

**United Bermuda Party Throne Speech Reply – Delivered by the Hon.  
Dr. Grant Gibbons, MP, JP on November 14<sup>th</sup>, 2005**

To His Honour the Speaker and Members of the House of Assembly:

Mr. Speaker,

In just seven years, successive PLP governments have robbed Bermudians of hope for a better future. A series of scandals, broken promises, excessive spending and waste, carelessness with the truth, declining standards and an utter lack of strong, moral leadership have destroyed people's faith in the ability of the PLP government to deliver a better Bermuda.

The United Bermuda Party has said this before, but more recently, this criticism has spread throughout the community. Others are making their voices heard, including long-time PLP supporters. Clearly, the performance of the PLP government since 1998 has been a crushing disappointment to all Bermudians, of all races, all classes and all political persuasions.

In 1998, the Progressive Labour Party promised their government would rekindle hope. But hope disappeared somewhere between the BHC and Berkeley fiascos on the road to pay-to-play. And the PLP government has become everything they said they once fought against: vengeful, self-serving and seriously out of touch with the people.

Unfortunately, the 2005 Speech from the Throne does nothing to lift the despair that permeates our community today. For people without hope that

the PLP government will do the right thing, or even do what they say, the words in this Throne Speech provide no comfort.

## **Independence**

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda have lost hope that the PLP government will do the right thing on independence.

When Premier Scott reintroduced the issue of independence to Bermudians, he called for a “comprehensive, fact-finding, analytical and reasoned approach.”

Now, 18 months later, we have had the analysis, consultation and discussion the Premier asked for.

- The UN Decolonization Committee has visited twice.
- Numerous public meetings have been held.
- The Bermuda Independence Commission has released its report, followed by a half-hearted apology for its serious omissions and errors.
- The UK Government has stood firm on its preference for a referendum to determine Bermuda’s sovereignty.

- Bermudians for Referendum have presented Premier Scott with the signatures of over 14,000 registered voters who support a referendum on independence.
- The Chamber of Commerce, the Association of Bermuda Insurers and Reinsurers, the Association of Bermuda International Companies, BIBA and other members of the international and local business community have called for a timely referendum in order to end the uncertainty that is eroding confidence in Bermuda.
- Individuals, organizations and columnists have freely expressed their varying opinions on independence through outlets available in the print and broadcast media.
- And numerous polls have clearly demonstrated that the majority of Bermudians oppose independence and support a referendum.

After all this, has the PLP government demonstrated that they are listening to the people? Have they shown respect for the will of the majority in both word and deed? The answer, unfortunately, is no.

Premier Scott has confused everyone by laying out a number of options for deciding independence, including a general election and referendum on the same day or a general election followed by a referendum in a year's time. He may have even more variations on that theme; no one seems to understand precisely what the Premier is saying.

And now, in the Throne Speech, the PLP government calls for additional public meetings, followed by Parliamentary discussion of a Green Paper and

then a White Paper. Conveniently omitted from the Throne Speech were a timetable and a date for closure by referendum.

Apparently, only Premier Scott and his crystal ball know when the rest of us will be sufficiently informed, adequately educated and mature enough to make a decision, just like he knew that the 14,000 people who put their names on the referendum petition didn't know what they were signing.

The United Bermuda Party believes that a Green Paper and White Paper are unnecessary. The people of Bermuda are telling us they have all the information they need to make a considered judgment about sovereignty.

One of my favourite hymns, Mr. Speaker, begins with this line: "Once to every man and nation, comes the moment to decide." For those of us who recognize the social and economic damage a prolonged debate on independence can cause, that moment can't come soon enough.

We urge Premier Scott and the PLP government to do the right thing. Be straightforward. Establish a timetable. End the uncertainty. Give the people of Bermuda closure.

The issue of independence is of far greater importance to the future of Bermuda than the political aspirations of the Progressive Labour Party. Today's Bermudians and future generations must not be used as pawns in a personal political game.

We urge Premier Scott to call a referendum for the first quarter of 2006. Let every voice be heard. Let every vote count. And then let's get on with providing real solutions to the real problems facing Bermudians today.

