



United Bermuda Party's Reply to the Throne Speech

Delivered by Kim Swan JP MP, Interim Leader

Friday November 18, 2011

Mr. Speaker,

Thank you for recognising me and giving me the opportunity to offer a reply to the Throne Speech.

This is my 14th Reply to the Throne Speech since 1998 and my 5th in this Honourable House since February 9th 2008.

Mr. Speaker,

This year's Throne Speech drew applause with mention of various initiatives by the Government.

We note with interest the title theme for the Throne Speech: 'Let us build one another together. '

Mr. Speaker,

We stand before you today - I as the Interim Leader and my colleague the Honourable Member from Southampton West Central both of the United Bermuda Party - representing a Party that is truly in reformation mode and undergoing a transformation.

We are living this theme 'Let us build one another together ' and so we can also relate to the great difficulties that the people of our beloved Bermuda are facing today.

Mr. Speaker,

The people of Bermuda are praying for this country to do better.

Today, people from all walks of life agree that Bermuda must be put on the 'good foot' economically and socially.

It is our contention that there is less room for the usual blame game.

Mr. Speaker,

We have noticed that there appears to be a willingness by the government to embrace suggested solutions, and we are pleased that some of our long-standing solutions and those offered by the Bermuda First initiative which we participated, are finding favour with the government.

Mr. Speaker,

We consider it logical, given all the anticipation of an election on the near horizon, that the Government would deliver a Throne Speech with a list of promises in the form of initiatives and/or legislation for consideration to augment its Throne Speech.

Most governments would do the same.

However Mr. Speaker, it is because of that very reason why we support fixed term elections, reform to the electoral process and reform to the political system.

Mr. Speaker,

This year's Throne Speech is against the backdrop of a Bermuda that has been saddled with trying times economically and socially.

A country with no natural resource - other than the good natured friendliness of its people and our exceptional reputation internationally – but a country that now has national debt which has grown five fold in less than five years.

Mr. Speaker,

For the first time, thousands of Bermudians are unemployed or critically under-employed in Bermuda and it is incumbent on those of us who are elected officials to work tirelessly to turn matters around.

Whilst these election promises to address neglected areas can be like water to a thirsty man in the desert, we are duty bound to point out that many of these and other solutions/recommendations have been put forward before.

The bottom line is that we need to get our people and our economy working again!

Mr. Speaker,

Public Safety is public enemy #1 and at no time in our modern history has loss of life been so much in threat.

We are pleased that the government is prepared to take on board recommendations that in the past have been put forward by the United Bermuda Party and the Bermuda First Initiative. With regard to the later we collectively worked with them and it makes imminent good sense for government to embrace them.

Our concern is for the restoration of good law and order to Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

Community policing is at the heart of regaining our vulnerable neighbourhoods and at long last the Throne Speech the government is latching on to Operation Ceasefire that one of our former Shadow Ministers put forward and we mentioned in our reply in 2010.

Thankfully Mr. Speaker,

We in the United Bermuda Party had reached out and offered our helping hand to the Minister of National Security and now we encourage the private sector to do likewise.

An important component of an initiative such as Operation Ceasefire is community participation, buy and funding. We encourage the Minister to enlist assistance from private individuals and companies.

Mr. Speaker,

The state of our economy is causing many a sleepless night up and down the country.

The Throne Speech mentioned that government will table legislation on 'work permits and permanent residence for eligible job creators'.

We reiterate that government needs to increase the amount of foreign currency spent in Bermuda.

The Government further needs to convincingly communicate, with all deliberate speed, the importance of international business to Bermuda and our economic importance to the United States through reinsurance.

Mr. Speaker,

Our people are our only resource next to the natural beauty of our land.

We must have Bermudians across the board favourable about International Business and Tourism to immediately guard against further erosion of our economic bases.

Mr. Speaker,

The government is caught between a rock and a hard place - because greater numbers of unemployed Bermudians illuminate the remaining foreign workers; and decreased foreign workers mean a shrinking economy. This has meant less money circulating in Bermuda whilst at the same time creating a difficult political situation.

Our position is to encourage the government to do what is best for the Bermuda people and in the best interest our country. It is a given that we must grow our economy and strike the right balance that protects our island for future generations.

Today with the exodus of guest workers the affects are felt in many other sectors of our economy - rents, purchases of goods and services - and that will impact on us all in the long run.

Also Mr. Speaker,

The Bermuda national debt has ballooned to over 1 billion dollars; and in the past year we have seen a shrinkage of the economy and unemployment amongst Bermudians at levels never witnessed before on these islands.

Businesses are feeling the effects of a severely decreased income base and Bermudians are experiencing unprecedented financial hardship.

Mr. Speaker,

The Throne Speech touches on Tourism. We in the United Bermuda Party's thrust is concentrated on encouraging government to focus on growing hotel bound leisure visitors, whose earning capacity far exceeds that of cruise passengers.

