FIRST (1ST) SITTING OF THE EIGHTEENTH (18TH) MEETING OF THE FIRST SESSION OF THE THIRTEENTH (13TH) LEGISLATURE

THE PARLIAMENT OF TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS

OFFICIAL HANSARD REPORT

13 MARCH 2026

(Parliament)

Hon. Speaker

Speaker

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PRAYER

OPENING OF THE SITTING

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Good morning, Honourable Members. I call this first sitting of the 18th meeting of the first session of the 13th Legislature of the Parliament of the Turks and Caicos Islands, to be held on Friday, 13 March 2026, at the Honourable N.J.S. Francis Building, Pond Street, Grand Turk, to order. Members, I now call on our chaplain, Bishop Coleta Williams III, to pray for the Parliament.

PRAYER

Chaplain:

John chapter 13, verses 14 to 15: So he got up from his meal, took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples feet. When you think of servanthood, what do you envision? Servanthood is not about position or skill. It is about attitude. The heart of leadership centres on character rather than just skills, focusing on who a leader is, not just what they do.

It involves fostering empathy, building trust and serving others to create a culture where people want to follow. Key teachable and actionable character traits, often called HEART, are: hunger for wisdom; accept the best; accept responsibility; respond with courage; and think of others first. These form the core of servanthood-based leadership. Character over competence: while skills are necessary, character defines a leaders long-term impact.

Service-oriented leadership means leading with empathy and focusing on helping others grow. Influence is not just title. Leadership is about impact, not just position. Intentionality: becoming a better leader requires conscious daily effort. Let us pray. Father God, the chief servant who has called us and given us this great opportunity to serve our people and this country, cause us not to take it for granted and to always put country above self. Bless us now as we convene to do the business of this House and its people. We pray especially today for our Premier as he celebrates his birth anniversary.

Grant him long life, good health and happy days. We pray for this Government and all the leaders of this House, the Leader of the Opposition and all its members. We pray your guidance, that they be mindful of their responsibility to seek to improve the condition of all mankind. Bless our Speaker as he presides with wisdom and good judgment, and our Attorney General with physical and mental strength and clear legal guidance.

Bless this Parliament. Bless this, our beloved country. May your kingdom come and may your will be done. In Jesus name we pray.

MOTION TO SUSPEND STANDING ORDER 12

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Good morning, Mr Speaker, colleagues and Mrs Misick. Thank you for being here today to celebrate my birthday in Parliament. Mr Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 1, I move that Standing Order 12 be suspended to allow this Honourable House to sit beyond the 6 pm hour. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Shaun David Malcolm:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion has been moved by the Honourable Premier and seconded by the Honourable Minister for Home Affairs that this Honourable House sit beyond the 6 pm hour. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Honourable Premier.

REARRANGEMENT OF BUSINESS

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you, Mr Speaker. Pursuant to Standing Order 49, I wish to rearrange the business of this Honourable Parliament so that Government business can proceed over all other business. In that regard, item number 6, papers, is to be taken as item number 4; item number 10, reports from committees, as item number 5; item number 11, first reading of bills, as item number 6; and item number 17, orders of the day, as item number 7. Thank you.

PAPERS

DRAFT FISCAL AND STRATEGIC POLICY STATEMENT 2026-2027 TO 2029-2030

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. I also want to go on record and wish our Honourable Premier a happy birthday today, and we wish that he has many more happy birthdays to come. I also welcome those who are here with us this morning, Members as well as strangers in the gallery. I welcome those listening via Radio Turks and Caicos and via our online platforms. I send condolences to persons who have lost loved ones since we last met, and congratulations to those who are celebrating happier times in their lives. I apologise for our slightly late start as we tried to take care of some technical issues with our Order Paper this morning.

Honourable Members, I now return to the Order Paper. Number 3, messages from Her Excellency the Governor: there are none. We are now at papers, and we will have the draft Fiscal and Strategic Policy Statement 2026-2027 to 2029-2030 laid by the Honourable Premier and Minister for Finance. Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I beg leave to lay on the table of this Honourable Parliament, in accordance with Standing Order 32 and section 109 of the Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution Order 2011, a Draft Fiscal and Strategic Policy Statement 2026-2027 to 2029-2030.

THIRD SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION ESTIMATES 2025-2026

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Madam Clerk. Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. Honourable Premier, we will also have the Third Supplementary Appropriation Estimates 2025-2026 laid by the Honourable Premier and Minister for Finance.

DRAFT FISCAL AND STRATEGIC POLICY STATEMENT 2026-2027 TO 2029-2030

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Mr Speaker, I would like to make a short statement in relation to the laying of the paper on the FSPS. Do I do that first, or should I do that after?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

You lay it first, I think, and then you can make a statement.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

I have laid that already.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Okay, yes, you can make a statement now.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you, Mr Speaker. I rise today to lay before this Honourable Parliament a Fiscal and Strategic Policy Statement for the period 2026-2027 to 2029-2030. The Statement represents the Governments medium-term fiscal framework in accordance with section 109 of the Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution. It sets out the limits on public debt relative to public revenue, the limits on debt servicing as a share of public expenditure, and the level of reserves required to safeguard our fiscal stability.

It also outlines the expected financial impact of existing and new Government policies over the coming years. Mr Speaker, this framework is guided by the 2023 Framework Document agreed between the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands and the United Kingdom. It establishes clear fiscal principles: strengthening revenue relative to the size of the economy; improving the performance of statutory bodies and Government companies; ensuring that recurrent spending is supported by sustainable revenue; controlling public debt; and, where appropriate, leveraging partnerships with the private sector to manage cost and risk. Mr Speaker, our overarching goal remains long-term fiscal sustainability.

At the same time, the Government continues to modernise the tax system so that it becomes more efficient, progressive and fair, ensuring that those with greater means contribute proportionally while strengthening the revenue base needed to deliver essential public services. Mr Speaker, our fiscal strategy is also aligned with Vision 2040 and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Together, these frameworks guide us toward a future of higher national income, social cohesion, environmental protection, citizen security and strong governance. In practical terms, our

medium-term priorities include investments in human capital, affordable housing, sustainable tourism, national security, economic diversification, infrastructure expansion, environmental protection, digital government, public transportation, disaster resilience, social protection and citizen empowerment. Mr Speaker, the expenditure ceiling for fiscal year 2026-2027 is set at $543 million, including $57 million in capital investment.

This is still, to some extent, a moving target as we try to get the Budget presented within a short time, perhaps beyond the end of March, but certainly not much beyond April. These resources will support critical national priorities while maintaining discipline in fiscal management. Mr Speaker, despite a global environment characterised by moderating growth and ongoing economic uncertainty, and I will speak more to this when we make a Budget presentation in early April, the Turks and Caicos Islands continues to demonstrate resilience. Our economy is projected to maintain positive growth, supported by a strong tourism sector, continued investment in real estate and infrastructure, and expanded opportunities across our economy.

Mr Speaker, I must point out, however, that things are constantly changing. We are all aware of what is happening in the Middle East. It is going to have an impact on inflation and the cost of living in the short term. Hopefully the war will not last much longer, but we have already seen the vicissitudes in fuel pricing, and, being a country that depends significantly on fuel, I think we will be impacted. I intend to make a separate statement about that in the very near future.

Mr Speaker, nominal GDP is expected to reach approximately $2 billion by 2026, with unemployment projected to decline to about 4%, reflecting continued job creation and economic activity. On the fiscal side, the Government projects total revenue of approximately $550 million in 2026-2027, alongside responsible expenditure management. Importantly, the fiscal outlook anticipates an operating surplus and continued compliance with the principles of responsible financial management. Mr Speaker, net Government debt remains firmly under control, with forecasts indicating a negative net debt position, demonstrating the strength of our public finances.

This is something that I will speak to again more definitively in the Budget, because, given the trajectory of investment in the private sector, we will probably need to go to the capital market to borrow. I anticipate that we will have an early supplementary in the new financial year. Mr Speaker, within the fiscal space, the Government is prioritising targeted investment that supports national development. That includes rank upgrades within the police force, which will promote 32 officers to the rank of corporal, alongside additional funding to bolster the national crime-fighting plan, including support for witness protection, anti-human trafficking initiatives and intelligence systems.

I think our investment and efforts as they relate to crime fighting are bearing fruit, and we want to continue to invest in that area. Mr Speaker, we are also strengthening our labour market through the development of a digital labour market information system, which will improve workforce planning and employment opportunities for Turks and Caicos Islanders. Further investments will support continuous training and development across the public service, expanded inter-island student subsistence, and the introduction of new four-year degree programmes and technical and vocational initiatives, including programmes in nursing and education. Mr Speaker, this Statement also provides resources to commemorate 50 years of ministerial government, an important milestone in the democratic development of our Islands.

Additionally, the Government will establish a secure residential rehabilitation facility for at-risk boys aged 12 to 17, providing structured supervision and development support while further strengthening social protection. Mr Speaker, provision is also made for new staffing within the civil service, ensuring that Government has the capacity required to deliver services efficiently. Importantly, $7.8 million remains unallocated to address urgent priorities, particularly in the infrastructure and health sectors, ensuring that the Government remains flexible to respond to emerging needs. In closing, the Fiscal and Strategic Policy Statement reaffirms the Governments commitment to prudent fiscal management while investing in the future of our people and our country.

It provides the roadmap for responsible budgeting, sustainable growth and an improved quality of life for all residents of the Turks and Caicos Islands. Mr Speaker, the allocations to Ministries are indicative and will be subject to adjustments as the financial year progresses, and saving options will reflect changes in Government priorities. With that said, I now lay the Fiscal and Strategic Policy Statement for 2026-2027 to 2029-2030 before this Honourable House.

Thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier, for laying the draft Fiscal and Strategic Policy Statement for the years 2026-2027 to 2029-2030. The Chair recognises the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. I do not rise on a point of order, but I wish to make a request of the Premier, if he is willing. He does not have to do it; there is nothing in the House rules. However, if he is willing to give Members a copy of the summary that he made, it would be appreciated.

Honourable Premier, if you saw the talking on this side, I was not trying to disturb you. I was explaining to the new Members the importance of the FSPS and why it is so important to go through this document while you were speaking. It is at his discretion if he wishes to do so.

I also ask why he added the copy of the State of the State, when that was neither here nor there.

GOVERNMENT OF THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS 2025-2026 DRAFT SUPPLEMENTARY APPROPRIATION BILL 2026, NO. 3

Hon. Gordon Burton:

That would be up to the Honourable Premier, if he would like to give a copy of his speech. I cannot dictate whether he does that. If he wishes to do so, then I guess you will receive it. The Chair recognizes the Honourable Premier to lay the Third Supplementary Appropriation Estimates 2025-2026. Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The statement that I just gave is public. It is on the radio and available to the public, and I am happy to provide the House with a copy to circulate among Members. It is basically a high-level outline. As I said initially, it is a strategic policy statement on which the budget is built. Once the budget is presented, it has to encapsulate the principles. The numbers may change, because as we work through the budget and discoveries are made in terms of revenue streams or expenditure, the actual numbers in terms of the global indications of expenditure and revenue may change, but the principle remains, and the priorities in terms of where Government will spend its money will remain. I am happy to make this available to Members.

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I will follow the correct procedure on this one by making my short presentation first before I lay the supplementary. As you know, this is the first reading, so it is not customary to give any lengthy presentation. This is a high-level, short presentation to lay out in broad terms what is included in the supplementary. Mr. Speaker, I rise to present the Third Supplementary Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the fiscal year 2025-2026. For the public, I will point out the difference between the FSPS and the supplementary. The FSPS looks forward to the medium term up to 2030.

The supplementary speaks to the current budget cycle, which ends in March of this year, and relates to how we reallocate funds that may not have been spent, because this is cost-neutral. The proposed supplementary seeks the approval of this Honourable House to make targeted adjustments to the approved budget in order to address a number of unavoidable operational requirements and statutory obligations that have arisen during the course of the financial year. I emphasize from the outset that this supplementary is anticipated to be cost-neutral, as the additional allocations will be funded through savings identified across several areas of Government expenditure. Therefore, there will be no impact on our current fiscal position and no impact on our cash reserves.

The proposed increases primarily relate to the following areas: compulsory land acquisition, $12 million; an increase of $280,000 under estate management to meet higher-than-anticipated rental costs; retirement of contingency warrants, including warrant number 2 to address Hurricane Melissa relief to the island of Jamaica, and warrant number 4 to address the prevention of mosquito-borne diseases possibly arising from flooding events experienced late last year, which require an additional $200,000 of funding; the Department of Rehabilitation and Community Service, $150,000 to cover safety precautions, repair works and fencing for the Provo Children Home; the Treatment Abroad Programme, $4.5 million, due to rising health care costs; and claims against Government, including contingent liability payments, backlog rental payments, settlement for compulsory land acquisition and employment claims, $2.2 million. Mr. Speaker, in keeping with the principles of responsible financial management, these additional expenditures will be fully funded through savings identified across Government operations: personnel costs of $8.5 million due to delayed recruitment and staff attrition; operating expenditure of $7.8 million due to effective cost-saving measures and project delays; and capital expenditure of $3 million.

The Supplementary Appropriation reflects a decrease in the amount appropriated for the Public Sector Investment Programme for financial year 2025-2026 from $49.8 million to $46.9 million, a reduction of around $3 million. This supplementary focuses on projects needing additional funding: vehicles for Immigration, $12,400; Chalk Sound sidewalks, $50,000; equipment for Mechanical Division, $48,000; mobile clinic, $112,000; and vehicle for the Health Promotion and Advocacy Unit, $6.4 million.

Deferred projects include community park recreation facilities, $500,000; construction of the Community Centre in Bottle Creek, North Caicos, $1 million; Community Centre, The Bight, $200,000; Blue Hills signage project, $150,000; renovation of the Fuller and Clementina Walkin Park, $550,000; and works to the dump site, $730,000. Mr. Speaker, year-to-date performance was driven primarily by strong collections in work permits, statutory body remittances and stamp duty on land transfers. Additionally, the Ministry of Finance has intensified compliance and enforcement efforts, which have contributed positively to revenue collection.

Year-to-date recurrent expenditure totalled $335 million, which was 13% behind estimates and 9% higher than the prior year. As of the end of the third quarter, the Development Fund balance was $82 million, and capital expenditure year-to-date was $18 million. The year-to-date operating surplus was $81.6 million. Capital expenditure, as I said earlier, was $18.1 million against a budget amount of $49 million, so the net surplus at the end of the third quarter was $63.5 million.

