

Wednesday, 21st March 2012

Government Speech delivered by

His Excellency The Governor General,

SIR COLVILLE N. YOUNG

Mr. Speaker and Mr. President of the Senate, Honourable Members of the House of Representatives and the Senate, My Lord the Chief Justice and other Justices of the Supreme Court, Excellencies of the Diplomatic Corp, other distinguished invitees, ladies and gentlemen.

It is my distinct honour and privilege to open this new session of the National Assembly following the general elections held on 7th March 2012. While it marks the fourth administration of the United Democratic Party, it is also the first time that the present Government has been returned to office consecutively for a second term. Belizeans have demonstrated once again that they have the capability of working the democratic process through free, fair and peaceful elections.

It is customary in a speech of this kind to outline the Government's projects, plans and priorities over the next five years. While much has been achieved during the last term of office, my Government will continue the focus on economic and social programs, infrastructure and physical development, national security and public safety and the delivery of Government services. We will pursue all these and more under the principles of good governance, honesty and transparency.

Let me now highlight some of the key areas that my Government will be pursuing during the present term.

(A) Economic Management

During the next five years, my Government will continue the sound stewardship of our nation's economic, financial and fiscal affairs. While the world economic conditions continue to be challenging, our commitment to economic growth and stability remains undiminished. Hence, the Government will modernize, restructure and streamline its delivery of services as well as create the enabling environment for the private sector to generate and hasten business activities and job opportunities.

While the Government will concentrate on the construction and rebuilding of the nation's road and physical infrastructure to support productive sector activities, we will also direct our attention to making Government services more efficient. The Government will, therefore, be modernizing and restructuring its major revenue departments so as to ensure that the assessment and collection of taxes are both fair and equitable.

We will focus on attracting new foreign direct investment and new tourism investments to be important pillars in promoting sustainable economic growth and in expanding and diversifying the exports of goods and services. We will improve the Fiscal Incentives Programs, expand incentives for environmentally friendly investments in energy, bio-fuels, tourism and forestry management in order to assist such growth. Also, we will pursue favourable trade agreements and redouble our efforts to work shoulder to shoulder with CARICOM, Central America and Mexico.

The Government in conjunction with the Development Finance Corporation and the private sector will establish Small Business Development Centres with one-stop windows for small business financing. In addition, my Government will put systems in place to expand the Business Processing Outsourcing Industry, including call centres, with the objective of creating 5,000 new jobs by 2017.

(B) Tourism and Culture

My Government will continue to emphasize and steward the need for sustainable development of the tourism industry, to create even more jobs and more foreign exchange earnings while respecting our natural and cultural resources. We will, therefore, continue to improve infrastructure for tourism, invest in human capital and create the enabling climate to ensure that Belizeans of all levels benefit equitably from the industry and its related activities.

In addition, my Government will promote “green” development by facilitating access to affordable green technology sources, funding, incentive packages and public education.

We will develop and implement an Arts and Culture Strategic Plan to emphasize, preserve and promote our local culture and heritage. This will be complemented by the establishment of a Belize Heritage Trust to preserve Belize’s heritage buildings.

These plans and activities will allow us to achieve our tourism targets over the next five years. These targets include (1) increasing the number of visitors by 10% and 5% for the overnight sector and cruise tourism sector, respectively, (2) increasing hotel accommodation by an additional 1,200 hotel rooms and (3) increasing sector employment by an additional 2,500 tourism jobs.

(C) Agriculture and Fisheries

During the next five years, my Government will continue to integrate technology in agro-production and fisheries to diversify and maximize outputs and returns in sustainable ways while protecting the environment. This will allow the country to become more self-sufficient and to have larger outputs for exports. We will, therefore, need to focus on improved local and international market access for agricultural and fishery products and on providing small-scale producers with access to skills, resources and opportunities.

(D) Natural Resources and Environment

The Government will continue to implement the National Protected Area Policy and Systems Plan, the Land Management Program, the National Forest Policy and the Solid Waste Management Project. All these are to ensure the integrity and viability of our natural environment. In addition, we will establish the National Integrated Water Resources Management Authority, through the Global Climate Change Alliance Project, to strengthen the management of water resources throughout the country. Furthermore, we will collaborate with our regional partners to incorporate climate change and natural disaster risk management within national plans. Also during the next five years, my Government will implement phase two of the first time landowners program to an additional 15,000 first time landowners.

(E) Oil and Energy

My Government is committed to an energy policy that will put Belize on a path to energy efficiency, sustainability and resilience over the next 30 years, while maximizing economic benefits to the nation. We will develop a Petroleum Exploration Plan to guide oil exploration and a comprehensive Energy Act to enable our growing economy to maximize on the use of the variety of fuel and energy resources available. Besides, the Government will promote the widespread adoption of energy efficiency and conservation measures in all sectors of the economy. Such a transformation will also create high-quality jobs.

(F) National Security and Public Safety

My Government recognizes that an integrated and holistic approach is required to make Belize safe and where the entire nation shares responsibility and participates in the effort to restore respect for Law and Order.

To this end, my Government will improve the management, administration and general welfare of the Police Department, as we construct new dormitory facilities to accommodate officers and construct a new and modern police headquarters on the Chetumal Street extension.

