

Social Renewal & Economic Recovery

Working together to move Bermuda beyond the pandemic.



Speech from the Throne

**On the Occasion of the
Convening of the Legislature**

*Delivered by Her Excellency the Governor
Friday, 5 November 2021*



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2021

DELIVERED BY HER EXCELLENCY THE GOVERNOR
MS. RENA LALGIE

5TH NOVEMBER 2021

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; through the ages, historians and scholars have written countless volumes dissecting events and citing certain periods as “definitive” for the story of a century, a generation or an era. When the story of this third decade of this 21st Century is written, it will no doubt be an account of how the nations of the world were humbled by an invisible enemy, an enemy against whom our only defence was to defy the very social interaction we require to thrive.

Bermuda and her people have fought this fight and have suffered great loss: loss of life, loss of health, loss of employment. The wounds inflicted by the global pandemic have been felt by every family, and the entire island mourns the loss of life and prays that those seriously ill will improve. The economic havoc wrought by the need to restrict people’s movement and work will stress public and private finances for years to come.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; the noted British anthropologist Dame Mary Douglas said: ***“If you want to change the culture, you will have to start by changing the organization.”*** The systems and institutions designed in the last century and only mildly adjusted to continue into the next have too often been exposed by the pandemic as being unfit for purpose. Changes that were deferred have now become imperative for survival. Changes that were resisted now transcend stubbornness, as resistance is negligent for future generations. Changes denied defy the sacred trust of elected office and do not serve the needs of the people.

The Government is determined to drive the change Bermuda needs, by implementing Bermuda’s Economic Recovery Plan and delivering on the election pledges endorsed by voters just over one year ago. Bermuda’s Economic Recovery Plan has 31 priority projects in 7 broad categories: Economic Diversification; Financial Markets; Infrastructure Investment; Expanding the Residential Population; Labour Market & Social Development; Healthcare Reform; and Regulatory Reform. The successful execution of these initiatives will ensure that the island is prepared to meet the inevitable shocks that will accompany the period following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; parents, teachers and students have battled to continue teaching and learning through Zoom and other online platforms, forced to sacrifice the all-important in-person educational experience in the name of public health. As a semblance of normalcy returns to the classroom, the Government's commitment to the reform of the education system is reinforced by the demonstrated need to develop in our children the skills, knowledge, values and relationships to equip them for careers that drive the existing and future economies.

Almost one hundred and seventy years ago, on 1st September 1852, a society of black men purchased a lot of land in Hamilton Parish on which they had built the Temperance Hall. They were shipwrights, carpenters and a farmer, who - only 20 years after the end of slavery in Bermuda - came together for the promotion of education. In his work "Heritage", Dr. Kenneth E. Robinson records that for the price of one shilling these men, as the Trustees, would ensure that the premises would be used: ***"...for the purposes of a School for teaching reading, writing, English grammar and arithmetic with other branches of solid English education, and the principles of Christian religion..."***

This ***"most worthy achievement"*** of these black men is not forgotten and symbolises the value of honouring the core ideals of founders, even when buildings are repurposed. Such pursuits are timeless, and Temperance Hall stands today as a testament to their vision. While no longer a school, it is a monument to the proud history of the Hamilton Parish Temperance Friendly Society.

The Government will advance the transformation of public education with the launch of the first two signature senior schools at the Berkeley Institute and Cedarbridge Academy in September 2022. The Berkeley Institute will deliver signature programmes in "Finance & Insurance" and "Health and Social Care", while the Cedarbridge Academy will deliver signature programmes in "Trades for Building Construction and Maintenance" and "Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math". While the Ministry of Education advances additional aspects of education reform, the Learning First Programme will continue to ensure that improved methods for teaching and learning are implemented in our public school system, which is vital for improved education outcomes.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; the grossest inequity exposed by the global pandemic is in the area of healthcare and health insurance coverage. The Government's recent expansions to the prescription drug benefit for persons on HIP and FutureCare, as well as the support to uninsured, pregnant women, has come at a cost and without the opportunity to address the systemic reform so desperately needed and promised in this Government's election platform. Achieving affordable universal healthcare is a complex, multi-year commitment and is a fundamental part of Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, because it will reduce costs to business, which in turn increases economic growth. To further the goal of universal healthcare, the Ministry of Health will accelerate the ongoing stakeholder engagement in the transition to an integrated healthcare model to increase the speed at which affordable essential healthcare is delivered.

