



THRONE SPEECH 2018

Delivered by

His Excellency Governor, Dr. John Freeman, CMG

On the Occasion of the Opening of the

Of the Second Session of the 11th Legislature

of the House of Assembly of the Turks and Caicos Islands

Monday, June 18th, 2018

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Ministers, Her Ladyship the Chief Justice, Hon Premier and Members of Cabinet, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of this Honourable House, Officials, Members of the Clergy, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, Good Morning.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to extend a warm welcome to all present here today and to those listening by radio to the opening of the First (1st) Sitting of the First (1st) Meeting of the Second (2nd) Session of the Eleventh (11th) Legislature of the House of Assembly of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Mr. Speaker, I consider it an honour to address the Members of this House and to outline the Government's plans for the period ahead.

Recovery Efforts

Mr. Speaker, in September of 2017, the Turks and Caicos Islands faced unprecedented major climate events such as never been seen in its recent history. Two major hurricanes, Irma and Maria, severely impacted our country and left a trail of destruction on all inhabited islands. For the first time ever in the history of these Islands, every Island in the chain was impacted. But Mr Speaker, what was evident to the Government was not just the trail of destruction but the resilient spirit among the people that resulted. Government, corporate partners, citizens, regional and international governments and bodies joined together to ensure that early recovery was swift and immediate. Mr Speaker the Government remains grateful to those valued partners.

Mr Speaker, the Government now has the awesome task of rebuilding and doing so responsibly and resiliently while delivering on other priorities that cannot enjoy the luxury of waiting a second longer and in the face of an anxious and expectant public. This, Mr Speaker, in the Government's view requires a delicate balance.

The Government is committed to ensuring as much as possible that the mandate given by the people is fulfilled even amidst the many competing challenges for the limited resources; the Government does not take lightly the trust of the people and the mandate given in respect of governance of this great nation. To that end, the Government knows that it must, together with this Honourable House, face the issues challenging the Turks and Caicos Islands head on and overcome them.

In rebounding from these events, there is an opportunity to rebuild a stronger and more resilient Turks and Caicos from an infrastructural and social perspective. Mr. Speaker the Government is committed to this massive undertaking of recovering from the climate events of September 2017 and has formed and mobilized a National Recovery Task Force whose sole focus is to manage strategically the recovery process from hurricanes Irma and Maria. Good governance requires the careful management of resources. This Task Force, which reports to Cabinet, is comprised of a cross-section of representatives from the Public and Private Sectors and is headed by a dedicated Project Manager, will coordinate interagency,

local, regional and international actions and resourcing arrangements to efficiently and effectively manage all recovery aid in a prudent, transparent and accountable manner. This body will approach the nation's recovery in a manner that is cohesive, holistic, cost-efficient and avoids waste and duplication of efforts over the next four years.

Public Works Department

The Government remains committed ahead of the presentation of the official Recovery Plan to make school repairs a priority and the Government was pleased to secure funding and obtain legislative approval for the first school repairs a mere 5 months after the Storm. In February and included in the Supplementary Appropriation Bill 1, the funds are set aside for critical school infrastructure was included and approved and the Government recognizes the need to deliver an aggressive rebuilding programme for our Schools and critical government departments. To this end, the Government has provided much needed resources to deliver on its capital programme.

THE ECONOMY

Mr Speaker, in turning to the economy, despite a forecast of positive economic growth in 2017, regrettably indications are that output in the tourism sector was significantly weaker during the last quarter of 2017 than forecasted, reflecting in part in weather-related factors, mainly hurricanes Irma and Maria, which resulted in delays and the cancellation of significant travel itineraries during the period September to December 2017. Moreover, the loss of significant hotel room capacity on the Island of Providenciales which we know is the country's largest market, during the final quarter of 2017, following the passage of the hurricanes negatively impacted the sector and resulted in the projected growth not being achieved. However, despite suffering the same strength and wrath of the hurricanes we were able to bounce back more quickly because of the TCI resilience. Mr. Speaker the Government is pleased to report that despite the poor performance in 2017, preliminary information suggests that the domestic economy stabilized during the first quarter of 2018.

Mr. Speaker the Government is again pleased to report that in 2017 construction activity increased slightly and is projected however to show significant growth in 2018 and steady growth going forward. The rebuilding activities started in 2017 and have increased significantly in 2018, as persons and businesses repair their properties, destroyed by the two hurricanes in 2017. Private investments will increase as the reconstruction of more businesses and homes continues and additionally Mr Speaker the Government has more than \$12 million in construction projects which have already been contracted and more than \$38 million in new projects for the current fiscal year which will greatly impact the performance of the construction Industry going forward.

Mr Speaker the Government is committed to creating an enabling environment for new investment and is pleased that several varied-scale investment projects have and will be announced shortly and that these projects along with ongoing rebuilding work in the aftermath of Hurricane Irma and Maria will further bolster activity in the construction sector.

