



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

2021 SPS windup
By Premier Hon. G. Wayne Panton, MP, JP
15 July, 2021
Parliament

Mr. Speaker,

As a young man, there was a popular TV show that had an intro that always caught my imagination. The intro was this:

"There is a fifth dimension, beyond that which is known to man. It is a dimension as vast as space and as timeless as infinity. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between science and superstition, and it lies between the pit of man's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of imagination. It is an area which we call The Twilight Zone."

Mr. Speaker, yesterday as I sat here and listened to my good friend, the Hon. Leader of the Opposition, I felt like I was living in the Twilight Zone.

In his view everything wrong with Cayman has happened since this PACT Government took office less than three months ago, and everything right

with Cayman happened under the watch of the last two governments.

Although I have no quarrel with the assertion as two the first of his last two governments

Mr. Speaker, the longer I sat here, it dawned on me I wasn't in the Twilight Zone, but instead I was hearing the voice of Jacob but feeling the hands of Esau. (Jacob pretended to be his older brother and took Esau's blessing from his elderly and blind father Isaac).

Mr. Speaker, let me make one thing clear to all in the Opposition:

The elections are over!

The people have spoken!

The Independent candidates carried the day.

I fully understand the role of the Opposition Mr. Speaker. They are to hold Government accountable and I expect them to do their job. But there is no reason for an attitude of arrogance to continue from that side. You can't hide arrogance under a thin veil of friendship. You can't hide entitlement and insult under the guise of "we're just trying to be helpful". It's a thin veneer that all can see through.

I know the Leader of the Opposition. I believe I know his heart. I believe he is a good man. But I don't believe that what I hear often is a true reflection of the man I believe I know. What I hear from him too often is, in my opinion, a reflection of others. I believe that too often there is a risk that he is a mouthpiece for others.

I grew weary yesterday of the many inferences that the PACT Government has finally made its position known on varying issues. The reality is that the Leader of the Opposition said very categorically that the most important priority for the country is reopening. We have already had massive public engagement on the vaccine drive, two press conferences, a detailed public announcement at the Chamber of Commerce on that very subject and the reopening and the delivery of our SPS in the past three months. Perhaps he has missed all of that as a result of reclining in his easy chair. I don't know how anyone could think that we have been quiet or missing in action.

The Opposition continues to call for a 1 September date to open our borders. Within a few weeks of coming in to office we had to put the same team of public servants that had previously advised the former government on locking down and coming out of lockdown and unlocking phases to work for weeks to address with a reopening plan. Obviously we have thanked

them in the past and we thank them again now. From the reports I have received, none of the recommendations of their committees had been adopted and as I have already told the country, there were no plans for, and not even any preliminary work done for, a safe reopening strategy.

We have accepted many of the recommendations from the Programme Board; in some cases with minor modifications, which attempt to deal with the hardest challenge of all brought on by this pandemic and that is safely reopening.

It is an accepted reality that locking down was the easy part. And now, with the assistance of the same public service advisors comprising the Programme Board, we have a plan to safely reopen in stages. The former government's position is that our plan is unacceptable and unworkable. Mr. Speaker, the central aim of all of the advice given to the former government and my Government is protecting the health and wellbeing of the people of the country. Now we seem to be being told by the former government, the Opposition, that we should reject that advice and that core principle.

Mr. Speaker, are they really suggesting that we should now put the health and lives of our people at undue risk?

Mr. Speaker, my good friend the Hon. Leader of the Opposition reminded us that all the Government ministers from the previous government were re-elected. Patently true.

But what is also true Mr. Speaker is that seven people getting re-elected does not a majority make. He needed nine other people to be elected with him to get to 10 and have a majority.

Mr. Speaker, I remember the night of 14 April quite clearly. Social media was awash with a lot of popping of champagne corks, patting each other on the back, while toasting an assumed success going down on Crewe Road.

But you know what else was going on Mr. Speaker?

The people on this side of the aisle were hard at work.

And just as we were hard working then, we are hard working today, and Mr. Speaker, I am very happy and proud to be leading a team of young, energetic, and hardworking individuals.

Mr. Speaker, just last week the Hon. Minister of Finance - my Deputy Premier - celebrated his 22nd wedding anniversary by attending a Saturday meeting at the Government administration building from 10 in the morning until the wee hours of 2am Sunday. That's dedication. That's hard work.

I raise that to highlight to the public that there are no divisions in the PACT Government. They are just hard working people. Yes there may be occasional differences of opinions; that is as it should be.

Mr. Speaker, there are no extension cords over here. There is no one that will just “follow the leader, leader, leader, follow the leader.” Being a leader is a role that you earn and one at which you have to work to maintain.

I want to assure the Leader of the Opposition, his colleagues and the people of this country that the PACT is intact. I was part of the Progressives Government that had members split away from its leadership. No group of individuals - whether it's a coalition or a party or whatever - is immune from disagreement.

But Mr. Speaker the heat of the level of disagreement amongst members in the Progressives was far greater at times than what I have experienced so far in discussions amongst members of the PACT Government. I would say there is a far greater commitment to our ideals and each other.

But Mr. Speaker, there is one thing that pleased me yesterday. It was good to see my good friend being supported at least at the end of the day by all members of the Opposition.

I was worried for a bit when it appeared he was alone in the House. That's not a position any leader wants to be in.

However, Mr. Speaker, my colleagues and I were a bit disappointed that none of the other members chose to speak; something the Leader promised us they would do to offer us advice on how to run a country.

I say again, Jacob's voice and Esau's hands.

Mr. Speaker, as I listened to the Hon. Leader yesterday, he made reference to all the experience they had when they first formed the government back in 2013. I know of what he spoke because I was there with him, myself a brand new Minister.

But Mr. Speaker, you know who else was also there with us? Five other new members. Of the 13 members that made up that government, seven were brand new members. The last time I checked Mr. Speaker, seven is more than half of 13. Is he implying that the Government elected in 2013 was inexperienced? I don't think so, but that might have been what he was implying.

Mr. Speaker, I want the record to show that of the 12 members of the PACT Team, seven are NOT first timers. More than half of this PACT team certainly does have experience.

