

2003 – 2007 POLICY AGENDA
WEDNESDAY 24TH SEPTEMBER, 2003
Delivered by
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CHIEF MINISTER AND MINISTER OF DEVELOPMENT, TOURISM,
NATURAL RESOURCES AND DISTRICT ADMINISTRATION
to the
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Mr. Speaker, Members of the Executive Council, Honourable Leader of the Opposition, Members of this Honourable House, Ladies and Gentlemen, Boys and Girls.

Greetings and Introduction

Mr. Speaker, I am very humbled by the trust the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands in general, and the people of Bottle Creek, in particular, have placed in me and my administration. For this, we say thanks! We accept the mantle of leadership of the affairs of this country with a sense of purpose. We dedicate and commit ourselves to fulfilling the pledges we made in our Manifesto in order to put *‘Turks and Caicos Islanders First!’* We have already begun to work for you, the people, and will do so continuously to earn the trust and confidence you have placed in us!

The Deputy Chief Minister and Minister of Finance and National Insurance in his first ‘Budget Address’ informed us of the financial context in which this administration has to implement its mandate for change. Change – which is demanded by the men and women and boys and girls of this country, as we move forward together to achieve our dreams of a better Turks and Caicos for this and future generations. We have been assured by his address that a firm plan will be put in place to ensure the funding and implementation of our development Agenda.

Mr. Speaker, ‘The Speech from the Throne’ highlighted some of the key policies and programmes my administration will pursue in its first term of office to implement our development agenda and put *‘Turks and Caicos Islanders First.’* Therefore in this

address, I will provide additional information concerning our legislative agenda and several of the programmes mentioned in the Speech from the Throne; provide details of our programmes for business development and improved development planning; and discuss some of our other policies and programmes, especially those that will be advanced by the departments that fall within the Ministry of Development, Tourism, Natural Resources and District Administration.

Good Governance

Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the main focus of my address, I would like to begin by restating our commitment to ensuring that the Turks and Caicos Islands remains a representative democracy that is of the people, by the people and for the people. This is why my administration is committed to changes in the way the affairs of the people are conducted. We want to have a very active legislative session, and will therefore prepare an annual calendar for the legislature. This will present advance information concerning legislation we will be advancing on behalf of our people.

Consistent with these proposed changes, my administration has an aggressive legislative agenda. Mr. Speaker, in line with the pledges we made in our Manifesto to put *'Turks and Caicos Islanders First'*, some of the legislation we plan to amend or enact during our first term in office are as follows:

1. National Health Insurance legislation
2. Integrity in Public Office legislation
3. National Bank legislation
4. Hotel Cooperation legislation
5. Family Law legislation
6. Employment Ordinance
7. Business Licensing Ordinance
8. Real Estate legislation
9. Establishment of Infrastructure Development Fund, under the Finance and Audit Ordinance

10. Public Transport Authority legislation
11. Distribution of Service Charge Regulation
12. Telecommunications Ordinance
13. Civil Aviation Authority legislation

Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying, I hereby restate our commitment to passing anti-corruption legislation, which was not passed during the last eight year despite a pressing need for it. My administration will also work to strengthen and improve the effectiveness of the offices of the Ombudsman and the Complaints Commissioner. May I also reiterate our commitment to a process of Constitutional advancement for the Islands? In the medium to long run, in keeping with the growing financial strength of these Islands and the needs and aspiration of our people, my administration will negotiate with Her Majesty's Government to achieve our goal of full internal self-government.

District Administration

Mr. Speaker, we as a government make no apology for our confidence in the Turks and Caicos Islands' people, and for our unshakeable belief that if Turks and Caicos Islanders are to mould their destiny and take control of this country, their government must not only talk the talk, but also walk the walk – the government must help to empower the people not only by its words, but more fundamentally, by its deeds. This is why one of my first actions on assuming office was to take responsibility for District Administration. I view this as a significant development because we want the people of these Islands to have direct access to their government; to have a voice in determining and shaping the policies and programmes that affect their reality; and to evaluate and hold this administration accountable to them.

