



THRONE SPEECH 2014

Delivered by

His Excellency Governor Peter Beckingham

At the

Ceremonial State Opening

Of the Second Session of the 10th House of Assembly of the Turks and Caicos Islands

Thursday, 9 January 2014

Mr. Speaker

Honorable Members of the House

Members of the Diplomatic Corps

The Reverend Clergy

Hon Heads of States and Government

Visiting Dignitaries

Ladies and Gentlemen

I bid you all a warm welcome to this, the First Sitting of the First Meeting of the Second Session of the Tenth Legislature of the House of Assembly of the Turks & Caicos Islands. I also do wish a God-filled Happy and Prosperous New Year to all.

ECONOMY

The year 2013 was a challenging one, but through the grace of God and the hard work of the Members of this House of Assembly, Members of Cabinet and Civil Servants, in partnership with the Private Sector, we were able to make progress towards building a bright and prosperous future for all of our people in this generation and the generations yet to come.

Mr. Speaker, as we continue on our journey of nation building, our primary goals remain those of the development of a vibrant economy, the education and empowerment of our people, the creation of opportunities for our workforce, the restoration of national pride, the achievement of desired and satisfactory standards of health care, the strengthening of social protection and security and securing our borders.

Mr. Speaker, as we strive to achieve all of these goals we will remain committed to the preservation of our Christian faith and values, and the practice of good governance in the arena of fairness and justice in the conduct of all of our affairs.

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

The revitalization and growth of the economy and the creation of jobs has been the principal thrust for my government as we seek to provide a decent standard of living for those who live and work in these islands. The economy has seen a 3.4 percent growth in GDP and an even larger projected growth in 2014 due to the injection of Foreign Direct Investment. However, there is still much work to be done; all Turks and Caicos Islanders are yet to feel this growth,

with some being unemployed and many small businesses continuing to struggle.

My government has been working diligently to ensure that stalled major infrastructure projects are restarted so as to create jobs and facilitate economic growth. Mr. Speaker, two of four stalled projects (Shore Club and West Caicos Resort) are slated to commence construction early this year and there are high expectations for the positive economic impact that these will have. In addition, four new hotel projects are scheduled to break ground later this year.

The execution and progression of these projects has not been an easy task, which underscores the need for a robust investment policy, an effective investment agency, and an enabling business environment to ensure that we are able to attract investment, both local and foreign, and remain competitive in the global arena. Mr. Speaker, this is why my government has as its priority this year the reinstatement of a "TCInvest like" agency, the amendment of the Investment policy, the reform of the business environment, and the empowerment of Turks and Caicos Islanders through education, business training, investment incentives, funding support and the continuation and refinement of the reserve category of business licenses. Mr. Speaker this will enable us to develop a broad middle class with a greater potential for economic advancement and upward social mobility.

My government has been in dialogue with the practitioners of the financial services industry regarding the modernization of our legislation and the development and marketing of new financial services products. To this end my government is committed this year to the modernization of our financial services legislation, as well as the continued strengthening of our regulatory framework in compliance with international standards and the Caribbean Financial Action Task Force guidelines.

The diversification of our economy is critical to sustainable economic growth, and to this end my government is committed to diversification within our main industry of tourism and into other sectors such as manufacturing and processing, agriculture, and aquaculture. My government will develop a medical tourism policy, an eco-tourism policy and initiative, and a sports tourism policy so as to diversify our tourism industry. Mr. Speaker, we are advanced in the development of a manufacturing policy, and the Director of Agriculture has been recruited and will see the completion of the agriculture policy and implementation of a robust agricultural programme.

The Providenciales International Airport expansion project is well advanced, and upon completion will facilitate an increase in the airlift into the TCI. This will allow the arrival of visitors to our shores from new and emerging source markets, aided by our new tourism product development and marketing strategies and our Tourism strategic plan which will be completed this year. Mr. Speaker, a major focus of my government this year is the development

and marketing of tourism products and activities in the family islands that will facilitate the decentralization of tourism activity and increased economic growth in these islands.

