



THRONE SPEECH 2015

Delivered by

His Excellency Governor Peter Beckingham

On the Occasion of the Opening of the

Of the Third Session of the 10th House of Assembly of the Turks and Caicos Islands

Thursday, 5 March 2015

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Ministers, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of This Honorable House of Assembly, Honourable, Government Officials, Ladies and Gentlemen. Good Morning.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to begin by welcoming you all present to this First Sitting of the First Meeting of the Third Session of the Tenth Legislature of the House of the Assembly of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

I stand with a sense of pride and humility, noting the many accomplishments of our Government and our people over the short two years since coming into office and thanking God for the blessings he has bestowed on these Islands.

Mr. Speaker, the years leading up to this point in the governance of these islands was quite eventful for the Government and the people of these islands. During this period we set out an agenda for economic recovery and growth and laid a solid foundation for the future prosperity of all of the Turks and Caicos Islands and all who reside on our shores. We remain committed to ensuring that Turks and Caicos Islanders are empowered at every stage of their development and can enjoy a good quality of life in their senior years.

Turks and Caicos Islanders throughout their long history have proven to be innovative, pragmatic, resilient and smart, surmounting all obstacles and challenges. These characteristics have been revealed most particularly in times of economic challenge and change.

The Turks and Caicos Islands National Song, composed by Rev. Conrad Howell quotes “We stand with courage brave, To maintain this land of ours With islands scattered here and there With trust in God we stand.” Speaks to these very traits; reflecting Islanders innate, time-tested ability to adapt to the ups and downs of an often turbulent world. And the record shows that the people of the Turks and Caicos know not only how to survive, but how to, through sacrifice, prosper and thrive.

Mr. Speaker, creating jobs and economic growth is and will remain our Government’s top priority. Whilst, Mr. Speaker more work needs to be done... I can proudly say that this Government has delivered on many promises to the people of these islands during our short time in office, while at the same time laying a basis for a secured future for our children and our children’s children. I wish to assure the people of these islands that our successes are not accidental, but rather the results of deliberate policy decisions, though some of them may have been unpopular and difficult, they were taken in the interest of our people The benefits of which are now being manifested and will continue into the future.

Mr. Speaker, sectors cannot expand, the economy cannot grow, and the future cannot be

secured unless the policies we implement and the vision we pursue, place the people as the drivers of progress. Mr. Speaker, progress today will depend not just on Governments' actions to fulfill its mandate for change, but relies squarely on people's understanding that "we are all in this boat together" and that decision taken to keep the boat afloat are decisions taken to keep everyone afloat.

Mr. Speaker, we often face the challenge to exercise patience and understanding, while efforts to solve longstanding problems are undertaken. As members of society we must all accept that the scale and complexity of the challenges of nation building are by no means simple and that solutions may not seem to surface as rapidly as we might like. Where important decisions are required, a considerable amount of focus, time and effort is often required to satisfactorily and appropriately address the issue at hand But Mr. Speaker in order for this to happen we all (including the opposition members) must play our part, working together to fix these Islands and bring us to that place of sustainable prosperity.

Mr. Speaker, we have seen tremendous growth in the economy, mainly driven by tourism and related businesses. This has been the result of unprecedented increase in the tourist arrivals to our shores, soaring from just over one million in 2013 to 1.4 million in 2014. This 24 percent increase in arrivals was experienced in both overnight stays as well as cruise passengers. Mr. Speaker, some may say that this accomplishment is due only to inclement weather to the North, but we wish to state categorically that it is mainly due to my government's policies as it relates to the marketing and promotion of Turks and Caicos. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to not only promote Turks and Caicos as a destination but to have specific focus on the development, marketing and promotion of tourism in the family islands, and in so doing diversify and decentralize the tourism economies of our islands. Mr. Speaker, these initiatives will be implemented under the framework of a new tourism strategic plan and taxation incentives that will facilitate the development of private sector tourist attractions, airlift and tourism accommodations in the family islands. Mr. Speaker, the mainstay of the economy of Grand Turk is Cruise based tourism, which my government welcomes and will continue to support through the development of cultural villages both centrally and in the south of Grand Turk and the introduction of fish fry as a major tourism product.

Mr. Speaker, the maintenance of a clean environment and the preservation and promotion of culture and heritage is critical to the sustainable economic growth and development of our small nation. Mr. Speaker, to this end we are committed to addressing the environmental cleanliness challenge due to lack of resources and ineffective laws or non-enforcement thereof. Mr. Speaker, the increase in funding and strengthening of local government in district administration will give those communities the ability to take care of their own affairs and manage their works and maintenance programs. We will likewise increase funding in the larger

islands of Providenciales and Grand Turk to adequately address these environmental challenges.

