

To His Honour the Speaker and Members of the Honourable House of Assembly:

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to begin this my first Reply to the Throne Speech as Leader of the United Bermuda Party by congratulating Dr. Brown on his recent victory as the new leader of the Progressive Labour Party and the latest PLP Premier of Bermuda.

I would also like to commiserate with my colleague because in taking the reigns of the PLP Government – as I'm sure he well understands – he is taking over not a going concern but a broken government.

The first item I would like to address in this Reply bears this out.

Mr. Speaker,

We have right now at CedarBridge Academy a situation that typifies all the faults and failures of the PLP's years in power.

Last week, the Government shut down the school because mould had spread out of control causing students, teachers and administrators to become sick. To continue the students schooling, the Government put in place emergency facilities at three islands where students are ferried each day to their classrooms. Back at CedarBridge, overseas experts have been brought in to deal with the contamination. Estimates are that it could be weeks if not months before the buildings are rendered safe enough for students to return.

Mr. Speaker,

The situation would be dreadful at any place and any time, but in this instance it is more so because this Government was aware of the situation and the sickness long before they closed the school. Indeed, some reports indicate that the Government was aware of the mould problem last year. Our own Shadow Minister for Education, The Hon. Member Neville Darrell, raised his concerns with two Education ministers only to be told that the situation was in hand.

But **Mr. Speaker** it wasn't.

Nothing appears to have been done to eliminate the toxic mould. And while the Government forgot about it or dithered, they allowed our children to continue attending classes. Nothing appears to have been said to alert them or their parents to the problem. Students and teachers continued to show signs of illness until the frequency of sick-outs and symptoms compelled the Government to close the school.

As I've said, the CedarBridge situation exposes some of the worst failings of the PLP in power: It exposes their indifference, their inability to get the job done and their failure, above all, to put people first.

This is a government that time and time again has taken its eye off the ball; even when the health of our children is at stake. It is a failure of focus and attention to detail that seems to be part of their DNA.

This government somewhere along the way forgot that it was elected to serve the people. Instead of a proud record of accomplishment and public service, they are known for failing or ineffective ministers, warring factions, out-of-control spending and self-service.

The disappointment on the street is real, particularly given the euphoria in 1998 when they sold themselves as the party that cared for the little man.

In Bermuda today, the general feeling is that after eight years in power, the PLP has failed to deliver. Despite the rhetoric, despite the promises, despite the resources, the PLP regime has failed to improve the quality of life for Bermudians, and they have disappointed many.

At first their lack of action to help people was puzzling. But now, it is a grave concern. Their reign has been characterized by lots of talk, many slogans followed by no real action, unless you count changing Premiers.

And that, **Mr. Speaker**, is a record of accomplishment.

The latest version of the PLP in government has been accompanied by a lot of pop and sizzle. There have been a lot of words about hard work and getting things done and reconnecting with the people.

So we waited with anticipation to hear what the new Premier was going to say. Like everyone else, we were expecting something innovative, perhaps something inspirational. We read news stories about the weekend rewrite of the Throne Speech to reflect the direction the new Premier was going to take the country. Everything was set for Dr. Brown to blow us away.

It didn't happen.

Indeed, my colleagues and I found the speech flat with no clear vision or sense of direction. It struck us more as a punch list of ideas than a guide to action for the country.

Mr. Speaker,

We see the Throne Speech as nothing new. On reflection, we should not have been surprised.

The fact of the matter is that this PLP Government is not a new Government. It is a repackaging of the same people with the same ideas drawing on the same depleted level of energy to stay in office as long as possible.

Don't be misled that this is a change of government. All that has happened is that a Premier has been sacked and the Number 2 has become the Number 1. There is blood on the floor and there are bruised egos and festering wounds. In other words, Mr. Speaker, it's the same old PLP.

No one should forget that these are the same ministers who allowed our children to be schooled in a toxic building and who were in charge of the \$70 million cost overrun at Berkeley.

No one should forget that these are the same ministers who have failed to build houses for people in need while spending more than \$2 million renovating homes for its first two Premiers.

No one should forget that these are the same ministers who decided to build a hospital in a national park.

No one should forget that these are the same ministers who presided over the Homes for People raffle that left dozens of "winners" holding a ticket instead of a key to a house.

No one should forget that these are the same ministers who drove through massive pay hikes for themselves and who spend \$1 million a month on overseas travel.

No one should forget that these are the same ministers who have not allowed the people to have a referendum on independence.

And **no one** should forget that these are the same ministers who misled the electorate in 2003.

It's the same old crowd.