Inexperience is an old excuse, especially one that young Caymanians leaving high school or returning from university hear constantly; that they shouldn't be hired because they have no experience. Is the Hon. Leader of the Opposition implying that some members of Cabinet shouldn't be there because they have no experience? Does he truly believe that former Minister Archer, former Minister Rivers or I shouldn't have been ministers back in 2013 because we had no experience? Yet, I think he can rightfully talk about the achievements of government that we, as a young government, made from 2013 - despite having no experience.

Mr. Speaker that is the sad mindset that many people have in our community. And it is one of the reasons education is important and why this Government has made education a top priority.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize the number of broad outcomes as well as the initiatives in the SPS may be a lot for the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues to digest, and as such I will go through them a bit more in detail, again, for his edification and understanding. I will add a bit more meat to that bone so I hope he is still hungry after lunch because here we go.

Strategic Broad Outcome 1 is to improve education to promote lifelong learning and greater economic mobility.

Mr. Speaker, this broad policy centres on the cornerstone of every upwardly mobile society. Education.

We have allowed a myth to take over our public education system; that our children coming through the public-school system have been poorly educated. That they are not fit for the job market. That being Caymanian and being educated within one of the best funded education systems per capita in the region, somehow makes them “less than” those individuals educated elsewhere.

This is a LIE that we have allowed to take root in the hearts and minds of our students and our people. I have seen it impact their self-esteem and self-confidence. It is a lie that we have allowed to chip away at our sense of pride in who we are.

But our external exam results, our curriculum, the performance of our students, the dedication of our teachers and administrators, prove beyond a shadow of a doubt that the big lie is just that. A fallacy. A myth. A construction of falsehood.

Yes, there are areas in our public education system that need correction. And with the strong education standards structure we now have in place, they are being addressed and will continue to be addressed. Ongoing improvements will be made to ensure that every Caymanian child receives a quality education that opens their horizons rather than limits their viewpoint.

To meet our first broad outcome we are building a stronger integrated education foundation by firstly providing free meals in public schools. The old proverb that hungry bellies have no ears is truth.

Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that the true situation of hunger in Cayman only came to light during the COVID-19 lockdown, when those children on the NAU and charity lists had no access to school meals. This must change. We cannot have our children trying to learn on empty stomachs.

We must look at our students, our children, as whole beings. They don't exist only while at school. We will introduce programmes to enhance their emotional wellbeing and mental health. We are concerned with their physical health too and will ensure that each public school has its own resident nurse.

We also cannot expect working parents to assist in their children's education without providing the real-world resources and tools they need. Toward this end, we will fund homework centres at public schools, ensure early-morning supervision of students at all schools, and increase funding and support for robust after-school programmes.

From the start of our children's education journey, we will strengthen early education programmes, and ensure that all schools have adequate reception classes.

Within the classroom, we will ensure that there is a teacher's assistant in every class up to Year Nine. And we will improve the provision of learning support services to ensure there is a learning support centre in each public school to support students with special needs.

With regard to student's social development, we will integrate Caymanians and non-Caymanians within the public school system and end the practice of social promotion.

To meet our goal of lifelong learning, we will increase capacity in public high schools to allow the reintroduction of A-Levels and strengthen and enhance the transition year programme between high school and college.

With regard to tertiary education, we will provide free tuition to Caymanians at the University College of the Cayman Islands and the International College of the Cayman Islands and expand the scholarship age limit for post-graduate degree programmes. The Minister of Education has already announced expansions to the current scholarship criteria for undergraduate degree programmes.

In general, we will incentivise Caymanians for upskilling themselves through a reward system and develop more Caymanian teachers by offering a Post-Graduate Certificate in Education at UCCI linked to an accredited UK university.

We will also provide educational opportunities for our senior citizens by using public school facilities after school hours.

To tie in with our goal of developing new industries within our Islands, we will invest in tomorrow's economy through STEAM - Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics - courses and increase investment in technical and vocational training programmes, beginning with a centralized Technical and Vocation Education and Training (TVET) curriculum at the

primary school level. Outside of schools, we will promote more private sector internship and apprenticeship opportunities.

To support all of these goals, we will improve the technology infrastructure in schools to support increased usage. We will also ensure that students are well-equipped, regardless of their circumstances at home, to access technology – which we will continue to do through the provision of free devices. To ensure students can get Internet access at home, we will partner with a local telecoms providers.

Our efforts in education could well be in vain if we are not accountable on our actions and progress. We will implement a governance model to enhance accountability in education, including legislation to create a framework to increase accountability for schools and teachers; create an education board to oversee and run schools; and introduce programmes to incentivise parents to get involved in school improvement.

We will do all of this by increasing the allocation to the Ministry of Education's budget each year.

To address the Leader of the Opposition's concerns about education, we have no intention of halting the good work being done by the Hon. Minister of Education. She is indeed a beacon of competence and reassurance and

we are grateful she agreed to join the Government so she could continue her good works.

Strategic Broad Outcome 2 is to ensure an equitable, sustainable and successful healthcare system.

Mr. Speaker, the PACT Government believes that healthcare is a human right. At present, Caymanians' access to healthcare is often limited by employment status, position on the socioeconomic ladder, and age. None of this should be so.

To fully achieve this aim, we will promote Caymanians in the healthcare industry by highlighting local career and employment opportunities and programmes and incentivise Caymanian medical professionals to return home to work.

We will promote healthier living and provide wellness education through better marketing of public health services; encouraging more wellness checks; and strengthening youth mental health support in particular with assistance from the relevant NGOs.

We will modernise the healthcare legal framework and expand public healthcare services throughout our communities by enhancing medical services in public schools; offering more public health services and

improved facilities in district clinics; and implementing a district clinic shuttle system.

Since the majority of our population regularly receive medical care at the publicly-funded Cayman Islands Health Services Authority (HSA), we will enhance its building and services, including providing more efficient service and less waiting time.

We will initiate an overhaul of hospital rooms, waiting areas and the ER area, and we will ensure quality control at the hospital through frequent inspections.

We will expand services, including the provision of a specialised youth mental health facility.

And, we will offer more comfort for patients' family members, including proper sleeping facilities for family members staying with patients overnight and increased amenities on site such as a 24- hour snack shop.

In addition to these direct and specific actions, our aim is to enhance the overall standard of healthcare services in the Cayman Islands that we provide through the HSA.