## **Race Relations**

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda have lost hope that the PLP government can improve race relations and move Bermuda ahead in a spirit of unity.

Forty-one years ago, during a period of radical social reform, the founders of the United Bermuda Party recognized that Bermuda's long-term social and economic success depended on black and white Bermudians working together as equal partners. They also believed that the issue of race relations belonged at the top of any political party's social agenda.

We are proud of their accomplishments during the years that followed, which saw major reforms leading to universal adult suffrage, free public education and advancement in human rights legislation. More recently, a United Bermuda Party government established the Human Rights Commission and CURE.

Today, the United Bermuda Party knows there is still unfinished business between black and white Bermudians, and we applaud efforts to address the injustices of the past. The struggle to achieve One Bermuda will never be easy, but we must persist, because the price of failure is too high.

So what can be done? Most legal barriers to equality of opportunity have been eliminated, and agencies are in place to enforce the law. That work

must continue. But we must also turn to changing hearts and minds, and that work is never ending.

As a political organization, the United Bermuda Party chooses to welcome diversity. We use our multiracial and multicultural differences as a source of strength and ideas that better reflects the people we serve.

We understand the impact that political leadership has on the moral tone and standards of a country, so even in Opposition we have worked at improving race relations.

Our 1998 platform called for establishing economic empowerment zones in North Hamilton and other areas.

Following a racially divisive 2003 election, when PLP candidates subjected black United Bermuda Party candidates to racial slurs, we proposed that the two political parties develop a code of conduct for handling issues of race during election campaigns. Premier Scott agreed to meetings, but after two sessions, it was clear that the PLP government had no real interest in pursuing the initiative.

We didn't stop there, however. In 2004, we established a Shadow Ministry for Race Relations and Economic Opportunity to encourage discussion and develop concrete initiatives to stimulate economic opportunity.

Earlier this year, in the House of Assembly, we introduced one of those initiatives: an economic empowerment bill that, among other things, would

award 20 percent of government expenditure on goods and services to small businesses. The legislation also included training and mentoring programs.

So when the Scott government indicates a desire to improve race relations in Bermuda, as they did in the Throne Speech, we take notice. But it's fair to ask how sincere they really are.

Black members of the United Bermuda Party have had a particularly heavy burden to bear, as historically they have been targets of racially inflammatory attacks. Since 1998, PLP Parliamentarians, including Government Ministers, have publicly called various black United Bermuda Party MPs “suntanned,” “a maid-servant to the white master” and “a black buffoon.”

White members of the community have not been spared, either. When the Auditor General legitimately questioned financial aspects of the Berkeley Senior School project, he was accused of racism. In 2003, the Deputy Premier said voting for the United Bermuda Party would take black Bermudians “back to the plantation”—and he admitted recently, in this Honourable House, that he did it for political gain. And, of course, we're all familiar with the trouble Premier Scott has controlling his BlackBerry.

Some may say this behaviour is just the “cut and thrust of politics.” We reject that view. It is manipulative, insulting and hurtful. It destroys trust. It sets a terrible example, causes permanent scars and certainly does nothing to improve race relations in Bermuda. In some cases, it may even violate Bermuda's human rights legislation.

The United Bermuda Party fully supports the goal of CURB—Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda—and other organizations to eliminate racism. But rather than hand off the responsibility to another committee, we believe that Premier Scott and his Cabinet should have enough ideas of their own to set the agenda, raise the standards and lead by example.

It's not enough for the Premier to chant "Bermuda works best when we work together." We challenge the PLP government to present their own concrete plan that addresses not only racism but also how they would improve race relations and move Bermuda ahead through unity and equal partnership.

### **Education and Training**

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda have lost hope that the PLP government can improve the education system and give our children the opportunity they need and deserve.

Economic opportunity is key to achieving racial parity in Bermuda, and education is key to economic opportunity. That's why the United Bermuda Party, after seven years of PLP government, is increasingly concerned about the deterioration of public education on our island.

Our schools may have been desegregated in the 1960s, but in 2005 they remain essentially segregated. Today's de facto segregation isn't based

strictly on race, but on class. The United Bermuda Party believes that two school systems were wrong in 1965, and they are wrong today.