For example, we drew governments attention to the innovation of the Corporation of St. George and their partnership with a private developer to bring a boutique Hotel and Marina to the historic town. This is an example of an existing initiative driven by Bermudians that meets the current and future needs for our town and seaport.

Mr. Speaker,

We reiterate our call for a Tourism Authority led by the private sector that will be charged with the deployment of the people's taxes in this vital industry. We see this as an immediate undertaking to empower the industry stakeholders to rebuild a key economic engine.

Mr. Speaker,

The time has come to empower and trust our people in tourism.

An Independent Tourism Authority would do just that, and it will also work with government, but it will be empowered to do what is necessary to rebuild this vital economic engine without delay.

The Tourism Authority and not politics would drive other considerations such as Gaming for visitors, the Hamilton Waterfront, Airline Concessions and other proposals critical to the rejuvenation of the tourism industry.

Mr. Speaker,

The Tourism Authority would empower our people, like Captain Dendrick Taylor from St. George's, who for twenty years has had a vision for a fleet of Super Yachts servicing Bermuda from the eastern seaboard whilst also developing Bermudians to develop in the tourism trade with a view to them becoming future industry entrepreneurs.

Mr. Speaker,

Social Cohesion must become a National imperative.

The Throne Speech mentions its track record of dealing with controversial social issues and tackling discrimination'.

Our aim is to work to help foster better relationships that will help us to Unite Bermuda's People!

Bermuda sadly remains a socially fragmented country.

We in the United Bermuda Party recognise the progress Bermuda has made; however, that progress is of no consolation to those living in modern day Bermuda with:

- Gang infested communities;
- Experiencing a death in the family caused by a senseless murder;
- Unable to contribute to the family because they have been laid off;

Mr. Speaker,

One needs to read the vile comments made on the blogs, on Facebook and other social mediums to know that there remains an ugly undercurrent in Bermuda that must be stopped.

This country is experiencing much of the worst it can ask for all at once, yet I can think of nowhere else as blessed as our beloved Bermuda.

Mr. Speaker,

We in the United Bermuda Party - with two committed Members of Parliament - are here to make a positive difference in the lives of Bermuda's people by being advocates to make Bermuda the best place it can be.

Mr. Speaker,

The Throne Speech emphasised the importance of creating job opportunities.

We are prepared to act selflessly and fight for the issues that will improve Bermuda socially and economically.

But the provision of jobs must occur with creating greater volumes of foreign currency through international business and growing hotel bound leisure visitors to Bermuda

Mr. Speaker,

Whilst the government promises to introduce an Equality Act.

We will allow our good actions to lead by example, be advocates for the people and endeavour to bring to an end - favouritism, cronyism, and all the other dreaded 'isms' that have harmed our people and called into question fairness and social harmony in Bermuda.

We are prepared to represent all of Bermuda's people fairly, in an honest manner and ensure discrimination is a thing of the past and fairness dwells abundantly.

We will immediately get to the bottom questionable decisions in government where the involvement of government officials are considered unethical &/or unprofessional.

This will ensure that all parliamentarians and the government officials are always held accountable.

Mr. Speaker,

The government also mentioned that it will be 'tackling discrimination'.

We respectfully recommend and encourage government to make the Human Rights Department independent of the government. This move alone would provide protection for persons or groups legitimately aggrieved by the government who do not have the resources to fight for their rights against the institution of government.

Mr. Speaker,

We support the government's call to expand the whistle-blower legislation. However, we see the need for us to speak out against ministerial micro management and we pledge to stand in the breach of partisan politics. Hence, we promise to recognise and do what is best for our country and its people.

Mr. Speaker,

Like the government said in the Throne Speech, we too will encourage the Auditor General and Internal Audit to follow the money. But we also know that financial instructions allows and demands of us to be handle the peoples money properly at all times.

We will ensure that necessary procedures are in place to ensure that the custodians of the public funds act responsibly, ethically and above all act honestly as well.

We will remain open to constructive criticism and advice from all who care enough to offer it to us and above all act towards the government in the same fashion.

Mr. Speaker,

We will work to ensure that all decisions and deliberations meet the litmus test of integrity and are of benefit to Bermuda and all of its people.

We will lead by example so that the principled based Leadership we stand for today will positively influence your government to work tirelessly in the best interest the people.

Mr. Speaker,

Truth be told the people are 'sick and tired of being sick and tired', especially those who have witnessed a spend happy government which wasted millions during the time of plenty only to short change the needy in their time of need.

Very sad Mr. Speaker, but it is what it is!

Mr. Speaker,

Our aim in the United Bermuda Party is to become your government by continuing to act responsibly and representing the issues of the people of Bermuda by offering this government solutions and holding them accountable for their actions.

AND Ultimately, Unite Bermuda's People.

Thank You Mr. Speaker and God Bless Bermuda.