Mr. Speaker,

There is merit in the suggestion by some of our well wishers that the United Bermuda Party should minimize its focus on the Government and concentrate on telling Bermuda who we are, what we stand for and what we would do for the country.

As the leader of the party I want to address these concerns because I know they reflect disillusion with the government and a yearning to know that there is something out there that is better; something that says to the people: 'We've got your back.'

Right now, the United Bermuda Party has a role to play as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. It is our duty to critically analyze what the Government does and to highlight what it does not do.

And we've done a pretty good job. We exposed "pay to play." We led the fight to save the Botanical Gardens and to get hospital planning on the right track. We've highlighted the plight of our senior citizens and pushed for a referendum on Independence to end the uncertainty.

So we make no apologies for being critical of the Government, but we recognize that we have not given the public as much as we could about who we are and what we stand for.

Mr. Speaker,

My colleagues and I are a diverse group of people; that well reflects Bermuda today. We bring all sorts of experience to our task and we share some basic beliefs.

We are bound together by the determination to get this country moving towards a common future – one future – where all Bermudians can live as brothers and sisters in a society that is safe, just and tolerant.

We are joined in determination to equip people to succeed in the world around us.

We want to make sure that everyone is given the opportunity to succeed on their own terms.

We want to make sure the environment is safe and sustainable.

We want to make sure that the people get better government; one that is more open, honest and accountable.

Our philosophy is based on compassion for those in need and strong fiscal management.

Our goal is to bring us all together, black and white, into one citizenry where we look each other in the eye with respect.

Mr. Speaker, this is the United Bermuda Party that I lead.

And I promise you now that we will take care of people in need and carry on the sure-handed leadership that created this amazing economy.

Our years in Opposition have sharpened our thinking and our resolve. We have learned that good government begins and ends with the people. And I promise that we will get things done.

Our vision is to ensure that our people are able to fulfill their purpose and destiny in life.

We will build a social, economic, educational, ethical, political and spiritual environment that challenges our citizens to live to their fullest potential.

We recognize that our prosperity lies in our people and that we must build on the experience of the past, the circumstances of the present and prepare for the challenges of the future.

HOUSING

Mr. Speaker,

Nothing demonstrates the Government's failure to meet the needs of the people more than housing.

For eight years, the public has been misled into thinking that action would be taken to reduce the housing crisis. But the Government's work is known for projects that never happen, for endless delay, for cost overruns, poor planning and empty promises.

Government ineptitude was made crystal-clear this summer when its own Sustainable Development consultant reported that it had no clear housing policy. Its initiatives, he said, were ad hoc and purely reactive in nature. In other words, there was no vision, no plan and no housing policy at all.

In the Throne Speech, we are told of ten homes that have been finished. We are told about projects under contract, or soon to be completed, or started by Christmas. The image is that of an action-oriented Government working hard to help the people. But this is spin, Mr. Speaker. Spin to hide its 11th-hour scramble to get in the game; spin to make people forget that it has been eight years of little action and many disappointments.

We are very concerned that the Government is not producing housing that is more affordable. The prices for the units at Loughlands will be in the neighbourhood of \$550,000. Government is allowing some homes at Southside to be sold for around \$800,000. We believe the Government should focus exclusively on building affordable housing and rental units and let the market take care of the rest.

Mr. Speaker,

The United Bermuda Party has for years demanded that the Government commit itself totally to resolving the challenge of housing. We do so again today.

Our strategy to deal with housing focuses on short-term needs and long-term solutions.

To meet the **immediate need** for emergency housing, we will start by building 100 homes for affordable rent.

But affordable ownership is also a priority. Bermudians must feel that it is possible to own a home. Our plan would provide new, affordable options to young people and families, particularly those trying to save for their first home. Among other things:

- We will take immediate steps through tax incentives, duty-free materials, use of government land and financial assistance packages to build affordable first-time homes costing no more than **\$300,000**.
- We will introduce a **SHARED EQUITY PLAN** to enable buyers who are unable to buy a suitable property on the open market and who do not have sufficient funds to come up with a down payment, to purchase on a part buy/part rent basis.
- We will encourage private construction of affordable housing in special development zones through tax and other incentives
- We will encourage construction of multiple-dwelling units in high density areas and the liberalization of building height restrictions for special projects.

We are pleased that the Government finally seems to be moving on duty relief to facilitate affordable housing developments, but we have to ask why it has taken so long.

The United Bermuda Party understands that no long-term solution to the housing crisis is possible without a long-term plan.

We will continue refining our National Housing Strategy in consultation with experts in housing, planning, environment and finance to make sure innovative and long-term approaches are used to improve affordability and availability.