One area in which we are currently lacking is with regard to assisted living care for our seniors. We have an aging population, and it is not right that many of our elders do not receive proper care.

A Joint-Ministerial Council to establish additional assisted living homes and retirement facilities through public/private partnerships will fill this gap.

Regarding the overall standard of healthcare in the Cayman Islands, we will implement public education programmes on the negative impacts of over-utilisation of healthcare services – on both the quality of service and its affordability.

And finally, we will take action to specifically and fully recognise healthcare as a basic human right in the Cayman Islands. None of our citizens should go without necessary medical care because they cannot afford it.

We will revamp and expand CINICO services to extend access to healthcare to more Caymanians, provide free healthcare for children and the elderly, and reform existing criteria to access free healthcare.

We will also promote better mental health and special needs insurance coverage.

The PACT Government is keenly aware that any society is judged by how it treats its most vulnerable people. It is beyond time that we address the health and needs of ALL of our people. Just as with education and other vital human services, there should be no one falling through the cracks in our healthcare system in a society as relatively affluent as ours.

We can assure the Leader of the Opposition that work on the Long Term Residential Mental Health Facility in East End is ongoing.

So, on to Strategic Broad Outcome 3 Mr. Speaker. It allows for providing solutions to improve the well-being of our people so they can achieve their full potential.

Mr. Speaker, this broad outcome is centered on social development and the provision of human services, focusing on families and family life, housing, employment, and safety. These are all areas of life central to our well-being and our growth in society.

This outcome goes across Ministries and addresses people as whole human beings.

The first aim of the PACT Government is to be people-driven. By and large people think in terms of what they need to be productive members of

society, and how to do good for themselves, their family and community, taking into account their abilities, resources and environment.

And this is the approach we are taking with regard to social development. Nothing exists in isolation. Every person, process, community, country is the sum of all parts and a product of the surrounding environment.

We are aiming for an environment of growth and fulfillment for all citizens who make up our society.

First, we looked at ways in which we as a Government could provide support to the family system and our communities. We thought collectively about what our individual constituents told us along the campaign trail. Of their hopes, dreams and also their challenges and setbacks. We thought about what would most help people and families striving to do better, be better.

A lot of what we heard centred on how to keep families together and functioning well, while also being a part of the economy and labour market.

We will address those needs with financial assistance to help working families offset the costs of daycare services. For public servants, we are also considering a daycare pilot programme at the Government

Administration Building. We realise that sometimes you have to try different things to make a positive change.

Achieving a work/life balance and finding quality family time are also goals of our constituents. So, we will increase the number of parks, civic centres and multi-purpose halls within our communities and promote activities that encourage family participation.

And of course, high on the list for all families and communities is safety.

Many concerned voices have been raised in the past few weeks regarding the unsettling increase in gun violence in our Islands. While shootings historically were largely limited to specifically targeted individuals – no more acceptable - the violence has become more reckless with innocent bystanders being harmed. This brings a climate of fear to the forefront. We cannot have our people living in fear for their safety and that of their loved ones.

We have made it a clear objective of the PACT Government to create safer communities through direct and indirect interventions and approaches. We support neighbourhood watch programmes and encourage a culture of openness by urging communities to cooperate with the police.

We will provide more cultural sensitivity training and support to all front-line police officers, including community safety officers; and provide funding for necessary equipment and facilities to improve responsiveness and increase law-enforcement visibility and crime deterrence in vulnerable communities.

In terms of crime prevention, we will address the root causes of criminality in our communities to develop and implement effective anti-gang strategies to reduce crime and to support vulnerable young people.

Rehabilitation and the reduction of recidivism will be accomplished through the expansion of the Second Chance programme, which matches ex-offenders with suitable employment opportunities.

We will also fund programmes to rehabilitate and assist young offenders before they become long-term criminals.

At the national level, we will focus on interdiction by improving border security through the continued development and integration of Customs and Border Control and Coast Guard services.

From a governance perspective, we will continue work with the National Security Council to enhance oversight and accountability of the Royal

Cayman Islands Police Service to improve the force's relationship with the communities it serves.

Looking to the future, we will provide improved infrastructure through two key projects:

- A modernised Courts building and infrastructure to relieve current backlogs and meet future requirements; and
- A new fit-for-purpose prison for the Cayman Islands to fully address all security concerns and avoid over-crowding.

Improving public safety is not a one-dimensional process but requires a layered and integrated approach that includes elements of prevention, deterrence, accountability, and rehabilitation. By addressing all of these areas simultaneously, we aim to help fix what is broken in our society and ultimately make our communities safer.

While we usually think, in terms of infrastructure to mean physical systems, such as roads, networks, and cables, each society also needs to be underpinned and shaped by a social framework or infrastructure, which guides how we live and work together, how we grow as people, form and solidify communities, and develop overall as a society.

To help our citizens to find pathways to growth, we believe that it is a vital imperative to create new industries and to expand those that already exist. We have key opportunities in the areas of film and agriculture right now and must grab them with both hands to develop the full potential these industries have in our Islands.

The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on our tourism industry have provided a very clear lesson – we cannot depend on a couple of industries to keep us afloat indefinitely. We must diversify. We must be resilient.

The pandemic has also shown us that we have to be more creative and innovative in our approach to old and new challenges.

Access to capital for business opportunities and building can be a real challenge for entrepreneurs and prospective homeowners, so we will create new opportunities to access capital for both of these groups.

Another must for a modern society is to revamp the way we deliver government services, and we are already well on our way with that. We will modernise Financial Assistance legislation and institute a joint approach between the Needs Assessment Unit and Workforce Opportunities and

Residency Cayman – or WORC - to create a user-friendly system to access government services.

To make daily life easier, and give people some breathing space and protection in the consumer market, we will reduce duty on essential items and implement and enforce a consumer protection law.

We also think that an improved public transport system will help as necessary relieve the stress and strain caused by Cayman’s current traffic woes.

By addressing these aspects of daily life in a targeted way, we believe it will all add up to make a real difference.

But what is absolutely fundamental to improving the well-being of our people and ensuring that every Caymanian can achieve his or her full potential is to have pride in who they are.

Given the years of being unfairly viewed as “less than” with regard to education and ability in the job market and in other arenas of society, we must promote pride in our national identity.

This can be done through existing and new honours and awards system, through cultural programmes, and the celebration of local talent in the arts, sports and all other areas of endeavour and achievement.