Consistent with my assumption of responsibility for District Administration, we will review the *modus operandi* of the offices of the District Commissioner with a view to implementing operational reforms to turn them into 'true' development agencies, as opposed to just an extension of the government bureaucracy. As a first step toward local

government, my administration will reintroduce District Boards to act in an advisory capacity to the District Commissioners. In the medium term, we will engage the services of consultants to advise on the future structure of a sustainable local government machinery for these Islands.

As a demonstration of this change, we have included within this Budget a sum in excess of \$1 million for community projects, which will be planned and implemented at the district level. This is a first step! We also plan to work with the communities to empower them and build their capacity to implement bigger projects in the future. My colleagues and I look forward to the opportunities and satisfaction that will result from the successful implementation of these community projects.

Elaboration of Policy Agenda

Business Development

Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, I will now turn to the details of my address.

Greater business opportunities is an essential element of our core principle of putting *'Turks and Caicos Islanders First'*. This is why the new administration supports business and is totally committed to the development of our economy by creating greater opportunities for business. An environment where commerce is vibrant and flourishing is a necessary precondition for our country to continue to improve the standard of living of our citizens and those who live amongst us. It is through business opportunities that we can bridge the gap between the rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots.

To achieve our objectives, we will put in place clear, fair and firm policies to facilitate and encourage business development. Businesses will have nothing to fear from this government. To this end, I recently informed the Providenciales Chamber of Commerce of our plans to review a number of policies and legislations which affect businesses.

For the benefit of all, I would like to recap these initiatives which will affect such important areas as:

1. Business licenses
2. Immigration, and
3. Labour

In the area of business licenses, we propose to establish a Business and Liquor Licenses Authority. We believe that an authority with statutory powers and clear policies will be better able to carry out government's agenda and secure legitimate business opportunities for Turks and Caicos Islanders in the future. To reduce unfair competition, illegal fronting and selling off of valuable national assets, as a first step, we propose three categories of businesses to be defined by the type and level of capitalization as follows:

Category 1 – Belonger Only

Category 2 – Belonger/Expatriate Joint Venture

Category 3 – Open

Our strategy to empower and promote Turk and Caicos Islander owned businesses does not end with the creation of three business categories. It goes further! Critical to our efforts, will be business development policies to spread opportunities amongst many of our citizens, as opposed to the few, as was the case during the last eight years.

Mr. Speaker, as part of our strategy, before the end of this year TCInvest will have a permanent office on the Island of Providenciales, and further, the Agency's staff will visit the other Family Islands frequently. TCInvest's Small Business Unit will be strengthened and we urge Belongers to take every advantage of the services and advice they provide. Additionally, the scope of the Small Enterprise Development project will be expanded to include a review of conditions that affect small business development, with a view to making recommendations to government concerning new policies, revising current legislation and the introduction of new ones, where necessary, to promote small entrepreneurial endeavour.

Consistent with our strategy, I wish to refer to page 9 of our election Manifesto and reaffirm our commitment to *“transform the lending arm of TCInvest into a full fledged*

National Bank.” Accordingly, we will consider closely the recommendations made regarding the future of this TCInvest, and refine them to reflect our business development strategy. Since the task of taking leadership decisions to empower our people cannot be delayed, I assure you that our efforts in this area will be carried out in a timely manner. In the interim, we are placing TCInvest on a new footing, charging it to further reduce its interest rates on loans, respond quickly to customers requests and aggressively market its services so that our people could take advantage of the credit opportunities which may be available.

