to another active season of bad weather.

And, as all Honourable Members in this Chamber well know, the security risks we face do not emanate only from natural disasters. In my role as Governor, I am fortunate to work with highly competent leaders and staff in our Police, Coast Guard, Prison, Regiment, Customs and Border administration, Port and Airport, and Cyber Security experts. Our economy and way of life depends to a large extent, on a stable and secure society, and we know that this is threatened – in particular by the availability of

guns, by knife crime, by increasingly engineered drugs and by gangs and groups in organised crime, and those who support and protect them. I am pleased that this Government, as its predecessors, is taking a joined-up approach to security and law enforcement. I would draw the attention of this Chamber in particular to the excellent work being done by Police Commissioner Kurt Walton to deliver effective crime analysis, forensics and detection, which has led to our overall rate for solving crimes rising close to 50% (and 85% for our most serious crimes). We are also working hard to tackle Cayman's abysmal record for road deaths and injuries through the Government's plans to introduce a penalty points system on driving licences, as well as by improving public transport.

As Governor, it is also my responsibility under the constitution to promote "Good Governance" - this means working in partnership with the Government and with everyone in this House to ensure integrity, transparency, accountability and lawful process in all we do. I am immensely grateful for the support of the Honourable Attorney General and his Chambers who ensure that legislative changes and improvements are carefully scrutinised before they come to Parliament. We are also fortunate in Cayman to have a number of independent bodies who oversee different aspects of public sector work - for example, the Auditor General, the Director of Public Prosecutions, the Ombudsman, our Commissions on the Constitution, the Judiciary, human rights, standards in public life, and anti-corruption. These bodies all ensure that Cayman retains its strong reputation, both regionally and globally, for a high standard of governance and oversight we can be proud of.

As the Government and the civil service plan to deliver this ambitious agenda, I am confident that they will work in partnership, reaching out also to the private sector and civil society for added ideas, talent and resources. We are grateful for the work of Cabinet Secretary, Mr Sam Rose, in support of our government and Cabinet meetings. The United Kingdom also stands ready to partner Cayman as we forge a refreshed relationship fit for the future. His Majesty King Charles III is always interested to hear about developments and decisions in Cayman, and is a strong supporter of our work through the Commonwealth and of our bid to make Little Cayman's coastal waters a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Our Premier was able to further this bilateral agenda with Foreign Office Minister Stephen Doughty in London last week, and tonight, I travel

to the United Kingdom for our annual conference of ambassadors and other heads of delegations, where we will discuss world affairs including security, the global economy, development, environment and societal issues, and probably AI as well. I shall be proud to represent Cayman and the contribution we make through our regional and international links.

So, today I want to thank you, Mr Speaker, and all of the Honourable representatives in this House for your unwavering service and effort. For your dedication to our communities and for your support to me as Governor. Our partnership is precious and makes us all stronger, as we look to the future with confidence and compassion.

God bless this House, and God bless these wonderful Cayman Islands.

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