Education should be a source of opportunity, not a mark of privilege. People who can't afford to send their children to private schools deserve the same opportunities as those who can. But today, that birthright for Bermudian children in the public school system is in jeopardy.

Recent statistics show that almost 50 percent of our public secondary school students don't graduate in their senior year, and in 2003, the failure rate reached as high as 74 percent.

Terra Nova exam results show that Bermuda's middle- and senior-school students have scored consistently below the US average on language, reading and math over the last five years—and these poor results were understated, because in some years up to 25 percent of underperforming students were not tested.

This is simply not good enough, and the PLP government must take responsibility for these dismal results. The Minister of Education may think that full-page newspaper ads can divert attention from bad news, but our children deserve more than PR and photo ops to profile the Minister.

A dysfunctional public education system has a powerfully negative impact on our social cohesiveness, our competitiveness as a country and our ability to supply educated Bermudians to power our economy. It widens the gap between the haves and the have-nots.

The negative impact is felt in a very personal and disturbing way by young Bermudians who apply for jobs and get turned down for lack of basic skills. They see good jobs in our main service industries go to foreign workers and wonder why. They feel alienated from their community, and they don't understand it. They have every right to ask those questions, and a large part of the answer is that Bermuda's education system failed them.

Data from the 2000 Census clearly shows that income is directly correlated to education; the higher the level attained, the higher the annual income. For example, the Census shows that on average someone with no certificate can expect to earn only half the income of someone with a bachelor's degree.

This means that the 50 percent of our children who aren't graduating from our public secondary schools are doomed to a lifetime of substantially lower earnings capability—unless they are caught by other training programs.

This situation disproportionately affects black Bermudians, given the demographics of our population and public school system. They will end up as discouraging statistics in CURE reports unless real reform takes place within the public education system.

Unfortunately, the PLP government believes the answer is to change the testing policy, cut back on the Terra Nova exams and, essentially, move the goal posts. This is wrong. It doesn't raise standards, it lowers them.

For their own sake and for Bermuda's future, our children must be able to compete on a world stage. The PLP government must be held accountable for providing an education system that graduates students with the right academic, technical and life skills to do so.

Mr. Speaker,

The United Bermuda Party plan for education reform focuses on three basic principles: 1) Increased emphasis on the individual student and the role of parents; 2) Setting higher standards and demanding greater accountability for better results; and 3) Increased responsibility and flexibility for each school. Here are some of our specific proposals:

- There should be a licensed teacher in every classroom. The PLP government committed to a programme of teacher certification with an independent licensing authority several years ago, and the United Bermuda Party supported the initiative. But like so many of the PLP government's promises, this has proved to be all talk and no action.
- Teachers and parents should have the resources and tools to know if their children need extra support or development of a special talent.
- Achievement levels of all students should be tested regularly against international standards.
- Performance of individual schools should be monitored and reported on a regular basis to the people of Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

Since the United Bermuda Party established the National Training Board in the 1990s, we have been vocal supporters of its efforts to provide technical training and certification to Bermudians not inclined to pursue higher education. The programs have delivered men and women with valuable skills to a workplace eager to hire them.

Because of this success, the United Bermuda Party would expand support for the NTB's goals of technical training and lifelong learning. We would:

- Create a hospitality industry and trade division within the Ministry of Education.
- Formalize a national certification training and examination centre at Bermuda College.
- Establish a national apprentice programme in Bermuda at Bermuda College.
- Set up a tax incentive program for companies hiring and training apprentices locally.
- Make Bermuda College the focal point for workforce development and lifelong learning, in addition to its current responsibilities.

## **Housing**

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda have lost hope that the PLP government will ever deliver affordable housing and a comprehensive housing plan for this island.

Seven years is a long time. In fact, seven years is more time than it took to wage World War II or build the Empire State Building. So by anyone's standards, the PLP government has had a long time to develop a comprehensive plan for housing and build some homes.

Before the Throne Speech, Premier Scott raised expectations by appointing a new Minister of Housing. And sure enough, in the speech we got a promise to begin—not to complete, but to begin—construction of 330 new rental units in the next 30 months. We also got a hodgepodge of numbers attempting to show how effective the PLP government has been in providing homes to Bermudians.

