



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE 2005

DELIVERED BY
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ON THE OCCASION OF THE
CONVENING OF PARLIAMENT

2005 Speech from the Throne

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

I am delighted that my first visit to Bermuda is on the occasion of the celebration of the five hundredth anniversary of the discovery of Bermuda. Her Majesty the Queen has asked me to convey to those present and to all the people of Bermuda her congratulations on the achievements of the past and her good wishes for the future.

The past year has seen a number of devastating challenges. We have witnessed lives ravaged by Hurricane Ivan in the Caribbean, the tsunami in Asia, bombings in London, and most recently Hurricanes Katrina and Rita across the Gulf Coast of the United States of America.

During these troubling times, Bermudians and residents alike came together in a spirit of generosity and empathy to offer support, prayers and condolences to the victims of natural and human made disasters.

These tragedies remind us of just how delicate and insecure life can be. It should be evident that our way of life can be changed not only by an act of God, but as a result of our reluctance to address the threats that we make to our own existence.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

To steer a more responsible and responsive path for the future of Bermuda, the Government has elevated Sustainable Development to the level of a national imperative.

The Government has led the way by launching a public discourse that has engaged the concerns and views of everyday Bermudians and residents, as well as businesses, and organisations regarding the combined social, environmental, and economic successes and challenges to this society.

The result of the extensive consultation that has taken place has been incorporated into specific plans of action that, in collaboration with the local community, will establish the framework for a sustainable Bermuda.

The goal of Sustainable Development in conjunction with the all encompassing, cross-ministry, Social Agenda, designed to improve the lives of all Bermudians, is the Government's commitment to make the individual and collective actions of this society more strategic, integrated, comprehensive and effective. As a direct consequence, the continued and future success of the economy will result in – a Bermuda for everyone, and everyone for Bermuda.

The next phase of the Social Agenda will see the introduction of legislative and social initiatives designed to protect and sustain Bermuda's growth, environment, economy and culture. These combined efforts must be a social contract, a partnership between all of Bermuda to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to be both participants and beneficiaries of the success of this country.

Therefore, in the coming months, the Government will appoint respected members of the community and research groups to provide assistance to a newly established **Social Agenda Management Resource Team (SAMRT)**. This Team will serve as a think tank to provide high level and independent advice from the private sector and wider community. The Team will also be utilised in the implementation and long-term management of the Social Agenda.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

Over the past nine months, the country has engaged in a national dialogue regarding the issue of Independence. The historic and autonomous Bermuda Independence Commission made an important contribution to public participation and understanding by seeking out and engaging the views of the community regarding Bermuda's future. The work of the Commission and the contribution by the public has left an indelible mark on Bermudian society; creating an unprecedented base of knowledge that will be invaluable as the country moves forward to determine its place in the global community.

The Bermuda Independence Commission highlighted to this community that if the process towards sovereignty is handled in an open and transparent manner, international business will not leave these shores, the dollar will not lose its value and the status and relationship with overseas neighbours will not be threatened.

Independence is therefore a natural progression for a mature jurisdiction such as Bermuda.

The work of the Commission may be completed, but it is crucial that their footprints not be forgotten. Therefore, to educate the public about the conclusions reached by the Bermuda Independence Commission, **the Government will hold public meetings across the Island.**

This exercise will be followed by the presentation of a **Green Paper to the House of Assembly and ultimately a White Paper** outlining the Government's policy proposals for an independent Bermuda.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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To promote new and existing Government services and programmes to Bermudians and residents, and in line with the Government's commitment to Public Access to Information legislation, a **Government Information Television Channel** will be launched. This communication tool will be a mechanism to increase Bermudian content on the airwaves and provide an opportunity for young Bermudians to enter the field of public media.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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Children play a critical role in the future of any society. The best way to help children is to help families. Therefore, the Government will introduce a series of legislative and policy initiatives to help improve the lives of Bermuda's families.

Since 1998, the Government, in collaboration with the Bermuda Housing Corporation, has housed and provided mortgages for almost 800 families. Over **380 families were housed in rental units** and during that same period, in excess of **400 new mortgages** were provided to Bermudian families to achieve their dream of home ownership.

To ensure that even more Bermudians have a secure place to call home, the Government will commence the construction of **330 new rental units over the next thirty months**. This will mean that since 1998 and within a 10 year period, the Government will have provided housing for over 1100 Bermudian families.