The era – if not the reality, certainly the perception - of Caymanian marginalization is over.

A key aspect of human welfare is the need for shelter. And in the case of Caymanians, their desire and need to literally own a piece of Cayman is basically a dream that has slipped away because of Cayman's rising property costs. Many are asking how, in just a few generations, property costs have so far outpaced the middle-income Caymanian's earnings.

When you feel like you're not a part of your country's success, like you've been excluded from owning a piece of the pie, how are you going to feel invested in its growth and success? Too often, our own people, are feeling as if they've been left out and left behind.

Home ownership is an intrinsic goal for many people around the world. And it is no different here in the Cayman Islands. The PACT Government does not think it acceptable for our people to be kicked off the property ladder – or even prevented from getting a foot on the first rung.

Consequently, a necessary component of providing an effective social infrastructure is to provide adequate and affordable housing in our communities. To do this, we will provide more Government-guaranteed home-assisted mortgages and lower the cost of borrowing through Cayman Islands Development Bank programmes.

To assist young Caymanians to buy land, and own a piece of our Islands' future, the PACT Government has committed to reduce stamp duty on land for Caymanians. We hope that this step will put more young Caymanians on the road to home and property ownership. We need our citizens to feel like they are a part of our Islands' economic success.

We do recognise that economic success is by no means the only indicator of a successful and growing society.

We also need to have a healthy society; a balanced society. A society in which mental health and state of happiness is acceptable. Since being elected in April, your PACT Government has exhaustively examined ways to improve the mental, physical, and social health of the Caymanian people.

We fully realise that we need to do all in our power to create healthy communities throughout the cycle of people's lives.

A significant segment of our society that is underserved in the area of health and wellness is our senior citizens. Income and correspondingly quality of life and access to health care can drop dramatically after retirement.

What an indictment on Western society! That those people who have spent their younger years building our community, raising and educating our children, building and maintaining our infrastructure, have to struggle in their supposedly golden years is unconscionable.

We will improve the lives of Cayman's seniors by enacting legislation to reform the current pensions system to provide greater retirement protections.

We will provide social and personal development programmes and activities for seniors and establish additional assisted living homes and retirement facilities through public/private partnership.

Since an improved environment also improves people's mental health, we will increase the number of recreational green spaces and ensure cleaner communities through recycling and waste management.

Being a productive member of society, earning your own money, and feeling a sense of achievement in yourself and your abilities are invaluable

aspects of being employed. Even better is being employed in a field that you choose and a job that you enjoy.

This fulfillment should never be out of reach for our people.

The PACT Government is dedicated to creating greater employment opportunities for Caymanians. We will remove barriers to employment and create new pathways to employment.

We are committed to:

- Ending the dependency on cheap labour;
- Increasing training and development opportunities;
- Reforming work permit fees; and
- Increasing enforcement of our labour laws.

In this effort, we will use educational facilities after hours to provide lifelong education opportunities for all ages and we will partner with the private sector to offer on-the-job training programmes.

All people deserve to make a living wage in return for their labour. A key component of ensuring a fair society is to increase the minimum wage.

While we look at eradicating the concept of the working poor, we must also reduce the number of our people who could be unfairly classed as

“unemployable.” We must remove barriers and obstacles to employment, especially entry level employment.

An immediate step is to reduce discrimination against young people in education and employment through decriminalisation of marijuana.

Far too many of our young people suffer unduly harsh punishments, and have their futures permanently blighted by what are minimal misdemeanors. In far too many cases, the punishment far outweighs the crime.

As has been shown to good effect in Canada, the United Kingdom and several states in the USA, decriminalisation is an effective tool and has not proven to increase criminal activity.

I’ve just said a mouthful and covered a lot of ground. As you will have realised, many of the strategies and tactics I have outlined involve more than just one Ministry.

As I said in my remarks yesterday, this PACT Government does not work in silos. We are as a Cabinet bound by collective responsibility, and we pledge to work in collaboration with our fellow members to get the things that our people need done and delivered.

So on to Strategic Broad Outcome 4: Strengthening good governance for more effective government.

Mr. Speaker, I previously highlighted a host of Government services and initiatives aimed at making people's lives better.

Our Strategic Broad Outcome 4 is aimed at making Government better and more accountable to the public.

We hope to enhance participatory democracy through fully functioning constituency offices and district councils and to promote accountability within Parliament and the Executive through:

- Proper compliance with publication of Annual Reports
- Development and implementation a transparent Concessions Policy
- Timely response to Auditor General reports and recommendations
- Appointment of a Compliance Officer for each Ministry
- Implementing a Code of Conduct for both Parliament and Cabinet
- Updating the Parliament Standing Orders; and
- Better vetting and background checks of board appointees

We will expect and encourage the people to hold us accountable.

Overall governance in the Cayman Islands has suffered at times due to a lack of enforcement of existing legislation.

We will promote stronger enforcement of current legislation and also enact “Sunshine laws” to provide greater transparency. Consequently, we will also increase accountability to the public for private sector and civil organisations.

As part of this government’s commitment to accountability and transparency, we will increase public communications and access to information through frequent press briefings and publication of Cabinet decisions in summary form.

We are determined to provide transparency in all Government activities (when able) and to encourage greater public participation in decision making.

We have already set a policy to promote inclusion and diversity in Government appointments to all boards and commissions, as well as changed the membership of the Central Planning Authority to provide a greater representation of varying viewpoints. I recall yesterday the Leader of the Opposition saying it was laudable but suggesting that the implementation would be difficult. I can’t say I followed that observation.

And as we have now seen for ourselves, there must be more sharing of information across Government departments to reduce silos.

Ministries, departments and sections of Government must communicate and work in tandem to achieve the outcomes that this Government has identified.

There is a spirit of collaboration amongst Cabinet colleagues, and we aim to promote the same ethos of collaboration and cohesion throughout our teams.

Our Strategic Broad Outcome 5 is supporting climate change resilience and sustainable development.

Mr. Speaker, the PACT Government is committed to seeing the Cayman Islands thrive, both now and in the months and years ahead, and long into the future.

We must abandon the short-sighted kind of approach that has been the norm in some areas of Government policy until now. This is especially so when we speak of environmental protection and overall sustainability.