In our drive to empower Turks and Caicos Islanders, we will actively encourage and facilitate, where possible, joint venture business arrangements between foreign investors and local businesses. To ensure effective participation of Turks and Caicos Islanders in such commercial activity, thus limiting horror stories of the past, we shall provide additional capital through setting up of a mutual fund. We will also endeavour to ensure that Islanders are not confined to only small businesses, by encouraging and creating the conditions necessary for the formation of locally owned investment ‘clubs’ to pool resources to enable them to undertake bigger businesses. Our proposal to establish a Turks and Caicos Islands Protection Board is consistent with both our business development strategy and our commitment to put *‘Turks and Caicos Islanders First.’*

May I now focus on our policies in the area of Immigration? We are committed to the development of progressive Immigration policies that are clear, firm and fair. My administration knows that for our development to continue we must have stable and dynamic immigration policies that accord with our international obligations, that give foreign investors and workers certainty to live, invest and work in this country, and also balance the rights of Turks and Caicos Islanders to advance to the commanding heights of this economy. The confusion of the past, due to the lack of harmonization and consistency between immigration, business licenses and work permit policies is a deterrent to business development. This has to and will be addressed as a matter of priority.

The Minister of Immigration has therefore announced the appointment of a multi-sectoral Commission to review our existing immigration laws and policies; study those of other countries that have similar dynamics at work; gather and assess the views of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands and make recommendations to the Minister for a new and improved immigration policy and ordinance. This should reflect our commitment to human rights and all of our regional and international obligations, whilst at the same time securing the rights of and opportunities for all our citizens thereby making *'Turks and Caicos Islanders First.'*

The work of this Commission will involve the participation of persons in all communities throughout the Islands. In carrying out its work, the Commission should also review past initiatives. Mr. Speaker, while this Commission is undertaking its work, we have frozen the issuance of Belonger Status certificates. However, Work Permits and Permanent Residence Certificates will continue to be processed and issued on a timely basis. We look forward to informing this Honourable House of the work of this Commission as it progresses.

Labour is an essential factor of production, which is often neglected. Labour, productivity and harmony are critical for a stable industrial relations climate. My administration is quite aware that too often workers are dismissed from their jobs unfairly, and while they may have a good case for unfair dismissal, they invariably do not have the money to retain and pay a lawyer. Many employers know this and are reckless in their use of this tactic. As you all well know, government's own agencies are not immune from these practices. Surely such developments are not consistent with promoting the stable industrial climate that is so essential to our overall development. This why, as part of our efforts to empower and put *'Turks and Caicos Islanders First,'* we will move quickly to pass legislation to give workers the power to organize and bargain collectively.

Under the Labour legislation, a Labour tribunal will be established in accordance with standard practice to resolve disputes, quickly, fairly and firmly. This will give workers another avenue to get justice on the job.

This administration is equally aware of the potential for abuse of unions, but we believe that there is greater abuse when workers are denied the opportunity to sound their collective voices. In anticipation of the legislation that will be passed, I call on those workers that will undoubtedly form themselves into unions, to be careful that its leadership, in particular, is mature and responsible. Unions work only where its leadership is mature, responsible and committed principally to the goals of its membership and also to the wider interest of the country, to ensure the continued economic development and growth. The government will work to facilitate the collective bargaining process to achieve “Win-Win” outcomes whereby the winner is the Country and ultimately all who live and work here.

Development Planning

Mr. Speaker, all of us in this Honourable House are aware that over the past several years these islands experienced significant levels of economic growth. As a government we will ensure that this continues. However, our efforts will go further, for in our endeavors to achieve a high rate of economic growth, we shall ensure that our country experiences “economic development.”

As a government, in our march towards this goal we are mindful of the observations of that celebrated economist, the late Professor Dudley Seers, who insists that in looking at the matter of development, three important questions must be considered:

1. What is happening to poverty?
2. What is happening to unemployment?
3. What is happening to inequality?

The late professor contends that even if a country is achieving a high economic growth rate or even if the per capita income were to double, this would not be development, especially if unemployment, poverty and inequality had actually persist or worsened.

Ever cognizant of this, together with our irrevocable commitment to ensure that *'Turks and Caicos Islanders are First'* we will implement a number of programmes and projects in the short, medium and long terms to ensure people centered development and that we avoid the trap of higher levels of acute poverty and marginalization of our people.