Mr Speaker, the Government will begin an aggressive campaign and promotion of its new Investment Policy Statement which centers on not only attracting new investment but through its aftercare program seeks to maintain and strengthen old investments which helps in strengthening the economic structure. Mr Speaker my Government's Investment Policy Statement has new distinctive features which focuses on the following:

1. An enabling Business Environment
2. An articulated vision and goals
3. Carefully documented project evaluation and approval process
4. Encouragement of domestic investment
5. A focus on Grand Turk
6. Training Subsidies and
7. Engagement of Local Investors through structures that will allow the sale of equity to them, so they too can take advantage of the success of development projects.

Employment opportunities are also expected to increase steadily over the years, mainly due to an increased demand for services provided in, among others, the tourism, construction, fisheries, and other sectors.

Mr Speaker, as part of the Government's overall sustainable development strategy going forward, targeted sectors within the Turks and Caicos Islands economy will be stimulated.

PEOPLE INVOLVEMENT

But Mr Speaker, the Government is not content to allow the economy to grow without ensuring that its people are active participants in setting its direction, are positioned with the right skills to benefit from the many opportunities that are bound to come.

VISION 2040/MTDS

Mr Speaker, the Government recognizes the need for constructive dialogue amongst all sectors of society and especially among its elected leaders. The Government is therefore grateful to those who have responded positively to think-tank sessions that have helped to form critical policies, to those who have attended the several rounds of town hall meetings, to those who participated in the recent national priority poll and to those members of this Honourable House who continue to see the value in being good stewards of our people's future. The Government is particularly grateful to those in the Public Service and the members of the House of Assembly who participated in the critical crafting of the Vision 2040 and Medium Term Development Strategy. The Government was pleased to have those honourable colleagues attend a day to craft the Vision Statement for these Islands and to give their input in the way forward. Mr Speaker, the Government remains committed to holding these type forum so as to ensure that all of our people understand that when we work together we can create something beautiful.

Mr Speaker the spirit of partnership among the members of this Parliament saw the creation of a vision statement my government believes encapsulates the sum total of the ambitions of the people of these Islands: I quote from the document:

“By 2040 a united Turks and Caicos Islands will be a global leader in levels of prosperity and human development. Our people will be positioned to be fully responsible for our collective future as a nation. We will have a more resilient country that balances economic, social and environmental development for the greater benefit of all our people and our posterity.”

The Government is pleased to partner with the members of this Honorable House and the Public Service leaders in the creation of what we believe will charter a bright future for our country. The Government will follow with public consultations during the month of July and August and will seek to ensure that we as a people unite around this Plan of Vision 2040. Mr Speaker, the Government will thereafter introduce its Medium Term Development Strategy (MTDS) which will be reviewed annually and will comprise development programs and projects. The three-year Medium Term Development Strategy emanating from Vision 2040 will be based on the tenets of inclusive growth, economic development and economic transformation.

Mr Speaker, the Government believes that we must be futuristic in our current decision-making and that we must make decisions now that are bipartisan and more importantly reflect the aspirations of our people.

Mr Speaker, the Government understands that whether it be short, medium or long-term, people are looking for tangible improvements in their lives. Turks and Caicos Islanders are looking for plans that seek to transform their economic and social standing first and foremost; and then that of every person intending to meaningfully contribute to the growth and development of this country. Our people want inclusive growth that is fuelled by strategies implemented at an efficient pace.

MINISTRY OF FINANCE INITIATIVES

Concession Policy

Mr Speaker, as we continue to emerge from the devastation left behind by Hurricanes Irma and Maria, the Government is committed to assisting the Turks and Caicos Islands people. Over the last few months the Government has been able to issue four (4) Customs Orders, which have relieved customs duties of over \$7m for, both businesses and people of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

The Government continues its commitment to growing the Turks and Caicos Islands economy as the business recovery concession policy is progressed.

The Government will continue on with this momentum by establishing a comprehensive concession policy that will allow various concessions on duties and fees to be either reduced or waived for MSMEs.

Credit Union and Consumer Protection

The Regulations will progress for the Credit Union and the Consumer Protection Ordinance. The Financial Services Commission has proposed staff to monitor its implementation. In the

area of the National Quality Policy (NQP) the Government has sought the assistance of COSME to develop the NQP and Consumer Protection Regulations. Currently the NQP Working Group is formed comprising of the Chief Environmental Officer, Director of Trade, Deputy Secretary of Finance and representative of COSME. The members of the NQP Working Group would be responsible for general oversight of the process towards implementing a NQP and establishing a Bureau of Standards for the Turks and Caicos Islands.