For far too long Cayman has been the proverbial ostrich with its head in the shifting Seven Mile Beach sand on issues such as climate change and ideas of reducing our dependence on fossil fuels.

We turned a blind eye to over-development, over-fishing, over-population and kept aiming for more, more, more. More people. More buildings. More cars. Eventually, Mr. Speaker, a runaway train will crash.

The PACT Government is taking an entirely new approach to sustainability.

For the first time in our history we have a Ministry focused on sustainability and recognising the reality and impacts of climate change on our Islands.

Now we must create a culture of change and provide support and funding for renewable energies. This includes funding for solar and other renewable energies, incorporating the provision of micro loans to assist with conversion to renewable energy.

To ensure that both funding and policy are aligned with our sustainability objectives, we will change the planning fee structure to encourage smaller and energy-efficient homes and create a climate change trust to fund climate change policy.

A primary contributor to pollution, dependence on fossil fuels, and a large carbon footprint is the area of transport. To change this, we will promote the electrification of transport by reducing the number of second-hand cars being imported from Japan; increase the number of electric charging

stations; and promote the use of electric vehicles in the public transport system.

Let me stop here Mr. Speaker and address one of the concerns the Leader of the Opposition had yesterday. He falsely said that this Government had canceled the free George Town shuttle bus programme. No, we didn't. The former administration had only funded the programme by reallocating funds from other outputs sufficient only to allow it to end on 28 May. When I was advised of this, it was already too late to seek additional funding and it would have required a lengthy procurement process.

However, Mr. Speaker, the rationale and effect of the programme were on opposite ends of the spectrum. Regular buses were still running those routes along with the free bus service so in fact rather than being an environmentally sound proposal it was in fact contributing to our net Co2 emissions. And I have a hard time believing that his projections of numbers of people in the seats of those buses because every time I saw them or received reports, they were basically empty and oftentimes held just the driver. The bottom line is we didn't cancel the programme. They didn't fund it and it wasn't environmentally sound. They also had presented to them

the option of acquiring electric buses, which would have been ideal, but they did nothing.

While keeping on the environment, a long overdue imperative is to secure our natural environment. So much of what Cayman has to offer in terms of quality of life and attractions for visitors is based on our natural environment. In general, successive Governments have taken this for granted and have been poor guardians of the natural wonders we are so lucky to possess.

We will enact stiffer fines and penalties for environmental violations and limit the sale of Crown lands.

We will also re-plant buffer zones that have been damaged and ensure the protection of existing mangroves, which act as natural carbon sinks.

To protect against future environmental destruction, we will continue the purchase of land, especially beach lands, for public usage and the benefit of generations of Caymanians to come.

For all residents, including this and future generations of Caymanians, to understand the importance of sustainability, we will build awareness and understanding of climate change through increased environmental

education in schools and an integrated public education campaign on the effects of climate change.

The ultimate environmental goal of the PACT Government is to build a legacy of sustainability in the Cayman Islands.

We will achieve this through policy change, community action and the provision of sustainable infrastructure.

In the realm of policy, we will:

- Update and adopt the 2011 climate change policy;
- Ensure climate change policies are included in development laws;
- Fully implement the National Energy Policy;
- Raise duty on items that are not environmentally friendly;
- Establish a sustainability and climate change task force; and
- Change existing laws to regulate construction in the dynamic beach zone.

Through community initiatives we will:

- Offer incentive programmes to encourage recycling and reduce waste; and
- Bolster food security efforts.

To provide sustainable infrastructure development we will:

- Review and revise the national development plan;

- Increase the number of solar farms through public/private partnership; and
- Upgrade CI Government facilities to utilise renewable energy.

We have put a lot of thought into shaping a sustainable future for the Cayman Islands and consequently for the Caymanian people Mr. Speaker.

And as the Minister with direct responsibility for this area, I am looking forward to guiding our Islands through this “sea change” in our approach to sustainability, with the valued support of my Ministerial colleagues.

The Leader of the Opposition yesterday perhaps attempted to give me a bit of a lecture that there is not a binary choice between development and protection of the environment. In fact, Mr. Speaker, I have always maintained that we support sustainable development and that must at its core mean that you find the right balance in how you develop and even where you develop. The irony, Mr. Speaker, is that the perception of his government is that their approach was supporting development at any cost; the cruise port being one such example.

Strategic Broad Outcome 6 is to increase Social Justice in the workplace.

Mr. Speaker, as we are looking at a sustainable future, let's harken back to just a few moments ago when we heard about the big lie about our public education system.

There were more myths, and stereotypes, built on top of that one. We all know them. Caymanians are lazy. Caymanians don't want to work.

Caymanians don't want the jobs that we have to offer. Caymanians have no real-world training. Caymanians don't want technical and vocational jobs. Caymanians don't want to work in hospitality. And so on, and so forth.

It is to the point that Caymanian discrimination is rampant in our labour market. Don't tell us it doesn't exist. Each and every Caymanian in this chamber has experienced – either directly or indirectly, some form of this discrimination during his or her career.

This Government will not further it. We will not tolerate it. We are going to smash each and every one of those stereotypes and provide the opportunities that our people deserve in their own land.

We will maximise Caymanian employment. We will enforce the laws and regulations surrounding work permits. We will, as the sixth broad outcome on our list says, Increase Social Justice in the workplace. This does not mean we will deny necessary work permits. Only that the law must be

complied with. Business should only apply for a work permit when a suitable Caymanian cannot be found to do the job.

First, we will enhance job opportunities for Caymanians through a data-driven and robust compliance approach. Where necessary, we will enact changes to existing labour laws and regulations. This will include development of a comprehensive skills database, which will allow WORC to match work permit applications to unemployed Caymanians with the relevant skills and experience, and also match available jobs to new graduates.

Of course, our approach is not solely a punitive one. We recognise and appreciate that there are some great, perhaps many, employers out there. We will not have the good suffer for the bad. We will implement an accreditation system that rewards employers for hiring, training, and advancing Caymanians.

On the flip side, we will increase work permit fees in areas where Caymanian labour is readily available and increase administrative fines for illegal employment practices. We will also name and shame companies that consistently engage in poor labour practices.

Beyond immigration-related issues, we will create and regulate a fair and safe workplace environment.

