



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2016

CONTINUING THE PROGRESS, FROM AUSTERITY TO PROSPERITY

Delivered by

His Excellency Governor Peter Beckingham

On the Occasion of the Opening of the

**Of the Fourth Session of the 10th Legislature of the House of Assembly of the
Turks and Caicos Islands**

Monday, 18 April 2016

Mr. Speaker and Members of this honorable house, ladies and gentlemen, as the Governor and representative of Her Majesty The Queen, it is my pleasure to deliver to you the Speech from the Throne and I am honored to welcome you to the opening of the First (1st) Sitting of the First (1st) Meeting of the Fourth (4th) Session of the Tenth (10th) Legislature of the House of Assembly in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

This being the only meeting of the session where the crown and the government will meet together I am further privileged to have occasion to speak to the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands on the future plans of the government to continue the progress towards prosperity for all persons living in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Over the past three years, much has been achieved but much is yet to be done and it is with renewed hope and a spirit of collaboration that I charge each member of this honorable house with the duty of demonstrating a greater sense of commitment and determination in working together for the greater good, namely, the enhancement of the lives of our people. As a parliament and as a government it is imperative that the people of these islands continue to be placed at the forefront of your legislative agenda, and it is also imperative that you set aside all differences as you fully and respectfully engage in the debates that will shape the lives of our people, for they deserve nothing less.

There has been tremendous success here in our islands in recent years, the economy of our nation has been stabilized, revived and has now been set on a pathway of progressive growth; the country's finances have rebounded from a state of deficit, and have recorded some of the highest surpluses in our history; our tourism product was and continues to be rated as one of the best in the world and this is to name just a few. But while we reflect on our achievements, we recognize that we now stand at a critical point in our country's history, where there is a considerable amount that still remains to be accomplished as we take this nation forward into the future. As we look back over the past 4 years, from whence we came, we can clearly see that

with the help of The Almighty God, that yet another milestone has been left behind and that so too will be the challenges that lie before us. It is my intention today to lay before this honorable house and the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands, our plans for the future.

The success of our economy, of our industry and of our finances must translate to the success of our people.

This PNP Government is committed to all people residing here in the Turks & Caicos Islands, and has heard their cries and is focused on the things that matter most to them: gainful employment and fair compensation; fair opportunity in the work place and in the job market; protection and assistance for small start-up businesses; affordable and accessible modern-day education and advanced learning; affordable and accessible health care and treatment; safe and secure neighborhoods where they can raise their families; protection from capitalization of free enterprise and unfair price hikes at the pumps and in supermarkets; an enabling environment to invest in the development of these islands; and, a clear, respected and acceptable pathway to citizenship so that they can unite with their families and help us to grow our beloved Turks and Caicos Islands.

Some of these goals are more challenging than others but they are all achievable and I am certain that this Government can achieve these goals and by earnestly conducting the business of the people, I know that this PNP Government will make these goals a reality.

Here is how it will be done:

GROWING THE MIDDLE CLASS THROUGH EMPLOYMENT AND FAIR EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CONDITIONS

The Government is committed to the re-establishment and growth of the middle class as the formula for empowerment of Turks and Caicos Islanders and long-term sustainable economic success.

Since coming to office the Government has created over 400 new positions in the civil service alone, and with the support for investment and development many others gained employment opportunities in the private sector. This will continue as more development stimulates the construction industry and as this occurs, the Government will continue to agitate for the employment of Turks and Caicos Islanders.

But efforts will not stop there. Employees in the work force need to be assured of fair compensation and be given fair opportunities for development and advancement. Towards this end the Government will do the following:

- Through the enabling provisions of the new Immigration legislation ensure that job opportunities are properly and accurately advertised and that Turks and Caicos Islanders are given fair opportunities to be employed in those jobs.
- Modernize the Labor Laws to mitigate against discrimination in the work place to ensure that persons of equal or comparative qualifications receive comparable compensation regardless of nationality.
- Encourage higher remuneration commensurate with experience and responsibility by delivering another pay raise to the civil service this financial year.
- Work with the Civil Service Association to develop policies on long term and terminal benefits.

- Alleviate the strain on lower income households by conducting a comprehensive review of the minimum wage with a view to improving minimum earnings and the establishment of a living wage rather than a minimum wage.
- Review the hospitality industry service charge parallel with the introduction of Credit Union legislation that will provide workers with affordable savings and rainy day plans.

