

2006/07 SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

MONDAY 8 MAY, 2006

Delivered by

HIS EXCELLENCY GOVERNOR RICHARD TAUWHARE, MVO

To the

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ON THE OCCASION OF THE 3RD SESSION OF THE
7TH LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL**

Mr. Speaker, my government assumed office a little over two and one-half years ago. This is therefore a good time to thank God for the many blessings He has bestowed on these Islands under my government's leadership. It is also a time for us to stop and reflect on the progress which has been made in delivering my government's 2003-2007 Policy Agenda; and to rededicate ourselves to achieving the objectives contained in it and to the task of Nation Building. This is a responsibility my government accepts with humility and look to God for guidance and strength as it works on behalf of the people.

Mr. Speaker, we are at a critical time in the development of our country. While my government has made much progress in delivering its 2003-2007 Policy Agenda; it will not stop nor rest on its laurels. My government will move with renewed vigour to build on the achievements of recent years and continue the process of transforming the country into a world class tourism and investment jurisdiction for the benefit and enjoyment of this and future generations.

POLICY AGENDA

My government is committed to delivering its Policy Agenda around the themes that are included in the 2003-2007 Policy Agenda. However, these will be refined to take account of emerging issues and to seize new opportunities. I am therefore pleased to elaborate on the main policy commitments for my government during this legislative session.

GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE CONSTITUTION

Mr. Speaker, it is the view of my government that our existence and purpose are based on the fundamental principles of representative democracy and inherent therein, the constitution and the rule of law. It is from this “eternal fountain” that all things of value in our society flow: our individual rights and freedoms, our growing economic prosperity, our pursuit of happiness. It is therefore appropriate that I start here.

Mr. Speaker, my government remains committed to ensuring that the Turks and Caicos Islands remain a representative democracy that is of the people, by the people and for the people. A strong, advanced, and modern constitution is essential to the strengthening of our democracy and our quest for nationhood. I am therefore pleased to say that in October 2005 my government agreed to a new and modern constitution for the Turks and Caicos Islands with the United Kingdom Government. The new constitution, when brought fully into force, over the next fourteen months, will expand the membership of the Legislative Council, which will be renamed the House of Assembly. Instead of

having thirteen elected members, three appointed members, and two ex-officio members, the new House of Assembly will comprise fifteen elected, four appointed, and one ex-officio member. This change is significant in that the larger House will contribute to the better running of this institution of government by the availability of more members to serve on committees. This, Mr. Speaker, ensures that the committees when functioning as they are intended will provide the checks and balances and demand accountability in the system. This, Mr. Speaker, serves democracy. This serves the Turks and Caicos Islands.

My government is likewise committed to an aggressive legislative agenda in this session of the Legislature. We will move to pass legislation in several areas of our national life to complete our promise to the electorate in this term. These include electoral reform, anti-corruption in public office, and marriage dissolutions. My government will continue to operate in the “sunshine” in all its dealings. Accountability grounded in integrity continues to be the cornerstone of the foundation upon which my government stands. Ministers will continue to provide the Legislature with direct and truthful account of their Ministries. My government remains committed to ensuring the proper functioning of the office of the Complaints Commissioner, and has removed from the new constitution any impediment to their proper functioning.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

The economy of these Islands has expanded under the watch of my government. My government is pleased that this has translated into improved budgetary outcomes. My

government especially pleased that the benefits of growth and development are now more equitably spread across more of our Islands, especially our long neglected Capital, Grand Turk.

My government will therefore continue to be vigilant in its stewardship of the nation's financial affairs. In doing so, it will continue to develop and implement prudent fiscal policies to ensure stable and predictable budgetary outcomes over the medium and long terms. This will ensure timely delivery of its development agenda. Among the measures my government will adopt in support of this objective are: setting and monitoring targets for key budget parameters; formally establishing a Government Reserve Fund, setting targets for the orderly build up of reserves; strengthening public financial management by adopting international best practices to measure performance over time and facilitate international comparisons. My government will also improve budgeting for unforeseen expenditure and emergencies by insuring government's assets and expanding disaster preparedness and mitigation programs.