As at the third quarter, the cash balance was $428 million. The balances in the various funds were: Consolidated Fund, $247 million; Development Fund, $82 million; National Forfeiture Fund, $3.4 million; National Wealth Fund, $95.7 million; and Destination Enhancement Fund, $530,000. The closing cash balance, as indicated earlier, was over $428 million. Mr. Speaker, the results reflect the Government continued commitment to sound fiscal management, disciplined expenditure control and strengthening revenue administration. With that said, I take pleasure in laying on the table of this Honourable House, for forwarding to the Appropriations

Committee, the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands 2025-2026 Draft Supplementary Appropriation Bill 2026, No. 3, together with supporting schedules.

Thank you. Mr. Speaker, I am happy to make these notes available to Parliament in case Members wish to peruse them.

REPORT FROM COMMITTEES

EXPENDITURE COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS UNAUDITED HALF-YEAR REPORT 2025-2026

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier, for laying those papers on the table of this Honourable Parliament this morning. Honourable Members, I will now return to the Order Paper, and we are now at Reports from Committees. We will have the report from the Chairman of the Expenditure Committee on the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands unaudited half-year report 2025-2026, to be laid by the Honourable Chairman of the Expenditure Committee, the Honourable Elected Member for South Caicos. Honourable Member.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Good morning, Mr. Speaker. Good morning, colleagues. A pleasant good morning to the wonderful people of South Caicos. On behalf of the people of South Caicos, I extend a happy birthday to the Honourable Premier, and we hope that you leave here and go to South Caicos to celebrate your birthday in style and class.

Mr. Speaker, I beg leave, in accordance with Standing Order 32 and section 64, for the report of the Expenditure Committee to be laid on the table and printed without question. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Kimbule A. Skippings:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion has been moved by the Honourable Chairman of the Expenditure Committee and seconded by the Honourable Elected Member for The Bight, that the report of the Expenditure Committee on the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands unaudited half-year report 2025-2026 be laid on the table of this Honourable House without question put. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Honourable Member.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Mr. Speaker, the Expenditure Committee met on Thursday, November 13, 2025, to examine the Government half-year report, April 1 through September 30, 2025. The Committee heard from the Ministry of Finance, Economic Development, Investment and Trade. After scrutinizing the report, the Committee came up with the following findings and recommendations. On the overall fiscal position, the Turks and Caicos Islands Government is operating with a surplus due to underspending.

On revenue performance, overall revenue is trailing in certain areas, leading to a surplus being derived from underspending rather than exceeding targets. Performance is better than 2024 but below 2025 expectations. The tourism decline is impacting other sectors, such as Customs and CPF. A Customs audit was planned for January to address potential revenue leakages, and we can see and hear that working.

A Customs audit dragnet approach, with a committee focusing on revenue, has been approved and is being implemented. The Government needs to explore broadening the base of taxation, as revenue is heavily dependent on tourism. On the expenditure overview, a new Auditor General has been appointed. A significant portion of funds is allocated to professional consultancy and health care.

Key expenditure variances, being underspends, are: payroll, $6.9 million; NHIP, $5.7 million; maintenance expenses, $4.5 million; grants and contributions, $2.5 million; hospital provisional charge, $15 million; and professional consultancies, $4.2 million. Key expenditure overspends include social welfare projected overspend and repatriation expenses of $315,000. On the cash flow statement, the Government ended the period with a strong cash position of approximately $429 million across various funds: Consolidated Fund, $243 million; and Development Fund, $88.5 million. On capital projects and procurement, the majority of the top 10 capital projects are from the previous year, 2024.

Delays in budget approval and project progression have impacted expenditure. The procurement process is lengthy, up to six months, impacting project timelines. Challenges exist in accurately scoping projects and producing designs before budgeting. Ministries often request additional funding for projects, leading to delays. Key issues and recommendations raised include the need for revenue diversification, reducing reliance on tourism revenue through broadening the tax base, and capital project efficiency. The Committee recommends addressing delays in procurement and project scoping to improve expenditure, considering adding in-house estimators and quantity surveyors with Physical Planning to reduce reliance on costly overseas consultants, establishing more caucuses focusing on water, electricity and infrastructure, and addressing the sustainability of spending and the impact of population growth. Reference was made to the 2040 document and Sustainable Development Goals. On health care costs, the Committee recommends investigating and

controlling rising health care costs, including treatment abroad.

On Government hiring, the Committee recommends addressing challenges in filling technical positions within the Government. On Governor Office consultancy, the Committee recommends addressing consultancy costs from the Office of the Governor. The next steps are that the Committee will continue to monitor the implementation of the recommendations and review progress in future reports. Mr. Speaker, the Committee acknowledges the efforts of the Ministry of Finance in managing the Government finances.

However, the Committee urges the Government to address identified challenges proactively, particularly in diversifying revenue, improving capital project efficiency and controlling health care costs. We will continue to work with the Government to ensure responsible and sustainable financial management for the benefit of the people of the Turks and Caicos. Mr. Speaker, in accordance with section 64 of the Turks and Caicos Islands Constitution 2011, I move that this report of the Expenditure Committee be adopted. Do I have a seconder?

EXPENDITURE COMMITTEE REPORT ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE TURKS AND CAICOS ISLANDS UNAUDITED HALF-YEAR REPORT 2025/2026

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Chair of the Expenditure Committee and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education, that the report of the Expenditure Committee on the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands Unaudited Half-Year Report 2025/2026 be adopted, has been agreed to. The ayes have it. Thank you very much, Honourable Chair of the Expenditure Committee, for your report.

FIRST READING OF BILLS

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SPEAKER AND OTHER MEMBERS' SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES AMENDMENT BILL 2026

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, I will now return to the Order Paper, and we are now at the First Reading of Bills. We will have the first reading of the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026, to be moved by the Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Grateful, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, pursuant to Standing Order 92, that the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be now read for a first time. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

It has not been moved as yet. The Chair recognizes the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

The Honourable Member for Kew Town and St. John's. Mr. Speaker, it probably should have been said at the beginning that I would want this Bill to go through all three readings today. Mr. Speaker, I move that the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be taken first on the Orders of the Day, to completion and passage, and the other Bills to follow. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Premier, you have to move that it go through all three readings today.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I apologize. I move that, pursuant to Standing Order 90(5), the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be allowed to go through all three readings within this meeting. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Premier, seconded by the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, that the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill

2026 go through all three readings during this sitting, has been agreed to. The ayes have it. I will now call on the Honourable Attorney General to move for the first reading of the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Grateful, Mr. Speaker, and grateful to the Honourable Premier. Mr. Speaker, I move, pursuant to Standing Order 94, that the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be now read for a first time. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education, that the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be read a first time, has been agreed to. The ayes have it. Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

This Act may be cited before its commencement as the House of Assembly, Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Act 2026, and after its commencement as the Parliament, Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Act 2026. This Act shall come into operation on publication in the Gazette.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SPEAKER AND OTHER MEMBERS' SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES AMENDMENT BILL 2026

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Honourable Members, I will now return to the Order Paper, and we are now at Orders of the Day, the Second Reading of Bills. We are at the second reading of the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026, to be moved by the Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move, pursuant to Standing Order 92, that the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be now read a second time. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Health, that the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be now read a second time, has been agreed to. The ayes have it. Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Grateful, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, section 124 of the Constitution of the Turks and Caicos Islands provides for the remuneration of the Speaker and the other Members of Parliament. In particular, it provides for the Speaker and the other Members of Parliament to be paid such remuneration and allowances as prescribed by an Act. Chapter 1.06 of the 2021 revised edition of the Laws of the Turks and Caicos Islands is that Act, and it provides for salaries and allowances to the Speaker and Members of Parliament.

This means, Mr. Speaker, that such payments can only be made once an Act of Parliament has been made or amended reflecting the recommendations in a report of the Integrity Commission. It also means that any payment outside of an amendment, or contrary to it, would be unlawful. Mr. Speaker, I am aware that, in accordance with section 124 of the Constitution, the Integrity Commission has made a report recommending the payment of a transportation allowance to the Leader of the Opposition, to be paid on a monthly basis at a rate of $1,600 a month for rental of vehicles while on the island of Providenciales in his capacity as Leader of the Opposition. The context of this payment, Mr. Speaker, is that, in its last report, the Integrity Commission had recommended that the Leader of the Opposition be provided with a vehicle on Grand Turk and on Providenciales.

While neither of those vehicles has been purchased, it is my understanding that the Leader of the Opposition's fuel costs on Grand Turk are being covered. This allowance would cover the fuel costs and transportation on Providenciales. It is recommended to be made retrospective to 1 November 2023 to take account of the earlier recommendation. Mr. Speaker, in accordance with that advice, the Cabinet, having considered the recommendations of the Integrity Commission, has approved the payment of this allowance, retrospective to the date recommended.

That is what forms this Bill that comes to the House today, to amend the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Act in order to give effect to the recommendation of the Integrity Commission. Mr. Speaker, having said that, the Bill does two things. It does what I have just indicated, but it also renames the Act so that, instead of the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Act, it would now be called the Parliament

Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Act, in keeping with the constitutional amendment, which takes effect in any event by reference.

This would tidy up the law book in respect of this particular legislation. Mr. Speaker, I therefore commend the Bill to debate among Honourable Members of the House. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Attorney General. Honourable Members, the floor is now open to debate on this Bill. Are there any contributions? The Chair recognizes the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, normally, if there is any conflict of interest, we want that debated, so I just want Members to know that, while I normally arise first and speak to Bills, this one deals particularly with transport allowance for the Leader of the Opposition, so I will not go into detail.

I will just say, by way of correction, that I do not receive any fuel costs for Grand Turk either. I could have raised the issue of 2023 because I have been using my personal vehicle since 2021, so a couple of years were lost, but there are no fuel costs for Grand Turk or Providenciales.

I will not debate the Bill, Mr. Speaker, and I will take my seat. While I am on my feet, I want to wish the Honourable Premier a very happy birthday from the Opposition. Thank you very much for all your service to this country over the years. We hope that God gives you good health, sound mind and sound judgment, and keeps your knees, your mind and everything going. I know that from the time I turned 50, things have been changing with my body, so I hope that everything remains strong and that you are able and capable to continue to lead this country forward for the next four years and beyond.

Thank you very much for your service, and happy birthday to you. Thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for your contribution. Are there any further contributions? The Chair recognizes the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I think the Attorney General said everything that needed to be said. What I think is important, and I have said this over and over again, is that the Leader of the Opposition occupies a very important constitutional office, and it is important that the operation of Government reflects that. As long as I have anything to do with it in Parliament, I will always advocate for that, because the table turns and one has to treat others in the way that one would wish to be treated.

I think the issue of fuel, or some other kind of allowance that will compensate for the use of the Leader of the Opposition's own vehicle during the period he was without one, is something that we should take up. I know, Mr. Speaker, that this is a continuing matter that we have to discuss, because I believe there was also an issue that relates to your expenditure as well. These important offices of Parliament need to be treated with respect. This is a moving issue as we move to elevate the offices of Parliament, including that of the Chaplain of Parliament, the Speaker and the Leader of the Opposition, and to improve the facilities.

All of these things need to be developed over time. I hope we can pay a little more attention to getting these things in place, working with the public and with the local branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. This has been long coming, so I am happy, and I think I have the backing and support of the entire front bench and my colleagues on the back bench in supporting this.

Thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier, for your contribution. Are there any further contributions? There being no further contributions, I will call on the Honourable Attorney General to wrap up the debate.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to Honourable Members for their contributions to the debate. Mr. Speaker, there is only one other bit of business that ought to have been dealt with today, and I think, with the leave of the House, we should lay the report from the Integrity Commission, which I know is very brief and deals only with discrete matters, but it ought to be laid for the benefit of Honourable Members. With the leave of the House, if we could have that report laid today, I think that would be a good thing. With that, Mr. Speaker, I am grateful once again to Members for their contributions to the debate, and I move, pursuant to Standing Order 93, that the Bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be referred to a Committee of the whole House.

Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs is that the bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be referred to the Committee of the Whole House. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Honourable Members, I would now like to suspend this Honourable House and call on the Honourable Father of the House, the elected Member for Cheshire Hall and Richmond Hill, to preside in the Committee of the Whole House. This Honourable Parliament is hereby suspended.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Please be seated. Good morning, Honourable Members. We are in the Committee of the Whole scrutinising the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026. I now call on the Clerk to read Clause 1.

Clerk:

Clause 1, Short Title and Commencement.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

I now call on the Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 1 now stand as part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Attorney General, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education, is that Clause 1 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any contributions? Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

I am grateful, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, just to insert the bracketed 1 after Clause 1, on the first line under Short Title and Commencement, right before this Act may be cited, et cetera. Mr. Chair, I so move. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Kyle Knowles:

Second.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Attorney General, seconded by the Minister of Health, is that in Clause 1, bracketed 1 be inserted. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Any further contributions? Any further contributions? There being no further contributions, the motion is that Clause 1 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 2, Interpretation.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 2 now stand as part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Attorney General, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education, is that Clause 2 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Any contributions? Any contributions? There being no contributions, the question is that Clause 2 now stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 3, Long Title amended.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 3 now stand as part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Kyle Knowles:

Second.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Health, is that Clause 3 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Madam Clerk, are there any contributions that Clause 3 stand part of the bill? Any contributions? There being no contributions, the question is that Clause 3 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 4, Section 6 amended.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 4 now stand as part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Kyle Knowles:

Second.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General, seconded by the Honourable Minister of Health, is that Clause 4 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Any contributions? Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

I am grateful, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that, after the words Section 6 of, the word the be inserted, so that it reads Section 6 of the Principal Act, et cetera. I so move, Mr. Chair. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General is that, in Clause 4, the word the be inserted before Principal Act.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Yes.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

So moved. Seconded by the Minister of Education. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any further contributions on Clause 4? There being no further contributions, the question is that Clause 4, as amended, stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 5, Retroactive Application of Transportation Allowance.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 5 now stand as part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Kyle Knowles:

Second.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General, seconded by the Minister of Health, is that Clause 5 now stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any contributions? Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

I am grateful, Mr. Chair. Mr. Chair, I move that the word the be inserted before the words Leader of the Opposition in this clause. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Second.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General, seconded by the Minister of Education, is that the word the be inserted before Leader of the Opposition in Clause 5. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any further contributions? There being no further contributions, the question is that Clause 5, as amended, stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Honourable Members, we are now at the end of the bill. We now suspend to have the Honourable Speaker take the Chair.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, this Honourable House now resumes its sitting. Pray be seated.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Mr. Speaker, the committee met to scrutinise the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to inform you that it passed through committee with amendments. Thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much. Honourable Members, I want to thank the Honourable Father of the House, the Honourable Elected Member for Cheshire Hall and Richmond Hill, for chairing the Committee of the Whole House and overseeing the passage of this bill. Honourable Members, I will now return to the Order Paper. We are still on Orders of the Day, and we are now at the Third Reading of Bills. We will now have the third reading of the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026, to be laid by the Honourable Attorney General.