In the face of globalization and the eventuality of free movement, there is need for greater protection of Turks and Caicos Islanders in the employment market. This Government will build upon its current policy for Turks and Caicos Islanders to be given first choice for placement in those positions for which they are qualified by ensuring that greater accountability is placed on employers looking to import labour.

The Government will expand the requirements for employers to submit staffing plans beyond the resorts to include all entities as a means of ensuring that remunerations are based on job functions and not on nationality.

The Government will continue its efforts to fulfill its commitment to conducting a national skills audit and the development of a Labour Market Information System that can inform of the skills currently available and those needed. This will inform both national immigration as well as education policies. This will afford the Government greater insight and enable them to permit the import of those skills that are needed and prohibit import of those that are readily available, while also funding the development of those skills that are lacking through the national scholarships and grants program. This will also provide vital information for the development of the National Population Policy.

The Government will modernize the Trade Union legislation as an additional mechanism to protect the rights of employees from unfair labour practices, discrimination.

GROWING THE MIDDLE CLASS THROUGH EDUCATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

One of the greatest achievements of this Government through its strategic policies was recovery of the economy from austerity and placing it on a path to sustainable prosperity. With the turnaround in the economy the government was able to not only pay off the 170 Million Dollar Loan that was guaranteed by the UK Government, but was able to make major investments in the education of our people. Having invested in new primary and secondary school infrastructure and providing scholarships and opportunities for tertiary level education, this government is committed to continue to invest in the areas of technical education as directed by our skills audit and will continue to develop our early childhood education infrastructure and programs.

The Government will also ensure that greater funding is available for more scholarships and grants, especially in the areas identified as a skills gap and to improve the overall marketability and competitiveness of Turks and Caicos Islanders.

The Government recently passed the Micro, Small, Medium Enterprise Legislation, which provides encouragement and support for Turks and Caicos Islanders wanting to venture into entrepreneurship. This will complement the recently reviewed and expanded list of reserved and restricted categories of businesses for Turks and Caicos Islanders participation.

To ensure that there is maximum participation, the Government through Invest Turks and Caicos will host workshops and seminars that will support and strengthen MSME businesses. The Government will provide support for SME businesses during the infancy stages through a new Center for Entrepreneurial Development (CED) providing the necessary technical and business services assistance. The Government will ensure greater enforcement of the laws regarding reserve and

restricted categories or businesses and unfair business practices where they exist to mitigate against the formation of monopolies and monopolistic tendencies while ensuring that we are competitive globally and facilitating sustainable business growth and prosperity of our people.

ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION AND SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH

The diversification of the economy remains a major strategy of this government to ensure economic sustainability, business and job growth and resilience from internal and external economic shocks. The introduction of the MSME program is one of the key pillars of economic diversification and several policies have been developed and continue to be developed in support of economic diversification and include policies on agriculture, manufacturing and processing, health tourism and other initiatives such as information and technology infrastructure, aquaculture and pelagic fishing.

The Government firmly believes that if we are to be sustainable as a jurisdiction we must be globally competitive and hence the ease of doing business must increase and the cost of doing business must decrease. The Government to this end will continue to improve its systems to reduce the complexity and increase the ease of doing business and productivity through its investment in E-Government technologies especially in areas of finance, Immigration, Health, Education and law enforcement.

The Government will continue to reduce the tax burden and broaden the tax base while protecting the consumer through the introduction of consumer protection legislation and increasing Government's revenue through increased compliance.

Even though it is the desire of the Government for greater diversification of the economy, the Government recognizes that Tourism, and the diversification there of, will continue to be the main economic driver of our country and hence we will

continue to develop and diversify our tourism product and invest in the marketing and promotion thereof and expand our reach into new source markets globally. We will continue to support the development of tourism in our family islands by developing the necessary infrastructure such as airports, seaports, and roads and attracting local and foreign direct investment in tourism products such as hotels, villas, Eco lodges, and associated tourism services.

INVESTMENT IN HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

The Government strongly believes that the health of the nation is the wealth of the nation and will therefore continue to champion the realization of our vision of a healthier and empowered people throughout the lifecycle in communities conducive to healthy living. The government is on a campaign to reorient the focus of health care to preventive with a resultant reduction in the burden of diseases and economic loss due to premature death, complications and disabilities and resultant expenditure in the treatment of complications and disabilities.