My government is committed to the servicing of our debt and provision of educational opportunities, healthcare, jobs and social services for our people, all of which require an adequate and predictable revenue stream for the government. Mr. Speaker, to this end my government will seek to broaden the tax base, lower the tax burden, increase tax compliance and grow the economy through the introduction of new legislation and the enforcement of existing regulations.

HEALTHCARE

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

My government is currently undertaking a review of the healthcare system at all levels and sectors with the goal of developing a healthcare reform strategy. However, my government is continuing its conduct of the financial and clinical audits of the TCI hospitals, with the implementation of corrective recommendations as deficiencies are uncovered. Mr. Speaker, my government has as its goal the rationalization and reduction of costs of various aspects of operation of the hospitals, as well as an increase in financial accountability and new revenue regeneration from medical tourism and other third party revenue sources.

My government intends to introduce Health Professions Legislation which will facilitate the regulation of the standards of delivery of healthcare at all levels and all sectors.

My government will amend the National Insurance Ordinance and regulations to ensure that adequate healthcare coverage and access to healthcare at all levels are provided for all persons legally resident in the TCI. To this end my Government will be relentless in our pursuit to ensure that, with regards to the NHIP, children under the age of 18, the unemployed and the elderly will be granted coverage, and that a Pharmaceutical procurement program is developed to provide medications at a cost effective price to NHIP community-based pharmacies.

PUBLIC SERVICE

Mr Speaker and Honorable Members:

My government is committed to working with the Office of the Deputy Governor to ensure that the Public Service is effective and efficient in the delivery of services to the public and to ensuring that recognition is given to those Public Servants with records of exemplary service through the establishment of a Public Service Incentive Awards Program. My government is committed to the revision of the civil service employment policy to ensure that Turks and

Caicos Islanders are afforded the opportunity for employment, training and upward mobility within the civil service. My government will develop and enact credit union legislation that will serve as the framework for the establishment of a Public Service Credit Union and Hotel Workers Credit Union.

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

The progress of this nation in terms of expanding our economy, creating employment opportunities and empowering Turks and Caicos Islanders will impact various aspects of our environment. It is our goal to preserve, at all costs, the quality of our natural surroundings.

My Government will, through the Department of Planning, work to clearly define, establish, enforce and maintain a style and identity unique to our islands thus developing an Infrastructure Master Plan. To this end my government has established an infrastructure working group and a private public partnership (PPP) policy and guidelines to drive these infrastructure development programs.

My Government will continue the improvement of the standard of living through the enhancement of assets required by the public in everyday life such as water supply and management, solid waste management, transportation, communication and energy. We have made significant progress with the improvement of the water infrastructure on Grand Turk, with similar work to be undertaken in Salt Cay and South Caicos. We are committed to the amendment of the Road Traffic Ordinance to ensure fairness and the maintenance of high standards in the delivery of transport services to the public. We are committed to the development of an energy policy and the amendment to the Electricity Ordinance to ensure the introduction of renewable energy and the lowering of the cost of electricity. We will continue to develop the necessary policies, and will request proposals to facilitate both the development of a deep water port on East Caicos and the linking of the Caicos Islands; these initiatives will all result in significant long term economic growth and diversification, job creation and a lowering of the cost of living.

EDUCATION AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

The education and empowerment of our people is critical and essential to the progressive and sustainable development of our nation. We have therefore claimed this year to be the Year of the Young Person.

Overcrowding in our schools remains a critical issue. This year we will ensure that all children of school age are able to access education. While we have provided sufficient funds in the short term to recruit teachers in private places for primary school students, we will continue the work started last financial year to plan the funding of an Early Childhood designated center which will have the effect of opening spaces within the Primary schools.

The overcrowding and safety issues at Clement Howell High School are of paramount importance, and this year My Government will ensure that plans are finalized to split that High School and move the lower school to an alternate location.