My government views borrowing as a legitimate tool of economic policy management. This should be used prudently. My government is therefore committed to sustainable debt management within the framework of the Borrowing Procedures agreed with the United Kingdom Government, and other internationally recognised sustainable debt benchmarks. My government plans to seek a sovereign rating for government debt to enable borrowing at more favourable terms. It views this as progress in its mission to develop and modernize all aspects of our Turks and Caicos economy and society at large. My

government will likewise use borrowing as a tool to empower residents of these Islands by promoting the issuance of Government Bonds. My government believes, Mr. Speaker, that in addition to empowering our citizens, this measure will nurture confidence in Government by citizens and institutions that they can invest in Government Bonds thereby directly contributing to the development of their country while investing at the same time. My government believes, Mr. Speaker, that this is a win, win situation.

ECONOMIC & INFRASTRUCTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ENVIRONMENT

My government believes that some services are best provided by the private sector or in conjunction with the private sector. This is why it will continue the privatisation program, which it started upon taking office in 2003. It will also seek private sector participation in the provision of essential infrastructure. Such initiatives will be explored for the port sector and will be modelled after the very successful procurement process adopted for the National Hospitals Project. My government's effort in all instances will be guided by the need to achieve transparency, value for money and affordability.

My government has made considerable progress in improving the physical infrastructure throughout the Islands. But, much more needs to be done in this area. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, my government will continue its program of infrastructural development with special attention being paid to improving the transport sector infrastructure in Middle Caicos, North Caicos and South Caicos. My government's activities in this sector will be guided by the recommendations of the draft Transport Sector Policy. The country's air

and sea ports have received considerable attention from my government over the past two years and ten months it have been in office. Mr. Speaker, this Honourable House can be assured that no effort will be spared to bring all our nation's ports up to date with the considerable and growing demand that our developing economy is placing on it. The North Caicos Port is currently under construction, and others in the nation will undergo renovations and extensions as may be required during this legislative sitting and beyond.

Mr. Speaker, our economic policies must be aimed at implementing solutions to the development challenges facing the nation. This is why my government pledged and has launched a Ten Year Development Plan process. This is indeed a very exciting process – we have an opportunity to determine the kind of Turks and Caicos Islands we want in the future and to allocate resources to achieve our vision. My government is very pleased that the people have embraced the planning process with enthusiasm. It encourages continued support throughout the entire planning process. My government will adapt future budgets to implement the agreed recommendations of the Ten Year Development Plan.

Mr. Speaker, my government is committed to economic diversification of the economy. It will continue to promote the deepening and diversification of our tourism sector by opening other Islands to development through new and more imaginative investment initiatives, and by exploring non-traditional markets such as Asia and Eastern Europe, from which to attract new visitors. My government does not intend to rest on the laurels of the recent success of our tourism industry. It will continue its efforts in conjunction

with stakeholders at home and abroad to improve upon the development and marketing of the tourism product.

My government will continue ongoing initiatives and introduce new ones to improve the prospects of the financial service sector to make it a stronger second pillar of economy. Efforts to promote agriculture and crafts development in the Caicos Islands will be enhanced. Mr. Speaker these issues would also be addressed within the Ten Year Development Plan.

Mr. Speaker, my government is cognizant of and appreciates that we have been blessed with an island nation that has been made beautiful by Mother Nature herself. Our country remains largely unspoiled and pristine. This is in fact one of our biggest tourism draws and contributes largely to the quality of life enjoyed by citizens and residents alike. My government intends to ensure that it remains that way for many generations to come. My Government is proud of its stewardship of the environment, Mr. Speaker, and it will continue to be diligent in ensuring that its economic development program can co-exist and be sustained within our natural environment. My government will enhance ongoing programs in this area and will continue to engage all stakeholders. Our pristine environment will continue to be a central theme of our development and promotional efforts. Recognising the potential impact of Global Warming and Climate Change on small island states such as ours, my government will consult with regional and international agencies on this phenomenon with the view of taking steps it can in solidarity with nations and peoples of like mind to reverse the trend.