Mr. Speaker, our greatest culture and heritage asset is our people who have toiled and made these islands what they are today. Our Government is committed to the promotion of our culture and heritage and as such has dedicated an entire month and a national holiday for its celebration. Mr. Speaker we will continue to recognize and appreciate our people for their contribution to these islands with the bestowal of various honors and awards during our National Heritage Day celebrations.

Mr Speaker, the road to economic recovery in these islands has been challenging, but due to our strategic policies and sound fiscal management we can now boast of being amongst some of the best performing economies in the region. However, there is still much work to do as we strive to convert economic growth into sustainable economic development and empowerment of our people through job creation and small and medium business development.

Mr. Speaker, the creation of jobs through public and private sector infrastructure development projects, creation of an Invest Turks and Caicos Agency with an SME programme facilitating the development of local businesses, the continued reduction in the taxation burden and the increase in minimum wage are all strategic policies, to which we are committed, that will ensure economic growth and development and the empowerment of Turks and Caicos Islanders. Mr. Speaker, my Government will in addition implement, develop and publish a Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the Turks and Caicos Islands and implement consumer protection legislation so as to increase and sustain the disposable income and wealth of all. Mr. Speaker, it is only through the strong economic recovery of these islands and the resultant increases in government revenue, credited to this governments' policies over the last two years, that we are now able to move faster on our manifesto promises, contrary to the rhetoric and beliefs of those who say it is because election is near, or contrary to those claiming credit by saying they were asking for it.

Mr. Speaker, we were given an onerous task to pay off a \$170 million dollar loan in five years and come February 2016, we are on target in accomplishing that feat with the removal of the UK loan guarantee. Mr. Speaker is quite possible that our BBB+ stable rating, when reviewed this year June may most likely be upgraded and can consequently allow us to receive even more favorable borrowing offers on the bond and loan market as we refinance the remainder of our debt in February 2016. Mr. Speaker, such accomplishment would allow us to increase funding in the many areas of need, such as roads, schools, and other infrastructures and the funding of new programs in the areas of education, health, social development, labour and security, the welfare of civil servants and civil service productivity. Mr. Speaker, this is a great

and envious position for the Turks and Caicos Islands to be in in short a short period following the recession and the coming into office of my government.

Mr. Speaker, we came to office with a mandate to improve the welfare, working conditions and professional development of civil servants and by extension the productivity of the civil service. Mr. Speaker, my Government as promised, reinstated the 10 percent reduction in salaries in 2013, and now due to the availability of funding will spend an additional 9 million dollars this year in the increase in civil servants salaries due to the regrading initiative, which focused especially on teachers, front line and emergency services employees. Mr. Speaker, we will continue to deliver on our mandate by making funding available for skills and professional training and certification of civil servants and prepare them for continued upward mobility and advancement within the civil service. Mr. Speaker we will make adjustments to the benefits of employment such as housing allowance, reintroduce salary increments and implement terminal benefits to replace the lost gratuity benefits. Mr. Speaker, my Government is knowledgeable of the poor state government building and office infrastructure and is committed to improving the work environment by acquiring new rental spaces and establish centralized government office complexes on Providenciales, Grand Turk, North Caicos and South Caicos

Mr. Speaker, our Government is committed to ensuring that all TCI residents have access to health care and services of the highest quality based on available resources and in keeping with the Primary Health Care approach of equity, accessibility, affordability, efficiency, coverage and impact of services provided.”

My Government throughout this year will embark on five (5) strategic goals over the next year:

1. Strengthen governance and stewardship role of the Ministry of Health and Human Services in the health system
2. Define and further develop the model of care in TCI
3. Institute a health financing structure geared towards a more sustainable and affordable system
4. Develop and retain a robust and competent health system workforce through efficient planning and management
5. Reinforce and strengthen Public and Environmental Health in an effort to prevent disease, prolong life, and promote health at the population level

Furthermore, my Government will embark on a National Health Strategic Plan (NHSP) in the coming year to provide guidance, vision, values, priorities and strategic direction to the health care renewal process. Shifting political and governing practices has created a renewed need for an interim strategy that can bridge a dynamic and shifting health system. The NHSP will ensure that all national partners in health work together effectively toward achieving combined

strategic goals and objectives. The NHSP will also serve as a comprehensive document designed to provide direction and guidance to stakeholders and the public to improve the health status of the population of the TCI.

Mr. Speaker, my Government will be relentless in our pursuit to ensure that the vulnerable throughout the islands are protected and have equitable and affordable access to health care at all levels of care. Mr. Speaker, as Minister of Health, it is my Government's mandate to ensure that clinics on all islands are opened and have the necessary tools and equipment to cater to the needs of our Islanders. In the next few weeks, we will see an official opening of Middle Caicos clinic followed by the Salt Cay clinic as we plan for the development of a new clinic on North Caicos and expansion of the clinic on Providenciales.