INTEGRITY COMMISSION REPORT RECOMMENDING REVISIONS TO ALLOWANCES OF THE SPEAKER AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, with the leave of the House, I wish to lay on the table of the Honourable House, in accordance with section 124 of the Constitution, the report of the Integrity Commission recommending revisions to the allowances of the Speaker and other Members of the House of Assembly, prior to having the third reading of the bill.

Mr. Speaker, do I have your leave?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Yes, you certainly do. Madam Clerk.

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY SPEAKER AND OTHER MEMBERS' SALARIES AND ALLOWANCES AMENDMENT BILL 2026

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker, and that report is laid for publication. Mr. Speaker, I move pursuant to Standing Order 99 that the bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be read for a third time. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Health is that the bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be now read a third time. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Honourable Attorney General. Sorry, Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

This Act may be cited, before its commencement, as the House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Act 2026, and, after its commencement, as the Parliament.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

I am very grateful, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, I move pursuant to Standing Order 99 that the bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 do now pass. Do I have a seconder?

AIRPORTS AUTHORITY AMENDMENT BILL 2025

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Attorney General and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs is that the bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 be now passed. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Honourable Members, the bill entitled House of Assembly Speaker and Other Members' Salaries and Allowances Amendment Bill 2026 do now pass. Honourable Members, we will now return to the Order Paper. We are still on Orders of the Day, the Second Reading of Bills, and we will now have the second reading of the Airports Authority Amendment Bill 2025, to be moved by the Honourable Minister of Education.

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Mr. Speaker, a pleasant good morning to all those persons listening in. I rise on behalf of the Minister with responsibility for PPID to state that the Act to amend the Airports Authority Act be deferred to the next sitting. Do I have a seconder?

DESTINATION MANAGEMENT FEE AMENDMENT BILL 2026

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Education, seconded by the Honourable Minister for Public Safety and Utilities, is that the bill entitled Airports Authority Amendment Bill 2025 be deferred to the next sitting of Parliament. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary say no. The ayes have it.

Honourable Members, I will now return to the Order Paper. We are still at the Second Reading of Bills, and we will now have the second reading of the Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026, to be moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism. Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Speaker, I move pursuant to Standing Order 92 that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 be now read a second time. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education is that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 be now read a second time. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Speaker, Members of Parliament, in 2023 this Government took the responsible and forward-looking step of introducing the Destination Management Fee in response to strong growth and increasing international demand for the Turks and Caicos Islands. Mr. Speaker, this was not a reactionary measure; it was a strategic one. As visitor arrivals continued to rise, it became imperative to ensure that growth did not come at the expense of our environment, our infrastructure, or our people. The Destination Management Fee ensures that those who benefit from our beaches, our marine environment and our public amenities make a direct contribution towards their preservation.

Mr. Speaker, sustainable tourism requires sustainable funding. Therefore, this measure enables us to safeguard our natural assets, enhance the visitor experience, and strengthen the long-term resilience of our local economy. It reflects responsible governance, ensuring that growth is balanced, managed and beneficial to all people. Mr. Speaker, we are here today to amend the Destination Management Fee Act. The purpose of this amendment is straightforward: to clarify definitions within the existing legislation and to ensure fairness, consistency and proper administration. This amendment is driven by responsible governance, and where operational experience reveals ambiguity in the law, it is our duty, and the duty of this Honourable House, to provide clarity.

Mr. Speaker, ambiguities in the principal Act have created operational friction with international carriers and inconsistencies in application. This amendment protects the integrity of the system and ensures smooth compliance. Good governance requires refinement when gaps are identified. To be clear, this amendment does not introduce a new fee, nor does it increase an existing rate.

Specifically, this bill clarifies who is considered a passenger for the purposes of the Act. The current ordinance does not contain a clear definition of the term passenger, which has led to ambiguity as to whether members of the flight crew are subject to this fee. It also confirms that crew members are not subject to the fee. It provides an exemption for short transit passengers who remain in the islands for less than three hours.

This bill also adjusts the age exemption to under two, which aligns with current travel standards and administrative practice. The under-two threshold mirrors the industry standard definition of infants, which is practised by most airlines and is already clearly identified on airline manifests and ticketing systems. By contrast, verifying whether a child is above the age of two but under 10 can be subjective and often relies on documentation not readily accessible at the point of sale or collection. Mr. Speaker, the Turks and Caicos Islands Airports Authority encountered significant operational friction with international carriers due to ambiguities within the principal Act.

These amendments provide the statutory clarity necessary to maintain professional relations with our airline partners and to ensure efficient and accurate revenue collection. I reiterate that the Destination Management Fee exists to support the continued enhancement of our tourism product, which includes beach management, environmental protection and the overall visitor experience. To clarify, this is not a new fee. Mr. Speaker, I commend this bill to this Honourable House.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister, for your presentation on this bill. Honourable Members, the floor is now open for debate. Are there any contributions? The Chair recognizes the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I rise to make my contribution to the Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill, let me say a pleasant good morning to all the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, particularly my constituency of Grand Turk South and Salt Cay. Let me say happy birthday to all those celebrating birthdays and anniversaries at this time.

We say happy birthday to Mr. William Botron Williams, who celebrated his 95th birthday this week. He lives in Palm Grove, as everybody knows. Happy birthday, Mr. Williams. I want to offer condolences to all the bereaved families in the Turks and Caicos Islands. May God give you comfort during this time of bereavement. Mr. Speaker, very shortly, there are no red flags in this bill. It is straightforward and it is needed. The clarifications are necessary because a lot of things were ambiguous in the bill, and I can see how persons could use that to twist things around and make matters complicated.

Clarifying who is to be charged and to whom the fees are to be administered is sensible and wise for the Turks and Caicos Government and the Ministry of Tourism to do. In a different forum, as we have to debate only the context of the bill, we will debate the overall functioning of the DMO, the use of the funds and the results showing how the funds were used. This is not the time for that. We are talking about the fees and clarifying the definitions.

I am sure I will have more than enough time to go down that road with you, Honourable Minister. I rise to support this. It makes sense. Anything that is good for the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, Mr. Speaker, I will be the first to support.

Honourable Minister, I believe this is good for the country and good for the people, so I support it. I believe the Member for the Bight also supports it, as he knows first-hand about tourism and its importance. We support it from the Opposition, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for your contribution. Are there any further contributions? The Chair recognizes the Honourable Member for South Caicos.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Good morning, Mr. Speaker. I rise today to lend my support to this bill. As the Leader of the Opposition noted, he and the Member for the Bight lend their support to this bill. On behalf of the people of South Caicos, I would also like to lend my support to this bill.

Thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. Are there any further contributions? There being no further contributions, I call on the Honourable Minister of Tourism to wrap up the debate and to commit the bill to the Committee of the Whole.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Speaker, I thank the Honourable Members for their

contributions to this debate. I move that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 be now referred to the Committee of the Whole. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Shaun David Malcolm:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, the motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs is that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 be referred to the Committee of the Whole. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Honourable Members, I will now suspend this Honourable House and call on the Honourable Minister for Cheshire Hall and Richmond Hill to chair the Committee of the Whole.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

I would like to call on the Honourable Elected Member for Richmond Hill and Cheshire Hall to chair the Committee of the Whole House. This Honourable Parliament is hereby suspended. Honourable Members, we are in the Committee of the Whole scrutinizing the Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026. Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 1, short title and commencement.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Minister of Tourism.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Honourable Chair, I move that Clause 1 now stand part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education is that Clause 1 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any contributions? Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

I am grateful, Mr. Chair. In Clause 1, there is an omission. I move that the bracketed text be deleted and substituted by the words publication in the Gazette. The bracketed text in Clause 1 should be deleted and substituted by the words publication in the Gazette. I so move, Mr. Chair.

Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Can you please repeat that, Honourable Attorney General?

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Grateful, Mr. Chair. In Clause 1, I move that the bracketed text be deleted and substituted by the words publication in the Gazette. I so move, Mr. Chair.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Yes. Can you read it first, please?

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Mr. Chair, may I approach?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Yes. Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

I am grateful, Mr. Chair. I withdraw my motion. Thank you.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Thank you, Madam Attorney General. Are there any further contributions? There being no further contributions, the

question is that Clause 1 stand part of the bill. Those in favour, aye. Those to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 2, interpretation.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 2 stand part of the Act. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Deputy Premier is that Clause 2 stand part of the bill. Those in favour, aye. Those to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any contributions? There being no contributions, the question is that Clause 2 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 3, Section 2 amended.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 3 stand part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Second.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education is that Clause 3 now stand part of the bill. Those in favour, aye. Those to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any contributions? Recognizing the Ninth All Island Elected Member.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just an observation, as the Honourable Attorney General did earlier: after the word of, we should insert the word the, so that it reads Section 3 of the Principal Act instead of Section 2 of Principal Act. Let me rephrase, Mr. Chair. I move that Clause 3 be amended to read as follows: Section 2 of the Principal Act. Can I have a seconder?

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Second.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Ninth All Island Elected Member and seconded by the Elected Member for South Caicos is that Clause 3 be amended to read Section 2 of the Principal Act. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any further contributions to Clause 3? There being no further contributions, the question is that Clause 3 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 4, Section 3 amended.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 4 stand part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Minister for Education is that Clause 4 now stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any contributions? There being no contributions, the question is that Clause 4 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it.

Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

Clause 5, Section 2 amended.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Chair, I move that Clause 5 stand part of the bill. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

The motion moved by the Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Minister of Education is that Clause 5 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Are there any contributions? Yes, I recognize the Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. On this section, to the Minister: what about planes that make emergency stops here in the Turks and Caicos Islands for more than four hours or have to overnight? Has that been considered? Will they be taxed? It is still transit, but with an emergency stop passengers may have to sit here in the airport for more than four hours or even overnight if there is a sick patient or some other reason. Has that been considered anywhere?

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Through you, Mr. Chair, I am fairly certain that that is covered in the principal Act. There is no charge in the event of an emergency or for emergency transit passengers.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Yes, it is section 5. So that is covered in the principal Act, that they are exempted from paying those fees regardless of how long, even if it is over three hours that they have to sit at the airport.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Are there any further contributions?

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Mr. Chair.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Member, elected member for South Caicos.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Through the Chair, my concern is the transit passengers and understanding the rationale behind their being exempt from paying anything because they are in transit. I am just trying to understand the rationale behind that.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Honourable Minister, could you answer?

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

We have had this question before and we have defined the answer. Transit passengers who remain in the Islands for less than three hours do not meaningfully access or benefit from the tourism product that the destination management fee supports. Charging them would be commercially unreasonable and inconsistent with international norms. The exemption ensures fairness and protects our relationship with carriers.

The omission of an in-transit exemption was a significant outlier in regional aviation policy, and the proposed three-hour limit is practical and enforceable, providing the TCIAA with the legal shield necessary to deny or approve refund requests. It prevents us from exposure in terms of airlines seeking refunds for transit passengers.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Just a quick follow-up. Thank you, Honourable Minister. My thought process was that the transit passengers will be using our facility in terms of our terminal building and our airport, and I was considering that to be some form of consolidation for using it.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Remember, the destination management fee speaks specifically to the tourism amenities and the tourism industry. I am not disagreeing with you, but I imagine that would be subject to a different fee other than the destination management fee, which serves a specific purpose. This money is assigned to a specific area and used for a specific purpose.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Are there any further contributions? There being no further contributions, the question is that clause 5 stand part of the bill. All in favour, aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Honourable Members, we have come to the end of the Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026. I now suspend to wait for the Speaker to take the Chair. This committee is now suspended.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, this Honourable House now resumes its sitting. Pray be seated. Honourable Member.

Hon. Samuel Ernest Been:

Yes, Mr. Speaker. We have come to the end of scrutinising the Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026, and I am pleased to inform you that this bill is passed with amendments.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. I have had some coffee now, so let me see if I can get this right. Honourable Members, I want to thank the Honourable Elected Member for Cheshire Hall and Richmond Hill for chairing the Committee of the Whole and overseeing the passage of this bill.

Honourable Members, I will now return to the Order Paper, and we are now at the third reading of bills. I call on the Honourable Minister for Tourism to move for the third reading of the Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026. Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Speaker, I move that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 be read for a third time in accordance with Standing Order 99. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Kyle Knowles:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Health, that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 now be read for a third time. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Madam Clerk.

Clerk:

This Act may be cited as the Destination Management Fee Amendment Act 2026 and shall come into operation on publication in the Gazette.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Madam Clerk. Honourable Minister.

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 99, I move that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 do now pass. Do I have a seconder?

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Second.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, motion moved by the Honourable Minister of Tourism and seconded by the Honourable Minister of Education, that the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 do now pass. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Honourable Members, the bill entitled Destination Management Fee Amendment Bill 2026 do now pass. Members, I will now return to the Order Paper, and we are still at the second reading of bills, and we will have the second reading of the Mortgage Corporation Bill 2026, to be moved by the Honourable Premier. Honourable Premier.

MORTGAGE CORPORATION BILL 2026

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. In relation to the Mortgage Corporation Bill 2026, I move that this be deferred until the next sitting of the Honourable Parliament. Second.

TWO MINUTE SPEECHES BY MEMBERS

TWO MINUTE SPEECHES BY MEMBERS

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, motion moved by the Honourable Premier, seconded by the Honourable Member for South Caicos, that the bill entitled Mortgage Corporation Bill 2026 be deferred until the next sitting of Parliament. All in favour say aye. All to the contrary, no. The ayes have it. Honourable Members, I would now like to return to the Order Paper, and we are now at two-minute speeches by Members. The floor is now open for two-minute speeches. Are there any contributions? The Chair recognizes the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker. As I had already wished happy birthdays and condolences to those persons celebrating and mourning throughout the country, I want to deal with an issue that is emerging here in Grand Turk. Recently, we have heard of about three different incidents where tourist cruise ship passengers have been robbed at gunpoint here in Grand Turk over the last week, Mr. Speaker, at Governor's Beach in particular, Little Bluff, and another place. I hope that those in authority can nip this in the bud right away before it spreads. I was disheartened when I heard about it. It really took me aback that this is happening now here, that persons are targeting tourists.