Shortly, the Perimeter Lane Housing Project will begin. This project includes the construction of **12 one bedroom units, 16 two bedroom units, and 10 three bedroom units**, which will result in an additional 38 units in total.

The Bermuda Land Development Company will progress work on the Old Naval Hospital at Southside. This project will deliver **40 one bedroom units, 40 two bedroom units, and 40 three bedroom units**, which will contribute one hundred and twenty units in total to house both small and large families. In addition, construction will begin on the 200 unit Harbourside mixed housing development with 100 affordable units already having been awarded.

The redevelopment of Victoria Row and Albert Row in Dockyard **will add another 20 two bedroom rental units** for Bermudians in need.

The West End Development Corporation **will commence work on 25 one bedroom units and 26 two bedroom units** at the North Basin. The Victualling Yard in Dockyard will also see the **development of 16 one bedroom units, 16 two bedroom units, and 16 three bedroom units**.

The Ministry of the Health and Family Services, including the Departments of Court Services, Child and Family Services, Financial Assistance, and the Hospitals, will work collaboratively with the Ministry of Works and Engineering and Housing to **establish a team of case managers responsible for identifying and assisting families who need housing, financial assistance, and family counselling.** This combined approach to providing social, financial, and housing assistance programmes will ensure that families at risk are given the tools to address the complex and interrelated issues that they face on a daily basis.

The Government will also increase its efforts to reintegrate indigent and homeless persons into the larger community. **Work will commence on a night shelter and rooming house facility for 200 persons.** Residents of the facility will be provided with quality programmes to develop the skills required to adapt to independent living so that they can contribute to society.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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In order to aid families during the difficult period of separation and divorce, additional options such as family counselling and mediation will be instituted through amendments to **the Matrimonial Causes Act 1974**.

In addition, the Government will introduce **an Online Child Protection Bill** to prevent the creation, distribution, possession and access to pornographic material. This legislation will provide protection for children and instigate severe punishment for offenders.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

Drugs drive crime!

Drug abuse and addiction crosses racial, gender and class boundaries; it is a plague on all of us.

Therefore, a better coordinated approach to drug interdiction, intervention, education and prevention will be mounted to reduce the negative impact of drugs on individual users and to prevent drug related crimes that impact the community.

The Government will **establish a National Steering Committee on Drugs**. This Steering Committee will serve as an umbrella coalition, drawing together all of the existing bodies that tackle different aspects of Bermuda's drug problem.

In order that the highest priority be given to this pernicious problem, the Cabinet will have direct responsibility for directing and coordinating the national assault on the supply of, and demand for drugs in Bermuda.

The establishment of this new and unprecedented approach to tackling Bermuda's drug problem is an opportunity for everyone to play a role in reducing this affliction on the community.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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In May of this year, the Government announced the initiation of a study on **Young Black Men in Bermuda**. That study was finalised in October. As a result, the Cabinet will consider the recommendations of the report with the intent of implementing strategies to assist this important segment of the community.

To underpin the Government's strategy on young offenders, **a Bill will be tabled to amend the Young Offender's Act 1950**. These amendments will be complemented by the **Misuse of Drugs Amendment Bill** to divert first time young offenders away from incarceration and into counselling and rehabilitation programmes.

In support of this strategy, the Government will **develop a Juvenile and Family Treatment Court System to target young offenders and their families as a unit, rather than dealing with the offender in isolation**. Cohesive treatment will help to provide additional structure to the lives of young offenders and increase the opportunities for success of the second chance that they will be given.

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To improve the administration and support provided to Bermuda's senior citizens and physically challenged persons, **the reporting structure of the National Office of Seniors and Physically Challenged will be amended.** This organisational change will be made to increase the autonomy, efficiency and flexibility of the Office to meet the needs of Bermuda's seniors and physically challenged.

As an additional benefit to seniors, **fees charged for British Overseas Territories Citizen passports for seniors will be eliminated through an amendment to the Government Fees Act 1965 and its Regulations.**

In recognition of the contribution of the charitable sector, the Government will **amend the Charities Act 1978** to give Charity Commissioners increased regulatory authority, and to strengthen the reporting requirements of charities.

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The strengthening of the economy requires more than a commitment to statistical growth; it necessitates opportunities for those eager and able to contribute to its success.