The change will begin with efforts to realise cost savings and continue the multi-year journey towards universal health coverage. The Ministry of Health will develop a national digital health strategy to leverage technology that will streamline administrative expenses, so more funds can be spent on delivering healthcare services. Additionally, the Government will commence merging the administration of the Government healthcare plans, which will deliver cost savings. Concurrently, the Ministry of Health will develop an integrated patient pathway for essential care as the first step in launching a pilot health plan for universal coverage. The pandemic has shown the world that lack of access to affordable, essential healthcare is a significant contributor to the poor health outcomes of working-class communities, and the Government is focused on delivering affordable, essential healthcare for all.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; there is a Native American proverb that sets the tone for the moral imperative of our stewardship of the natural environment:

“We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

Bermuda is a treasure trove of environmental wealth, a critical habitat for marine biodiversity, and is poised to become a key player on the global stage of climate risk financing. As a small island vulnerable to the effects of climate change, Bermuda must be a leader in the fight to save the planet for future generations. During this Session, the Government will introduce a Marine Development Act, which will include a marine spatial plan identifying the 20% protected area of Bermuda's EEZ. The Act will also create a framework to balance development and sustainability, providing an application process for the investment in fishing, offshore renewable energy and "blue tourism". The process will guide the management of ocean uses across the EEZ, drawing on local expertise and utilising an environmental impact procedure akin to the Bermuda Plan for land development.

Also in this Session, to execute another initiative of Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, the Government will introduce a Bill to facilitate the developers of renewable energy technology testing their products in Bermuda. This legislation will lay the groundwork for additional investment in Bermuda, whose innovation can reduce the cost of electricity for local consumers. Relatedly, regulations will also be introduced to address the cost of the fuel surcharge for electricity and also to better regulate the storage and distribution of fuel, with the aim of reducing energy costs for Bermuda's residents and businesses.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; among the metrics of a successful education system is the ability of individuals to realise employment and career opportunities as an outcome. In line with Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, the Government will implement the Youth Employment Strategy to meet the identified needs of unemployed persons between the ages of 18 and 26. There is multi-generational trauma and dysfunction that manifests itself as the social dysfunction we see in our island. The root of these issues is a lack of opportunity, so Bermuda's youth must be returned to full employment and will be provided with the support to train for jobs in the economy.

In order for Bermuda to be successful in the global war for talent and investment, we must be more competitive. Any and all services that we provide to the global economy must be viewed from the lens of how we improve the delivery of services, so that Bermuda and Bermudians can benefit. Bermuda's competitive edge will be enhanced this Session with the introduction of a digitised immigration application process. This will improve the customer-facing delivery of services and ensure that the existing manual immigration process does not serve as a hindrance to the specialised talent required to further grow Bermuda's economy.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; social isolation and psychological stress have featured as part of the island's pandemic experience. Communities of faith and third-sector charitable organisations have filled the void in the lives of the people and, along with frontline healthcare workers, have provided relief to many. This mission has been carried out with love and genuine care and concern, masking the fact that these organisations are in dire financial straits themselves. A reduction in outreach and in donations to support their work have stretched their ability to meet financial commitments, and the relief they have provided for others must now be provided for them.

Led by the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation, the Government will work with the island's lending institutions to provide financial, loan and mortgage assistance to communities of faith and third-sector entities. The role they play has proven vital to community well-being and will be increasingly important as we weather the storms of economic recovery.

The Bermuda Economic Development Corporation has evolved since its inception over 40 years ago, and over the last 20 months the BEDC has played an invaluable role by providing 287 businesses with 5.1 million dollars in financial assistance. The Government acknowledges the essential role that the BEDC will play in Bermuda's economic recovery, therefore during this legislative Session, the Government will advance legislation to modernise the Bermuda Economic Development Corporation Act. In line with Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, the boundaries of the economic empowerment zone in Hamilton will be extended, and with the North East Hamilton Plan set to come before the Legislature during this Session, the BEDC will advance residential developments in Bermuda's economic empowerment zones.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; like in so many other countries, Bermuda's senior population is growing, and by 2025 it is likely to have overtaken the number of persons under the age of 18. This fact will require the re-examination of legislation to protect seniors. In this Session, the Government will advance amendments to the Senior Abuse Register Act 2008 to protect seniors against the growing prospect of financial abuse.

The Ministry of Social Development and Seniors is charged with leading the Government's support of the most vulnerable in society. In this regard, the Ministry will develop a formal register of persons with disabilities to ensure these men, women and children have the easiest access to services and assistance to enhance their lives.

Wherever Government services touch the lives of the island's children, the approach must be one through which they are nurtured and developed. The Swiss psychologist and philosopher Alice Miller observed that:

“Children who are respected learn respect. Children who are cared for learn to care for those weaker than themselves. Children who are loved for what they are cannot learn intolerance. In an environment such as this, they will develop their own ideals, which can be nothing other than humane, since they grew out of the experience of love.”