I did not even want to say this over the airwaves, but it has to be said, and I hope that we deal with it right away and crush whatever is going on. That cannot happen here in Grand Turk, and it should not happen throughout the Turks and Caicos Islands. I have seen where we have got a hold of things in Providenciales, which I am sure the entire country is most grateful for, but now we cannot neglect other areas where there are so many tourists.

We have to remember that Grand Turk receives over a million tourists, and these tourists are up and about, not in a resort around a pool. They are up and about throughout the community and throughout the island. There is a need for more protection and more surveillance. During the budget debate, I will be bringing up the question of CCTV cameras when we have the police and the different departments before us.

We have to protect the goose that is laying our golden eggs, and we cannot let that get out of hand. I want to caution everybody out there, all those who have a position of authority to impact us, to deal with that matter. The second matter is that we had an issue throughout the Turks and Caicos Islands. At the commencement of March, all justices of the peace had stamps that expired, and that is something that should not have happened. There was no one legally able to sign any documents as JPs from 1 March going forward. I do not know how that came about or who dropped the ball somewhere, but all the JP stamps had legally expired on 1 March.

Persons going to them realised, I cannot sign that; that would be against the law. I do not know if it has since been corrected, which I hope, but that is something that should not happen. I have never seen it happen before. I do not know what led to it happening, but I do not know if the Premier is aware of it.

The Deputy, I think, is someone we need to look to, to see why it happened and what caused all the stamps of all the JPs to expire on 1 March and not be renewed, or whatever happened to make their stamps null and void. Those are the two issues that were heavy on me today to bring to this House of Assembly in my two-minute speech. Later on, I will address other issues. I am happy to see that, in relation to the airline situation, the Government heard the cries of the people and acted.

That is all we are asking for, and I must thank the relevant Ministries, in particular the Premier, for acting on that and getting that sorted out for the persons. Now we have to see it in operation and hope that it continues to serve the best interests of the people. I know that the Honourable Member for South Caicos may have some issues on the airlines, but we have to ensure that, particularly for Salt Cay and South Caicos, the airline coverage is adequate for the people, as we are paying the subsidies. The people are paying the money through the Government. I want to again give credit where credit is due to the Honourable Premier and his Cabinet team for dealing with that for the people of Salt Cay.

Thank you very much, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for your contribution. Are there any further contributions? The Chair recognizes the Honourable Minister of Home Affairs.

Hon. Shaun David Malcolm:

Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. As I am not doing a ministerial statement today, I want to raise two issues during my two-minute contribution. First, I want to say good afternoon to you, my colleagues in this House, those in the gallery, especially the First Lady, and all the wonderful people across these Turks and Caicos Islands whom I am proud to represent, from Gibbs Cay to West Caicos.

I, too, want to say happy birthday to the Premier as he celebrates today. He is a young man with whom I have had the privilege of working for the last 30 years, with a break in between. When I started out, I was in my 20s and he was in his 50s. Now he is in his 70s and I am in my 50s, so time does fly.

I will be 54 in the next two weeks as well. I pray that God will continue to strengthen him and bless him with long life, as we came from the same genealogy in Bottle Creek. I would also like to wish my beautiful daughter, Shania Malcolm, who is celebrating her 23rd birthday tomorrow, as she listens there in London. She is one of my heartstrings.

She knows I love her like she loves mud. Also, my oldest niece will be celebrating her birthday there in Fort Lauderdale on Sunday, and they will be the same age, so my brother and I were working together. Amen. Also, cousin Bert Williams, who celebrated his 95th birthday. He is a Reeds man here from Grand Turk. I pray that God will continue to strengthen him.

I also want to register my condolences to all those who have passed, especially to the young lady who lost her life last Friday in that tragic accident, Miss Mary Morley. As you know, I spent some time at the Clement Howell High School as a teacher, and she was one of the few hundred persons I had the privilege to teach during that time. I pray that God will strengthen her family in this time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Shaun David Malcolm:

Mr. Speaker, the two issues I want to raise quickly are these. First, I want to let the public know that I am cognisant of the fact that many persons are still walking in the morning because of the lack of transportation, as the crackdown on the jitney issue continues, and it will continue until we get them all off the streets.

For those persons waiting for the community cab to roll out, I want them to know that we have already received Cabinet approval to move ahead. There is one area that requires amendment in this Parliament, and the drafting instruction has been done and is being worked on. Hopefully, at the next sitting, with the blessing of the Leader of the Opposition, we may be able to get it through in three readings, and by the end of the month we can roll out the community cab, especially in Providenciales, so those persons will not have to walk in the morning.

We want them to know that we are working. I also want to put the public on notice that the long-awaited draft amendment Act has been formalised, which is great news for the people of this country. It is getting ready to come to this Parliament, hopefully in the next sitting as well, dealing with the removal of all import permit requirements for vehicles that are within 10 years old. I know the country is anxiously waiting for the time when people no longer have to write in for permission to bring in their vehicles once they are under 10 years old. We will move that, Member for South Caicos. I want the public to know that their Minister is not sitting down.

We are working, and these things will be implemented. We are also dealing with those Japanese cars. That is coming to the House too with this amendment. I wish I could have put zero more years on it, but as a first step Cabinet has granted approval to move it from 10 years to five years.

In the next few weeks, persons will not be able to bring any Japanese cars over five years old into this country. We have enough problems dealing with congestion on the streets, and hopefully the next amendment I bring to this House will allow none to come into this country. With that, Mr. Speaker, I want to bid the people of these Turks and Caicos Islands a very safe and blessed weekend, as I will be in Provo with my High Rigby family as we mourn the loss of cousin Cicely Ewing Rigby and little Shanice this coming Sunday.

With that, Mr. Speaker, have a blessed afternoon, and may God continue to bless all the people of these Turks and Caicos Islands.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for your contribution. The Chair recognises the Honourable Ninth All Island Elected Member for his contribution.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, honourable colleagues, strangers in the gallery and everyone listening by various means. Mr. Speaker, first let me wish a very happy birthday to our Premier. May God continue to give him strength and good health. Also, for the vision of the Honourable Leader of the Opposition, may he continue to lead us for the next four years and beyond. That tells the country who is going to lead this country for the next four years and

beyond, and we thank you. Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the recent update on the overseas medical treatment programme, which has been discussed at the barbershop, at the hairdresser, at the supermarket, at town hall meetings, and everywhere you turn people ask questions.

Let me begin by reminding everyone of the purpose of the National Health Insurance system. It was established to facilitate accessible, affordable and quality healthcare for its beneficiaries, and to ensure that the resources of this plan are responsibly administered for those entitled to its benefits. The law is clear. Overseas treatment is not a first option. It is a specialised mechanism used when the required medical service is not available in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

It must be assessed through a formal referral process. These treatments involve travel, specialised care, accommodation and sometimes long-term support. They come at a significant cost to the public. The reality we must confront is that healthcare costs across the region and internationally continue to rise sharply. The Government has a duty, both moral and legal, to ensure that these limited resources are directed towards those with a clear and permanent legal connection to the Turks and Caicos Islands. The update announced by the Ministry of Health does exactly that. Going forward, eligibility for government-funded overseas treatment programmes will be reserved for individuals who hold Turks and Caicos Islander status, British Overseas citizenship, or a status card. Mr. Speaker, this is not discrimination.

This is responsible governance. Every sovereign nation makes decisions that prioritise the wellbeing of its citizens. The United States makes decisions for Americans. Jamaica makes decisions in the best interests of Jamaicans. The Dominican Republic makes decisions in the best interests of Dominicans. In the very same way, the elected representatives of the Turks and Caicos Islands and the executive branch must make decisions in the best interests of all Turks and Caicos Islanders. That is our duty, that is our mandate, and that is precisely what this policy adjustment reflects. It is also important to emphasise that this measure is targeted and fair.

First, patients who are already overseas receiving treatment under approved plans will not be affected. Their care will continue for the duration of the treatment that was approved. Secondly, this change applies only to government-funded overseas medical referrals. Access to healthcare in the Turks and Caicos Islands will continue to be covered by the NHIP under the framework that remains unchanged.

Thirdly, the Government continues to invest significantly in strengthening our local healthcare capacity, expanding specialist services, improving diagnostics and upgrading clinical infrastructure, as you will see with the polyclinic planned for Providenciales. To those residents who may be affected by this change, I want to speak directly and respectfully. We understand that healthcare is deeply personal. It touches families, livelihoods and life itself. But responsible leadership requires us to make decisions that protect the long-term sustainability of our national healthcare system, not only for today but for future generations of Turks and Caicos Islanders. Again, this is not discrimination or exclusion.

It is about a distinction we are making for the benefit of our people and generations to come. The national healthcare system is a cornerstone of social protection in these Islands. Protecting its sustainability is not optional; it is essential. I therefore ask those residents affected to view this measure not through the lens of division or discrimination, but through the lens of stewardship: the stewardship of public funds, the stewardship of national healthcare, and the stewardship of the future of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Before I sit down, I also wish my brother, Daneri Belliard, a very happy birthday as he celebrates today. These are very challenging times, and I pray that God will continue to give him health and long life. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for your contribution. The Chair recognises the Honourable Minister of Health for his contribution.

Hon. Kyle Knowles:

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, persons in the gallery, and the wonderful people of Wheeland and West Caicos, whom I have the privilege of serving once again. Mr. Speaker, I would like to associate myself with the birthday greetings to our Honourable Premier. One thing I can say is that my political journey started with the Premier, and I have the pleasure of being here in this House because of God's grace and his wisdom. I also want to give a shout-out to my father, Mr. Samuel Knowles, Mr. Vincent Parker and Mr. Charles Palmer, who are listening via the internet.

I extend condolences to my family and to the family of the late Sister Ewing, who was my grandaunt. That may be news to some of you, but again this shows how intertwined we are here in the Turks and Caicos Islands, as my colleague the Minister of Home Affairs has always made us aware. Mr. Speaker, I want to share some information about my constituency and some of the things that have been happening.

Through the Constituency Council, we have the Easter kids' event happening on 4 April and the senior citizens' breakfast on 25 April. While it is some time away, I thought it best to make it known so that persons around these Islands know that, even though I may be burdened and working hard in the Ministry of Health, I am still making time and effort to ensure that my constituency is always taken care of.

Last week, through our constituency team, we moved throughout the area carrying out menial but important work, clearing some roads and bushes, and doing things that we as a committee and team decided to do to ensure that our footprint remains strong in the constituency. Again, the Wheeland Fish Fry, something I have been talking about for

some time, is almost finished. The landscaping has started, and we now only have to move into getting the other infrastructural components in place. Soon, Mr. Speaker, I will be inviting everyone to the Wheeland Fish Fry.

When this happens, it will be a great and proud day for the constituents of Wheeland and West Caicos, because they were neglected for many years. But when yours truly came in, working hard, staying committed and making sure that I delivered what the people asked for, not what I thought they needed, we were able to have this project accomplished. I wanted to pause to say this so that the community and the constituency would be aware, and so that the country is also aware of what is continuously happening in my constituency.

Of course, I will get to my ministerial statement at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you to all those persons listening.

MEMBER STATEMENTS

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for your contribution. The Chair recognizes the Honourable 8th All Island Member for her contribution.

Hon. Sharon A. Simons:

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon to my colleagues, to those persons in the gallery, and to the wonderful people of the Turks and Caicos Islands who have elected me to represent them in this Parliament, who are listening to us via Radio Turks and Caicos and viewing via our social media platforms. Mr. Speaker, let me first wish the Honourable Premier a very happy birthday.

Though his hair is getting a little grayer and his steps a little slower, may God continue to bless him with good health, long life and a sound mind, so that he can continue to lead these Turks and Caicos Islands. Mr. Speaker, I would also like to wish Mr. Albert Williams, Mr. Butt, my family, my good, good cousin according to the Minister, a very happy birthday. He celebrates 95 years. God has blessed him with long life. To all those other persons who are celebrating birthdays, those whom I may not know, and the Honourable Minister's daughter, who will be celebrating her birthday, a happy birthday.

I would also like to express my deepest sympathy and condolences to those grieving families who are grieving their lost loved ones. Mr. Speaker, today is the Premier's birthday, and I am not going to add to his grey hair or his slower steps. I would like to congratulate the Government and the Minister of Technology and the Ministry for the implementation of ePay.

Mr. Speaker, it has improved the lives of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands. For one, I can speak for it because I have used it and I did not have to stand in any lines. I can say that it is a good thing, enriching the lives of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, and I hope to see more of that where we can do that here in this House of Parliament. Mr. Speaker, I also had the privilege of attending the town hall meeting in Providenciales, where persons voiced their concerns and issues pertaining to healthcare, work permits and other issues in this country.

The Premier and his Ministers so ably explained what this Government intends to do about their concerns and issues. Mr. Speaker, we all know that it takes some time, and I think this Government will continue to listen to the issues and concerns of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands and try to alleviate the stress that is happening in this country. I was happy to see that the Honourable 9th All Island Member spoke about overseas treatment when it comes to medical care. We all know that it is a burden on this Government when it comes to overseas treatment abroad, and the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands have to understand that, in order to look out for the interests of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, there are some things that have to be implemented and changes that have to be implemented that we may not like.

The Premier and his Cabinet take the hard decisions in order for all persons in the Turks and Caicos Islands to be able to survive. Mr. Speaker, with that being said, once again I would like to wish all the persons of the Turks and Caicos Islands a good and blessed weekend.

Enjoy your weekend. I thank you very much.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member, for your contribution. The Chair recognizes the Honourable Member for South Caicos.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

I rise this morning. I was hoping I could rise and have a wonderful speech like my colleague, the Minister from Wheeland, but unfortunately I have to rise and complain like the scratched record I am. The Leader of the Opposition touched on the airline to South Caicos, but I think, with all due respect, justice was not done to the inconvenience of the airline pulling out on the people. You see, South Caicos is dependent on Grand Turk as it relates to government services as well as the hospital.

Major operations are done through the Grand Turk branch of the hospital.