We will enact family leave policies, and ensure maternity, paternity and vacation leave policies are in line with international standards. We will promote diversity in the workplace and introduce a national wellness programme that incentivises employers and encourages employees to strike a better work/life balance.

To ensure equity and remove discrimination, we will implement national anti-bullying and sexual harassment policies and enact stronger laws to protect the disabled, elderly and other vulnerable groups.

Employees deserve to have choices as well as parity in their benefits, and toward this goal we will spread health insurance risk by introducing a CINICO healthcare plan that is affordable and covers pre-existing conditions.

To ensure that workers have access to information and know their rights as well as their responsibilities, we will establish a centre that offers free labour advice.

And as has been mentioned previously under Strategic Broad Outcome 3, we must and will increase the minimum wage.

Every person living in the Cayman Islands must be able to survive. With our Islands being listed several times as one of the world's most expensive places to live, we are clearly seeing that people's earnings are being outpaced by the cost of living.

While this may not be a popular move among the business community, it must be done and we will have to gradually enhance the current minimum wage to become a realistic livable wage.

One of the main barriers to full employment of Caymanians, especially younger Caymanians, has been the complaint that potential employees do not have enough experience to fill an advertised position. To surmount this barrier and help in providing equal opportunities for young Caymanians in the labour market, we plan to increase work experience opportunities through public/private sector partnerships.

We have seen through the recent partnerships between WORC and CITA specific to the tourism industry that such partnerships are both possible and beneficial – to both those being employed and the businesses themselves.

And finally, as part of our remit to achieve social justice and equity in the labour market, we will review the Permanent Residency point system to ensure greater protection for Caymanians.

We have seen the effects of the point system on the property market, and also the preference it gives to certain demographics, which has unalterably skewed the composition of our local population.

We have also seen how grants of new Permanent Residents have been used to block the employment and advancement of similarly qualified Caymanians. This was never the intended goal of a Permanent Residency system and necessitates a thorough review to ensure that we are not putting Caymanians at a disadvantage when we grant Permanent Resident status.

Under this umbrella, we will both reform the rollover policy and provide initiatives to address underemployment of Caymanians.

We are not being vague about our goals and policies in the area of Caymanian employment and advancement. Caymanians first. End of story.

In Strategic Broad Outcome 7 we will utilise sports to enhance the lives of our people.

Mr. Speaker, as we move from the discussion on the advancement of Caymanians in the labour force, we land on an area of opportunity that has long been underdeveloped in the Cayman Islands. Throughout the world,

sports has long been an arena that offers educational and employment opportunities to many otherwise disadvantaged communities.

We have the opportunity to turn sports into another area of economic benefit for the Cayman Islands, in addition to promoting sporting activities as an avenue of personal development for our young people.

We will promote the benefits of sports by encouraging a culture of fitness in communities through public education campaigns. This will include the promotion of academic opportunities through sports, and the development and enhancement of sports tourism opportunities.

Governance structure and improved standards in sports will be done by establishing a National Sports Council.

At a community level, we will facilitate healthy competition to improve performance through:

- Supporting more competition in schools and inter-island;
- Promoting gender equality in sports;
- Encouraging Caymanian and non-Caymanian integration;
- Increasing regional competitive engagements; and
- Establishing district level sports programmes for our seniors.

We will support growth through funding. Specifically, we will:

- Provide funding for sports development; and
- Provide funding to augment sports scholarships.

At a policy level, we will mandate that all sporting organisations seeking funds from Government have vibrant and established youth programmes.

Infrastructure development is an integral aspect of elevating sports at a national level and fully harnessing sports tourism opportunities. Our plan is to enhance facilities for optimum results.

At the national level, we will establish public/private partnership to increase the number of sporting facilities and develop national sports academies.

However, sporting activities usually begin and develop at the community level, so our key goal here is to increase access to more localised facilities within communities.

As part of this effort, we will:

- Develop existing sporting facilities to include additional general exercise areas;
- Provide greater access to facilities for persons with disabilities;
- Ensure there is proper lighting/security at all public sports facilities; and
- Increase the number of swimming pools available for public use.

Once we develop sports as an integral aspect of people's daily lives, not only can we achieve our goal of a healthier population, but we can also position sports as a springboard to other opportunities beyond physical fitness.

With focus and attention paid to further development, sports can open new pathways for Caymanians to educational and professional opportunities and ultimately fulfilling their own potential in areas they may otherwise never considered.

Mr. Speaker, led by the very able, capable, and passionate Minister, the Member from West Bay North, this Government looks forward to guiding our Islands and people through a new era in sports development at every level – individual, community, national and international.

And let me lay to rest another concern the Leader of the Opposition raised yesterday, we have every intention of completing the work done on the sports complex on Cayman Brac. The Opposition leader is entitled to his opinions but not his own facts.

Mr. Speaker, Strategic Broad Outcome 8 is building a modern infrastructure to ensure a successful future for our Islands.

Until now we have largely been discussing human services that have a direct impact on people's lives.

We don't often think of infrastructure development as being a direct human service. However, think about the time you spend in traffic - especially if you live in the Eastern Districts - and you'll understand how roads and transport infrastructure affect not only your daily activities, but also your mood and stress levels.

Or think about how important it is for you to stay in touch with businesses, friends and family overseas, especially during these times when we cannot travel. It's usually only when things go wrong that we appreciate the importance of a strong and resilient telecommunications infrastructure. But in reality, it affects our lives and our emotions every single day.

So many aspects of a positive future for the people of the Cayman Islands rest upon the existence of a modern infrastructure.

Central to the success of this broad policy outcome is that we plan tomorrow's infrastructure today.

Vital to this process is that we provide for public education and consultation on national infrastructure development as we do the necessary work to update and revise the National Development Plan.

Since the way our Islands develop will impact not only each and every one of us living here today, but will also affect our children, grandchildren, and countless generations to come, it is necessary that we get this right. We are already seeing the effects of unplanned and unsustainable development.

Part of our efforts in updating the National Development Plan and doing better planning for our Islands' future growth include developing a national road transportation plan and creating a national infrastructure fund.

Before I continue I must address another fallacy made by the Leader of Opposition yesterday concerning roadworks.

Mr. Speaker, you will have heard answers provided to questions earlier today that his inaccurate and completely unfounded allegations were clarified.