But no one will be fooled. Not the families still sleeping in cars and tents. Not the working single mother of three who can't afford \$3,000 a month for a two-bedroom apartment. Not the hard-working young Bermudians who feel they'll never be able to leave home and get on the housing ladder. Not the first-time buyers who can't afford a million-dollar-plus home.

The PLP government still hasn't offered a comprehensive plan, just a bunch of numbers that don't add up no matter how you do the math. Even their mobile emergency homes are homeless, sitting unoccupied in a government quarry.

And the PLP government is notorious for misleading the public about housing. Look at the Bermuda Homes for People project, which collapsed when its financing disappeared, but not before Premier Scott presided over one of the more unprincipled publicity stunts of his term: a lottery for the Southside homes when he already knew the project was bankrupt.

Every time the United Bermuda Party has probed a little deeper, beneath the rosy glow of the housing promises, we've discovered that the PLP government rarely has answers to our questions. How will the housing be financed? Is the financing currently in place? What's the total cost to the taxpayer? What will the rents be? What infrastructure, such as roads, lighting and water, will be necessary to support these developments? What impact will these developments have on existing neighbourhoods? Have the residents been consulted? Have other organizations, such as the Bermuda Land Development Company and WEDCO, signed off on the government's plans?

If these projects were fully thought through before they were announced, or if they were part of a comprehensive plan, the answers would be available. But they're not, and they never have been.

The United Bermuda Party will acknowledge success in housing only when the PLP government has actually earned such recognition. There have been too many failed projects and too much mismanagement to take the current round of promises seriously.

Mr. Speaker,

The United Bermuda Party has presented its own comprehensive plan for housing numerous times, and we won't go into detail here except to explain, once again, the difference between scattershot projects and a plan, and to update the public on several new ideas that we've explored on behalf of the long-suffering people of Bermuda.

The United Bermuda Party's housing plan is comprehensive because it addresses the complex issues and cycles of availability and affordability; because it focuses on both short-term needs and long-term solutions; and because it calls for the development of a National Housing Strategy that will analyze all available information, undertake new research, employ extensive consultation, set clear goals and provide a solid rationale for all decisions made on housing.

The PLP government has never had a housing plan, and that is why over seven years they have failed to meet the basic housing needs of Bermuda's people.

Two interesting housing concepts we believe could be used effectively in Bermuda include shared equity and reverse mortgages for seniors.

Shared equity provides a way to get renters on a faster road to home ownership. A stepping stone between renting and home ownership, shared equity allows qualified renters to purchase a government property on a part buy/part rent basis. People unable to carry a full mortgage can buy a share of the property and pay rent on the remaining share, which is usually owned by a government company, such as the Bermuda Housing Corporation. As their income increases, they can increase their ownership share.

Reverse mortgages are not a new concept, but we believe they could be utilized more frequently to assist Bermuda's seniors. We know that about 80 percent of seniors own their homes, but sometimes their pensions and other income are too low to pay for the necessities of life. A reverse mortgage would allow them to capitalize on the value of their home to produce additional income.

## **Tourism**

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda have lost hope that the PLP government can manage tourism effectively and reverse the dramatic freefall the industry has experienced since 1998.

Tourism receives little attention in the Throne Speech, and we hope that's not an attempt to avoid a discussion of this year's dismal tourism results. Recently Minister Brown blamed hurricanes, hotels and other horrible

events beyond his control for the most recent bad news. But finger pointing will not fill hotel rooms and airline seats.

The 2005 monthly hotel occupancy rates for the first nine months are below 2004 levels for every month except April. Air arrivals are down year-over-year, and they dropped 9.5 percent in the third quarter.

In a desperate effort to boost total visitor arrival numbers, the Tourism Minister has pushed cruise-ship passengers to over 48 percent of total arrivals this year—a huge jump from 36 percent in 1998. But as most Bermudians know, cruise-ship passengers contribute far less to our economy than visitors arriving by air. In fact, it now takes the spending of seven cruise ship visitors to compensate for every air visitor we lose.