Hon. Shaun David Malcolm:

Yes.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Right now, as it currently stands, we have patients who have to come to Grand Turk but have to go through Providenciales, spend the night, and go through all of this debacle just to get to Grand Turk to see the doctor. God forbid it is an emergency; we know what a delay can cause. I am no medical expert, but my scientific brother can help me with that. Mr. Speaker, I know the Premier and I had a conversation surrounding the airline, and I know he is actively working to rectify the situation.

I do not think for one minute that he does not share the same sentiments as me and wish that there was a magic wand that he could just spin. But I think that something has to be done immediately in the interim while we wait on something to be permanently fixed. I think it is not fair to the Government to be in this debacle. It is not fair to the private entity to be in this debacle, but it is more so not fair to the people of

South Caicos to be dependent on and living between, oh Lord, and thank God. So I call on the powers that be, and if it is only money, you know my feeling when it is only money. We need to get it fixed immediately. I would like to go on record in thanking, even though he is not here, the Minister for PPID, because I feel like he thought I was going to address it, so he texted me and told me that the walkway for

South Caicos has been committed, the contractor has been selected, and we should see boats coming through the cut with material as I am speaking. If that is not the case, somebody from South Caicos can text me and I can address that adequately. As it relates to the dump site, I know my colleague knows I was going there. He is probably tired of me going there, but, as I say, at the end of the day the people of South Caicos have overwhelmingly supported this Administration for the last umpteen years, and I do not think it is the Government's intention.

I think the bureaucracy needs to be addressed, because if something needs to be done, it needs to be done. Really and truly, I was just like the people on the outside, saying the Government, the Government, the Government, but there is so much bureaucracy. If we can fix the law in this Chamber, let us fix the law so that we do not have to say it is bureaucracy.

We can fix the law and get it done because it needs to be done. It is easy telling somebody we are working on it because we are, but it is hard to keep working on it and keep working on it and keep working on it without any sort of light at the end of the tunnel. The situation with the dumping at South Caicos is becoming so deplorable.

We have just added a new resort. They have three restaurants, so there is more food, more scavenging and more dumping, and there is the situation with the dogs and different animals. We have to make a cognizant effort to rectify the dump situation. We have to do something with the dump. It is not that we could do it or should do it; it is a must. Please, I beg of you, for God's sake, let us get the dump sorted out in South Caicos.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank my able colleague, the Minister of Tourism, for the signs and the houses, and the sign that was recently erected in South Caicos. It is a beautiful sign. The bird-watching benches are coming out perfectly, and I look forward to the other enhancements to the tourism product in South Caicos through the Ministry. I cannot sit without thanking the Minister of Education for her continuous support for the satellite college, which gives a lot of the younger people in the community, who are otherwise committed, the opportunity not to have to move to Providenciales or Grand Turk to go to school.

It gives them an opportunity to enhance their skills. It goes without saying that the people in South Caicos are grateful for that, and they look forward to more courses and even bachelor's degree courses online. I thank you, Honourable Minister. I would also like to call on the Minister responsible for Labour.

We have two nice hotels in South Caicos, but we do not have a labour presence in South Caicos. When there is a dispute, most people tend to run to Border Force or immigration, but it is not an immigration issue; it is a labour issue. I would like to call on the powers that be to please see that, in this upcoming Budget, we have a labour presence in

South Caicos so that people can take their disputes to the right channels. I know a lot of times we say that these things are for people visiting from Grand Turk to oversee the government aspects in South Caicos. It is not working. It cannot work. There are two barriers.

One is the cost of travel and the cost of living.

SOUTH CAICOS CONSTITUENCY ISSUES

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

In terms of hotels for civil servants, we all know that they have a travel policy by which they must abide, so it is not a blame game. The system we depended on, where we relied on Grand Turk for these things, has been outgrown. We now need to put these facilities in South Caicos so that the people of

South Caicos can have access to them and feel a part of the broader Turks and Caicos Islands. Mr. Speaker, I hope that my good Government is listening to me, because I am begging on behalf of the people of South Caicos, whom you all love dearly and in whom you believe. Each and every one of you has been there and spent time there in your respective lives. I know the Premier was once a policeman in South Caicos, so I know

South Caicos is dear to his heart. I know the Minister responsible for health is my great friend, so I know South Caicos is dear to his heart. I know the dump can get fixed. I beg you, please help me to help the people of South Caicos. Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Member. The Chair recognizes the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Mr. Speaker, given the fact that we are at the 1 o'clock hour, there are two points I would like to make quickly in response to the intervention made by the Honourable Member for South Caicos. When we come back it is question time, so we would have lost the opportunity for the two minutes.

I thank colleagues for their indulgence. As it relates to the airline into South Caicos, I am hoping that we will have a solution to that potentially by the end of today or over the weekend. Also, as it relates to the dump on South Caicos, as you know, it is on private land, and we are actively in negotiation with the owner so that we can take ownership of the property and then be more intentional about how we manage the waste there.

That is currently in negotiation as we speak. The Minister for Health has already spoken, but on his behalf, we have had a conversation. Thank you for bringing it to my attention. I followed up with the Minister, and I think he has made a commitment to do some remedial work in the meantime while we sort out the ownership and have a more structured plan or programme for maintenance.

There is more that I can say, but I realize we have gone on, and my beautiful wife came all the way here to have lunch with me, so it is time to have lunch.

SUSPENSION OF SITTING

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. It is not only his birthday, but he is also a Chairman. Honourable Members, we have just passed the 1 pm hour, and we will now take our midday break. This Honourable Parliament is hereby suspended until 2 pm.

ORAL REPLIES TO QUESTIONS

ORAL REPLIES TO QUESTIONS

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, this Honourable House now resumes its sitting. Pray be seated. Members, we have just returned from our break, and we are now at question time. We have one question for oral answer and a number of questions for written reply. Honourable Attorney General, do we also read out the questions that are for written reply, or do we not?

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

We do.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

The Chair recognizes the Honourable Attorney General.

Hon. Rhondalee M. Braithwaite-Knowles, OBE, KC:

Grateful, Mr. Speaker. Yes, all of the questions should be read out, but in terms of those that are for written reply, the Member who has asked the question can agree that the answers would be supplied without necessarily having to read all of them out. The custom and convention is to read them.

SIPT AND CIVIL RECOVERY EXPENDITURE AND RECOVERIES

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Attorney General. The first question, Honourable Members, is to be asked by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Premier be pleased to say, in light of the duration and fiscal magnitude of the SIBT proceedings, whether the Government intends to publish an annual consolidated report detailing the SIBT expenditure, the civil recovery expenditure, the value recovered, the net fiscal position, and the interest of transparency and public accountability?

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Thank you for the question, Honourable Ninth All-Island Member. The answer to question 1 is yes. Of course, this matter is ongoing, and to the extent that we can speak directly to it, one has to be careful, but that is the intention.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. The second

question is to be asked by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member to the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Premier be pleased to lay on the Table of this Honourable Parliament a comprehensive and itemized statement of all public expenditures incurred in relation to the Special Investigation and Prosecution Team and the associated civil recovery programme from their inception to the present date?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Premier. Honourable Premier, can you turn on your microphone, please?

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

The answer to that is yes. I will undertake to lay that answer on the Table, and work has already begun on compiling that schedule of expenditure or expenses. Currently, we have identified $124 million spent, but we are working on obtaining information on details of salaries that are not captured in the Turks and Caicos Islands system. That will be provided to the Honourable House in writing as soon as we have the rest of the information.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. The third question is to be asked by the Honourable All-Island Member to the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Would the Honourable Premier be pleased to lay on the Table of this Honourable Parliament the total cumulative expenditure incurred from inception to date, a year-by-year breakdown of expenditure by financial year, and the budgeted amount versus the actual expenditure for each financial year?

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Again, Mr. Speaker, the answer to that is yes. The compilation of the information is being undertaken at the moment because it is quite extensive and we want to make sure that we report accurately. That information will be forthcoming, potentially as early as the next sitting of the House. Unfortunately, I do not have the information available to lay today.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. The fourth question is to be asked by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member to the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Premier be pleased to lay on the Table of this Honourable Parliament a full breakdown of all costs directly attributed to the SIPT, including but not limited to professional legal fees paid to external counsel, including King's Counsel, junior counsel and instructing counsel; salaries, retainers or contractual payments to prosecutors, investigators and senior legal officers; remuneration, allowances, housing benefits, travel expenses, subsistence, relocation costs, pension, gratuity or any other emoluments paid to members of the SIPT team; administrative and support staff salaries and related costs; expert witness fees, forensic accounting services fees, consultancy services, court-related expenses, including construction, leasing, maintenance and utilities; operational costs associated specifically with the SIPT proceedings; security, transportation and logistical support costs; and any other direct and indirect expenditure attributable to SIPT operations?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

I undertake to lay the information requested on the Table of the House as soon as it is available, Mr. Speaker. Is that the third or fourth question?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

That is the third.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Fourth.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Fourth. One was labelled twice.

Hon. Tamell Seymour:

Number 1 was labelled twice.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Instead of being 1, 2, 3.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Yes, that is the fourth question. The fifth question is to be asked by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member to the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Yes, Mr. Speaker, number 1 was labelled twice. Will the Honourable Premier be pleased to lay on the Table of this Parliament a full breakdown of all costs incurred in relation to the civil recovery proceedings, including legal and advisory fees, asset tracing, valuation, investigative expenses, settlement negotiation, mediation costs, administrative and operational expenditure, and any contingent fee arrangement or success-based payments, if applicable?

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Mr. Speaker, again, I thank the Honourable Member for his question. I undertake to have that information laid on the Table of this House today.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. The sixth question is to be asked by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member to the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Premier be pleased to lay on the Table of this Honourable Parliament the total value of assets and funds recovered through the civil recovery proceedings over the same period, specifying cash recoveries and real property or Crown land returned, the estimated value of recovered assets at the time of recovery, the net proceeds realized by Government following the deduction of legal and administrative costs, and the amount outstanding, if any, under settlement agreements or court orders?

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Premier.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Mr. Speaker, I so undertake to do in due course, once the information is available. Thank you.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. Honourable Members, question number 7 is to be asked by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member to the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Premier be pleased to lay on the Table of this Honourable Parliament a calculation of the net fiscal impact of the SIPT and civil recovery operations, being the total cumulative expenditure minus total recoveries realized, with a statement indicating whether the programme has resulted in a net cost or a net gain to the public purse?

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Again, Mr. Speaker, I am grateful to the Honourable Member for his question, and I will ensure that information is provided to the Parliament as soon as it is available.

QUESTION 8 - SIPT AND CIVIL RECOVERY EXPENDITURE

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier. Question No. 8 is to be asked by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member to the Honourable Premier.

Hon. Willin A. Belliard:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Will the Honourable Premier be pleased to lay on the table of this Honourable Parliament under what accounting classification SIPT and civil recovery expenditure has been recorded in the national budget and financial statements; whether those expenditures have been subject to audit by the National Audit Office; whether any value-for-money assessment, cost-benefit review or independent financial evaluation has been conducted; and, if so, whether such report will be laid before this Honourable Parliament?

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

Hon. Charles Washington Misick, OBE:

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the question by the Honourable Member, and I undertake to provide that information to Parliament as soon as it is available. Parliament has an absolute right to know a breakdown of those costs, and I undertake to make them available for delivery to the Parliament. Of course, it is then up to Parliament to decide what it wishes to do.

STATEMENT BY MINISTERS

STATEMENTS BY MINISTERS

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Premier, for your response to those questions by the Honourable Ninth All-Island Member, and we look forward to receiving your written response. Thank you, Honourable Members. I will now return to the Order Paper. We are now at petitions. There are none. Government notices: there are none. Private Members' notices: there are none. Notices of questions, which we have already gone through.

We are now at statements by ministers, and we have several ministerial statements that have been provided to us. We will start with the ministerial statement of the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports and Culture. Honourable Minister.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT - MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, YOUTH, SPORTS AND CULTURE

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Stand firm and take heart. Do not let fear rule you, for God walks beside you in every step. You are never alone, and His presence will carry you through. Mr. Speaker, good afternoon to you, to the esteemed Members of this Honourable House, to those present in the gallery, including Mr. Williams, as always, and Mr. Bean from Tourism, and to all who are listening via RTC or live streaming on Facebook. I extend a special greeting to my constituents, of whom, Mr. Speaker, you are one: the people of Electoral District 9, encompassing Five Cays, South Dock and Chalk Sound. My beloved people, may God continue to bless you all. Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform this Honourable House that, around June or July of this year, I am going to be a grandmother.

Do you believe that, Mr. Speaker? I look forward to the day when I bring my grandbaby here to hear her grandmother speak and fight for the people. I promised my daughter I was not going to say that, but I could not keep it any longer. Mr. Speaker, I join my esteemed colleagues in extending warm congratulations to all those who are celebrating joyous occasions, including birthdays and anniversaries. Of course, happy birthday to our Premier.

I wish him a year filled with strength, wisdom and continued success as he leads our nation forward. May his day be blessed and surrounded by joy, on behalf of my family and the constituents of Electoral District 9. I must also add that Delcine Simmons wishes our Premier a happy birthday and expresses her gratitude for his leadership and support.

Mr. Speaker, I also take this moment to offer my heartfelt condolences to families across our islands who are experiencing loss and grief. In times of sorrow, words may not always suffice, but I hope that the collective love, support and prayers of our community provide comfort and strength to those in mourning. Condolences are extended to one of the active youth of this country, Mr. Andy Misick, on the passing of his mother, Tertia Misick, who will be laid to rest on March 19. Condolences are also extended to the bereaved family of Mrs. Mary Morley Nelson of Five Cays, who passed away last Friday during a car accident, as other Members alluded to earlier.

Her grandson, Alexander Hall, also succumbed to his injuries on Sunday of this week. Let us continue to uplift the family in prayer, including Alexander's mother, Dee Dee Howell, and Mary's husband, Mr. Nelson, whom I know very well. Condolences also to our Member from Blue Hills and my Deputy Permanent Secretary, Mr. Edgar Howell, the granduncle of the deceased child. May their souls rest in peace and rise in glory.

Mr. Speaker, for information purposes, I wish to say to the people of this country that the results for the January 2026 Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate, referred to as CSEC, were released today at noon. Congratulations are in order for those students who performed outstandingly. As I looked at the list, I noticed that we also have lifelong learners who were actively involved in the January CSEC examinations. The Inter-Primary School Track and Field Championships will be held from March 18 to 20, Wednesday to Friday of this week. We wish each primary school all the best as they compete at the national level.