Continuing on Mr. Speaker, we are experiencing the results of not developing a national road transportation plan, taking into account population growth via immigration and otherwise in tandem with development patterns and local population movement from one district to another.

There are many factors that both impact development and are impacted by development. Everything is interconnected, and we cannot even hope to maximise our Islands' potential or improve Caymanians' quality of life by continuing in the ad hoc manner of previous decades.

A key aspect of future infrastructure development that has long been neglected is that of our agricultural industry. The COVID-19 pandemic put a spotlight on our vulnerability due to having the majority of our food imported. We must develop this area, both in anticipation of another potential disaster, and as an area of opportunity for economic diversification.

Toward these objectives, we will provide funding for land acquisition for agricultural purposes.

Mr. Speaker again I pause to speak to the Hon. Leader of Opposition's concerns raised yesterday about the Farmers' Assistance programme. He suggested that we should have fixed the problems instead of canceling it. The Minister held two meetings with commercial farmers who expressed concerns about developing abuse of the system that led to a decision to suspend it temporarily while the Ministry looks at the checks and balances. It was not to do away with the support or the system.

As in all areas of government and governance, the public sector does not exist in isolation. Much of the information we need in order to effectively plan is held with the private sector and vice versa. So, we recognise the need to foster healthy partnerships with private sector stakeholders.

In order that our people and industries develop to their full potential, it is vital that we build a modern infrastructure.

As noted previously, the PACT Government will provide funding for an additional subsea fibre optic cable.

Once again, the time is now. We are at the stage where our underwater communications cables are at their end-of-life phase, and there are no back-up systems in place. Connectivity is vital to Cayman's financial services industry, which has kept these Islands afloat over the past year.

We have a similar situation evolving with the lack of a national sewage and wastewater system in that we are in danger of contaminating our freshwater lens. It is imperative that we act before disaster strikes while also thinking ahead to provide necessary services for the future.

It is also well past time to address existing issues and problem areas. It is now incumbent upon this Government to develop and implement a national

storm water management plan, including remediation of chronic flooding areas.

To ensure that residents are not impacted by similar problems in the future with regard to flooding and other mishaps, we will enact legislation and regulations to ensure property developments have the proper infrastructure in place, such as drainage, street-lighting, speed bumps, etc.

Prevention in this respect, is surely better than cure.

The PACT Government will address water delivery system in the Sister islands.

And to ensure that our Islands' physical infrastructure is indeed making people's lives better, and providing a better standard of life overall, we will ensure compliance with existing legislation regarding physical access for persons with disabilities and increase the number of cemeteries across our Islands.

Perhaps this is an appropriate place to conclude my remarks on infrastructure development. I hope it underscores the fact that infrastructure development affects all of our lives in every aspect, even after we are gone.

We cannot continue with a business-as-usual approach. We cannot wait and see. We are seeing today the effects of yesterday's lack of foresight and planning. If this Government's plan seems very bold, aggressive and ambitious, it is because it is. But realistically, it is our short-term survival and future wellbeing we are talking about today. The events of the past year and a half have clearly shown us that we cannot afford to be complacent any longer.

Strategic Broad Outcome 9 addresses improving our financial services as an industry, product and economic driver for our islands.

Mr. Speaker, much has been said, and deservedly so, of the financial services industry carrying our Islands through the COVID-19 pandemic. And it's true. The industry, and consequently Government revenues, performed far better than anticipated.

Compared with the shutdown of our tourism industry, the outlook for the financial services industry is a lot more rosy.

However, we must be realistic and never smugly secure in our own success. This is an area like in many areas of life that there is one constant and that is change.

And the financial services industry is also one that evolves rapidly and is affected by global shifts. It is vulnerable to external threats and also to increased and aggressive competition.

In summary, in financial services, we always need to be playing at the top of our game.

The PACT Government knows that we must maintain our best-in-class reputation as a financial services jurisdiction.

This is a multi-pronged effort, based strongly on our robust regulatory structure. A key goal in this effort is removal from the Financial Action Task Force Gray List, and any other consequential high-risk lists.

Indeed, Mr. Speaker, the Cayman Islands has joined with 130 other countries and jurisdictions, considered by the OECD to represent more than 90 per cent of global GDP, in the OECD consensus for framework to reform international tax rules. As indicated by the Ministry of Financial Services press statement issued on 7 June, 2021, the two-pillar plan is directed at international corporate taxation rules to ensure that large multinational enterprises pay their share of taxes wherever they operate, and this aligns with the Cayman Islands' stated position that taxes should be paid where they are rightfully owed.

To achieve it, and to keep the Cayman Islands off any international high-risk list, we must ensure that our existing laws are being enforced.

We will also need to pass legislation that makes Cayman a proactive jurisdiction and continue to keep our financial services products cutting edge. To do this, we will have to implement more IT tools to enhance our regulatory framework and ensure CIMA has sufficient resources.

At the foundation level, we must pay special attention to clarifying laws and regulations on the opening of bank accounts.

This slate of actions, if taken swiftly, will strengthen our reputation and position us well to fight current and impending external threats.

Overall, the Government as an industry stakeholder needs to pro-actively engage the international and local communities as a primary objective.

Internationally, we will:

- Centralise the voice of all industry stakeholders;
- Promote the Cayman Islands' strong legal, regulatory and compliance infrastructure;
- Network with key EU/UK/US stakeholders;
- Engage proactively with international political and regulatory organisations;
- Promote initiatives to de-bunk tax haven myths about Cayman; and
- Ultimately re-define how we position the Cayman Islands as a tax-neutral jurisdiction.

On the local front, we have to educate the local populace on the positive economic impact of the financial services industry and increase funding to NGOs to promote Cayman's financial services industry here and abroad.

Taking all of these actions as a concerted and coordinated effort, will allow us to effectively ring-fence and protect our financial services industry from both known and unanticipated external threats, while also strengthening the industry locally through increased Caymanian participation in and understanding of the industry and its benefits to the Cayman Islands' economy and society as a whole.

As a Government, we must understand that we must continually evaluate, re-evaluate and act to strengthen and improve the financial services industry both today and for years to come if we are going to be able to rely on it as a key pillar of our economy. S

Our Strategic Broad Outcome 10 to improve our tourism industry, as a product and economic driver.