During this Session, the Department of Child and Family Services will be strengthened in the area of child safeguarding to reduce the harm, abuse and distress of children on our island.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; to complement the new financial conduct legislation for local financial institutions that will be advanced this Session, the Ministry of Finance will also look to protect consumers by reducing the fees charged by service providers to residents with private pensions.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; the issue of Bermuda's waste management is an infrastructure crisis, to which all efforts must be devoted to solve. The Government must tackle this critical infrastructure project to ensure that Bermuda does not have to revert to landfilling its solid waste. The Tynes Bay facility must be replaced, and pending that replacement the Government will take all the necessary steps to ensure a continuation of the service provided by this critical facility. To that end, in line with Bermuda's Economic Recovery Plan, a cross-ministry project management team has been formed to accelerate the replacement of Tynes Bay and the upgrading of Bermuda's waste management and water infrastructure.

Infrastructure issues are magnified in the Town of St. George and likewise require proper planning. During this Session, the Legislature will consider a Strategic Plan for the Town of St. George. This plan will be informed by consultation with all relevant stakeholders and will represent the best means by which to raise the fortunes of the Old Town in the wake of the renewal opportunity presented by the new St. Regis Hotel, renovated St. George's Club and the construction of the new marina.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; Bermuda has a robust public sector governance framework. However, the Public Access to Information Act is over a decade old and is in need of review. During this Session, the Government will introduce amendments to the Public Access to Information Act to centralise the processing of requests for information. This will create greater uniformity in the management of requests and relieve public officers of the task of handling more complex requests for information, so that they can focus on their key job tasks.

Additionally, in this Session, the Government will advance amendments to the Electronic Transactions Act 1999 and the Personal Information Protection Act 2016 to create a harmonised personal information privacy regime for online services, in keeping with international best practice. These legislative changes are necessary for Bermuda to be an attractive domicile for technology companies.

Service on Government boards and quangos has similarly become more complex, as these bodies are delegated further powers and independently perform functions under various statutes but on behalf of the public. During this Session, legislation will be advanced and amended as appropriate to mandate fiduciary training as part of service on boards or committees, and to require that the members of certain boards include persons professionally qualified in either law or accounting.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; for Bermuda to thrive, it must remain a safe place to live and work. Public safety will be enhanced by marrying technology to crime prevention and detection. During this Session, the Ministry of National Security will advance a new island-wide CCTV system, which will include newer features to assist the police in tackling road traffic offences and violent crime.

Data is the new oil, and Bermuda must ensure that our cybersecurity defences are adequate to defend our island from dangerous online actors. During this legislative Session, the Government will introduce a CyberSecurity Act, which will establish minimum standards for cybersecurity for critical assets such as energy supply, telecommunications, water infrastructure and government data.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; no economic recovery of Bermuda will be achieved without a recovery in tourism. There are dormant hotel sites that must be redeveloped and reopened, and there is a global demand for leisure tourism that can be met by destinations that are safe and provide value for money. In keeping with its core function, the Bermuda Tourism Authority will deliver enhanced sales and marketing abroad. Here at home, Bermuda must resolve to provide an experience that matches its price point. Our survival in tourism demands that we give visitors what they want and cannot find better delivered elsewhere.

Whilst the execution of any tourism campaign and marketing strategy is the purview of the BTA, leadership in tourism policy must come from the Government of Bermuda, who commit tens of millions of taxpayer funds to the organisation, a commitment which demands a far greater return than has been realised in the years since the creation of the Authority. That is the challenge laid before us as a destination: to chart a course in tourism that will yield the brand relevance required to meet the post-pandemic demand for travel.

The tourism recovery will be aided by the Ministry of Transport, which will pursue an air service development policy to secure increased airlift from traditional gateway cities and to increase connectivity for Bermuda.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; democracy is constantly evolving. The relationship between non-sovereign territories and administering powers must likewise evolve to reflect the realities of modern governance. During this Session, and in keeping with the UK Government's request for recommendations, the Government will advance proposed amendments to the Bermuda Constitution Order 1968.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; history was writ large on the international stage this year when a Bermudian woman strode to Olympic gold medal success in Tokyo. Bermuda finally had the opportunity to savour the thrill of victory at sport's highest level, a feeling with which our Caribbean family is familiar. Flora Duffy's success can be replicated by others on these islands and the Government will lead the drive to ensure that even more funds are invested in our elite athletes.