The Track and Field Association will host its final qualifying meet this Saturday, March 4, at the National Stadium, after which its final team selection will be made for CARIFTA. The 53rd CARIFTA Games will take place from April 4 to 6, with track and field in Grenada and the swim meet in Martinique. The names for the swim meet have already been released, but at the next sitting I will mention both teams, for swimming as well as track and field. As we all know, this month is

College Month, and we are encouraging the wider community to get involved and engage in the celebrations.

Information can be found on the TCICC website page. Mr. Speaker, let me now go deeper into my ministerial statement, which speaks specifically to my ministry and the strides we are making, and provides updates for the people of this country. Please allow me to address an issue of paramount importance to us all: the safeguarding of our children. Our children are our most precious resource, and it is our collective duty to ensure that they are protected, nurtured and empowered to reach their full potential. Every child has the right to learn in a safe and supportive environment, free from harm, abuse and neglect. The Ministry of Education is fully committed to upholding this responsibility.

We have implemented a range of measures to enhance child safeguarding across all educational institutions, including our private schools. We have established comprehensive child protection policies and protocols that every school must follow, including rigorous background checks for all staff and mandatory training on recognising and responding to signs of abuse or neglect. We are continuously doing this on a regular basis to ensure that our teachers and educators are equipped with the information to respond in a timely manner. We have trained dedicated safeguarding officers in schools to serve as the first point of contact for any concerns, ensuring that every report is taken seriously and addressed swiftly.

We are also working closely with law enforcement, social welfare departments, the Department of Rehabilitation and Community Services, and community organisations to create a network of support. I am pleased to state that many organisations that have direct contact with children are reaching out to the Youth Department for that kind of training so that they can be equipped with the knowledge, which is very good.

Additionally, we have introduced age-appropriate education programmes to empower our children to understand their rights, recognise inappropriate behaviour and know how to seek help if needed. In safeguarding, it is important not only to look at what we are doing for adults but also to educate our children so that they can respond positively.

I want to take the opportunity to speak briefly about our Quality Assurance Unit. I wish to update this Honourable House on its work as we move towards the implementation of a national school inspection programme in the Turks and Caicos Islands. The Quality Assurance Unit is advancing its mandate to uphold and strengthen educational standards, promote quality teaching and learning, and support continuous improvement across schools. As we continue to build out our programmes, they must align with the Sustainable Development Goals. Goal 4 speaks specifically to education, so we must ensure that our programmes reflect that.

In May last year, eight quality assurance officers completed a rigorous 70-hour training programme. On top of that, the final phase of the training was completed locally from January 26 to 30 through a week-long intensive exercise that mirrored a full inspection cycle. After the training, it was critical for us to get into one of our schools, and we chose the Ianthe Pratt Primary School in Providenciales, where a mock inspection took place. I am pleased with the progress being made.

Through strong regional partnership and thorough preparation, our quality assurance officers are now well positioned to commence school inspections that will strengthen accountability, raise standards and support improved outcomes across the education system. I thought it important for us to note exactly where we are in ensuring quality within our schools. Mr. Speaker, the after-school programme is flourishing quite well. Before I go into that, I want to say how pleased I was during Education Week, when our young people within our schools made a concerted effort to showcase their talents and skills.

I was most impressed with the communication skills our young people have developed, and I want to applaud the teachers around the Turks and Caicos Islands for their efforts. This Government is always intentional. When we talked about the after-school programme, many parents were excited, and they continue to be. We have increased the number. The last time I spoke to you, we had 1,200; now we are up to 1,396.

Among the new initiatives, we are looking at kickboxing, pickleball, bodybuilding, boxing and the fishing culture. Of special note, schools have embraced the initiative to start media clubs. We now have nine schools, five high schools and four primary schools, that have risen to the challenge. This led to a collaboration with Radio Turks and Caicos Islands to expose students to the technical aspects of radio broadcasting, as well as news reading and reporting.

This is what I mean when we talk about boosting skills and taking a holistic approach to the development of our children. The after-school programme is doing quite well. Additionally, this collaboration will lead to the relaunch of the Teen Jam Show on RTC. Other activities to be incorporated in the programme are darts, chess, and financial literacy with stock market gamification. I also want to mention that the Department of Culture will take an active role in the cultural component of the after-school programme, and we are looking at strengthening mas, straw weaving and boat building.

Schools will engage in these programmes, with intentionality. The feeding programme continues to thrive. Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to talk about young people. Our young people are doing well in the Turks and Caicos Islands, and it is important for us to recognise their efforts. Last time I spoke about Ariel Neely, Ocean White, Shakia Lewis, Berenice Dickinson and Farrah Grant, who have represented the Turks and Caicos Islands both regionally and internationally. I now want to congratulate our young youth parliamentarians, who did an exceptional job in this House on Commonwealth Day. Civic education and youth engagement are critical for our young people so that they do not feel a sense of disconnection.

As I look at the various Instagram and Facebook pages, I can tell that the country has really appreciated what they have done. I thank you, Mr. Speaker, and the Clerk for your continuous leadership. A job well done. Let us always continue to put our young people at the forefront so that their voices can be heard.

I also take this opportunity to inform Parliament of another policy measure approved by Cabinet: the establishment of the Screening, Admissions, Review and Dismissal Committee for Special Needs. It is important for us to recognise that students with special needs exist in this country, and to ensure that policies are in place to address their needs. The purpose of the policy is to ensure that students with special education needs are identified early, assessed consistently, placed appropriately and monitored effectively, so that every child, regardless of island or circumstance, has equitable access to quality support and improved educational outcomes.

I am excited about that committee, which will be put in place so that there is greater oversight over what we do with special needs. We all know of the Duke of Edinburgh International Award. Because it involves many of our young people and partnerships with other organisations, we must ensure that policies are in place to address exactly how we assist these young people. The Duke of Edinburgh International Award, often called the Duke of Edinburgh programme, is a global youth development programme designed to help young people build confidence, resilience, leadership and life skills through structured personal challenges. We have put a policy in place to ensure that children, young people and vulnerable adults participating in award activities are protected by a clear, legally compliant and accountable framework fully aligned with national legislation and government standards.

We had to put in place a safeguarding policy that speaks specifically to how we are going to carry out our affairs with these young persons in the Duke of Edinburgh Award. We also introduced a whistleblower protection policy for the Duke of Edinburgh International Award. The purpose of that policy is to encourage the reporting of serious wrongdoing in the public interest while ensuring that those who come forward are protected from retaliation and treated fairly. That is what the whistleblowing policy does for our young people who will be actively involved in the Duke of Edinburgh programme, because we want our young people to have a voice.

If anything inappropriate happens, we are able to address their concerns through policy. I also want to mention that the Department of Special Needs, in collaboration with the Oseta Jolly Primary School and the Turks and Caicos Islands Football Association, successfully hosted its second annual Kick for Inclusion. It is all about kicking ball and making them feel a part of the community, because too often our special needs and neurodiverse students tend not to be included. We want to take an inclusive approach. I take this opportunity to say a special thank you to the Honourable Minister of Tourism. Because of him, we had international guests, including Miss Côte d'Ivoire from the Ivory Coast.

She came, and she came with intention.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT ON EDUCATION, YOUTH, SPORTS AND SOCIAL SERVICES

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

She has donated a sizeable cheque to the Special Needs Unit to assist us with our autism programme. The data prove that autism is on the rise, not just in the Turks and Caicos Islands but around the world, so I thank Miss Côte d'Ivoire for her donation towards special needs in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

I also thank the Minister of Tourism because we partner and gel. We cannot achieve our objectives single-handedly, so collaboration is critical. On Monday, 16 March, the Ianthe Pratt Primary School will hold its school garden ribbon-cutting ceremony as it reaps the harvest from its hydroponics farm. I am excited, because hydroponics—growing plants without soil, using nutrient-rich water—has become an increasingly valuable tool in schools, not only for STEM learning but also for teaching sustainability, environmental stewardship and food security. We are ensuring that that is embedded into our schools very early. On another note, Mr. Speaker, I was so excited last Friday.

We had the opportunity to host a mega gala for our teachers.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION

Hon. Rachel Marshall Taylor:

Mr. Speaker, indeed it was mega. You see, Mr. Speaker, I am a former teacher, former principal and head of school, so I know what it means and what it feels like to be appreciated. We had over 420 teachers in one space, and I want to say, Mr. Speaker, our theme for Education Week was: Where parents lead, children succeed.

I saw parents from all walks of life and different professions coming on board with us to ensure that our teachers were well appreciated. My ministry did not have to spend much money on food because that was donated by our parents. You could actually taste the TCI flavour in that food, Mr. Speaker. It was scrumptious.

Thanks to all the hotels that decided that they would come on board with us. Mr. Speaker, each prize was donated with love. We had round-trip tickets anywhere in the Caribbean from InterCaribbean and round-trip tickets anywhere from Caicos Express. Provo Travel came on board and gave a round-trip ticket anywhere in America.

To top that off, JetBlue said that if they were going to give one, it would give two round-trip tickets to New York. Those were some of the highlights of the evening. Mr. Speaker, I will not talk about the hotels and weekend stays, but let me take this opportunity to identify our awardees.

In early childhood education, Kristeva Williams from the Iris Stubbs Primary School and Sabrina Hanfield from the Ianthe Primary School. Teacher of the Year for primary school went to Alva Roberts from the Oseta Jolly Primary School and Melicia Frater from Preparing Little Minds. Teacher of the Year for secondary school went to Christina Williams from Clement Howell High School and Marion Malabry from Precious Treasures. Assistant Teacher of the Year went to Jamila Jackson from the Thelma Lightbourne Primary School.

Counsellor of the Year went to Corinne Barbara. Excellence in special educational needs was also recognised. Mr. Speaker, we had many opportunities. When it comes to the Sustainable Development Goals, they speak about inclusion, and as Minister of Education we were intentional to ensure that support was given not only to government schools but also to private schools.

I take this opportunity to say thank you to our teachers. All information will be in the public domain by the end of the day. Mr. Speaker, I also take this opportunity to say a special thank you to the constituents and to let them know that all the works that I talked about last time will continue. It would be too long, because in ED9 we are doing big things.

My list is so long that I do not want to deprive one of the ministers of delivering his ministerial speech, but they will see it on social media in a few minutes. Thank you, and have a wonderful day.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SERVICES

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you, Honourable Minister, for your ministerial statement. We will now move on to the Honourable Minister for Health and Human Services for his ministerial statement. He is saying that he will allow us to hear the Honourable Deputy Premier and Minister of Immigration and Border Services for his ministerial statement.

Hon. Jamell Rayan Robinson:

Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, colleagues, strangers in the gallery, those listening on Radio Turks and Caicos, as well as on the House of Assembly or Parliament Facebook page. I thank the Minister of Health for yielding and giving me the extra time so that I can expound on the things that are happening within our ministry.

Mr. Speaker and honourable members of Parliament, before I proceed, I wish to pause and extend, on behalf of the Ministry of Immigration and Border Services, our deepest sympathies to families across our Turks and Caicos Islands who have recently experienced the loss of loved ones. We recognise the weight that grief places upon our communities, and we stand with you in compassion and continued support during this time. We also extend condolences to our former CARICOM Youth Ambassador, Mr. Andy Missick, on the loss of his mother, and to all others as well. I would also like to wish a happy birthday to our Premier, whose birthday is today, as well as to Mr. Bertram Williams, who is celebrating his 95th birthday today, Mr. Denary Belyard, my classmate, who is celebrating his 45th birthday today, and Shania Malcolm, daughter of the Minister of Home Affairs, Religious Affairs, Transportation, Gender Affairs and every other affairs there is, Mr. Speaker. Mr. Speaker, the Ministry of Immigration and Border Services remains steadfast in its mandate to safeguard our borders, strengthen regulatory oversight and modernise the delivery of immigration and employment services across the Turks and Caicos Islands.

I rise to provide this Honourable Parliament and the people of our islands with an update on the progress made across the ministry during the past year, and to outline the strategic initiatives that are shaping a more secure, efficient and accountable immigration and border management service. I turn quickly to employment services modernisation. Mr. Speaker, the Employment Services Department continues to advance reforms aimed at modernising service delivery while strengthening transparency, accountability and regulatory compliance. A key milestone in this effort was the introduction of the Application Processing System, which represents an important step forward in improving the management and processing of work permit applications.

Since the rollout on 1 December 2025, the APS platform has recorded 2,444 applications, reflecting the growing reliance on this digital system by employers and applicants. That is a correction to what I said at the town hall meeting, where I said there were over 8,000. It was over 8,000 in total that would have been applied for from its introduction in June 2024 to date. I need more persons to utilise the system because it is more efficient and better than going the paper-based route.

I implore the general public, agencies and all persons in corporate entities who are using the system to do so.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

The Chair recognises the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Mr. Speaker, what the minister is doing is important, so I want you to look at the quorum to ensure that, if members are outside, we do not go below quorum.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

We currently have a quorum, but if we lose another member we will not have a quorum.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

To ensure that the Honourable Minister can continue with his speech.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

If there are any members outside, please ask them to come inside. Thank you. Proceed, Honourable Member.

Hon. Jamell Rayan Robinson:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Thank you, Leader of the Opposition. Importantly, Mr. Speaker, the implementation of the APS has also improved processing timelines. At present, the average turnaround time for work permit applications is approximately 21 days, while labour clearances are processed within approximately 14 days. That refers to those that are on the system and are being paid. I am pleased to report that 576 applications have been successfully completed through the APS system since its introduction in December 2025. A further 693 applications are currently in progress and are awaiting the payment of outstanding balance receipts before they can be finalised. I note that because often persons complain about processes being stalled or things not going through, but if you have an unpaid balance receipt, you cannot get a work permit.

It is up to you, once you have your balance receipt, meaning the 90%, to move forward and pay it so that we can continue the process. Mr. Speaker, I take this opportunity to encourage members of the public to be diligent in settling the required balance receipts in a timely manner, as applications can only be completed once these payments have been received. As previously said, the efficiency of the system depends not only on the work of the department but also on the timely cooperation of applicants. This progress highlights the tangible benefits of modernising our administrative systems and strengthening the efficiency of our labour administration. The system has helped to improve transparency, reduce administrative bottlenecks and support a more structured processing environment within the department.