Mr. Speaker, while we have a relatively high per capita income and low levels of poverty, the results of recent economic growth in the Turks and Caicos has had several unintended consequences. These present us with a number of challenges, including the need for human resource development, promotion of entrepreneurial endeavour amongst the local population, concentration of economic activity on Providenciales and issues related to high immigration.

There is increasing concern in the Islands regarding the pace of development. Many Belongers feel they have no voice in the development process, and that they are being marginalized. Expatriates face uncertainty due to lack of clarity and policy inconsistencies. The convergence of these factors threatens the sustainability of development in the Islands. They must to be resolved without delay! This is why we have committed to preparing a Ten-year Economic Development Plan for the Islands.

Mr. Speaker, the Ten-year Economic Development Plan will build on current initiatives such as the Sustainable Development Planning Initiative (SDPI). The Ten-year Economic Development Plan will become the cornerstone for consolidating development in all the Islands as it relates to transport, education, land development, procurement of goods, provision of services and growth models. The plan will be futuristic, consultative, and flexible and linked to the capacity of the local population, mindful of limitations imposed by population size, resources and infrastructure development. The plan will also encompass a long term development vision for the Islands!

Mr. Speaker, it is our view that future development in the Islands will spread from the two growth points – Providenciales and Grand Turk – to the rest of the Islands. Specific Island development plans will be required for all of the Islands. These will be developed

in consultation with our people. An important element of my government's strategy is the revitalization of Grand Turk so that it can, once again, become the center of administrative and cultural significance as it ought to be.

I am also pleased to inform the people of Grand Turk, in particular that my administration has rescued the cruise ship project. Under the new proposal, Carnival Cruise Line will assume responsibility for the project and a \$30 million dock will be built in the southern section of the Island, thus limiting environmental consequences. Unlike in the former arrangement, such services as tour operators will be reserved for Turks and Caicos Islanders. This project will indeed provide the stimulus needed to rejuvenate the Grand Turk economy. The development of Salt Cay will feed off the development on Grand Turk. We envision that Middle Caicos and North Caicos will develop around nature tourism. South Caicos can become the center of an international fishing industry. Providenciales will continue to be the main engine of growth in the Islands for the foreseeable future.

Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, Ladies and Gentlemen, I am also pleased to list some of the other elements and principles that will be enshrined in our 10 year economic plan. These are as follows:

1. We will initiate measures that contribute to the infusion of a dignified and confident nation that is at peace with itself and the world – a nation whose people believe in themselves and who in their entrepreneurial, professional and other daily pursuits are energized by dignity and national pride;
2. We will strive to become a knowledge-driven economy with information technology serving households, schools, businesses and the government to improve productivity and our overall wellbeing;
3. We will promote the applications of law and order and elimination of corruption as key ingredients of our business, professional and political affairs;

4. We will work towards higher standards and innovation to become a first class tourism and investment destination;
5. We will put an end to *ad hoc* development and unsystematic and frantic disposal of our prime resource – land. Rather, we will develop a proactive approach to investment that will help us to market new areas;
6. We will discourage fronting by promoting genuine partnership between Turks and Caicos Islanders and foreign investors. This will be assisted by expanded credit provision from TCInvest and also by the introduction of new financial instruments such as mutual funds;
7. We will ensure that all major development projects are subject to proper Environmental Impact Assessment, which will be carried out with input of all stakeholders;
8. Adequate infrastructure is important if we are to continue to attract high caliber investors. Consistent with this requirement, we will seek to establish an Infrastructure Development Fund.

To launch the new planning process, I will convene a number of ‘*Roundtable Meetings*’ with citizens in every community of the Turks and Caicos Islands. These ‘*Roundtable Meetings*’ will allow Ministers and technical officials to gather from the communities, views concerning key development issues and project solutions to address them. As was already indicated in the presentation by the Honourable Minister of Finance, the outcome of these series of meetings will be reflected in a new short term planning document to be called ‘*Agenda 2003*’, which will form the basis of a new participatory budgeting process to ensure their implementation in future budgets.