The Legislature will be invited to consider a national sports policy. The Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport will weave together the elements of sporting success that will harness the talent of young people. The world stage can no longer be said to elude Bermudian athletes, who will find their desire and effort matched by the Government's commitment to their success.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; in addition to the Bills mentioned earlier, the Legislature will be invited to consider the following Bills in this Session:

- Banks and Deposit Companies Amendment Act
- Bermuda National Trust Amendment Act
- Cannabis Licensing Act
- Children Amendment Act
- Cruise Ships (Casinos) Amendment Act
- Distilled Spirits (Licensing) Act
- Economic Development (Investment Incentives) Act

- Financial Assistance Amendment Act
- Fisheries (Aquaculture) Amendment Act
- Matrimonial Causes Amendment Act
- Motor Car (Digital Fare Media) Amendment Act

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; the global pandemic has created a “mission interrupted” scenario for most governments, and in Bermuda the same can be said. “Moving beyond the pandemic” and “learning to live with COVID-19” have become a call to arms to drive the Government’s recovery agenda for Bermuda in the face of an uncertain world. The imposition of a global minimum corporate tax by the OECD will be a key part of the work that the new Tax Reform Commission must undertake. Global supply chain issues and inflationary increases in basic necessities have seen an increase in the cost of food. The ongoing economic shocks and the unenviable choice of some people to forego health insurance demands an accelerated pace of healthcare reform. The Government’s agenda remains as promised to the people of Bermuda, and “moving beyond the pandemic” signals a necessary priority on these and other critical issues that have been delayed due to resources diverted by COVID-19. The full effort of the Government will go into the successful execution of Bermuda’s Economic Recovery Plan.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; for 20 months the global pandemic has seen the world move through the fear of the unknown to the anguish of radically changed social interaction, too often culminating in grief for lost loved ones and friends. Bermuda can be proud of the way in which we have met the challenge of this age. Frontline workers have displayed selflessness in tending to the sick and vulnerable; public officers at every level have readily adapted to a new normal and have continued to deliver services to the public; community leaders and clergy have lifted the spirits of their congregations and provided solace during this most tumultuous period in a generation. For this, the Government is extremely grateful.

Amid all of this, stories of Bermudian excellence have made these days easier to face. Flora Duffy's success is the high point, but with little fanfare Joseph Weeks, a technical education instructor at the Bermuda College, was awarded the National Energy Globe Award from the Energy Globe Foundation, an international forum, for a project at the Bermuda College that utilised STEM to address food security using an aquaponics system powered by solar panels. Cyana Burgess earned a \$30,000 scholarship from BILTIR and is set to continue studying actuarial science and data analytics at the University of Leicester. Andira Crichlow, Aaron Crichlow and the Bermuda is Love team led their fourth free school clothing drive to support the island's children as they returned for the new school year.

Excellence. Community. Scholarship. Innovation. Bermuda has met the challenge, and through concrete acts of justice and civic activism, we have shown that we are moving beyond the pandemic.

Madam President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly. Convention allows the Governor to add a few reflections of his- or her- own at the end of the Throne Speech. The unconventional nature of the eleven months which I have spent in office means the reading this Throne Speech is the first time that I make a traditional address of any nature in the Governor's ceremonial uniform.

As Governor, I remain diligent in fulfilling my constitutional responsibilities with respect to security and continued compliance with international obligations. I look forward to working in partnership with the elected Government to tackle violent crime and all forms of serious crime in order to maintain Bermuda's global reputation as a safe place to live and to do business.

Much has been said of the social and economic challenges that we face, many of those challenges are of a nature or magnitude which was not anticipated. The functions performed by independent institutions is of even greater importance within that context. As Governor, I will continue as I have started, with an emphasis on ensuring that those appointed to serve are afforded the operational independence they need to enable good governance, security and justice; and that they in turn deliver their responsibilities with greater accountability.

My family and I remain in awe of the beauty of these islands but my children challenge me on a daily basis about some of the environmental issues raised in this Throne Speech. These issues are not unique to Bermuda and responsibility does not solely rest with Government leaders. I look forward to working with the Government and the wider community to support these efforts in whatever way that I can.

During this pandemic we have been reminded of the value of elected Governments working in partnership, of the need for compassion and the resilience of the human spirit. I wish to close by paying tribute to the charitable groups that have been feeding and caring for the people of Bermuda during their hours of need; and paying tribute to the dedicated women and men across Bermuda's public services for everything that they are doing to respond to the pandemic.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly; I declare this Session open, and may God guide you in your deliberations.



To view online go to: www.gov.bm/throne-speech

Design and pre-press production: Department of Communications

Printed in Bermuda by: Bermuda Press Limited

Photo Credit: Anthony E. Wade/Bernews – Flora Duffy and Clarence Hill photo
November 2021