Even though the Tourism Minister has not articulated a new policy on cruise ship arrivals, these high percentages should raise serious questions about his intentions. He has previously floated the idea of modifying both St. George's and Hamilton Harbours to accommodate megaships, and this Throne Speech mentions a master plan for ports infrastructure development. Unless the Minister can offer a reasonable explanation for how such a dramatic increase in cruise ship visitors benefits Bermuda, we can only assume he is playing a numbers game at the expense of our long-term tourism product.

Other tourist destinations such as the Bahamas have learned the hard way about the importance of maintaining the right balance between air and cruise ship visitors. Going for quantity over quality can devalue the reputation of a tourism destination and damage the long-term viability of its hotel industry.

Given this year's abysmal performance, the United Bermuda Party does not understand why the Scott government refuses to accept that government control of the tourism industry has not worked and is not working. Even the previous PLP tourism minister, the Honourable Renee Webb, agreed that an independent tourism authority should be considered.

Minister Brown can continue to enjoy extensive overseas travel. He can continue to award lucrative contracts as he sees fit. He can continue to benefit from the perks of his Ministry. But he can't continue on the same path and expect Bermuda's tourism results to improve.

There has been so much negative news about tourism that it no longer shocks us. Many people have just written tourism off. But the United Bermuda Party understands the danger of that position. Tourism is still a critical component of Bermuda's economy, and international business depends on adequate airlift and first-class accommodations. Since the PLP government has failed to diversify the economy and provide other opportunities, we cannot afford to neglect an industry so intimately linked to Bermuda's prosperity.

The PLP government should get out of the way and give responsibility for the tourism industry to an independent Tourism Authority, as most modern tourist destinations have done.

## **A PLP Government without Ideas**

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda have lost hope that the PLP government has the ideas and energy to deliver a better Bermuda.

The 2005 Throne Speech reveals a common pattern of the PLP government: when they're out of ideas, they create committees—or think tanks, or study groups or teams.

This year, they've introduced the Social Agenda Management Resource Team. Even though the PLP Social Agenda was just created a year ago—apparently after six years without one—it must have slipped through the cracks in 2005. How else can you explain why a government with a brand-new Social Agenda could find \$11 million for cricket but nothing for the homeless?

So now we see that the PLP government needs outside assistance in managing its Social Agenda. Surely something is seriously wrong with a government that needs help to create a domestic policy and can't rely on its civil service to implement it.

Another new committee is the National Steering Committee on Drugs. While the United Bermuda Party, along with all right-thinking people in Bermuda, supports efforts to eliminate drugs in our society, we do wonder

how this new committee, with few resources and no authority, can do anything more than talk about the problem.

We have already mentioned Citizens Uprooting Racism in Bermuda, or CURB. Once again, the goal is noble. We just have to ask why Premier Scott and his Cabinet have no strategies of their own for dealing with race relations.

Mr. Speaker,

While no Throne Speech can be expected to cover all the issues facing our community, we want to mention several initiatives that were either not included in the Speech or not fully explained.

We have heard nothing from the PLP government about Works and Engineering's 10-year plan to turn the former Marsh Folly dump into a park. Under this United Bermuda Party government initiative, the new park would have been nearing completion by now, improving the quality of life and increasing property values in the surrounding neighbourhoods. It would also have played a key role in the development of the North Hamilton empowerment zone. We urge the PLP government to provide a detailed status report on this important open-space project.

Given the worldwide concern about bird flu and the H5N1 virus, the United Bermuda Party has written to the PLP government recommending that immediate steps be taken to eliminate the feral chicken population and to

ensure that adequate stocks of appropriate antivirals and flu vaccine are available. To date, we have not received a response.

In the event that bird flu reaches Bermuda, most likely through the United States, feral chickens would be perfect carriers for the disease. While the current form of bird flu only infects humans after direct contact with infected poultry, most experts feel it is only a matter of time before this strain mutates into a disease that could be spread by person-to-person contact. Now is the time to prepare and avert a potential disaster.

No one will forget the catastrophic islandwide blackout following the failure at BELCO's switching facility last summer. Yet there was no mention in the Throne Speech of government's plans to avoid a similar scenario in the future. BELCO was quick to release the results of their own study on the event, but the PLP government has not released their independent report. We would also like to know if government has developed plans to diversify Bermuda's energy portfolio in order to reduce the risk of depending on a single source.