The Government will equip the police with new and secure communications and GIS tracking system, a new DNA laboratory and forensic equipment to analyze firearms and ammunitions that are recovered from crime scenes.

The Government will implement the RESTORE Belize Strategic Plan, which recognizes three major pillars for restoring Belize, namely, human development, citizen prosperity and citizen security.

(G) Education and Youth

My Government is firmly committed to the creation of a national education program to meet the demands of this emerging nation in the 21st century. Over the next five years, along

with its partners in education, the Government intends to raise the bar even further through focus on four main areas. These will be to (1) improve the quality and relevance of education at all levels, (2) improve the educational environment and attendance, (3) strengthen administration throughout the education sector and (4) increase student participation and achievement countrywide.

The Government will develop a National Human Resource Development Strategy based on national needs that will inform curriculum at secondary, ITVETs, and post-secondary/tertiary sectors and will guide scholarships and funding for education curriculum especially at tertiary level.

My Government will implement the National Youth Policy through the establishment of a Southside Youth Success Project and the expansion of the Gang Resistance Education and Training Program. Both initiatives are aimed at at-risk youth to provide mentoring, life skills and leadership training. Moreover, we will establish new sporting and youth facility on Chetumal Street extension.

(H) Health

During the next five years, my Government will strengthen the public health system to ensure healthy environments and safe food supplies for all Belizeans and our visitors. In the area of capacity building, we will continue to strengthen the nurses training programs, including training for specialist nurses, at the University of Belize.

We will expand on the reach of our health services by constructing new hospitals in San Pedro and Punta Gorda and improve and expand existing medical facilities in other parts of the country. We will extend outpatient services at all hospitals and polyclinics to a full 12 hours and on weekends.

(I) Housing and Community Development

In order to meet the housing demands in the country, the Government will complete and implement a national housing policy, which will inform the future of housing developments so as to enable our people to have access to secure and affordable housing within a safe and healthy environment.

The Government will renovate and maintain recreational spaces in neighbourhoods heavily impacted by gang activity, sponsor child-friendly and family-oriented entertainment events within communities and provide positive recreational opportunities in order to displace criminal activity.

(J) Infrastructure

To support the economic and social development of the country, my Government will continue its program of improving public infrastructure by building and upgrading the nation's roads, streets, bridges, canals and drains. We will, therefore, upgrade the following roads (1) the Southern Highway from Dump to Jalacte, (2) the Northern Highway from mile 2 to its junction with the Burrell Boom road, (3) feeder roads in the northern Belize, (4) the Manatee Road and (5) the Old Northern Highway.

While we will build new bridges at Chetumal Street in Belize City and at new Macal River crossing in San Ignacio, my Government will also rebuild the Haulover Bridge, the San Pablo, Orange Walk Bridge, the Maypen Bridge and the Mullins River Bridge.

In Belize City, we will upgrade the Collect and North Creek canals and improve the Neal Pen Road and Jane Usher Boulevard under phase 2 of the Southside Poverty Alleviation Project. Furthermore, my Government will secure financing for a new Belize City Infrastructure Project to meet the infrastructure needs of the growing population centre.

(K) Transportation

For the road transportation system, my Government will construct a new National Bus Terminal in Belize City, and we will enhance the safety and convenience of the travelling public by regularizing bus routes. The protection of pedestrians and our road network will remain important, as we move to control and redirect the flow of certain types of vehicular traffic in our urban centres.

With regard to the Air Transportation System, the Government will establish a Civil Aviation Authority by merging the existing Civil Aviation Department and the Belize Airport Authority. This will allow us to streamline the operations, regulations and maintenance of the Belize aviation sector.

(L) Delivery of Government Services

During the next five years, the Government will integrate the Government's open-vote workers into the permanent establishment. We will also centralize and expand training of public sector employees through the establishment of a Public Service Training Institute. In addition, we will enhance the delivery of Government services by implementing a Customer Service Policy at all levels as well as an Information Technology Policy and Plan, which will include an E-government framework.

(M) Control Over Public Utilities

One of the signal achievements of the present Government during its last term of office was to regain control over public utilities in the national interest, namely, telecommunications

and electricity services, which had been in private hands for the past several years. My Government is committed to maintaining this control and will endeavor to consolidate its position during the coming term. This is a fundamental plank of the Government's policy from which there can be no turning back.

My Government is equally committed to paying reasonable compensation within a reasonable time, as required by the Constitution, to all those whose shares in Belize Telemedia Limited (BTL) and Belize Electricity Limited (BEL) had been acquired by the Government in the public interest.

In fact, my Government has already made an offer of compensation to the former owners of both BTL and BEL, based on a Fair Market Valuation carried out by a leading international firm based in the United Kingdom. My Government is still awaiting a final response to the offer of compensation made several months ago. The Government firmly believes that it would be in the interest of all concerned to settle the payment of compensation without further delay so as to bring finality to this matter. And my Government will earnestly strive to achieve that goal early in the present term

Mr. Speaker and Mr. President of the Senate, that concludes this Session's "Speech from the Throne".

May I now with your kind permission, extend my best wishes to the new Government and indeed to all members of the House of Representatives and Senate, for a further term of fruitful deliberations and positive achievements for the welfare of the nation.

May God bless you all and our country, Belize !

Long live Belize!

Que viva Belice!

THANK YOU