Again, I say to all applicants for work permits: please go through the APS system. It is online, it is efficient, and it makes things easier so that you can get an answer quickly. Mr. Speaker, while the APS system represents a significant improvement in the way applications are processed today, it is also important to recognise that this platform serves as an interim step in the ministry's broader modernisation agenda. The APS system is helping to lay the foundation for the Digital Borders Programme, which will introduce a fully integrated digital framework for immigration, border management and identity verification across the Turks and Caicos Islands. The experience gained through operating the APS system is therefore helping to prepare both the ministry and the public for the more advanced digital systems that will form part of the digital borders transformation now under way.

Mr. Speaker, work permit processing continues to be a sore topic and a vexing issue within the ministry. However, our team continues to navigate these challenges to allow for greater efficiency and accountability. As such, it gives me great pleasure to report to this Parliament and the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, particularly the business community, that the Labour and Employment Services Department has secured 20 temporary positions to assist with the tremendous backlog and delays previously experienced. I wish at this juncture to recognise my Permanent Secretary, Ms. Althea Bean, the Deputy Permanent Secretary and the team within the Ministry of Immigration and Border Services for aggressively and diligently pursuing this matter and identifying the necessary funding for this undertaking. We also owe a debt of gratitude to Her Excellency the Deputy Governor, Anya Williams, and her team within the Human Resource Management Directorate for granting approval and facilitating the onboarding of these individuals.

This is another key indication of my ministry's and this Government's commitment to fulfilling its obligations to the people of these islands. Mr. Speaker, I turn to the Labour Tribunal update. As we strengthen employment services administration, it is equally important to update this Honourable House on the work of the Labour Tribunal. The Labour Tribunal continues to fulfil its mandate by providing fair, timely and accessible resolution in accordance with the Employment Act, for which we set up, at the last meeting, the Select Committee to Review the Employment Act, chaired by our Deputy Speaker and including other members of the House and technical members.

During the period 1 October to 31 December 2025, the Tribunal recorded 29 hearings, with 24 held in Providenciales and five in Grand Turk, at the newly established courtroom at the Labour Tribunal office. Beyond its adjudicative role, the Tribunal has also continued public education and outreach efforts, including public information sessions and engagement within the TCI Cadet Programme. Mr. Speaker, I turn to the Digital Borders Programme. Border security and modernisation remain central to this Government's priority.

In December 2025, the Turks and Caicos Government executed a contract with Vision Box, recently acquired by Amadeus, following an extensive and rigorous procurement process. Work on this transformative project officially commenced earlier this month with senior representatives from Amadeus and their subcontractors, Arvision AI and Red X, along with their technical teams. Initial site surveys have already been conducted across Providenciales, South Caicos and North Caicos, with Grand Turk to follow. This significant milestone marks the beginning of an 18-month journey to deliver digital technology solutions designed to strengthen border security, modernise operations and improve the way we serve citizens, residents and visitors alike.

A key component of the project will be the introduction of automatic border crossing technology through secure e-gate systems, which will significantly improve the efficiency of border crossings. From mid-2027, which is close to 18 months from now, hundreds of thousands of international travellers are expected to cross the Turks and Caicos Islands borders using these systems, benefiting from biometric identification validation and document authentication.

MINISTRY OF IMMIGRATION AND BORDER SERVICES UPDATE

Hon. Jamell Rayan Robinson:

I was jumping over that—and real-time monitoring. The programme will also introduce biometric registration

requirements for non-citizens, with biometric capture devices deployed across international airports, detention centres and Government offices. Additionally, mobile biometric devices will be issued to law enforcement officers, enabling faster identification of migrants in the field and strengthening operations.

Strengthening compliance also includes ensuring that customs revenues due to the Government are properly declared and collected. Since 2024, the Border Force Compliance Unit has undertaken extensive engagement with importers to regularise outstanding obligations. Those efforts have included direct meetings, training sessions, compliance notices, extended deadlines and structured compliance plans. Those collaborative efforts have yielded significant results, with $17.4 million recovered between January 2024 and December 2025 from historically outstanding declarations and unpaid entries dating back to 2020.

It is also important to recognise the scale of activity within the courier sector. Courier operators collectively generate approximately $8.64 million annually in revenue from import duties and customs processing fees. That is a very key figure, and I will touch back on that in a few minutes. These figures underscore the importance of maintaining strong compliance frameworks while ensuring the efficient movement of legitimate trade. Where accounts remain significantly out of compliance, the Border Force implemented targeted measures, including the temporary suspension of deferred payment facilities for certain accounts. Courier operators who achieve these thresholds and maintain the agreed pace of compliance will be considered for reinstatement of deferred payment privileges. Conversely, failure to adhere to agreed compliance arrangements may result in continued suspension of the facility and consideration of further enforcement measures in accordance with the Customs Ordinance.

It is important to emphasise that this measure does not prevent the continued importation or clearance of goods. Cargo may still be released through the standard customs clearing process on a cash basis, with duties paid prior to release. Priority clearance continues to be provided for medications, frozen goods, perishables and other essential supplies to minimise disruption to the public. These measures are not intended to hinder legitimate trade, but rather to protect public revenue and ensure that all operators meet their statutory obligations.

Border Force remains committed to maintaining a fair, transparent and predictable trade environment while ensuring that all operators meet their statutory obligations and that the revenue of the Turks and Caicos Islands is properly protected. This is where I am going to ad-lib for a second. Earlier I mentioned that couriers, on average, generate about $8.64 million in trade and import duties.

Based on our estimates and analysis of the entries we reviewed through the post-clearance audit function, there is roughly $890,000 in arrears per year. On average, about 91% of the moneys due to Government is collected, with a 9% outage based on the review going back. When persons run to the media to make it look like my staff are not doing their job, I have a problem with that, because a 91% success rate on anything is an A*. For persons to behave as though my staff are not doing their job, I cannot accept that.

To go further, the various ordinances, including the Customs Ordinance and the Public Finance Management Ordinance, allow the ability to go back, because they envisage an environment where some things will naturally be missed. Under the Customs Ordinance, documents must be secured for up to five years. Under the Public Finance Management Ordinance, certain records must be kept. Customs entries, whether electronic or hard copy, must be held for 20 years.

Invoices, statements and bills must be held under the PFMO for up to seven years, because it envisages the opportunity for an internal audit, the post-clearance audit function within Customs, or an external audit to check how well we are doing our job. The wisdom of previous legislators ensured that we have that opportunity. One particular courier—and I can read an excerpt straight from the matter, because some questions were asked—made it appear, after headlines accusing my ministry and my officers of being slack for doing their job under the law, that Government came to them and said, “Give us $3 million or you cannot operate.” The truth of the matter, which is in the article if one reaches the bottom part where the responses from my ministry were given, is that the courier reached out to our team to ask whether, if it made a $3 million payment to cover what it believed was roughly outstanding, it could continue to operate on the previous terms.

In communicating back to them what they had communicated to us over the phone, they are making it look like we came after them in that manner, when that is far from the truth. The fact of the matter is that, particularly for couriers and other importers who have pre-clearance, when we collect our packages from those couriers, we pay, or they do not release the package. On their books are the amount they collected for their service and the amount they charged the customer for our money—the people’s money. If a company is not administering its affairs properly and the Government comes after its revenue for the people so that we can deliver on this great mandate, that is not our fault; that is the company’s fault.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

GOVERNMENT BUSINESS

Hon. Jamell Rayan Robinson:

When you are ready to collect our money, it is sitting in your accounts; give us our money, because you already had it. We know you had it because the entry was made, even if it was partial. You released it to the customer, and we know that you do not release packages unless they pay. Somewhere, the money is there.

Give us what we are asking for. We are not begging. It is our money. Let us properly collect the taxes on behalf of the people of this country, Mr. Speaker. If we do not do our job, it is a problem. People say that government does not like to do this, that it is loose and lawless, and everything else under the sun. When we say that we have the ordinance to back us and

can go back five years to see how we performed, and whether we missed anything, which is a normal part of business, we realise that people owe, that they do not have the correct entries on the system, or that some entries are incomplete. We then say, this is what you have outstanding; please bring it up so that we can note exactly what is owed and so that you can remit payment to the Government of the Turks and Caicos Islands on behalf of the people.

That is simple science, Mr. Speaker. We are doing our job. We do not need fanfare for doing our job, but do not make it look like it is a problem when we do our job. I will continue, because another hot topic on the vlogs and social media is CARICOM.

The work of the Ministry also extends beyond national borders through active engagement with our regional partners. I had the privilege of attending the 50th Regular Meeting of the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community, held in Basseterre, St. Kitts and Nevis, from 24 to 27 February 2026, under the theme Beyond Words: Action Today for a Thriving Sustainable CARICOM. The meeting was convened under the chairmanship of the Honourable Dr. Terrance Drew, Prime Minister of St. Kitts and Nevis. Discussions during the conference emphasised the importance of strengthening regional co-operation in addressing shared challenges such as transnational crime, illicit firearms trafficking, narcotics trafficking, cybercrime, money laundering, regional security, food security and effective border management.

Among the discussions was the position of a number of overseas territories and associate members regarding co-operation and the continued advancement towards full membership within the Caribbean Community. Full membership in CARICOM would present meaningful opportunities for the Turks and Caicos Islands. It would strengthen our ability to engage more fully in regional decision making, enhance co-operation on matters such as border security and law enforcement, and provide greater access to shared frameworks for addressing crime, trade, food security and disaster response. We are already part of CDEMA disaster response.

We are part of CARPHA, the Caribbean Public Health Agency. I got that right, Minister of Health?

Hon. Kyle Knowles:

Yes.

Hon. Jamell Rayan Robinson:

With the other minister's help. I also see the Minister's help from before. We are part of these organisations. On the crime and national security front, if it were not for the ability of our Premier, the Honourable Charles Washington Misick, to pick up the phone and call the Right Excellent Honourable Philip Brave Davis, Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas, in 2022 going into 2023, we would not have had the 30-plus Bahamian officers to come here and help us quell the crime.

If it were not for the ability of our Premier to pick up the phone in 2024 and call the Most Honourable Andrew Holness, Prime Minister of Jamaica, to help secure 50 Jamaican tactical officers, who knows what the crime situation would be in these beautiful-by-nature Turks and Caicos Islands today? Who knows what our tourism industry would look like? Who knows what our economy would look like? Who even knows what the makeup of this House of Assembly would look like if crime had continued to rise the way it was rising, Mr. Speaker? That was our CARICOM brothers and sisters. Imagine, if we were full members, how much more access we would have, and how much more negotiation we could do for the benefit of our region, not just for our country.

I will leave that there.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

The Chair recognizes the Honourable Leader of the Opposition.

Hon. Edwin Andre Astwood:

Mr. Speaker, before the Minister continues, I want to thank him for reporting to the House on a trip that he made and its benefit to the Turks and Caicos Islands. This was not planned. I am not knocking any ministers, but I think that should be the example. We know exactly how it benefited the Turks and Caicos Islands and what it was all about. I want to congratulate him before he moves on from this point.

This is not sucking up; I have to give credit where credit is due, because when he is doing wrong I will be the first to say it. We have not heard too much of that in the House, where we can clearly see the benefit of the minister travelling for the Turks and Caicos Islands. Kudos to you, Honourable Minister, on that, and fellow ministers should follow suit.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you. Please proceed, Honourable Minister.

Hon. Jamell Rayan Robinson:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker, and thank you, Honourable Leader of the Opposition. I do not know if I can call you and thank you, godbrother, but thank you, godbrother. I do not know if that is parliamentary, but I have said it. Protocol Department update, Mr. Speaker. Work is also ongoing to strengthen and enhance the operations of the Protocol Unit. As part of these

efforts, the Ministry is currently in the process of onboarding a Protocol Officer who will assist in supporting the increasing number of official engagements and responsibilities managed by the Department. The addition of this role will help to alleviate the growing workload associated with diplomatic engagements and official functions, while also allowing the Department to advance the broader objectives we have set for strengthening protocol services within the Turks and Caicos Islands. This step forms part of our continued efforts to ensure that the Protocol Department is properly staffed and equipped to manage its expanding responsibilities effectively.

Also, although it was not captured here, I will mention that a team of senior persons, including, I believe, yourself to represent the interests of the Parliament, has come together to begin reviewing all the protocol arrangements in the Turks and Caicos Islands. We have varying iterations of protocol, so we need to have it streamlined.

There should not be a Governor's Office protocol, a Premier's Office protocol, a Parliament protocol, a judiciary protocol and a police protocol. There are many protocols out there, so we need to get one accord sorted out, however that needs to be done. Then we will call that a day. I will briefly touch on a portion of revenue compliance and customs administration. What I spoke about earlier I will dig a little bit deeper into, just two paragraphs, and then I will continue, because I want to make sure the honourable ministers can bring their ministerial speeches.

I am almost done. The authority that I spoke about earlier comes from section 122 of the Customs Ordinance, which requires that any person involved in the importation, exportation or carriage of goods maintains all documentation, books and records relating to those goods for a period of not less than five years from the date of importation, exportation or carriage, as outlined on page 85 of the most recent ordinance. This requirement is further reinforced under the public financial management framework through the document retention schedule established under regulation 99, which outlines the mandatory retention periods for financial and transactional records, including customs entries, invoices and receipts. The actions we have taken and will continue to take to get your money, the Opposition's money and all of our money, are grounded in law.

We did not just wake up one day and decide to do this. All of this was restarted in January 2024, when we began looking back and trying to get updated, which is the normal order of things. I will now note a few more important things. Customs processing fee waiver review.

I will turn briefly to the Government's review of the customs processing fee waiver. The Government has reviewed the temporary customs processing fee waiver introduced in July 2022 to cushion households during the post-pandemic period of global inflation and supply chain disruption. While this policy served an important purpose during the economic recovery period, conditions have since improved and it is no longer fiscally sustainable to maintain the exemptions across the full range of commodities originally included. Over the life of the waiver, the Government has foregone approximately $8.3 million in customs processing fees, representing an average of $2.3 million annually.

Accordingly, the Government will restore the customs processing fee on non-critical commodities previously included under the breadbasket waiver, effective 1 April 2026, while maintaining exemptions on essential staple items such as milk, eggs, cheese, chicken, fresh fruits and vegetables, sugar, bread, flour, rice and grits. There was a loophole in the exemption, because one of the exempted items was fresh meat, not canned meat, but fresh meat. That included all meats, such as steaks and salmon. Those high-priced meats were coming in duty-free and CPF-free.

They had a good run, Mr. Speaker, but we caught them. They took advantage of the loophole. Certain people in the profession of importing know about those things and ran through the open gates, so we had to close that one. Policy, population policy and strategic planning. Immigration and labour management must also be supported by sound population planning. The draft population policy underwent comprehensive review in March 2025, and engagement continues with the support of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, ECLAC. This work is focused on developing a credible, data-driven framework that supports sustainable development and national stability.