VRBO, Refurbishment Policy

Mr. Speaker, the Government will complete its review of the Vacation Rental By Owner (VRBO) Sector and will finalize its discussions with AirBnB to ensure that there is no continued leakage of taxes. The Government will ensure that quality of the TCI Branch remains intact in this sector and will address VRBOs in such a way that small and medium enterprises (SME) can profit from it.

First Time Home Owners – (Housing)

Mr. Speaker, the Government believes that all Turks and Caicos Islands deserve to share in the benefits of this economy.

This financial year, my government will take steps to ease some of the pressures faced by first time and existing homeowners.

My Government will look into any allegations of improper behaviour of insurers (regarding home insurance) and also the cost of living in TCI, and where appropriate, the Government will take necessary actions.

The Government will work prudently to protect the savings and equity that existing homeowners have painstakingly placed in their homes.

The Government will also work to give Turks and Caicos Islanders a better opportunity to enter the housing market, by providing incentives for first time home owners.

The Government is cognizant that there is no single solution, and no one government can do this on its own.

Revenue Authority

The Government aims to foster a more efficient and effective process of collecting taxes and increasing revenue through the establishment of the Turks and Caicos Islands Government Revenue Authority, a central revenue collecting agency. During this financial year work will commence for the establishment of a revenue authority and for its establishment in the year 2019/20.

The establishment of this statutory body will allow the merger of the TCIG's various tax collecting agencies and will help to nurture a high degree of voluntary compliance.

National Health Insurance Plan and Statutory Bodies Review

The Government has already carried out critical groundwork in the National Health Insurance Board and will complete the implementation of critical structural, financial, operational and other necessary changes for its efficient and effective carriage of its functions. The Government will also complete the implementation of recommendations contained in the Statutory Bodies Review.

The Government has already completed the review of the Interhealth Canada's contract with TCIG and there is continued dialogue as it relates to legacy issues. The Government will together to partner with NHIB in ensuring greater oversight of the Project Agreement with Interhealth Canada as well as work with the Ministry of Health and wider community stakeholders in areas such as health screening and prevention, and Primary Healthcare Renewal.

Mr Speaker the Government will complete critical maintenance and redevelopment work at the Ports and will poise the Ports for the anticipated growth in the Islands. The Government also commits to addressing three Airports within these Islands as a matter of priority. The Government will complete rehabilitation works to the Grand Turk and Salt Cay Airports and will repair the South Caicos Tower. The Government will also commission the critical works to construct the South Caicos Terminal and Combine Services Buildings.

MINISTRY OF TOURISM

Mr Speaker, the Government has officially ratified the National Tourism Strategic Plan (KPMG Report) and have created a Strategic Policy direction for this crucial sector from its Recommendations and the Change Document. The Government will focus on improvement of data collection for targeted marketing and decision-making, strengthening of sustainable and community based tourism, strengthening of the cruise industry as well as other areas.

The Government will continue its promotion of the destination through various niche markets; following a successful implementation in the past fiscal year we will continue our focus on the wedding market. The accounting lines for product development will be increased to enhance visitor experience and will continue to progress the expansion and upgrade of heritage sites across the Islands that will enhance the product offering.

The Government will continue its efforts to expand our source markets with continued partnership and promotions especially in the German market.

The Government will continue its review of the Tourism Ordinance. To date there have been successful advances towards this end and it will continue to progress this to enable advanced methods to improve service delivery and open new possibilities.

Maritime Department

The Government has lead on critical works in the maritime sector and is progressing with the development of a maritime policy through the assistance of the United Kingdom Maritime Coastal Agency (UK MCA). This policy will chart the way forward for the sector and Department responsible by providing clear guidance in line with international requirements on shipping operations, security and response to pollution of ships and safety of life at sea. The Maritime Department will focus its efforts in key areas aimed at increasing capacity and, improve quality of service and compliance and will continue its work in the area of the III code (triple I code) compliance to meet its international obligations. The Government will form a multi-sector/departmental steering committee that will oversee the implementation of key obligations within the Maritime sector including the development of a maritime 5-year strategy.

Gaming Department

The Government has completed its review and amendments of the legislation governing the sector. These revisions are consistent with international standards and will see the modernization of the industry in these Islands. The Government will begin the phased implementation of a new gaming environment, and will focus, through a consultancy, on the training of new staff and the development of key instruments that will govern the sector in the future, especially as it relates to obligations regarding Anti-Money Laundering and Responsible Gambling in the Turks and Caicos Islands.

Safety and Security

Mr. Speaker, the Turks and Caicos Islands has faced tremendous challenges in the area of safety and security; but the Government has and will continue to take initiatives to arrest and address these challenges.

Mr Speaker, the Government will seek the creation of a National Security Strategy and will work this year towards a strengthened Joint Law Enforcement Team.