Therefore, persons who have contributed to the economy through consistent paid work should be insulated from some of the financial burden of unemployment. Following a period of consultation, the Government will introduce legislation to provide for a **Scheme of Short Term Assistance to Newly Unemployed Persons.**

The Government encourages entrepreneurial spirit and will provide employment and economic opportunities to both current and future workers as well as small business owners through the development of a **Workforce and Employment Strategy.**

To place more Bermudians in direct benefit of the economy, this collaborative workforce development strategy will be implemented to help identify and respond to the changing occupational needs of Bermuda's economy. The strategy will also

amalgamate a number of existing programmes to increase the skills and knowledge of the Bermudian workforce.

To serve the needs of new and existing small business owners, **the Bermuda Small Business Development Corporation Act 1980 will be amended.**

The Government also believes, and the Social Agenda requires, that **an Economic Empowerment Zone be developed in North Hamilton** and elsewhere to encourage and protect often overlooked entrepreneurs.

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To attract and reward young persons for service to country, the Government will launch a pilot programme to offer additional incentives and rewards for Bermuda Regiment soldiers.

A full financial grant will be provided to members of the Bermuda Regiment who attend the Bermuda College. This mutually beneficial relationship between the Bermuda College and the Regiment will increase soldiers' access to higher

education. Additionally, **Regiment soldiers will be extended the courtesy of free travel on all of Bermuda's buses and ferries.**

In addition, through a broad based approach, the **Government will expand the co-operative work release programme between senior school students and employers.** This initiative will help young people to make informed decisions about their educational and future employment possibilities.

Increased achievement of students remains a major objective of the Government.

During the next legislative session **the Bermuda Public School System Testing Programme will be revised** to better serve the needs of students, teachers and parents.

Having heard directly from young Bermudians who participated in Bermuda's first foray with Raleigh International in Malaysia this year, the Government recognises the life changing impact that such a programme can have on Bermuda's young people. **The Government will therefore, provide additional funding for the Raleigh International Expedition in 2006.**

Additionally, the **National Training Board Regulations will be tabled** in order to commence the certification of workers in certain technical occupations.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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Heads of companies and other individuals commit an offence against Bermuda's workforce and taxpayers when pension, payroll tax and land tax are not paid in full in a timely manner.

In order to seek justice for workers and to ensure that they enjoy the retirement benefits for which they have worked so hard, the **Government will amend the Contributory Pensions Act 1970, the National Pension Scheme (Occupational Pensions) Act 1998, and the Taxes Management Act 1976** to hold Directors of companies legally responsible for unpaid pensions and taxes due to Government on behalf of workers.

These efforts will augment the Government's aggressive pursuit of outstanding monies owed and will also include **the establishment of a new dedicated Tax Court** so that cases of non-payment of taxes can be dealt with expeditiously.

The Government will also improve the legislative framework for a more competitive business environment.

Both the **Customs Tariff Act 1970** and the **Revenue Act 1898** will be amended to improve customs clearance processes for passengers and goods at all ports of entry.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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The Government will continue its ongoing reform of the criminal justice system and **will review the requirements for jury service** with the view to increasing the categories of law-abiding citizens who are allowed to sit as jurors. The rationale behind the exclusion of former police officers, lawyers, religious leaders and their spouses will be carefully examined to improve the diversity of persons selected to serve on juries.

Throughout Bermuda's history, crime detection and evidence analysis has faced numerous challenges. To ameliorate current conditions, the **Government will bring forward legislation to establish a DNA database** in Bermuda. This database will increase both the fairness and the overall effectiveness of the criminal justice system.

Vicious sexual and physical assaults have perpetuated needless fear within the community. In order to increase existing deterrents, the **Government will modernise the law on sexual and other assaults and introduce harsher penalties as appropriate.**

The Government will also work in tandem with communities and landlords to rid so-called drug houses of users of illegal substances. Through community partnership, **it is intended to return these homes to the much needed housing stock.**

To address the scourge of illegal breeding, and dog attacks, the **Dogs Act 1978 will be amended to increase penalties and strengthen enforcement.**

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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The Government recognises that it is time to modernise the Bermuda Fire Services. In this coming Parliamentary Session, **legislation will be introduced to amalgamate the different divisions of the fire services** so that they can better

serve the island. In addition, the **Fire Services Act 1982 will be amended to give enforcement power to the newly joined-up Bermuda Fire and Rescue Service.**

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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The Government acknowledges that race relations continue to impact the lives of Bermudians. Indeed, the Bermuda Independence Commission Report highlighted this fact and noted that: “It is fair to say, that the racial question and the implementations that flow out of its consideration have been an ever-present, although seldom acknowledged feature of the Bermudian social, economic and political landscape throughout Bermuda’s history.”

