



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Delivered by
His Excellency the Governor
on the Occasion of the
Convening of Parliament

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2004 SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

Just over one year has passed since the Progressive Labour Party Government was given a second mandate to govern Bermuda.

During the past year, the Government has emphasized its commitment to the establishment of a **social agenda**, an all-encompassing cross-ministry initiative designed to protect and sustain Bermuda's growth and economy.

A social agenda focused on the needs of those members of our community who have not enjoyed the full benefit of Bermuda's economic success. A social agenda that involves all of Bermuda and encourages those who have to reach out to those who do not have as much.

While some believe that the *status quo* has served us well, there is another view which contends that the time has come for us to craft a future that offers a sustainable growth rate and a political order that will ensure, for the first time, that the ‘haves’ continue to have but the ‘have nots’ **will** have more.

The Government’s policies and strategies must therefore ensure that those who feel disadvantaged will have an opportunity to be full participants in and beneficiaries of the success of their country. They must, however, be educated and trained to participate in a world that is becoming more and more interdependent.

The social agenda dictates that Bermudians must be adequately housed, employed, educated and trained to cultivate and expand our economy. The social agenda must provide remedies for the social ills that beset us as a community and it must ensure that our people live in a just and fair society where law and good order prevail. The social agenda **must** encourage every segment of the community to contribute solutions to the problems that face Bermuda today.

This will ensure a more unified Bermuda, a Bermuda where we are more and more our brother’s keeper, a Bermuda that is not only world-renowned as a model for financial success, but also a Bermuda that is renowned for true social harmony.

During this Parliamentary year, the promotion of the social agenda will be at the heart of every Ministry of the Government and human and financial resources will be dedicated to this end. Therefore, this Throne Speech will highlight the primary social agenda initiatives that will be implemented and expanded during the years ahead.

And to ensure the community is kept abreast of the progress that is being made, the Government will update the Honourable House of Assembly on a regular basis.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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There can be little doubt that one of the Island's most pressing challenges is the provision of adequate and affordable housing and rental units for Bermudians.

The housing strategy must be a multi-pronged one, and an immediate approach will see the Government **construct two, three and four bedroom manufactured emergency homes.**

As a longer-term strategy, the Government is **increasing the housing stock and the number of rooming houses by renovating identified derelict and vacant premises**. Additionally, the Government is **executing a phased rehabilitation and renovation of existing housing within the responsibility of the Government Quangos**.

In order to keep track of the status and availability of derelict properties, the Government will develop a **Housing Information Management System** to enable citizens requiring houses to be easily and quickly matched with suitable accommodation.

Amendments to the Customs Tariff Act 1970 will provide for Customs duty relief on imported building materials to be used in approved housing schemes. This initiative will reduce costs and place good quality homes within the reach of more Bermudian families.

The Government will **eliminate the Stamp Duty/Estate Tax on the primary family homestead**. Commonly referred to as ‘death tax’, this social agenda initiative will ensure that families no longer have to be

concerned about their ability to retain and maintain the house they have always known as home.

The **establishment of community based housing** for newly released prisoners will provide a structured, therapeutic and residential environment to ease their transition back into society. In addition, these facilities will allow support agencies to maintain vital aftercare contact with discharged residents and their families, thereby helping to reduce the recidivism rate.

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There is no more esteemed and valued group of residents than our senior citizens, those whose labour of love has contributed so significantly to the successes that we enjoy today. It is important, therefore, that the Government's social agenda includes initiatives to improve the circumstances of our senior citizens.

To this end, the Government will **research and identify best practice in order to establish a national monitoring system** to determine the level of service required to provide and maintain a quality standard of care in all seniors care facilities.

For those seniors who choose to live independently or with family members, the Government will, upon request, **conduct home assessments** to determine whether the homes in which such individuals reside are suitably equipped to handle their needs. Where alterations are necessary, the Government will recommend appropriate resources to effect the required modifications.

The Government will organize **seniors meetings and monthly educational workshops**. In addition, the Government will **introduce Seniors Health Issues Forums**. During these sessions, seniors will have the opportunity to receive vital information associated with wills, trusts, taxes, pensions, consumer awareness and other issues related to their welfare and well-being. They will also have the opportunity to discuss and have their concerns addressed. These social agenda programmes are not only intended to

inform, but also to help empower our seniors so that they can live healthier, happier and more productive lives.

Our seniors will also receive **new and improved services at wellness clinics** located across the Island. These community based clinics will allow seniors' health care concerns to be addressed at the point of need, thereby reducing the requirement to seek care elsewhere.