MINISTRY OF BORDER CONTROL AND LABOUR INITIATIVES

Mr Speaker the Government is aware of the increasing anxiety of the people of these Islands as it relates to the unprecedented entry of illegal sloops. The Government recognizes the challenge of migrants is a global one and requires regional and international partners. The Government is grateful to the UK and in particular to Lord Ahmad, Minister for the Overseas Territories in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, for the recent assistance

provided in the area of Border Protection in the form of Naval support, the upgrade of the radar system and the associated training, the provision of regional airlift coverage, the review by and recommendations from the UK Border Team comprised of relevant expertise and the consent for the Government to begin exploratory talks with the Bahamas Government to examine the possibility of their assisting in the patrol of TCI's waters.

The Government will continue its sustained approach through the Operation Guardian initiative ensuring that the laws of this land is upheld.

The Government as stated already publicly - will this year prepare all the groundwork and move towards its long-advocated Border Protection Unit to allow for the better management and protection of our border.

The Government will continue to enhance border protection by implementing the integrated border management system, the Advance Passenger Information System (APIS), and through the use of technological advancement in the capturing of bio-data such as finger printing and facial recognition.

The Government will continue to focus on matters of national security as a means of improving the overall quality of life for our citizens. We will continue the fight against fraud by improving the security of our documents as a mitigation against such risks; we will continue to collaborate with other agencies, nationally and abroad, to mitigate against cyber threats and other risks to our systems.

The Government will continue its efforts to streamline processes in order to make marked improvements in the delivery of products and services to the people of these islands. It will establish, implement and publish Service Level Agreements (SLAs) in commitment to improved service at all customer touch points; shorter waiting times from the time of submission of applications to the delivery of products; and, the eradication of application backlogs for all products and services. The Government has allocated additional manpower in the upcoming Budget to support this enhanced service.

The Government will continue to invest in the advancement and skills development of the hard working men and women who serve as employees, in order to build a dynamic workforce who can ably and efficiently respond to this dynamic environment. Avenues for promotion will continue to be made for promotion from within teams in order to foster a culture of high-performance.

The Government will utilize traditional and emerging methods of engagement especially media releases, press conference, aired talk shows and social media to increase visibility and improve the transparency in the work that it does, where it is safe and not of national risk to do so.

The Government will continue its effort to promote and improve the employment of Turks and Caicos Islanders. We will establish agreements with other stakeholders, for the implementation of Partnership and Apprenticeship Programs that would encourage and support the placement of people in vacancies within the job market.

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker, the Government has taken a comprehensive approach to ensuring that the education system is enhanced to provide students, from the early years through to tertiary education, with the skills required to succeed in the workforce and to become knowledgeable and competent individuals in society.

The Government will continue its review of the national curriculum and will continue the advancement of a number of policy initiatives to further develop the education sector. The Special Needs Policy and the Alternative Education Policy will be fully rolled out.

Mr. Speaker, educating citizens cannot be achieved by the Government alone. We recognize and appreciate the role that private schools play in our society. While it is true that in the past, the Government focused its attention on improving the public school system, this year we see improved partnerships with private schools. The Government has already commenced dialogue with Principals and proprietors of the private schools to explore opportunities in which the Government can provide greater support to private schools and raise standards in education across the sector.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is forging a collaborative relationship with the University of the West Indies (UWI) to further expand the Open Campus Programme in the Turks and Caicos Islands. This will provide a greater range of courses to prospective students who may wish to pursue further studies through an online modality. The Government will also continue its dialogue with UWI to explore expansion of programmes at the Turks and Caicos Community College (TCICC) and to the establishment of a research centre at the TCICC.

The Government will complete the full plans for a purpose built campus on the Island of Providenciales and will complete the rehabilitation works to the Grand Turk Campus. The Government is working collaboratively across Ministries to best use the results of the Skills Audit and will use the same to not only understand the job market but to also identify needs areas for scholarships and course development and offerings at TCICC in response to the needs identified for belonging training. The Government will complete its full review of the issuance of local and international scholarships and will develop a Program that supports our scholars performances to their full potential.

Youth Affairs

Youth Development is critical to the future viability of our nation. It is the Government's mandate to provide the appropriate policies and programmes to support youth development. The Government has revamped the Power of Me Programme to ensure the values and confidence are instilled in young people which are needed if they are to be upstanding citizens in society. Mr Speaker, this Programme will also encourage volunteerism, national pride and social consciousness.

Through the Young Entrepreneurship, Youths can acquire first-hand experience in developing innovative business ideas and how to manage these entrepreneurial ventures. The government

will seek to enhance this programme by facilitating greater access to capital through Invest Turks and Caicos for greater expansion of this initiative. The Government will also engage the private sector in developing an internship programme for our students at the collegiate level to hone their skills and acquire on the job experience during their summer break.

The Government will continue the second phase of the Listening Tour and will hold think tanks and focus group meetings with unattached youth and young professionals. These initiatives have already begun to inform the Youth Policy and decisions for my Government.