My government will begin the upgrading of existing sporting facilities around the islands, including the installation of proper lighting to encourage the safe use of these facilities. We will also provide short-term support for the development of a talent management program aimed at the identification and development of young persons with sporting talent to maximize their potential and to progress into a career in sports. We will further legitimize The Secondary Schools Sporting Association that will work closely with the Department of Sports to strengthen athletics within schools and ensure smooth running of National Schools events.

My government is committed to the educational advancement of all young persons and henceforth we will earmark a portion of the scholarship fund for the direct support of young persons in Technical and vocational areas for certification. We will ensure that scholarships offered meet national development needs.

My Government will continue to ensure that Turks and Caicos Islanders have access to tertiary education regionally and internationally, and will seek to establish formal relationships with universities abroad so students can have access to cost effective education. We will therefore conclude our application to UWI for contributing territory status, thereby allowing us to benefit from reduced fees for all students whether they are on scholarship or not.

My Government will continue to ensure the holistic development and empowerment of our Youth, and to this end we will facilitate the re-opening of the Youth Parliament, implement the Youth Empowerment Policy, fully implement a youth apprenticeship programme and reinstate the Cadet programme.

My Government is committed to the development of our teachers and will seek to sign an MOU with National College for Teaching and Leadership in the UK within this year, allowing us to implement part of our teacher development initiative aimed at building teaching and leadership capacity within our schools.

We will engage with CXC to host a number of initiatives aimed at improving teaching and

learning in Maths and English at both the primary and secondary school levels.

CULTURE

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

My Government will, through collaboration with our Department of Culture, Ministry of Tourism and other stakeholders, develop a Culture and National Pride Program that will allow for the preservation of our heritage and the promotion of our culture.

My Government has already strategically aligned the Culture Department with the Ministry of Tourism and the establishment of Heritage month and a National Culture and Heritage Day during the month of October.

My Government is committed to the development of heritage and culture programmes in collaboration with all schools and Non-Governmental Organizations.

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

My Government has as its objective, the creation of an immigration policy that ensures that the total population of Turks and Caicos at any given time is the most peaceful, productive and cohesive mixture, capable of creating and contributing to the social and economic life of these islands, with the result of moving us up on the Human Development Index whilst cultivating a prosperous, advanced society.

My government has drafted a new Immigration bill based on the report of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Immigration Reform and recommendations from other consultations. This bill will be geared towards protecting the homeland, will be investor and business friendly, will provide human resources for investment and will allow the critical population growth required to drive the future economy of Turks and Caicos Islands.

My Government will strengthen the Labor Board with view to creating a centralized authority concerned with the protection of the social and economic interests of the People of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

My Government will seek to provide resources that will ensure the effective surveillance and control of our borders to minimize illegal immigration and poaching. We will seek the support of the UK Government for these initiatives. We will strengthen the enforcement of regulations controlling illegal immigration.

CROWN LAND

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

My Government will seek to revise our land policy to ensure equitable distribution of Crown land for residential use and long term leases for major development projects. We will fund a Development Plan for the entire Turks and Caicos Islands, inclusive of Island Plans, which will guide the future development of the Islands for the next ten (10) years.

My Government will seek to amend the National Parks Ordinance to increase the amount of land in the protected areas and to make provisions for eco-friendly development within National Parks.

My Government will enact legislation that will protect the rights of women and children and develop institutions to ensure proper rehabilitation of juvenile offenders.

INDEPENDENCE

Mr. Speaker and Honorable Members:

My Government holds as one of its greatest charges the responsibility of readying our nation and our people for the move toward independence. We will continue the work to convene a Constitutional Committee of the House of Assembly whose mandate will be to review the 2011 constitution and make recommendations for constitutional change and advancement.

Guided by God our father, and bonded together by blood and the passion to build these our Turks and Caicos Islands, may we as a Government both of the people and for the people succeed in all our ventures.

May God bless us all, and may God bless The Turks and Caicos Islands.