The Government will also sponsor a **Health Summit** involving Bermuda's key health care partners for the purpose of promoting greater collaboration in the delivery of essential health services to the entire community.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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Too often our young people are recognised more for their negative behaviour than for their positive contributions.

In order for our young people to achieve their potential, they must be equipped with the tools to enable them to develop into productive citizens and to allow them to take their place as the leaders of tomorrow.

As a matter of priority, the Government will publish and implement the **National Youth Development Strategy**, a comprehensive national approach to address issues associated with our young people. The four principal areas of focus will be the development of potential leaders, enhanced family involvement, the strengthening of those agencies that interact on a regular basis with young people and the provision of opportunities for information-sharing on strategies that work.

Additionally, the Government will introduce an **Academic Monitoring and Character Development Mentor Project**. Working within the schools and communities, this social agenda programme will instil positive values in Bermuda's pre and early teens and provide mentors for our young people with a view to establishing on-going relationships between students and responsible adults.

In order to reduce the amount of idle, unsupervised time available to Bermuda's young people, a circumstance that enhances their chances of engaging in anti-social behaviour, **the Academic Monitoring and Character Development Mentor Project will also run during school vacations as part of the Life Skills Camps.** This will allow young people to sustain relationships with mentors while continuing their academic and social development.

To ensure that the first experiences our young people have with the Bermuda Police Service are positive, **the role of the Schools Resource Officers, will be expanded.** Resource Officers within the public education system help to promote students' understanding and appreciation of the importance of law and good order.

The establishment of a **Junior Police Cadet Programme in Bermuda's middle schools** will improve the relationship between our young people and the Police Service. The positive exposure afforded our young people will assist in their social development and increase their understanding of the duties of Police Officers.

The impact of drugs and crime on our young people is also of grave concern. The Government will **organize a National Conference on Youth, Crime and Drug Issues**. Utilizing both local and overseas professionals, this social agenda initiative will involve a wide cross section of the community in an effort to develop community driven solutions.

On a related note, the formulation of a **national strategy to counter young offenders** will identify national priorities based on information gleaned from a variety of sources. This will allow the Government to implement comprehensive policies and programmes to improve the lives of our young people.

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The social agenda recognizes the importance of community development and the value of building community spirit.

In an effort to foster greater pride and a sense of community, the Government will **formulate a national policy to recognize Bermudians**

who have made a significant contribution to the community. The Government will also reward organizations committed to developing and sustaining Bermuda's unique cultural traditions.

In conjunction with various social partners, the Government will establish a framework, and provide funding, for a **Community Areas Programme**. This programme will emphasize the importance of community involvement in implementing neighbourhood improvements to reduce the negative elements within our society. Although the objective is to enhance local neighbourhoods, the programme will also foster greater community spirit and a heightened sense of pride.

Potential initiatives identified for this programme include: infrastructure improvements, traffic calming measures, the upgrading of derelict buildings, area school involvement, the erection of plaques to identify locations or events of historical importance, day care needs for children and seniors, access for the disabled and community education.

To encourage participation in community programmes, the Government will conduct **community forums** where the concerns of neighbours, families and friends can be heard.

Additionally, through the Community Education and Development Programmes, and with the assistance of the Parish Councils, the various recreational, social and educational needs of the community will be addressed.

The Government cannot be expected to be the sole agent for social change. Rather, it requires a partnership involving the entire community. The Government's social agenda will recognize and reward efforts made to improve Bermuda's social environment. As a long term commitment, the Government will not only provide **advice but also assist with funding to approved community based individuals or organizations that initiate programmes and activities to improve their communities**. In this way, the Government will serve the greater good and honour its obligation as partners in the community.

Neighbourhood renewal also means that roads and thoroughfares must be protected from careless and irresponsible road users. In order to deter this behaviour, the Government will **implement a demerit points system for traffic offences**. Under this plan, points will be allocated for various road traffic offences. An accumulation of a specified number of points will result in licences being suspended. Not only will this encourage safer and more courteous road use, but it will also remove the perception of unequal sentencing and make road users more responsible for their actions.

In order to meet community needs for efficient, convenient public transportation, the Government's social agenda will feature a continuation of the **feeder commuter bus pilot scheme** similar to the successful pilot project introduced in Warwick earlier this year. These routes are designed to supplement the main bus routes and provide access to public transportation in those areas where buses are unable to provide service.

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We must all take the initiative to manage criminal activity and tackle those members of the community who seek to chip away at the foundations of decent society. As part of the social agenda, the Government will implement community relations strategies to increase public interaction and cooperation with the Police.