Culture

Mr Speaker, the Government will complete a cultural policy that will seek to acquaint and reacquaint all citizens and tourists with our rich heritage and culture..

Library

Mr. Speaker, it is the Government's vision to further develop the Library Services to play a vital role in the development of all citizens. The Government is currently progressing legislation to revise the Library Ordinance, which entails the introduction of a National Library Service. This National Service will address protocols for the management of public and private libraries and archiving.

MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS

Mr Speaker the Government is keen to ensure that social issues are ranked as important as economic issues, recognizing that both impact each other.

The Government is committed to protecting children who are in in need of care and protection from all forms of neglect as well as physical, psychological, emotional and sexual abuse. To attest to this the Government will provide the Social Development Department with much needed resources and will embark on a restructuring agenda that will yield new specialized units to address client needs: a dedicated children's unit, probation and parole unit, and welfare and benefits unit. Additionally, the preparatory work for the implementation of a "Chance for Chance Programme to support the rehabilitation, upskilling and reintegration of ex-offenders back into society," has received Cabinet's approval and it is a mandate the Government intends to resource fully over subsequent budget cycles. Mr Speaker, the Government in conjunction with the aforementioned policy and programmes initiatives, will ensure that its legislative agenda will include bills to support alternative sentencing, child justice, and amendments to the child (care and protection) ordinance.

Poverty Assessment

Mr Speaker, the Government will conduct a Country Poverty Assessment Program. This will give the government a better understanding of the state of poverty and it will use the recommendations to design programs to address the situation going forward.

Currently, UNICEF is providing technical assistance to the Department of Statistics in conducting a multiple indicator cluster sampling (MICS) survey which will help will fulfill a number of difficult indicators for the sustainable development goals (SDG's). The government consider work being done on the MICS and the poverty assessment as important as it will help it to get a better understanding of our people well-being.

Prison Management

Mr. Speaker, national security remains intertwined with our country's present and future prosperity. For this reason, included among our most important national development strategies is the protection of society from those who commit habitual and serious imprisonable offences and likewise to assist those offenders with an opportunity to successfully reenter society. So too is the provision of penal facilities that meet international human rights standards and a safe working environment for prison staff. To achieve this the Government will complete critical remedial works with the support of the UK Government and will construct a new prison wing to replace the yellow wing that was destroyed by fire. The Government will embark on a phased Prison Redevelopment Program with a stronger rehabilitative focus following a Phased Plan already in draft form to be approved. Mr. Speaker, more and more twenty first century governments are using technology to improve customer service delivery, and to empower staff and customers. The Government believe that TCI people deserve no less. Towards this end the Government will implement a new road traffic database system that will enable applications to be submitted and approved online. It will also have the important feature of linking directly with the Royal Police Force databases given this Agency's role in enforcing the Road Traffic Ordinance and of carrying out basic research on drivers. It is also the Government's plan to procure a license plate printing machine to print plates locally through the provision of labour within Her Majesty's Prison. This is expected to facilitate the production of license plates on demand and support the implementation of CCTV.

Mr. Speaker, the Government recognizes that these measures alone will not address the transportation needs of persons who have limited access, or no access, to a personal vehicle. The Government firmly believes that risks faced by children, women, hospitality workers and the indigent when they use unregulated jitneys cannot continue unchallenged. Mr. Speaker, the Government will introduce safe, legal public transportation in various forms for the traveling public.

Mr. Speaker, the Government is keen to equip responders to mitigate the loss of life and property, in the unfortunate event of disasters of any kind. To this end, Mr Speaker the

Government will begin its strengthening of Domestic fire prevention and will secure a new fire truck for the Island of Grand Turk.

Mr. Speaker there have been many lessons learned post the passage of hurricanes Irma and Maria. One of the most paramount has been the importance of resilient and reliable communications infrastructure. The Government has actively engaged the two telecommunications providers FLOW and Digicel, post passage of these major storms and stressed the critical need for a modern communication infrastructure. The Government is happy to report that its engagement with these service providers has proven fruitful; as they have reaffirmed their commitment to offering the people of these islands modern and resilient communications services. The installation of an underground fibre network has commenced enabling Fibre to the Home (FTTH) and Fibre to the Business (FTTB) services to be offered; which will increase the likelihood of no loss or quick recovery from communications loss post major climate event. The Government will continue to support service provider in their upgrading efforts.

MINISTRY OF HEALTH, SPORT, AGRICULTURE AND HUMAN SERVICES

Primary Health

The strengthening of primary health care continues to be a major focus of the Government, hence this year the focus is on increased provisions for primary health care. The Government is committed to the provision of universal healthcare that is affordable, accessible and of high quality to all persons residing in TCI. To this end the Government is committed to ensuring that health systems contribute to health equity leading to universal access of all residents in the Turks and Caicos Islands, reorganizing health services around people's needs and expectations to produce better outcomes, and integrating public health actions with primary care and working to ensure that health is both seen and done in all policies and sectors. In addition, the Government will strengthen health systems based on sound health leadership that is rewarded, recognized and retained.