In the medium term, *Agenda 2003* will lay the basis for more a detailed development planning process that will embrace wider social, economic and environmental concerns to determine the development vision for the Islands and provide the basis for Island specific development plans.

Infrastructure Development

Mr. Speaker, proper infrastructure is vital if economic growth is to take place in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Infrastructural development is one of the core mandates of my administration. We are committed to undertaking infrastructure projects that will benefit all of the Islands. This is why the Minister of Finance has devoted considerable time to informing the nation of the sustainable financial plan, which will enable us to implement our infrastructure development programme.

Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have already begun to make plans for the timely provision of essential infrastructure we need to continue our development. Already, we have had discussions concerning a project to strengthen the runway at the Providenciales International Airport. Advanced discussions have already taken place with the European Union concerning financing of the North Caicos Port and North/Middle Caicos Causeway Project. I would hasten to add that the latter project will be the first phase of the major infrastructure development project to link the Caicos Islands. My administration, therefore, reiterate its commitment to a Spine Link project to link the Caicos Islands. Such a project will allow us to reduce the cost of administration and infrastructure provision and improve the efficiency of capital in the Islands by limiting the need to duplicate projects and programmes.

Mr. Speaker, Governments around the World are increasingly utilizing joint ventures and private finance initiatives to ensure timely provision of infrastructure. The Turks and Caicos Islands have limited experience in this area. This administration plans to use these vehicles to speed up the delivery of infrastructure. However, unlike the former administration, we are committed to improving the transparency of such transactions as

well as our capacity to monitor and regulate them in order to maximize the returns to society, as opposed to the benefits of a few!

These core principles will be enshrined in our policy for this area. I wish to underscore that once our policy is agreed, it will be administered by our technical staff and not by Ministers. This will limit the potential for favouritism, which we believe, characterized past initiatives in this area. In addition, we plan to include joint venture projects among business development opportunities that will be marketed by TCInvest. In this way, we will be able to encourage innovative solutions and more competition to reduce final project costs.

Tourism Development

Mr. Speaker, my administration is committed to fully exploiting the potential of tourism by putting in place proper management mechanisms, while maintaining the country's environmental integrity and its reputation as being the country that is '*Beautiful by Nature*'. As part of the economic plan, the tourism strategic plan will be revised and updated for a more effective tourism industry. The main focus of the plan is to make the sector much more competitive and flexible to minimize the effects of external and internal shocks. It will also place greater emphasis on the socioeconomic and environmental effects of tourism on our country. An economic impact study will also be undertaken to better determine the needs of our tourism industry, especially in the areas of immigration and human resource development. This impact study will be absorbed into our Ten Year Economic Plan.

Under our tourism strategic plan, emphasis will be placed on attracting 5-star up-market hotel chains to the Islands. I am pleased therefore, to inform you that since taking office, we have had discussions with several 5-star hotel chain operators that are interested in operating in the Islands, including: Four Seasons, Mandarin and St. Regis. We also reiterate our commitment to attracting European plan hotels, generally, to lessen our dependency on all inclusive hotels.

Members of this Honourable House, ladies and Gentlemen, the following initiatives, among others, will be undertaken by us to deepen and expand our tourism industry:

1. Establishment of a Hotel Training School.
2. Increased cooperation between the government and the private sector
3. Increased effectiveness of the Tourist Board, and diversification into the European and Asian Markets.
4. Increased joint marketing and promotional efforts by TCInvest and the Tourist Board.
5. Formation of a Hotel Corporation to take the initial risk of constructing hotels on Grand Turk and the less developed Islands.
6. Product development and integration of the local culture
7. Turks and Caicos Islands Promotion Offices will be opened in London to cover the United Kingdom and Europe and in the United States to cover North America. These offices will be operated jointly by TCInvest and the Tourist Board will serve as *'one stop shops'* to market and promote our tourism, investment and financial services opportunities.

Inter-Island Tourism Developments

Mr. Speaker, my administration is keen to promote tourism developments in all the Islands of the Turks and Caicos Islands. Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that as a new administration, we will honour the agreements that have already been signed and will conclude those in the pipeline, provided that they are in the best interest of all of the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands.