The Police Consultative Committees will be revitalized as a practical means of involving the Bermuda Police Service with the communities they serve. The three Consultative Committees, which will operate in the Eastern, Central, and Western parishes, will allow citizens to become actively involved in crime prevention efforts through localized forums. These forums will provide an ongoing platform for the community to address the negative elements within their own neighbourhoods.

Additional community partnerships aimed at reducing and preventing crime will include **the expansion of the Communities that Care Project** that has already been successfully implemented in three local neighbourhoods. This

innovative project works by identifying and eliminating risk factors associated with delinquent or antisocial behaviour, thereby assisting our young people to make the right choices.

For those in the penal system, a range of programmes to provide opportunities to remediate negative behaviour will be offered in addition to programmes designed to enhance skills and build self esteem. The **Uncommon Results Programme** will be introduced in the correctional facilities to allow inmates to focus on the consequences of their offending behaviour while at the same time encouraging and reinforcing positive change.

It is also incumbent upon the Government to cause positive change in the lives of those afflicted by drug and alcohol addiction.

The National Drug Commission (NDC) has played a valuable role in setting the direction of Government's response to drug and alcohol abuse. However, after careful review, it has been determined that those who require services can be better assisted by the Ministry of Health and Family Services who are now well placed to deliver a holistic and comprehensive approach to

prevention, counselling, and rehabilitation. The benefits of this approach are boundless and will allow those who are trying to rebuild their lives the opportunity to take advantage of the technical expertise, administrative experience and knowledge offered by the Ministry. Accordingly, **the National Drug Commission will be incorporated into the Ministry of Health and Family Services.**

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As Bermuda continues to enjoy unrivalled economic prosperity, we can ill-afford to leave anyone behind. The Government's social agenda will feature a number of initiatives and programmes designed to create a well-educated and skilled Bermudian workforce and to allow qualified and experienced Bermudians of all ages to reach their full potential.

The coming year will see **the implementation of a Mature Student Further Education Award Programme.** In the past, age restrictions have prevented mature students from taking advantage of scholarships and other further education awards. This programme will allow mature students to

compete for scholarships and awards that will enable them to pursue educational opportunities beyond the Bermuda College.

The National Training Board will also introduce several innovative programmes to encourage and enhance the educational opportunities available to Bermudians.

The Tech Quest 2000 Project will give Bermudians the opportunity to take their place in positions of leadership in technology education, advanced technology and technology management.

The National Training Board will work in partnership with a number of institutions, including The Bermuda Regiment, **to assist the unskilled, unemployed and under-employed to gain the skills necessary for employment.**

Programmes for Senior Secondary School Dropouts will assist them to attain their high school equivalency qualifications.

A **Technical Career Preparation Seminar** will be arranged to direct, equip and assist unemployed individuals to attain the requisite skills they need to compete in today's job market.

Partnerships with the various **summer youth development projects** will provide our young people with early exposure to the programmes offered by the National Training Board.

In conjunction with the Government, the National Training Board will **implement a probation and parole project** to help inmates re-enter society by providing interpersonal and job-entry training.

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International Business is a key employer of Bermudians and a key contributor to our economy. This pillar of our economy injects vital capital and a potential additional human resource with a wide range of expertise to assist in the implementation of the social agenda. Therefore, the well-being

of the international business sector will be integral to the success of the social agenda.

To ensure that Bermuda's competitiveness and attractiveness as a premier international business jurisdiction is enhanced, the Government will introduce amendments to legislation that affects the conduct of international business in Bermuda.

The Government will also promote and advance an entrepreneurial and enterprising culture by **working with local banking institutions to provide assistance to small and medium sized businesses.** The Government will also unveil a template of incentives for small businesses to assist in their growth and development.

As the second pillar of Bermuda's economy, the tourism industry must remain an inseparable component of our economic growth and well-being.

In order to safeguard and enhance this vital industry, an aggressive effort will be made to **increase hotel bed capacity and diversify the types of hotels offered to our visitors.** Working with developers, the Government

will ensure that new tourism property development includes hotel beds as a component and that those tourism properties that are currently offline are quickly returned to the tourism product. To fill these new hotel beds, the Government will **pursue new business outside of traditional US gateway cities and secure new gateways from Europe**. In addition, the Government will insist that any new hotel development includes staff housing.

