



SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

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ON THE OCCASION OF THE
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DELIVERED BY

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Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, in the twelve months since the Legislature was last convened paradigm shifts have occurred in the global panorama that have challenged those norms by which modern democracies have existed. A young, energetic U.S. President has found the challenges of advancing a domestic agenda compounded by the global economy. A seasoned U.K. Prime Minister continues to forge a difficult path amid similar circumstances. In Bermuda we witness the trials of the two most influential of our international partners and reflect on how well we continue to weather the same storms. Make no mistake, Bermuda has not been immune to these global issues but our economy is proving resilient and this Government has committed to fostering the conditions required for every stakeholder to realize continued success in the New Bermuda.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, in this 400th anniversary year of the settlement of these Islands, our national discourse has been dominated by events that mark this impressive milestone. As a people born out of adversity and whose beginnings are a simple human story of collaboration, basic teamwork and unfailing character, the Government intends to reawaken these qualities in the people of Bermuda through a programme of national service. It was Martin Luther King Jr. who told us: "Life's most persistent and urgent question is: what are you doing for others?"

This initiative will require Bermudian young men and women to actively participate in mentoring the youth and committing to the provision of work experience designed to expose our youth to the rigours of the working world thereby permitting sound career choices and the early acquisition of those skills required to make our youth undeniable assets to a broad range of employers.

Dame Jennifer Smith challenged young people in words that ring as true today as they did in 1990: "arm yourselves with knowledge, the knowledge of your history - for knowledge is power and once you are empowered you will be able to become economically independent, educationally able, politically astute, socially active, internationally involved and spiritually sound. This is the challenge of your generation".

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, since this Government's bold steps in 2007 in the form of the Hopkins Review of the public education system the pace of reform has been steady and sought to minimize disruption to students.

The author James Baldwin penned these words: "not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced." Therefore, as part of the reform effort, the Ministry of Education will:

- Strengthen the detailed, personalized assessment of at risk students to ensure that behavioural, home, psychological, discipline and other issues do not go unaddressed;
- Expand and hone the skills of existing school counselors to include the provision of skilled career guidance to better prepare students for careers in Bermuda's economy;
- Implement specialized instruction for boys throughout the public school system recognizing the special needs of this particular group and their learning requirements; and
- Review the certification of teachers to ensure that the process and criteria match the rigour demanded of a system in transition to marked improvement.

The adoption of the Cambridge International Curriculum provides a unique opportunity to further strengthen the cultural ties that bind us in Bermuda. As a result, the 2010/2011 school year will see the introduction of instruction of Portuguese in the public school system of Bermuda.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, the success of the free day care initiative continues to realize meaningful savings for young families. However, parents of special needs children in the same age group continue to encounter difficulties in placing their children in suitable facilities. To meet this need the Ministry of Culture and Social Rehabilitation will lead a broad consultative effort to identify the best means by which to address this challenge for those families.

The statutory remit of the Commission on Unity and Racial Equality (CURE) is the elimination of racial discrimination and institutionalized racial discrimination in Bermuda. What the Government sees as a lack of progress in this area means that some new vehicle must be found to address an issue that continues to plague this community. Therefore, CURE will undergo a thorough review and with effect from 1st January 2010 its data collection function will be assumed by the Department of Statistics. The perennial findings are predictable and well known. A modern solution with the appropriate policy framework must be found to address the historical inequities, which have become more than a trend.

The transformational Mirrors Programme will continue to be a focal point of the Ministry of Culture and

Social Rehabilitation and during this Session a permanent home on a suitable island will be identified to maximize the elimination of those extraneous influences that can adversely affect the growth of participants.

The long awaited Study of the Employment and Earnings Gaps between Young Black Men in Bermuda and their Same-Age Peers has been released and, accompanying wide public discussion of the issues canvassed in the Report, the Government will develop a policy framework around addressing the gaps identified and equipping our young black men for success in this economy.

In response to the voices of the Island's young people, the Government will establish a state of the art recording studio where the incredible talent in the community can be nurtured and given the opportunity to shine locally and abroad.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, the intention of the Human Rights Act to prevent discrimination against all classes of people must be fulfilled. Therefore, the Act will be amended to ensure that no person is discriminated against in Bermuda.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, the administration of justice requires that our criminal law is amenable to amendments necessary to meet the challenges of prevalent crimes in society. Consequently, during this session, amendments to the Criminal Code will be tabled to redefine the offence of robbery and to increase the penalties for that offence. Additionally, amendments to the Jurors Act 1971 will be introduced to increase the pool of persons from whom a jury may be selected.

The Bail Act 2005 will also be amended to permit the electronic tagging of persons released on bail.

The process by which liquor licences are granted must be modernized and the enforcement powers under the Liquor Licence Act 1974 strengthened. Therefore, during this Session the Legislature will be invited to consider amendments to the Act which will better regulate licensed premises and provide a more efficient system for applicants and administrators alike.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, the care and concern for our natural environment should be shared by all. Aimed at the most delicate of ecosystems, The Ministry of the Environment and Sports will launch a Mangrove Conservation and Restoration Plan which will protect existing sites and initiate new mangroves to strengthen the marine environment.

Bermuda's National Parks System will continue to be enhanced through public playgrounds. Warwick's facility will be completed and Somerset's Long Bay will see a facility installed in 2010.