The Government is committed to increasing access to Health Care, by taking health care to the people, and strategically placing health centers closer to where people live and work. The soon to be commissioned Mobile Clinic as well as the construction of community clinics will begin the fulfillment of my Government's vision.

Agriculture

The Government believes that the development of agriculture in the Turks & Caicos Islands can help to reduce unemployment, raise income, and improve food security, and especially help to improve the health of our nation. It also believes that it can be a source of livelihood for many individuals, and also presents many direct and indirect business opportunities. To this end the Government is aggressively promoting the cultivation of land and the breeding of animals and plants for consumption, by providing incentives and assistance to both those individuals who are currently involve in farming, and those seeking to enter the industry. The

Government will continue its promotion to “Eat what you Grow, Grow what you Eat” program, which include the development of School, home, and restaurant gardens.

Environmental Health

The Government believes that the health of the environment influences human health and disease, and is committed to the continued assessment and control of those environmental factors that can potentially affect human health, preventing of vector borne diseases, and improving environmental quality. To that end, the Government is embarking on a number of initiatives which focus on ensuring compliance with International Health Regulations, reducing the spread of food borne diseases by increasing the training of food handlers, and increasing inspections and surveillance for the purpose of reducing vectors such as mosquitoes.

Cancer Awareness

The Government is committed to raising awareness of cancer and to encouraging its prevention, detection and treatment. It believes that early detection of cancer greatly increases the chances for successful treatment, and that there are two major components of early detection of cancer: education to promote early diagnosis and screening. To that end the Government has embarked on developing and implementing a cancer registry, increasing disease surveillance by the National Epidemiology and Research Unit (NERU), and the promotion of cancer awareness and screening programs throughout the entire country. The Government this year will also commission a Cancer Plan that will aid in its strategy in this area.

Treatment Abroad Program

Mr Speaker, the Government recognizes that the demand for accessing specialized and advanced health care outside the country continues to be in high demand. The Government believes that a balance can be achieved between quality and cost for this treatment abroad. My Government has already embarked on reviewing the Treat Abroad Policy, and conducting meetings with health providers for achieving the best possible health outcomes at the best possible cost. This work towards a new Treatment Abroad Policy will be completed by the third of the year.

Healthy Lifestyles

The Government accepts as true that good nutrition is an important part of leading a healthy lifestyle, and that when it is combined with physical activity, it can help persons reach and maintain a healthy weight, reduce risk of chronic diseases (like heart disease, hypertension, type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis, and certain types of cancer), and promote overall health. The Government has already adopted a School Nutrition Program and will finalize an implementation strategy shortly. In response again to the promotion of overall health, the Government has commenced the development and implementation of strong community-based health promotion and disease prevention policies, programs, and public awareness campaigns

that promote the vision of a healthier and empowered people by them making smart food choices and engaging in regular physical activity.

Sports Development

The Government believes that Sports, games, and physical activities are very essential to maintain health and physical fitness. To this end the Government has embarked on a number of initiatives to develop and promote sports and the athletes involved with it, promoting “sports for all” programs which encourage all residents to include sports in their Healthy Lifestyles programs, and placing the needed focus on the development, upgrading, and renovating of the sporting facilities throughout the country. The government will develop and revise legislation pertaining to Sports Development, Healthy Lifestyles, and Nutrition.

MINISTRY OF INFRASTRUCTURE, HOUSING AND PLANNING

Energy & Utilities

My Speaker the Government continues to make efforts to ensure the necessary legislative and regulatory frameworks are in place to effectively govern the sectors under its remit. The Government recognizes that the regulation of this sector and the need for real data to inform the rate is critical. To this end, the Government has made provisions to conduct a cost of service study of the sector to inform itself about the full cost of providing electricity service by customer type and location. This information from this study can be used to review and revise the rate structure periodically based on better understanding of energy costs of supply and to allow equitable cost allocation in the tariff structure.

Water & Sewerage

The Government has already agreed the implementation of the water and sewerage policy and will ensure much needed improvements to the water and sewerage sector. As part of the process, the TCIG Water Undertaking Unit will receive much needed legislative support to enable the unit to carry out its duties and ultimately enhance its sustainability. The Government will complete the first ever review of the management and operations of the Provo Water Company Ltd. Such a review will be undertaken by the government to ensure the management of the company is carrying out its obligations in accordance to the Instrument of Appointment and in compliance with regional and international standards and practices. My Speaker, the Government recognized the serious challenges in the area of water production and distribution especially of the Island of Grand Turk. The Government will address and resolve the myriad of legacy issues in their entirety over the next two Budget cycles.