A United Bermuda Party government would be working with BELCO to develop a plan for future energy needs. As part of this, we would recommend reverse metering, a common practice in California that allows businesses and homeowners who have installed photovoltaic cells and other generation equipment to sell power back to the grid. This is one way to reduce the overall energy demand on BELCO and diversify generation sources.

According to the Throne Speech, the PLP government has scaled back their previous proposal for unemployment insurance. We assume they recognized the enormous bureaucratic expense they would have inflicted on already overtaxed workers and employers, who are now paying \$200 million more a year in taxes than they were in 1998.

But the PLP government failed to spell out the details and implications of their new short-term welfare scheme. Nor did they explain what happened to the \$1 million put aside for launching the original program.

The Throne Speech did not mention the apparent intention of the PLP government to reintroduce the overtime provision defeated in the last session of Parliament. You will recall that this legislation was firmly opposed by employers and most unions, who believed it took away their natural right to negotiate their own overtime terms and were concerned about the impact on the cost of living. Once again, it appears that this government is unwilling to listen to the broader concerns of the community.

### **The Need for Strong, Moral Leadership**

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda have lost hope that the PLP government will provide the strong, moral leadership Bermuda needs.

This Throne Speech is the eighth legislative plan presented by the PLP government, and like the seven before it, it's full of promises. But earlier

promises have been broken more often than not, and proposed legislation has either moved through Cabinet like molasses or been dropped without explanation. The 2005 Throne Speech lacks credibility because the PLP government lacks credibility.

The 1998 PLP platform read: “The PLP’s policies and programmes are meant to rekindle hope, to heal Bermuda’s present divisions, and to replace apathy and alienation with a spirit of optimism and a feeling of oneness and unity.” These are worthy goals, but the PLP government has not come close to reaching them.

Today Bermuda is more divided than ever. It has become a nation of cynics, doubting the ability of government to deliver a better future. Most people think Bermuda is headed in the wrong direction, and they wonder if it can ever be turned around.

The United Bermuda Party believes it is not too late to restore hope, and as government, we’ll do it the old-fashioned way. We’ll lead by example.

- We will open up government in ways that are unprecedented for Bermuda.
- We will guarantee that people have access to public information—before 2011, by the way.
- We will protect the right of public servants to speak out about wrongdoing without fear of reprisal.
- We will ensure that a fair and open system of tendering is required in all government departments.

- We will reform Parliamentary procedures to make the legislative process more open to the public and more bi-partisan in nature.
- We will guarantee approval of any Constitutional change by the people, through their direct participation in referenda.
- And we will implement a Code of Conduct for all Parliamentarians that sets out clear, ethical guidelines for public transactions and behaviour.

And in this session, United Bermuda Party Parliamentarians will commit to a Code of Conduct in the same way that we have implemented random drug testing within our Parliamentary caucus. We will hold ourselves accountable, even if the PLP government chooses not to join us.

Mr. Speaker,

The core values that support the United Bermuda Party's proposals for a better Bermuda may strike some as old-fashioned. But we believe that qualities such as honesty, integrity, fairness, compassion and respect never go out of style.

These are values that have stood the test of time. But more and more, even well-intentioned and good-hearted people are reluctant to take a stand—to admit there is a clear difference between right and wrong. When asked to make a judgment, they shrug and say, “Whatever.”

But a “whatever” philosophy will not deliver a better Bermuda. “Whatever” will not care for the weakest members in our community. “Whatever” will

not educate our children to a higher level. “Whatever” will not make Bermuda safe again. “Whatever” will not guarantee opportunity for all our people. “Whatever” will not unite us in solving our problems.

A “whatever” philosophy leads to a lowering of standards in all areas of public life and can create a climate of opportunism and dishonesty throughout the community.

We have seen what happens when leadership loses its moral compass, when personal responsibility and accountability are ignored. The United Bermuda Party will do everything possible to reverse this trend. As the next government of Bermuda, we will be guided and inspired by the positive core values that made Bermuda special and caused others around the world to sit up and take notice.

We will do this, working together with all Bermudians, in a spirit of equal partnership and respect. We will do this to restore hope, once again, to our island home.