NATIONAL SECURITY AND ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

My government continues to be concerned over the increasing level of crime in the country, particularly crimes involving the use of illegal fire arms and dangerous weapons. It believes it is the inalienable right of our citizens and residents to live their lives and pursue their dreams in a society free of crime. This is why it has made a standing commitment to strengthen our law enforcement agencies by providing them with the necessary manpower, equipment, and funding. My government will review the laws on criminal acts in which a weapon is used, and impose stiffer penalties on persons responsible for such acts. It must be clear, Mr. Speaker, that my government will use every resource available to it to route out and stamp-out crime wherever it lies within these islands and bring the perpetrators to justice.

Critical to our national security is the need to stem the flow of illegal drugs into our country. This problem is also related to the influx of illegal immigrants from neighbouring countries. In addition to strengthening our own forces, my government continues to work with these countries and the United States authorities to strengthen Operation Bahamas and Turks and Caicos Islands (OPBAT) and increase inter agency cooperation and intelligence exchange between our Customs, Immigration and Police services.

In relation to immigration, Mr. Speaker, my government has accepted and is in the process of implementing the recommendations of the “Blue Ribbon Commission” it

appointed upon taking office. Our commitment was to make then existing immigrations laws and policies “clear, firm, and fair”. The recommendations will be enshrined in new immigration legislation to be brought before this house.

Mr. Speaker, with regards to illegal immigration, we continue to be challenged to find permanent solutions. The problem seems to become more serious each month. My government has utilized more human and financial resources within the appropriate agencies to combat this problem. This is evident in the excellent work that the brave men and women of the Police Marine Branch and the Special Police, Immigration, Customs Enforcement unit (S.P.I.C.E) are doing on the frontline of the fight against illegal immigration.

In addition to our own efforts, I am hopeful that the newly elected Government of Haiti, with the support of the international community, can bring some immediate economic relief to that country which should help to naturally restrict the flow of its citizens risking their lives to leave their homes in search of a better way of life. In the very near future, my government hopes to have the opportunity to express its concerns with regards to this matter to the newly elected government of Haiti, and extend our best wishes and sincere hope for a better future for the people of Haiti.

My government continues to view safety and security at our air and sea ports as being vital to our national security. That is why Mr. Speaker, my government has moved swiftly to implement the recommendations of the consultancy undertaken by my

government when it first came to power, to identify the projects and policies which are needed to comply with the new international requirements, including those of the International Civil Aviation Organization and International Maritime Organization. My government is confident that all our ports are in full compliance, but we must remain vigilant as we go forward to ensure that they remain so.

Mr. Speaker, our country remains threatened by Hurricanes. The 2006 season is a mere twenty three days away. My government remains committed to effective disaster mitigation and recovery programmes at both the government and household levels. This is consistent with my government's overall national security objectives. In fact, the Department has recently undergone reorganization and strengthening. My Government will continue to strengthen the Office of Disaster Management and fully implement the National Disaster Plan. We will also be supportive of regional initiatives, including those with the other United Kingdom Overseas Territories, in relation to disaster management and preparedness.

THE PUBLIC SERVICE

My government believes that a professional, highly motivated and results-driven Public Service is critical for the effective management of Government's business, the deliverance of Government services, and national development. This is important if we are to promote an ethos of public service amongst a younger generation of Turks and Caicos Islanders. My government has made some progress in this area by introducing a

Civil Service Recognition Program and hosting Motivational Seminars. There is a lot more to be done.

Over the medium term my government will promote fundamental reforms to the way our Public Service is managed. In this context, and under the new constitution to come into effect shortly, the Public Service Commission will be strengthened to improve recruitment and discipline, promote an output culture within the service and merit base remuneration. The Public Service Commission will be supported by a strengthened Secretariat. My government's efforts will not stop here. It will seek to improve capacity within the service through initiatives in such areas as training, succession planning and revised General Orders.

My government will also promote the application of information and communications technologies to improve the effectiveness of the public service. Key government departments will be reengineered to improve service delivery. My government is well underway with our plan to undertake 'E' initiatives in Government departments such as the Land Registry and the Companies Registry.

EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY

My government came to power on a mandate of change; to stop the marginalization of Turks and Caicos Islanders and to put '*Turks and Caicos Islanders First*', to protect its people from unfair competition and to promote Turks and Caicos Islanders in business. My government has delivered on that commitment and will seek to aggressively continue its policy of making Turks and Caicos Islanders First in their country. Front and centre to

the empowerment strategy of my government, is the prudent use of concessions on Crown land and customs duty to Belongers for homes and commercial developments. Another component of our policy is the encouragement of genuine joint ventures and partnerships between Belongers and foreign investors. My government will continue to support and widen these initiatives going forward. In addition, Mr. Speaker, my government will enhance existing programmes in the areas of health, education and small business development that are essential to empowering our people.

My government is committed to ensuring that all people of our islands, Belongers and non-Belongers alike can live productive lives and therefore we will continue to develop and implement policy measures to improve the quality of life for the entire population.

SOCIAL SECTOR MANAGEMENT

Mr. Speaker, my government has made considerable progress towards the construction of two new hospitals to improve the availability and delivery of health care within these Islands. It will spend some \$50 million over the next two years in the development of these two new facilities. My government looks forward to the opening of these new facilities by 2008. In the coming months, however, my government will undertake wide public education programs to inform the public of reforms planned, along with the coming on stream of the new hospitals. My government will continue to focus on prevention programs in relation to health and other social issues that adversely affect our society. Accordingly, it will seek to further strengthen such programs as Child Abuse, Domestic Violence, Drug Abuse, and Teenage Pregnancy.

My government has made considerable progress in providing for the education of our children. Scholarship programs will continue in line with the Scholarship Policy and emerging needs of the Labour market. My government's main thrust in the education sector will be to improve facilities and curriculum in primary and secondary schools. Youth and Culture facilities and programs will continue to be developed, and where already existing, enhanced. My government has already done much to improve sport and athletics in our society, but there is much more to be done and it is committed to doing just that. And, for good reason Mr. Speaker, my government will focus more on sports over the next twelve months in providing facilities and encouragement to our athletes as we prepare to host the CARIFTA Games in 2007. We plan to be good hosts, but we intend to compete and win several medals as well. I would therefore like to encourage all Turks and Caicos Islanders and residents to give our athletes all the support and encouragement we can and to be on hand in 2007 to cheer them.

Mr. Speaker, as part of our quest for development, my government will continue to pursue policies, which have a *'human face.'* My government's policies are so designed, and it will work diligently with a granite resolve to ensure that none in our society is left behind in our push towards modernization and prosperity. My government will continue to promote greater equality and social justice for all and compassion for the vulnerable groups such as young children, the elderly, disabled persons and those afflicted with life threatening diseases such as HIV/AIDS. This is why my government has strengthened programs in these areas. These programs will be further strengthened as we go forward. In addition, my government will develop national goals and targets to be used to monitor

the achievement of our objectives. These national goals and targets will be benchmarked with reference to the Millennium Development Goals.

Mr. Speaker, my government believes that the current economic expansion allows us the opportunity to move people from welfare and into paying jobs that build self-worth and bring a greater sense of dignity to individuals thus making them productive members of society. Through education and skills development training, it will reduce the need for state support and the dependence thereon by the next generation of Turks and Caicos Islanders. This is why we have renamed the Welfare Department the Department of Social Development. This transformation is inclusive of not just a new name, but a new mission and new policy initiative.

CONCLUSION

Mr. Speaker, my government has yet again outlined a very ambitious, yet realistic agenda, which it aims to implement in a pragmatic manner based on the availability of resources and the priorities that it has set. Successful implementation of these policies and programmes will continue the current prosperity, and ensure sustainable economic and social development of the Islands for us and future generations of Turks and Caicos Islanders. My government invites the public to hold it accountable as it works to implement the policies and programmes I have just outlined.

Mr. Speaker, ladies and gentlemen thank you all for your attention and may God bless our Turks and Caicos Islands