Mr. Speaker, as we discuss economic pillars, we move to an industry that has been extremely shaken by the events of the past 16 months.

Let me say right here we will absolutely ensure that every displaced Caymanian tourism worker will either gain long-term and steady employment within our reopened tourism sector OR will receive the assistance they need to get back on their feet until they do.

Our aim with the current COVID-19 tourism worker stipend is to continue to provide assistance until it is no longer needed. And our intention is that the tourism industry will be back up and running again in time for our traditional high season in November – which is when we plan to taper the stipends payments – with the idea being that displaced Caymanians will be back at work at that time doing what they love and taking advantage of those opportunities.

And we are certainly making a concerted effort to get Caymanians back to work in tourism, through the data gathered in the ongoing tourism worker survey; combined with a comprehensive training, retraining and upskilling partnership between WORC and CITA; and then matching out of work Caymanians in the hospitality sector with new jobs coming on stream as our Islands reopen to visitors.

There is nothing ad hoc about our plan to repopulate the tourism industry with Caymanian faces, nor is there anything lukewarm about our dedication

to supporting Caymanians who are in need of assistance and have suffered as a result of the pandemic.

And should circumstances conspire against us, and we don't have as many Caymanians back to work in November as we would hope, through our data-driven approach to reopening the industry, through the tourism worker survey and other analysis, we will know how many people still need our help – and we WILL help them. There are no Grinches on this side of the aisle.

There will be no nightmare scenario for our people in November, and we urge them not to listen to any scare tactics. The first letter in the name of the PACT Government stands for “people-driven” and we will not turn our backs on our people.

Now that I hope I've cleared up any fears about what may happen in November, let me explain how the PACT Government plans to re-shape and improve the tourism industry to benefit Caymanians and the Cayman Islands economy for the future. We are looking at long term growth, not just short-term gain. You could compare our approach to focusing on having money in the bank, not just change in your pocket.

We want our Caymanians in tourism to sit at the table, not simply be grateful for the scraps. So, let me explain how we plan to get there.

High on our agenda is a sustainable national tourism plan, which will make better use of data by policy creators to ensure a sustainable approach – much as we have already started with the ongoing survey.

Vital to having a sustainable approach to Cayman’s tourism industry is to expand and diversify our domestic tourism product.

We all know that if you do what you always did, you’ll get what you always got. We take that to mean that you have to change and make changes in order to grow. This is especially true after the extended closure of our borders due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Cayman’s reliance on a certain demographic and our famous legions of repeat visitors won’t work if they’ve decided to go somewhere else.

We can and must diversify by looking to new markets. Toward this goal, we will promote and grow sports and event tourism; diversify the tourism product with a greater eco-tourism focus; and expand into emerging and secondary tourism markets.

We will continue to market to high-net worth visitors, but we will also make the efforts to re-imagine cruise tourism.

We will expand Cayman Airways routes; promote Cayman Brac and Little Cayman; and increase and improve tourism infrastructure in the Eastern districts of Grand Cayman.

The modernisation of our travel and transport infrastructure will be vital to our tourism industry's survival.

To achieve this, we will establish a public/private partnership to construct a new general aviation terminal; improve public transport through legislative and infrastructure reforms; and improve ports of entry to enhance the visitor experience.

And finally, we get to what I see as our key goal in tourism – which is to transform the faces of our tourism industry, and to Caymanianise tourism in the Cayman Islands. To do this, we must do all that we can to encourage stronger Caymanian participation in the industry.

We have heard many times and through countless surveys that our visitors want to meet the people of our country. They want to meet Caymanians and to learn and understand something of the Caymanian culture.

This has been a stated wish from the horse's mouth, so to speak. Our tourists are telling us that local participation in our tourism industry is lacking. And we've known for a long time this to be true and now is the time to take real steps to get Caymanians more involved and invested in our tourism product and industry.

As part of this effort, we will expand and enhance the current national tourism education strategy and also promote greater Caymanian ownership of tourism-related businesses.

Part of our industry transformation effort will be to enhance quality and service delivery standards, initially by enacting a public transport code of conduct and creating and executing a national beautification plan.

Out of the adversity of a global pandemic, we have a huge opportunity to make a tourism product that was already great an example of excellence.

Our efforts have already begun, through a concerted training and development programme featuring extensive cooperation with the private sector and between several government agencies.

We are ideally positioned internationally as a safe destination and have the time and opportunity to build on this and our other strengths.

Despite the recent setbacks of the pandemic, the PACT Government is certain that the best is yet to come for tourism in the Cayman Islands, and we will do everything in our power to make this a reality.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, as I reflected last night on the contributions of the Honorable Leader of the Opposition, I realized that he missed one key point. The purpose of elections are to determine the will of the people, and the collective will of the people was that they did not want a Progressives-led government.

Mr. Speaker, while I recognise that the tone of the Hon. Leader of the Opposition's speech was somewhat adversarial, I will admit I was quite surprised. When we started this process, we in the PACT Government decided that we wanted a different tone of politics in Cayman.

To that end, we agreed that we would reach out to the Hon. Leader of the Opposition to get his input on items the Opposition would like to see addressed in the Strategic Policy Statement. On this side of the aisle, we do recognize that the members of the Opposition are also duly elected representatives of the Caymanian people and we are their Government too.

Mr. Speaker, I will also admit that prior to finalizing the SPS, we went down the list of everything the Hon. Leader of the Opposition asked to be included to ensure that they are addressed in the SPS.

I will now read the list of items that he wanted to be included in the SPS and you, and the Caymanian public, can decide for yourselves.

Mr. Speaker, this SPS addresses every single item raised by the Hon. Leader of the Opposition and then more – much, much more. But we still have the adversarial approach. Again, Jacob’s voice and Esau’s hands.

Mr. Speaker, I recognize that losing isn’t easy. I know. I lost an election before. But Mr. Speaker, the Caymanian spirit knows that we can face defeat without being defeated.

I am proud of the team that I am honored and privileged to lead. Many of them also know defeat but they were never defeated.

They are hardworking. They are energetic. They are passionate. They care, and they are competent.

Mr. Speaker, the elections are over. It is time to do the people’s business and I therefore ask everyone to join us in building a better Cayman, one that will make the quality of life better for every single Caymanian.

Thank you Mr. Speaker and I commend the Motion to this Honourable House.

###

###