Estates Management

My Speaker, the Government through its Estate Management Department intends to embark on several new initiatives with the aim of moving the TCIG estate, both owned and leased to a place where all properties are more technologically advanced, safe and healthy. The Government would move towards the building of a purpose built Government Complex

on Providenciales for efficiency and also to ensure enhanced space utilization value for money and long term financial profit for the TCIG.

Department of Planning

Mr. Speaker, the Government will ensure the creation a National Physical Development Plan. The plan will be prepared within the context set by the Vision 2040 Document and will be an important accompanying national planning document that should guide public sector development efforts. The National Physical Development Plan (NPDP) will address most of the aspects included in the Mid Term Development Strategy (MTDS). The preparation of this plan will require the involvement of all government departments and agencies and other non-government agencies and the public at large.

The new NPDP shall set policies regarding the types of housing to be developed, given the land scarcity in the country, as well as the importance of the involvement of the public sector in encouraging better housing for Turks and Caicos Islanders. The new national Physical Development Plan will also contain provisions for zoning, and plans will be prepared to cover each major island.

Mr Speaker the Government will also continue in the process of increasing efforts toward enforcing the building codes with the help of the its additional staff compliment, as well as facilitating the training of builders, to improve resilience, not only to buildings, but also to the utilities distribution infrastructure (water, power, telecommunications, etc.). The Government will continue with efforts to control development activity including enforcing the requirement for the conduct of environmental impact assessments for major projects and projects where there will be potential impacts on the island's delicate coastal and marine ecosystem.

Mr Speaker the Government is committed to the policy and strategy that has been developed and is being implemented in relation to halting the spread, as well as reversing the incidence of unplanned residential developments, and where possible regularizing and enhancing such developments.

PREMIER'S OFFICE

Climate Change & Environmental Policies

Mr. Speaker, in facing hurricanes Irma and Maria, ignorance cannot be feigned as regards the significant impact that Climate Change will present to these islands in the future. Though the Turks and Caicos Islands is not a major contributor to the practices that significantly impact climate change, we have experienced and will remain vulnerable to its effects if we do not take aggressive action and a firm stance on the global political stage and challenge the international community to partner with us in implementing strategies to mitigate its effects. Mr. Speaker, the Government believes that it is of extreme importance that we collectively support this Climate Change initiative, as it has not only national but global implications. The Government has taken a proactive stance in addressing Climate Change and has not only

laid the foundation but set in motion the mechanisms to guide TCI along the path of climate change adaptation. A Climate Change Committee led by the Office of the Premier has been formed; and a Climate Change Policy Statement which speaks to my government's initiative and commitment to mitigating the effects of climate change in these islands has been completed and endorsed by Cabinet. Subsequent to this Policy Statement a Policy and Green Paper will follow in August of 2018, ensuring that climate change adaptation provisions are included in all national policies, programs, strategies and action plans. Mr. Speaker this policy will not be a static document, but a dynamic work plan that is not only efficiently and effectively executed; but updated every five years to ensure that the Turks and Caicos Islands remains proactive and responsive to the ever-evolving threat of Climate Change.

As guardians of the natural environment of these Beautiful by Nature islands the government will ensure sustainable practices are actioned and incorporated into daily lives and a culture of eco-awareness is fostered throughout this archipelago. The natural environment plays a significant role in our primary industry, Tourism.

Mr. Speaker, the Climate Change Policy is only one part of a comprehensive initiative that the Government will mobilise to address the challenges and practices that impact our natural environment.

The Government will also present and action a waste management plan for the entire Turks and Caicos. These efforts are being supported by UNDP. The Adopt a Highway initiative will enable corporate citizens to play an active role in the upkeep and cleanliness of our public spaces.

The Government will in short order launch the Plastic Bag Policy which will see a full ban on plastic bags as part of our going green initiative.

The Government will also introduce a number of environmental initiatives that will aid in reducing pollution of our air and oceans, and for the preservation of our pristine environment.

The Constitution

Mr. Speaker, the Government is also pleased that meetings with the Official Opposition have been progressing. The Government will carry forward the recommendations agreed following consultation with the people in 2015 and have already invited the Official Opposition to join in.

Strengthening Local Government

Mr. Speaker, the mantle of responsibility that is borne by every successive Government in executing the will of the people is not taken lightly by the Government as it recognizes that the community is the pilot and engine for the Government's agenda. The authority with which the Government executes the people's vision will be coupled with the mechanisms and platforms for the voices of the electorate to be further amplified in the halls of power. The Government will ensure that all are given a seat at the table of governance and that the people are empowered

to shape the direction of these islands by taking active steps to implement and strengthen local government. Residents in the various districts within the sister islands have been engaged directly with the staff of the Office of the Premier through a series of community meetings to discuss the possible expansion powers of District Commissioners and the impactfulness of their roles as currently defined by their portfolios. Subsequent to these initial meetings, further consultation with the communities will occur to determine the most suitable model for local government.