A Queen Bee Rearing Project will seek to mitigate the global phenomena of collapsing bee populations and Bermuda's anticipated success in this initiative is expected to yield international outreach in this critical area of the food chain.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, during this Session the Ministry of Energy, Telecommunications and E-Commerce will submit its White Paper on Energy coupled with leadership in the development of incentives to encourage Bermudians to assume a lifestyle based upon practical energy conservation habits and to adopt energy efficient technologies.

A Regulatory Authority Act and the Electronic Communications Act will be tabled seeking reform in the telecommunications sector.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, the health of the Island's citizens continues to be a priority of this Government. The Ministry of Health will devise a National Health Strategy to provide a framework within which all projects and policies will fit.

During this Session the Legislature will be invited to consider the following items:

- Amendments to the Bermuda Health Council Act to enable the Council to act as the peoples' watchdog for the healthcare sector;
- Amendments to the Public Health Act to align it with best practice in patient safety and modern public health principles; and

- Amendments to the Nursing Act.

A new, comprehensive strategy for the physically challenged citizens of our community and the Island's approach to their everyday needs and aspirations will be enhanced with the key themes of dignity, accessibility and respect. The Ministry of Works and Engineering will lead by example through the establishment of wheelchair access ramps at popular beaches on the Island.

New Regulations for Complementary and Alternative medical practitioners as well as embalmers and funeral directors will be introduced.

Access to healthcare must be preserved for all Bermudians and where those groups most vulnerable have that access threatened this Government will act. During this Session FutureCare will continue to be developed as previously undertaken, but not in the face of callous practices in the private sector. Legislation preventing discriminatory practices within the insurance industry will be a considered option, particularly as regards senior citizens.

As part of the national health strategy, the Government will also conduct a study to determine the viability of an emergency health fund aimed at assisting those members of the community whose employment benefits or employment situations do not afford them the access to healthcare demanded by the standard of living we enjoy in this community.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, too many Bermudians have run afoul of the strict provisions which determine entry into the United States. Therefore, this Government will create a Visa Waiver Assistance Programme to encourage Bermudians to stay off the list of prohibited persons and moreover provide assistance to those requiring visas to enter our nearest neighbouring country, the United States.

The efforts of this Government have resulted in the ability of Bermudians to visit EU states without a visa and visa free access to other countries will continue to be pursued. Written, confirmed assurances that the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon will not adversely affect Bermuda have been obtained from the British Government.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, democracy is evolutionary. To ensure that Bermuda's democracy evolves in a manner that best serves the needs of the people, the Government will champion the convening of a parliamentary conference under the auspices of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. The aim of this conference will be to craft a modernized Legislature and to equip Bermuda with an efficient and effective model of legislative democracy, fashioned through an inclusive, participatory process.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of

Assembly, the vexed issue of gaming for Bermuda must be fully debated. Accordingly, during this Session the Government will invite the Legislature to consider a Green Paper on Gaming for Bermuda and provide the results of dispassionate research on the issue for public consumption.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, the Ministry of Finance has led the Government's able management of the impact of global economic conditions on the Island. To further enhance the legislative powers in this evolving scenario, amendments to the Banks and Deposit Companies Act will be tabled to strengthen the intervention powers of the Bermuda Monetary Authority in the case of troubled banks in accordance with recommendations of the International Monetary Fund. Further a deposit insurance scheme will be developed for the protection of retail depositors and the legislation governing the operations of credit unions will be modernized.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, as fortunes wax and wane in the tourism sectors of the Region and the world, Bermuda must remain competitive and upbeat in the growth of the original pillar of our economy. In this Session the Legislature will be invited to consider amendments to the Hotel Concessions Act to streamline the process by which concessions are gained and simplify the claims requirements to encourage smaller hotel properties to avail themselves of the benefits.

The Government will also intensify its efforts to increase joint marketing by the Bermuda Department of Tourism and individual hotel properties.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, the mosaic that Bermudian society has become could never have been imagined by those weary seafarers whose destiny was shaped by an unnamed hurricane 400 years ago. What is clear, however, is that in unity we have strength. In mutual respect we thrive. Perhaps the most apt summary is to be found in the words of a humble but brilliant man, in whose story we find rejection, prejudice, perseverance and ultimate success. George Washington Carver said: "How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant of the weak and strong. Because some day in life you will have been all of these." So shall this Government continue to discharge the mandate of the peoples' trust.

Traditionally at this point, before finishing the Speech from the Throne, the Governor adds some thoughts of his own. After a tumultuous year for the world in politics, and political tremors here in Bermuda, at present the focus for the year ahead is back to economics. There are, I suspect, twin lenses to the perspective of many in Bermuda, especially those who are not politically partisan. The first is a natural apprehension at the effects on Bermuda of the serious recession in the large economies to which Bermuda's prosperity is intimately linked. The second is a sense that because the damage to Bermuda from the global recession has, at least so far and mercifully, been less than in many other countries there is still scope for efforts to improve even further the quality of life across the board.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, for my part I undertake to continue what your Constitution prescribes, that is to oversee those who provide the law and order, the security and the transparency which underpin Bermuda's enjoyment of this Island's high quality of life.

Madame President and Members of the Senate, Mr. Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly, I declare this Session of the Legislature open and May God guide you and grant you wisdom in your deliberations.