We also want the strategy to include affordable housing options for the growing numbers of seniors and first-time buyers.

SENIORS

Mr. Speaker,

There is little mention in the Throne Speech of the plight of our seniors; a segment of the population that has really come to understand the meaning of government inaction and lack of concern.

Of the 7,000-plus senior citizens living amongst us

- More than half live below the poverty line
- Many live on less than \$400 a month
- Hundreds have no health care
- Constant stress about bills, sickness and simple mobility make their hard lives even harder.

In its first Throne Speech eight years ago, the PLP Government promised to “refurbish and renovate” senior rest homes. But only now is the new St. George’s Rest Home about to open. Elsewhere, indifference reigns supreme.

The Pembroke Rest Home, for example, is an utterly depressing facility that should have been improved long ago. Anyone who has visited the home will know what I mean.

In the West End, roof damage at Lefroy House caused by Hurricane Fabian three years ago has still not been repaired.

I think all of us here can agree that this is a totally unacceptable state of affairs.

Elsewhere, Government measures to assist seniors are having little effect. This year’s budget increases to the free prescription benefit and to pension benefits were simply inadequate, barely enough to keep ahead of inflation.

But the increases became downright meaningless when the Government at the same time passed an 18% increase to standard health premiums. And let us not forget that at the end of this year, seniors in Housing Trust properties across the Island will have to pay outrageous hikes in Government-controlled rent – some in excess of 100%.

Mr. Speaker,

The United Bermuda Party will not treat our seniors this way.

We want to give them hope. We want them to know that their government is there to help them.

Among other things, we will move quickly to establish the identity of seniors most in need, particularly those who rely on government pensions alone for their income.

We believe that they can be helped through a serious review of the pension system.

We will pilot a senior health care clinic to provide free preventive and basic care to seniors without coverage, or whose insurance limits doctor visits.

We will review the number of allowable visits seniors can make each year under the Hospital Insurance Plan. The current limit of two per year is unrealistic.

We will move immediately to provide free prescription drugs and eyeglasses for seniors who cannot afford them.

We will work with banking and housing organisations to help seniors secure reverse mortgages on their homes. We know that many of them are house rich but cash poor. Reverse mortgages can create a new, crucial source of income for seniors that can make all the difference in their lives.

We will launch a **HOUSING AT HOME PROGRAMME** to encourage families to provide housing at home for parents and grandparents. We will make it easier for families to build Housing At Home apartments on-site through duty-free construction materials, fast-tracked planning approvals and access to funding through the Bermuda Housing Corporation.

Finally, a United Bermuda Party Government will transform the Office for Seniors and Physically Challenged and create a Seniors Advocate to provide seniors with practical and legal advice and day-to-day support.

EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker

Our education system is failing students, and it is failing Bermuda.

No fewer than half our secondary school children are failing to graduate.

The failure to equip our young with basic skills holds dire implications for their lives. It limits their income, narrows their job opportunities and handicaps their ability to get ahead.

But it also has serious implications for the country, in terms of social cohesion, crime, national competitiveness and our ability to continue moving the economy forward.

Continuing failure also means continuing reliance on expatriate workers.

Unfortunately, last week's Throne Speech gives little clue that the Government is taking the crisis in education seriously.

We were told that with the completion of the \$120 million Berkeley School the Government will place a "renewed focus" on teaching our children the basics – reading, writing, math and critical thinking. It makes us wonder when the basics ceased to be the focus of education under the PLP.

We were told about an Outreach Programme, a Fishing Apprenticeship and a Skills Training Programme.

What we were not told, Mr. Speaker, is what the PLP Government intends to do to rescue our failing school system.

On reflection, we should not have been surprised by the omission because the Government has shown over the last eight years that it has not a clue about what to do.

We do, **Mr. Speaker**.

We begin with a few observations. There is too much bureaucracy. There is little accountability for failure in the classroom. There is not enough discipline and there is not enough emphasis on achieving international standards.

We believe reform should follow three basic principals:

- 1. We must develop talent one child at a time, and make sure that parents play an active role in that success.**
- 2. We believe that school principals – not the Education Department – should have primary decision-making authority for their schools, including the power to hire and fire and more responsibility to enforce discipline.**
- 3. We must set high standards and expect better results from both students and schools.**

Mr. Speaker, we wish to make sure that our children are given every opportunity to succeed.

A United Bermuda Party will set up a **voucher system** to help parents pay for their children to attend the approved pre-school of their choice.

We will provide our children with the opportunity for technical education at the secondary school level.

We will put in place a Parent Coordinator in each school to make sure that the relationship between parents and the school is productive.