The Government will ensure that Turks and Caicos Islanders are empowered to become active participants in the enhancement of the everyday lives of citizenry with the government as its partner. Each community will emerge from this process with stronger representation and ownership in the growth and development of their respective communities. The Government is committed to ascertaining a consultant to explore how District Administration can be strengthened and provided with the necessary resources. Mr. Speaker the family islands will not be left behind. The Government has already demonstrated its commitment to engage the people of this country through various means but most notably its Town Hall Meetings of which two rounds were completed and delayed after the Hurricanes and awaiting funding. The Government will continue this initiative and use all means of communication to engage our people further. To this end, a Communications Director this year will be added to the staff of the Premier's Office and will assist in this area.

Transparency & Accountability

Mr. Speaker, the Government is committed to increasing transparency in its spending and decision-making and will take all measures necessary to ensure an informed and engaged electorate. The Turks and Caicos Islands Government has a long history of supporting the community in facilitating projects and events that benefit the Turks and Caicos Islands; and it is committed to continually enhancing the economic vitality and social welfare of the community through sponsorships and charitable donations. It recognizes the power of volunteerism and contributing financial or technical resources and collaborating with local businesses and non-profit organizations. The Government has secured approval in Cabinet to a Contributions Policy to ensure transparency in the use of public funds by establishing guidelines for the granting and subsequent publishing of "financial or technical" assistance offered by the Turks and Caicos Islands Government. Mr. Speaker this policy provides a clear and precise application process and outlining criteria relative to the granting of contributions and ensures that there is not a duplication of Government efforts in providing financial and/or technical assistance to persons or organizations for the same project/event/cause from more than one Ministry per financial year.

Mr. Speaker, in addition to the Contributions Policy, the Office of the Premier will table in Cabinet a Consultation Policy that will set the standard for civic engagement in policy initiatives for the Turks and Caicos Islands for years to come.

Community Enhancement Program

My Speaker, The Government will also begin a small works program that would encompass massive clean-up and beautification projects around the Islands. The Government will engage in multiple projects to ensure that it captures and revitalizes our “Beautiful by Nature” Islands whilst providing employment for TC Islanders. This initiative will be supported by increased policing of our anti-litter and strengthened enforcement powers for the Environmental Health Department.

Mr. Speaker the Government recognizes that partnerships are critical to the achievement of its goals and that local as well as regional and international partnerships are all necessary.

International Co-operation

Over the past months, the Government has begun to establish new friendship agreements with Neighboring countries and the state of Florida for the furtherance of educational and other opportunities and capacity building for the Turks and Caicos Islands. The Government will continue to finalize these arrangements.

The Government is pleased with the level of engagement and developing relationships that it has already begun to enjoy with regional and international countries and organizations and with the UK Government.

The Government is pleased with its active engagement with the UK Government on matters of critical importance to the Islands especially on constitutional matters. The Government is pleased to say that as recent as last week during the Joint Ministerial Council Meetings and during the Government’s regular bilaterals, The UK Government has agreed to consider constitutional proposals from the Turks and Caicos Islands. The Government has already made representations in the area of Crown Land reform and has advised the UK Government that it would introduce both matters at a meeting jointly attended with the Opposition in London later this year.

Stakeholder Engagement

Mr. Speaker the Government believes that no one leader, no one Government, no one political party has all the answers. The Government believes that the time is now for constructive and mature dialogue and will commit to facilitating forum for meaningful dialogue.

Mr. Speaker as we move this country forward in the face of these challenges, the Government is committed to ensuring that the people of TCI are not left behind and that they are involved in the vision as well as its implementation.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, the Government believes there is still much work to do. The scope of the challenges TCI faces as a nation are broad and complex; but they are by no means insurmountable. The Government has laid the foundation for a prosperous Turks and Caicos and is up to the task of nation building. The Government is dedicated to the people of these

islands and will serve in partnership with them to propel the Turks and Caicos forward to prosperity and resilience.

The Government recognizes the need to work together with its citizens, its communities, private and public sector, regional and international partners in order to realize the country's full potential and it is committed to fostering these relationships.

Mr. Speaker the Government believes the challenges facing our country give an opportunity to develop the type of country that all would wish to see. The Government believes this opportunity requires all hands on deck. The Government further believes that from this House and every individual home in this country must have a vested interest in the development of this nation. The Government believes that this country is ripe with potential and with the right attitude, right allocation and management of resources, and right Vision, it can be well on its way to achieving that development.

Mr. Speaker, the Government believes that apathy is not a choice, that all citizens must be engaged and that togetherness on things that matter is central. May God continue to bless this Honourable House and may He continue to bless these Turks and Caicos Islands.