I am also very pleased to report on some of our efforts since taking office only a month ago. To improve prospects for Grand Turk, I am pleased to inform the public that a team of international consultants have been commissioned to advise us as the people's government on the location of a hotel for Grand Turk. The consultants were here on the island three weeks ago and met with His Excellency the Governor, Deputy Chief Minister

Hall, TCInvest, The Tourist Board, leading hoteliers and members of the general public and myself. Their report should be available within a few weeks.

Turning to South Caicos, plans are underway to shortly complete and expand the East Bay Hotel; and just two weeks ago Government received a proposal from an investment group to build a first class marina facility in the “*Big South*”. More is planned to capitalize the ‘*B*’ in the “*Big South*”. Accordingly, this administration will put pressure on the owners of the High Point Hotel to complete their project, in line with the terms of their development agreement. We will also build a new airport terminal and fire hall and construct central government office block on South Caicos.

There are two marinas and residential projects planned for Middle Caicos, and with the islands quiet charm and my government’s aggressive approach to promoting these Islands abroad, I can see great things happening for our largest Island.

Mr. Speaker, the Island of North Caicos has over the years been able to swim against the tide. Although our “*Nature Island*” is yet to attract the level of foreign investment in line with that of its neighbour, Providenciales, the people of North Caicos continue to build a “*solid innings*” – here I think of investment projects which have taken place on the island by the island’s sons and daughters - for example, My Dee’s Commercial Complex, ROM Office in Central Bottle Creek and the Pelican Beach Hotel at Whitby. Since taking office, I am pleased to report that we have received a proposal from a yacht club for a marina project at Sandy Point, and we will exercise every instinct of our beings to attract a major hotel to this island. This task should become much easier once the deep water harbour is underway. This administration is also committed to improving the airport and constructing a government office on North Caicos.

We have decided to upgrade the dock conditions at Heaving Down Rock, Providenciales so that the people who use this area to travel or move goods between Providenciales, South Caicos, Middle Caicos and, of course, North Caicos will have a safe place to moor their boats and load and unload their cargo.

Mr. Speaker we are finalizing the negotiations for a major hotel resort development on Water Cay on terms much more favourable to all of the people of these Islands than those originally agreed by the Honourable Members Opposite.

Mr. Speaker, although one must acknowledge that the level of investment activities throughout the islands have slowed down since late last year, as the Minister responsible for investment and development, I am heartened by the surge of investor confidence in these Islands since August 15th, 2003.

We are currently finalizing the Development Agreement for a number of condo hotel projects in Providenciales, including the Verandah Hotel, the Waterfront Hotel and the Grace Bay Club Extension. Building construction will get underway shortly for the Aman Resort at North West Point, and only two weeks days ago officials from another up market hotel came to see me about building another top class hotel at North West Point area.

Natural Resources Management

Mr. Speaker, my administration sees Crown Land as our people's heritage and we believe that we have a duty as stewards to manage this precious resource for posterity. Consistent with this commitment, we have already begun a review of existing land policies. Recognizing that Crown Land Parcel leases are the main vehicle for transferring assets and equity to Turks and Caicos Islanders, and the means of addressing the housing needs and commercial expansion of local businesses, this review aims to improve our land policies and will embrace:

- Improvement of institutional arrangements and administrative efficiency;
- Framework for land allocation;
- Proper planning of new settlements to include the provision of infrastructure and services. This will increase uptake time; limit the tendency towards partially developed subdivisions and increase home ownership amongst our people;
- Beneficiary assessment; and

- Policy monitoring and enforcement

I look forward to informing this Honourable House of the outcome of this review. As part of our efforts to limit the disposal for Crown Lands, I wish to announce that we prefer to use long leases as opposed to outright sale of land as the primary means of attracting investments. Consistent with our empowerment strategy, this administration also reiterate its commitment that Turks and Caicos Islanders will have access to a plot of Crown land to construct a home and also land for commercial purposes.