The work of this Ministry is guided by a clear responsibility to facilitate legitimate travel and economic growth while safeguarding our borders and upholding the rule of law. I commend the leadership and personnel across the Ministry, the Employment Services Department and the TCI Border Force for their continued professionalism and service to our country. Through modernisation, strengthened systems and the dedication of our officers and staff, we are building an immigration and border services framework that is secure, efficient and fit for the future. Before I finish, I want to note what the Member of Parliament for

South Caicos mentioned about a greater Labour presence in South Caicos. That is taken on board. We will lobby for a greater physical presence from the Labour and Employment Department in South Caicos. As we go through the budgeting process, we will also ensure that there are more visits from the Department, the Ministry and the Minister.

Although you met the Premier tonight, I am coming next week. Protecting our borders also means protecting the economic integrity of our country. When our customs systems are strong, our economy is stronger, public revenue is protected and the Government is better positioned to invest in the development of these islands. This is the standard that this Government will continue to uphold as we strengthen compliance, support legitimate trade and safeguard the future prosperity of these beautiful-by-nature Turks and Caicos Islands.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker.

STATEMENT BY MINISTERS

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Deputy Premier and Minister of Immigration and Border Services, for your ministerial statement. I call on the Honourable Minister for Tourism, Environment, Fisheries, Marine Affairs, Heritage, Agriculture and Gaming for his ministerial statement.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT BY THE MINISTER OF TOURISM, ENVIRONMENT, FISHERIES, MARINE AFFAIRS, HERITAGE, AGRICULTURE AND GAMING

Hon. Zhavargo Jolly:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. Good afternoon, Mr. Speaker, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Members of this Parliament, and everyone listening across the Turks and Caicos Islands, including those left in the stands. As we gather in this Honourable House, we do so with gratitude to Almighty God for granting us another day and a renewed opportunity to serve the people of these beautiful Turks and Caicos Islands.

On behalf of my ministry, the Ministry of Tourism, Environment, Fisheries and Marine Affairs, Agriculture and Gaming, I extend sincere best wishes to all the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands across the entire 40 islands and cays. Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in offering condolences to everyone across the islands, including the family of Sister Cicely Ewing, who is a close family friend of mine from the Prophecy Church. I also offer condolences to a very popular young man who has done quite a bit for this country in a short period of time, for the loss of his mother, Andy Missick. I send condolences to him and his family.

On a lighter note, Mr. Speaker, I join my colleagues in wishing the Premier a happy birthday. We had a conversation and were running the numbers, and I think the Premier has been serving his country in so many different capacities for more than half of his life. As a young man who is now beginning his journey in Parliament and at the executive level, it is very encouraging to see him still standing strong. As the Premier celebrates his long history, I have the honour today of celebrating the moving and passing of my first bill as an honourable parliamentarian, so it is a very proud day for me.

I thank my team in the ministry, as well as Madam Attorney General to my left, for supporting and holding my hand throughout this process. Oddly enough, as I think about the steps along this journey, and I hope I have the opportunity to bring many more bills throughout my political and electoral career, but as I look at the opportunity to actually be a lawmaker, it is very rare that you get to savour this opportunity, especially persons fortunate like myself to have an executive position right out of the gate. You very rarely get to appreciate the process of being a lawmaker and what it takes to do this. I refer back to my honourable colleague from South Caicos, when we were talking about red tape and the challenges where the law does not fit.

It makes me think back to our good cousin Courtney Missick and a saying he always makes: if the law does not work for the people, change the law. That is why we are here in this room. That is why we have this opportunity. We look at the laws based on the needs of the people, and we have the opportunity to change the laws so they can help and impact our people.

It makes me think back to the Youth Parliament that took place this week. As I gain experience and even confidence in speaking in this Honourable House, thinking about all the great contributors to Turks and Caicos who would have passed here, and seeing some of those young parliamentarians confidently represent themselves in this House, speak to issues and articulate themselves with no fear and without holding back, it gives me even more confidence to stand here today and look forward to my future and the future of some of these other young parliamentarians whom I hope will be here with me on this journey. Hopefully, we have the opportunity to sit in a seat and have other young people look at us and think about our long career and how we contributed.

Today is a very proud day for me, a little emotional, but I look forward to these opportunities where I get to savour this moment. As I dive into my ministerial statement, I want to talk about how a new year presents an opportunity for renewed focus, strengthened resolve and purposeful action.

It is a time to set meaningful goals, to pursue higher standards, and to recommit ourselves to the continued development and prosperity of these Turks and Caicos Islands. Mr. Speaker, I take this moment to solemnly reaffirm my commitment to the people whom I have had the honour to represent, and I remain dedicated to advancing policies that strengthen our tourism product, safeguard our environment, support our fisheries and agriculture sectors, and ensure sustainable economic growth for generations to come. Mr. Speaker, while we look ahead with optimism, we are also mindful of those who enter this year carrying grief. I extend heartfelt condolences to the families who have lost loved ones, and may God grant them comfort, strength and peace during this time of bereavement.

Mr. Speaker, it is my distinct honour and privilege to report on the performance of our tourism industry, the cornerstone of our economy and the primary driver of growth and opportunity in these Turks and Caicos Islands. As the travel and tourism industry continues to grow and evolve, we must understand the many moving parts that make up this sector, from the individuals and businesses that depend on tourism for their livelihoods to our Government and organisations that regulate and manage this industry. Mr. Speaker, we collectively have an important role in this country in determining the success and resilience of this sector as a whole. The future success of this country and our ability to maintain our position in the world as a highly sought-after destination depend on how well we seize this moment to restructure and reposition ourselves, not only to meet the needs of today, but our tourism needs of tomorrow and the future.

As such, I will continue to make an intentional effort as your Minister responsible for Tourism to ensure that the Turks and Caicos Islands seizes every opportunity to position itself as that destination. Mr. Speaker, in response to our intentional

efforts, the Turks and Caicos Islands saw an increase in stayover arrivals in December 2025, 4 per cent higher than the corresponding period in 2024. Moreover, stayover arrivals by air for the month of December were 64,493, in comparison to 62,610 in December of the previous year.

From January to December 2025, preliminary visitor arrival numbers totalled 640,754, on par with the number recorded for the same period of 2024, despite airlift fluctuations and external pressures. Mr. Speaker, it is worth noting that the Turks and Caicos Islands achieved an exceptional year of international recognition in 2025. We had the pleasure of earning multiple prestigious awards across diving, beach, romance, honeymoon and overall destination categories. Many of these accolades were determined by reader and traveller votes, reflecting the genuine experience of those who visit our islands and reaffirming the global strength of our tourism product.

Among the most notable recognitions were the PADI Scuba Magazine 2026 Reader's Choice Awards, where the Turks and Caicos Islands ranked second place for wall diving, highlighting Grand Turk and its most prolific feature; third place for big animals; top five for health of the marine environment; and top 10 in several categories, including best overall dive destination, underwater photography, and beginner and advanced diving. These results confirm our standing as one of the premier dive destinations in the world. In addition, the Turks and Caicos Islands secured the distinguished title of number one island destination in the Condé Nast Reader's Choice Awards UK. This further cements our global appeal.

Some of the other honours that we achieved in 2025 were the Caribbean's leading beach destination; the Caribbean's most romantic destination, which I hope our Honourable Premier and the First Lady will take advantage of as they visit Big South, hopefully today; best beach destination by Air Canada Vacations; favourite honeymoon destination by the Trazy Awards; number one best beach, Bambarra Beach, and number nine best beach, Grace Bay, in the USA Today 10 Best Reader's Choice Awards; and Grace Bay also ranked among the world's top 50 best beaches. Mr. Speaker, these awards are not by accident. They are the result of strategic public relations initiatives, sustained media engagement, meaningful partnerships with travel advisers and international platforms, and the collective efforts of our tourism stakeholders.

When travellers vote for the Turks and Caicos Islands, they are voting for the quality of our beaches, the health of our marine environment, the warmth of our people, and the authenticity of the experiences delivered across our islands. While these awards affirm our strength as a premier tourism destination, they also highlight something deeper: the interconnectedness of tourism, sustainability and food security. Tourism is the engine of our economy, but, Mr. Speaker, for that engine to remain strong and resilient, it must be supported by sustainable systems, including local food production. As visitor numbers grow and global recognition expands, demand for fresh produce, seafood, poultry and agricultural products also increases.

This presents an opportunity, not a challenge, for us to strengthen domestic food production and reduce our dependency on imports. The Leader of the Opposition mentioned that it is a healthy practice for Ministers, or even parliamentarians, when they go on official travel to report back, preferably through Parliament, on their travel and how it benefited us. I would like to report on a recent trip.

On Saturday, I had the pleasure of visiting North Caicos. While visiting the island of North Caicos, I had the pleasure of visiting our Kew Farm, and I cannot tell you how proud I am to see first-hand the work that they are doing over there. Mr. Speaker, when I travelled back to Provo, I felt bad for my poor family, especially my children, dragging these garbage bags full of cabbage, lettuce, Scotch bonnet peppers, tomatoes, pumpkins, watermelon and, I am pretty sure, sugar cane. I cleaned out that entire farm.

What we have been able to do as a test project at our Kew Farm shows us the potential of the local agriculture industry right here in the Turks and Caicos Islands. We are going to take this to a completely new level. What we have done at the farm is create opportunities by subdividing different levels of the plot and creating entry levels for farmers. If you decide today that you want to become a farmer, you can start off on a small plot with the assistance of the Kew Farm staff, and they can train you on the techniques and what it takes.

As you grow, you can get a larger plot and eventually apply for the large plots in the farming subdivision that we are working on. The future of agriculture here, now that we have a strategic plan and the funding through the Agriculture Department, is incredibly bright, Mr. Speaker, and it is something of which I am very proud as Minister. Food security is not separate from tourism; it is foundational to it. I intend to continue to lead a strong local agriculture and fisheries sector that includes, but is not limited to, enhancing the authenticity of the visitor experience, reducing import vulnerability and supply chain risk, retaining more economic value within our islands, and strengthening resilience during global disruptions.

When visitors dine in our restaurants, they should increasingly experience local Turks and Caicos Islands-grown products, locally caught seafood and locally sourced ingredients that reflect our culture and our environment. The same marine environment that earns us global diving accolades must also protect and sustain our fisheries livelihoods. The same pristine land that draws travellers must be stewarded to support agricultural expansion. Mr. Speaker, sustainable tourism and food security go hand in hand.

As Minister with responsibility for Tourism, Environment, Fisheries, Agriculture, the National Trust and Gaming, somehow being the newest and youngest member of this Cabinet, that list seems to keep getting longer and longer. I see this as a strategic alignment opportunity. Our continued global recognition strengthens our economic base, and that economic strength must in turn support investment in local production, training, innovation and environmental stewardship. As such, Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting farmers and fishers in scaling responsibly, encouraging linkages within the hospitality sector, promoting sustainable fishing practices, and protecting our marine and

agricultural resources for future generations.

International awards may bring prestige, but sustainability brings longevity. The Turks and Caicos Islands must not only remain a world-class destination; we must remain a resilient and self-strengthening nation. Mr. Speaker, I commend our tourism stakeholders for their excellence, and I reaffirm this Government's commitment to ensuring that tourism growth is balanced with environmental protection, agricultural development and long-term food security. The level of recognition mentioned above reinforces our position as one of the world's leading island destinations and underscores the importance of continuing investment in sustainability, quality and protection.

This is evident from the people who love to visit the Turks and Caicos and want to be a part of what we have. You would have heard the Minister of Education mention our current visitors. We now have with us Miss Côte d'Ivoire, as well as Miss Universe Belize, visiting us here in Turks and Caicos. They are not just visiting to see what we have and take part.

People have such an emotional attachment to the Turks and Caicos that they want to contribute when they are here, and we were able to benefit through the charitable donation to the SNAP Center, as well as TCIFA and the Rosita Jolly Primary School, through that collaboration. That is what comes out of our visitors when people come to the Turks and Caicos Islands. I affirm to the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands my humble commitment to strengthening our global presence while ensuring that growth is supported by responsible development and the preservation of the very elements that make our islands exceptional. It goes without saying that safety remains a priority.

The Leader of the Opposition mentioned some of the recent spikes we have seen, especially in the nation's capital of Grand Turk, and I want him to know that is not lost on this entire Government or on me as the Minister of Tourism. We have had recent meetings with the Commissioner of Police highlighting this fact and getting into deep discussions on how we can assist. Within the Tourism Ministry, we have been working on the establishment of tourism police, not just in Providenciales but here in Grand Turk, specifically with heightened awareness around our cruise industry. We are pushing for the hiring or acquiring of the cruise director position, whose sole responsibility will be here on Grand Turk to deal with all issues related to the cruise sector and to serve as a point of contact that you and everyone else in Grand Turk will be able to speak to regarding those issues, without having to wait for outside influence or outside action.

Mr. Speaker, I thank all the members and staff of the Ministry of Tourism, Environment, Fisheries and Marine Affairs, Agriculture and Gaming for their unselfish commitment to the Turks and Caicos Islands. We will create an environment beneficial to the success of this entire country in our quest for excellence. Mr. Speaker, thank you, and may God continue to bless these beautiful-by-nature Turks and Caicos Islands. Let us move forward united in purpose, guided by wisdom, and committed to serving the best interests of our people.

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Thank you very much, Honourable Minister, for your ministerial statement.

ORDERS OF THE DAY

ORDER PAPER

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, I will now return to the Order Paper. Personal explanations: there were none. Motions for leave of absence: I did receive a number of requests for leave, including from the Honourable Minister of Innovation, the Honourable Minister of PPID, the Honourable Elected Member for Leeward and Long Bay, the Honourable Deputy Speaker, and the Honourable Seventh All-Island Member. Notices of motions for the adjournment of the Parliament on matters requiring urgent consideration: there were none.

Subsidiary legislation made since March 2026: there were none. Honourable Deputy Speaker, we have now come to the end of our Order Paper. Sorry, apologies: Deputy Premier.

ADJOURNMENT

ADJOURNMENT SINE DIE

Hon. Jamell Rayan Robinson:

Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I now move that the Parliament be adjourned sine die.

Hon. Gordon Burton:

Honourable Members, this Honourable Parliament now stands adjourned. Stand by.