Mr. Speaker, the long awaited ambulances for Provo, Grand Turk and the family islands have been procured and will arrive on island shortly, and these combined with the new EMT training programme will greatly enhance the delivery of emergency medical services throughout the islands. The wellbeing of our people must be safeguarded Mr. Speaker, for the health of a nation is the wealth of a nation. Mr. Speaker, in keeping with this mantra you will see several bills coming to this House of Assembly this year including but not limited to: Health Regulatory Agency, Food Safety Bill, Tobacco Bill, Mental Health Bill, Pharmaceutical Bill, Health Information Protection Bill and National Health Insurance Amendment Bill just to cite a few. Mr. Speaker, we have been making much progress in the area of financial and clinical services accountability at the hospitals in accordance with the terms of the contract to ensure value for money and patient satisfaction. Mr. Speaker to this end we will be strengthening the capacity of the Ministry of Health to proactively manage the hospital contract and bring better value for money.

Mr. Speaker, being presented to this House today are a number of family law bills that will help to ensure the safety and protection of our vulnerable women and children. Mr. Speaker our commitment will be to the establishment of a place of safety for these individuals and that of a juvenile facility that will facilitate the rehabilitation of our troubled young people back into society as productive citizens. Mr. Speaker my government will continue to provide increasing levels of social support and funding for those persons who are vulnerable and the elderly in our community, in the form of non-contributory old age pension, improved facilities at the wellness center, and bringing of greater level of health care to the people, in the communities in which they live. Mr. Speaker, as a community, we must continually reassess how to best care for the people who have given so much to our small nation. Sometimes small measures bring the greatest joy. We owe them an enormous amount of gratitude for all they have achieved throughout life and for all they continue to accomplish; we owe our senior population our thanks and heartfelt salute. We can best demonstrate our gratitude and esteem by ensuring

that our communities are good places in which to mature and grow older.

Mr. Speaker, education is indeed the key to empowerment. It has been and continues to be the mission of this government to provide the resources necessary to educate our people at all levels, and to ensure that their education is relevant to the developmental needs of the country. Mr. Speaker, my government will continue to make adequate classroom space available at all levels and to this end, having completed the rebuilding of the Ona Ginton Primary School, we have begun the development of the new Long Bay High School and will continue to focus our school infrastructure development in the building of new primary school and an Early Childhood Center and Technical Institute at the Community College. Mr. Speaker our commitment to education is not only in the area of infrastructure but also in ensuring that we have adequate cadre of trained professional teachers. To this end we have increased resources directed at training teachers and also significantly improving the remuneration of teachers. Mr. Speaker the introduction of CVQs and other technical certification programs at both the secondary and tertiary levels will guarantee a work force that will meet the demands of a rapidly developing Turks and Caicos.

Mr. Speaker, increasing funding for scholarships locally and overseas combined with collaborative agreements with regional, UK and Canadian Universities will make available more opportunities for Turks and Caicos Islanders to obtain a first degree.

Mr. Speaker, my Government is committed to the holistic development of our Youth, and has delivered on our promise to reinstate the Cadet's Corps and the Youth Parliament programs. We will increase the funding to the Youth Department to facilitate the expansion of existing and the implementation of new youth programs. Mr. Speaker, my government is committed to the redevelopment of existing recreation parks such as the NJS Francis Park, South Back Salina Park and the development of new recreational parks and sporting facilities throughout the islands. Mr. Speaker these initiatives will not only have tremendous impact on youth development but also on the health and wellbeing of all residents within these communities.

Mr. Speaker, the security and safety of our communities, streets and borders are essential to the sustainable development of our nation. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to working with and providing increased funding and resources to the many front line agencies such as the various Police branches, Immigration and Customs to protect our land and citizens there in. Mr. Speaker, we are committed to enforcing stricter control of illegal immigration that can be detrimental to the health, safety and economic wellbeing of the people of these islands. Mr. Speaker, to this end we are committed to addressing illegal immigration activities and irregularities in residency with the introduction of new enforcement programs and new legislation that speaks to residency and Turks and Caicos Islander status.

Mr. Speaker the economic growth, development and empowerment of the people of these islands, is contingent upon our ability to implement sound policies in education, training and development programs, the creation of jobs and small and medium size local businesses, the marketing and promotion of these islands in particular our family islands, the attraction of foreign direct investments, the development and maintenance of our roads and building infrastructure, the preservation and protection of our environment, the protection of our borders and control of illegal migration, the protection of the health and safety of residents and the strengthening of the welfare and wellbeing and professional development and upward mobility of our valued civil servants.

Mr. Speaker, our achievements to date as a government is due to the hard work and dedication of civil servants, and to them my government say thank you. My Government encourages you to continue to capitalize on opportunities for your professional development as we continue to improve your standard of living and job security at the highest levels within an efficient and effective civil service.

Mr. Speaker, may God continue to bless these beautiful by nature Turks and Caicos Islands.