Mr. Speaker, preservation and protection of the environment is of utmost importance to my Administration and our tourism led-development strategy; therefore, we are committed to investing more money in the cleaning up of the streets and other public areas in our communities; enacting stiffer penalties for littering; implementing new ways for the proper management of marine resources; and the revitalization of our National Parks System.

Honourable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, we will also honor our commitments under the Environmental Charter with the United Kingdom, and will seek to use this as a way to leverage new development finances to the Islands from the United Kingdom and European sources. Our environmental management programmes will also embrace the development of a proper solid waste collection and disposal plan.

As part of Natural Resource Management and Economic Diversification strategies, this administration is keen to revitalize our fisheries and agriculture sectors. We have outlined in our Manifesto a number of initiatives; we plan to pursue the promotion of these sectors and increase their contribution to Gross Domestic Product. Consistent with this, we will develop a clear agriculture policy and consider the establishment and staffing of a Department of Agriculture. In the fisheries sector, our strategy calls for the revitalization of the fishing industry on South Caicos, diversification into deep-sea fishing and provision of loans to fishermen.

Social Sector Management

Mr. Speaker, my administration will enhance existing programmes in the areas of health, education and small business development that are essential to empowering our people. We will strengthen existing social safety-net programmes to protect less fortunate members of our society to ensure that no one is left behind.

We are committed to ensuring that all people of our islands live productive lives and therefore we will seek to implement measures to improve the quality of life for the entire population. Social security programmes for the elders, who are the guardians of our heritage, will be reviewed and expanded. It is therefore a source of pride and pleasure that after only one month in office, I can announce that we have been able to increase the monthly non-contributory pension from \$130.00 to \$200.00, an increase of more than 50%. In addition, programmes for the physically and mentally challenged will be expanded.

Mr. Speaker, Honorable Members, Ladies and Gentlemen, we have been assured by the Honourable Minister of Finance that the necessary financial arrangements will be put in place to ensure timely delivery of essential social sector infrastructure; particular emphasis will be placed on meeting the infrastructure needs of Providenciales.

Mr. Speaker, our Islands have had an ongoing debate concerning our health care needs. In this area, my administration will accord priority to the introduction of a national health insurance programme to limit costs to government. To advance this initiative we will engage specialists to assist in planning the National Health Insurance Programme.

Mr. Speaker, social sector programmes are major contributors to our overall development as a nation and people. This will require reviews and expansion of programmes in the areas of education, sports, youth, culture, health, HIV/AIDS reduction and gender affairs, along the lines elaborated in our Manifesto. Our activities in these areas will be detailed by my Ministerial colleagues.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker, throughout the general election campaign, the Progressive National People asked the people of the Turks and Caicos Islands to “*Hold On – a Change is Coming*”. I therefore wish to crave your indulgence and that of Honourable Members of this House to sum up.

As a government of and for **all** the people we are not only about encouraging Turks and Caicos Islanders to become better business people. **Our goal is to make people’s lives better**. After only one month in office, we have already begun to achieve this goal by fulfilling several of our campaign promises to our people.

- We have formulated a budget that is designed to maintain fiscal prudence and finance our development agenda, **because the change is here;**
- TCInvest has been directed to reduce its interest rates on loans, open an office on Providenciales and expand its services to our Family Islands **because the change is here;**
- We have increased the airport customs exemption allowed by returning resident from \$200.00 to \$400.00, and increase of 100% **because the change is here;**
- To improve service delivery, we have created separate Ministries of Health and Education **because the change is here;**
- We have budgeted \$1.2 million for community projects throughout the Islands, **because the change is here;**
- We have increased the National Insurance Old Age Pension by more than 50% and will review the National Insurance Ordinance to expand coverage to coverage to our fishermen, agricultural and seasonal workers, **because the change is here.**

Turks and Caicos Islanders will be **free at last because the change is now.**

Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for your attention. May God continue to bless the Turks and Caicos Islands.