The Report went on to recommend that, the “Government should lead a process whereby the diversity of Bermuda is celebrated and where opportunity is equal and where there is genuine social unity.”

In this regard, the Government will facilitate and support the Human Rights Commission, CURE and Non-Governmental Organisations in a major race relations initiative. Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda – or CURB – will be

the vehicle tasked with recommending to the Government tangible, achievable strategies for the elimination of racism in Bermuda.

An amendment to the CURE legislation will also be introduced to require large companies to review their policies to ensure that racial barriers to opportunity are removed.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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The beauty of the physical environment and diverse land forms are vital, not only to the stable economy, but to the health and vibrancy of this community.

The Government will enhance the quality of experience in Bermuda's parks through **an amendment to the Bermuda National Parks Act 1986**. The number of lands protected under the Act will be expanded, and enforcement powers against offenders will be increased.

Further commitment to preservation will be demonstrated through **amendments to the Stamp Duties Act 1976**. Stamp duty on land purchased to maintain open

spaces by non-profit organisations will be reduced to encourage an increase in the permanent reserve of Bermuda's communal lands. The reform of this Act will also result in streamlining and simplification of stamp duty categories.

The safeguarding of protected species and habitats will also be **enhanced through new Regulations under the Protected Species Act 2003.**

An important element of Sustainable Development will be a new strategic direction for the future of agriculture in Bermuda. **Amendments will be made to the Agriculture Act 1930** to ensure that one of Bermuda's most important industries remains viable into the future.

In addition, the Government **will introduce the Control of Pesticides Act** to consolidate relevant portions of the Agriculture Act 1930, the Public Health Act 1949, and the Pharmacy and Poisons Act 1979.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

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This Government has undertaken the development of a **master plan for Bermuda's ports infrastructure**. The Waterfront Task Force, comprised of a broad cross-section of the community, continues to examine the development of Bermuda's waterfronts and has recently considered a variety of options which will be presented to the people of Bermuda for their consideration.

The tourism product and the quality of life for all Bermudians stand to be enhanced by the development of the ports. In committing to this endeavour the Government seeks to launch a new dimension to the natural beauty of Bermuda.

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You will also be invited to consider the following Bills:

The Counsellors Bill

The Bermuda Hospitals' Board Amendment Bill

The Dental Practitioners Amendment Bill

The Bermuda Health Council Regulations

The Veterinary Practitioners Bill

The Fisheries Act Amendment Bill

The Electronic Transactions Amendment Bill

The Credit Unions Amendment Bill

The Companies Act Amendment Bill

The Bermuda Monetary Authority Amendment Bill

The Insurance Amendment Bill

The Post Office Amendment Bill

Civil Aviation (Licensing of Air Transport and Commercial Flying) Amendment
Bill

Hotel (Licensing and Control) Amendment Bill

Hotels (Licensing and Control) Amendment Regulations

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The Government believes that Bermuda's greatest resource is its people.

Currently, Bermuda's role on the world stage is performed by others. The UK Government speaks for Bermuda on international political issues; the financial sector delivers Bermuda's external economic impact.

It is the Government's view that the time has come for Bermuda to rehearse her own voice and to write her own script. Bermudians must be prepared to play many parts. They must expand their horizons. Let history record that Bermuda saw the challenge of the future and met it!

With our rich history and accomplishments behind us, our greatest success and best days are ahead of us.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

I believe that Bermuda is an extraordinary success story. It is the story of an island which has grown into one of the world's most prosperous islands. It is the story of an Island with the oldest Westminster democracy outside of the United Kingdom. It is, I am sure, a story still unfinished, with many more achievements to come. I look forward to learning more about that story in the course of my visit.

Mr. President and Members of the Senate

Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly

On behalf of Her Majesty the Queen I now declare this Session of Parliament open.
May Divine Providence continue to bless Bermuda and to guide this Legislature in
all its deliberations.

HRH THE DUKE OF YORK KCVO, ADC

Friday November 4th, 2005