To ensure year-round employment opportunities in the tourism industry, the Government will implement programmes and initiatives that will **refocus the Bermuda experience as one that is available throughout the year**. No longer will Bermuda be seen as having high and off seasons. Instead, the Government will reposition Bermuda's product to provide incentives for tourists to travel to our shores throughout the year.

Efforts will also be made to **stimulate greater interaction between Bermudians and tourists**. Although Bermudians have always been known as the friendliest people in the World, the Government will advance its social agenda by taking advantage of this most important natural resource – our citizens – by creating opportunities for more contact with Bermudians, thereby increasing the likelihood of return visits.

The Government will intensify its efforts to revive and support local entertainment through the establishment of **an Entertainment Development Fund**. This social agenda initiative will allow the Government to discover and nurture more of our abundant natural talent and ensure that it is available to our visitors.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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Access to Computers and the Internet can play a major role in improving the lives of the 'have nots'.

To enable Bermudians to keep abreast of today's fast-paced world, the Government will introduce an **Internet access in public places programme**. This social agenda programme will allow free Internet access on terminals located in post offices, libraries, and other public buildings.

The Government will also introduce a **recycled Personal Computer Programme**. Although recent statistics have shown that 74% of Bermudian homes have computers, the Government will not be satisfied until computer

access is within the grasp of all Bermudians. Both businesses and Government will be encouraged to pass their older but functioning personal computers to charitable groups or those in need so that they can enjoy the benefits that computer ownership offers.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

In addition to the social agenda initiatives already mentioned, you will be asked to consider a number of Bills, Discussion Papers and Regulations during this Parliamentary Session, including:

- **The Parish Rest Homes Board Bill** to coordinate the management of all Parish Rest Homes;
- **The Ombudsman Bill** to establish the functions and jurisdiction of the Ombudsman for Bermuda;
- **The Architects Bill** to provide for the registration of professional architects;
- Amendments to the **Companies Act 1981, the Exempted Partnerships Act 1992, the Limited Partnerships Act 1883, the**

Partnership Act 1902, the Trusts Special Provisions Act 1989 the Trustee Act 1975 and the Segregated Accounts Companies Act 2000 to enhance Bermuda's competitiveness and attractiveness as a premier international business jurisdiction;

- Amendments to the **Parliamentary Election Act 1978** to allow for an extension of absentee balloting during a General Election or bye-Election;
- Amendments to the **Commission for Unity and Racial Equality Act 1994** to allow for the inclusion of information regarding gender and Bermudian status of employees;
- Amendments to the **Human Rights Act 1981** to extend the definition of harassment, and to include mental illness, learning disabilities and obesity as disabilities;
- Amendments to the **Clean Air Act 1991** and **Clean Air Regulations 1993** to widen the powers and discretion of the Environmental Authority when issuing licenses;
- Amendments to the **Misuse of Drugs Act 1972** to provide for greater sentences and maximum fines of \$250,000 in Magistrates' Court and maximum fines of \$500,000 in the Supreme Court;

- Amendments to the **Restaurants (Temporary Customs Duty) Relief Act 2002** to extend the zero rate Customs duty concession on restaurant refurbishments, or new restaurant developments, beyond December 31, 2004.
- Amendments to the **Evidence Act 1905 and Criminal Code Act 1907** to provide for better protection to vulnerable witnesses, particularly in child abuse cases;
- **Child Abuse Regulations** to establish a child abuse register that will provide the ability to track and monitor individuals convicted of child abuse;
- Amendments to the **Financial Assistance Regulations** to raise the Annual Rental Value for qualified individuals from \$9000 to a value that would include more households; to provide the ability to give special dispensation to seniors and the disabled; and to provide discretionary authority to consider special cases that may ordinarily be overlooked by the existing regulations; and
- A Discussion Paper on **Public Access to Information**.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

I have outlined the Government's vision for its social agenda; it is an agenda for the people that will be delivered in partnership with the people. While the Government appreciates the challenges are great, the Government also recognizes that the opportunities are even greater.

All of us have an unquestionable commitment and obligation to build a society that allows people to have the quality of life they deserve. The Bermuda that our children inherit from us must be a place where opportunity and prosperity remain within the reach of each and every person.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

It gives me great pleasure now, on behalf of Her Majesty the Queen, to declare this session of Parliament open.

I invoke God's blessing upon you as you commence this new Session. May Divine Providence guide you in your deliberations.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Michael Medlicott Vereker, KCB'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial 'J' and a long, sweeping underline.

Sir John Michael Medlicott Vereker, KCB

Governor and Commander-in-Chief

Hamilton

Bermuda

29th October 2004