The Government has already developed several strategic action plans and Health in all Policies approach that are geared towards realizing the 2020 vision. Some of these strategic plans include:

- The development of primary health care clinic infrastructure and services in all of our communities thereby improving access the health care.
- The introduction and expansion of a comprehensive range of services such as physiotherapy, pharmacy, laboratory and other diagnostic services in the family islands.

- The introduction of extended clinic hours at our primary health care facilities that will improve access and reduce the cost and burden on our hospital emergency rooms.
- The expansion of our cancer screening program especially in our family islands and development of our cancer registry.
- The development of our Non-Communicable Disease management program to reduce complications and death due to diseases such as diabetes and hypertension.

The Government has begun and will continue its investment in our Health in all Policy initiatives to include initiatives such as:

- Green Fitness Parks in every community where the family and especially the youth can be safe while having clean fun and staying fit.
- The development of cycling lanes in our streets to promote fitness and safety.
- The improvement of lighting in our communities to encourage physical activities and safety.
- The development of our school health program.
- Tobacco control and the banning of smoking in public places creating healthy work and recreational environments.
- The promotion of healthy and safe foods manufactured or imported through the provisions of the Food and Drug legislation.

The Government will continue its progress towards Universal Health and through the amendment to the National Health Insurance Plan legislation will ensure that health care is accessible and affordable to all. The Government through the strengthening of the regulatory and policy functions of the Ministry of Health will ensure that the health of the public is protected and that persons have access to affordable and quality health care.

The Government will continue to ensure that we have an environment that is conducive to healthy living and sustainable economic growth and development.

The Government will amend its laws to provide for better enforcement of our environment and public and environmental health laws, to include wardens, volunteers and a ticketing and community service system of penalties for offences such as littering, improper garbage disposal, unclean premises and land and marine parks violations.

The Government will continue to invest in the protection of its environment by ensuring that the most sensitive of our land and marine habitats are placed in our national park system while ensuring that our population can enjoy and be empowered through the use of the parks but also creating opportunities for future balanced and environmentally friendly development.

The Government will continue to invest in and develop our water and liquid and solid waste management infrastructure to ensure population health, environmental protection and sustainable potable water supply to the population.

The Government as a part of the Climate Change initiative has adopted its Climate Change policy and created a Committee on Climate Change. To this end the Government has developed and approved its energy policy and is in the process of finalizing its consultancy on the development of a legislative framework that will give way to a greater degree the introduction of new alternative energy sources in the energy mix that will enable reduced electricity cost, reduction of our carbon emissions, slowing of impacts of global warming and climate change and promote the clean natural beauty of our islands.

SAFETY AND SECURITY FOR ECONOMIC SUSTAINABILITY

The Government has made significant investment in its people by way of education and social programs, infrastructure and the development of a robust and thriving economy. The Government also recognizes that the economic sustainability of these islands is heavily dependent on the safety and security of its visitors, residents and assets.

The Government takes seriously the threat that crime poses to the economic sustainability of our nation and will continue its investment in the Police Force, law enforcement and initiatives that serves to prevent, deter, combat and solve crimes of every nature and all magnitudes as one of its main priorities.

The Government recognizes that Tourism is the main driver of the economy of the Turks and Caicos Islands and has therefore approved additional financing to increase the police presence in communities and districts as part of the Tourism Police initiative while also boosting the Community Policing program through the recruitment and training of twenty police officers.

The Government will continue to invest in technology such as CCTV, Biometrics, and Drones that will enhance the surveillance, detection and apprehension of criminals in our communities and borders. The Government will continue to invest in the procurement of equipment such as police boats and vehicles that will increase the mobility of our law enforcement officers and enhance their endeavors to deter crime and apprehend criminals.

The Government will continue to invest in our young people through the development of social and youth programs such as the Cadet Corp, Young Enterprise and Youth Parliament that will provide them with a greater sense of responsibility, accountability, discipline and volunteerism.

The Government will continue to strengthen our juvenile rehabilitation program to increase our efforts geared towards creating more productive and responsible citizens. The Government will continue to invest in the protection of our children and women as we develop new programs and strengthen existing ones that support the development, empowerment and protection of women and children and the Government will continue to invest in the provision of a social safety net for our elderly as they retire to enjoy their golden years.

CONCLUSION

The Government has and will continue to work for the people and we are well on the way to building a better Turks and Caicos Islands for the prosperity of Turks and Caicos Islanders. We renew this pledge to you today. May God bless you and may God bless the Turks and Caicos Islands.