Our education plan will make sure our schools are held accountable for what they do. We will establish local school boards for each school and make them responsible for operations, staffing and school specific performance.

We will make school principals the education champion on the ground, by giving them the autonomy to do the job that's required. We will require school standardized testing results to be published.

We will fully implement teacher certification.

We will ensure that music, art, drama and sports are fully integrated into the curriculum, and explore lengthening the school day to accommodate these activities.

A United Bermuda Party Government will require annual school surveys on parent satisfaction.

To encourage higher standards, we will improve student performance by setting high academic standards in language, math and science, and support international accreditation

for secondary school graduation. We will make sure students master their grade-level curriculum before moving up.

To make the opportunity of higher education a reality for more Bermudians, we will:

- **Provide scholarship opportunities to Bermuda College for students who maintain a B average and 95% attendance in secondary school.**
- **Create lifetime learning grants so that Bermudians already in the workforce can get the retraining and education they need to compete effectively for better jobs.**
- **Determine the feasibility of contributing to a special education fund for each child at birth to assist with the cost of its future education.**
- **Grant up to \$15,000 per year in an interest-free loan for any student studying at the college level who needs additional financial assistance providing:**
 - **They have done two years at the Bermuda College or,**
 - **They are in going in their third year.**

ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Mr. Speaker,

We applaud the Government's decision to establish an Economic Empowerment Zone in north Hamilton, something we have been pushing for years.

In 2005 we put forward legislation to help people who had been excluded from economic opportunities because of institutional racism, but the Government dismissed it out of hand.

The Bill, if passed, would have committed the Government to an extensive empowerment programme for small businesses, including:

- **Allocating 20% of government spending on goods and services to small businesses – that's \$60 million that could be flowing to small businesses right now.**
- **Training small businesses in bidding for Government contracts.**
- **Requiring businesses winning government contracts greater than \$5 million to sponsor small businesses through a mentoring programme.**
- **Helping to secure financing for small businesses with government contracts from local banks and other institutions.**

That this legislation was dismissed for partisan political reasons told us once again that this Government's focus is not on people, but on their own interests.

Mr. Speaker we will continue pushing for these empowerment measures and many more.

Too many people have the mind and the will to succeed but lack the resources to succeed. We will broaden the mandate of the Small Business Development Corporation to include venture capital funding.

ASSISTING THOSE IN NEED

Mr. Speaker,

The most disappointing aspect of the PLP in office has been their neglect of people in need.

The rapid growth of Bermuda's economy has been a great blessing to many residents, but it has left many people floundering, in increasing difficulty, in its wake.

Too little has been done to help the elderly, the sick, the indigent, the under-skilled and the unemployed.

My colleagues and I see and talk to them every day. We hear their stories and we know the hurt is widespread. And we understand that their plight is felt all the more deeply because they are surrounded by such a rich and fast-paced society.

The contrast alone should be enough to inflame the heart of a caring government. But that has not been the case in recent years.

Even Dr. Brown gave his own Government a failing grade on the issue.

Two weeks ago during the leadership battle, he took issue with a comment made by then Premier Scott that his Government would "make a step" in the direction of poverty and quality of life issues.

Before party delegates he said: "After eight years we should be doing more than making a step. We should be feeling the impact of steps already taken."

And then he said: "In spite of what you hear, you are **not** better off than you were three years ago – **neither** is your neighbour, and **neither** is your son or your daughter." What an admission of failure by the PLP Government.

Mr. Speaker,

The United Bermuda Party can do better for people in need.

We want government to be their Good Samaritan.

Whatever it takes, we want the arms of government to reach out with help. Our approach is not about handouts. It is about giving people a helping hand and making sure it is there when they need it.

In recent years we called for a clear, upfront understanding of the scale of poverty, and so today we support the Throne Speech pledge to finally establish an official poverty line for Bermuda.

We ask the Government to move quickly on this.

Once the poverty line is determined, we would:

- Reduce payroll taxes for low-income earners.
- Reintroduce housing allowance for seniors based on income and not asset worth.
- Establish a commission to study the financial, employment, education and training needs for those in need. It will also explore practical ways to assist those who suffer from poverty through old age, disability or having a single parent.
- To ensure that future generations get out of poverty, we will provide more assistance for the younger generation of low-income families, to provide children and young people with ample opportunities to receive education and comprehensive development.

Mr. Speaker,

Our goal is to eliminate poverty. It is unacceptable that it exists in modern-day Bermuda. We believe we can do it. It just takes commitment and heart.

The most curious thing to come out of last week's Throne Speech was the formation of the Ministry of Social Rehabilitation. Nothing was newer and nothing had more history.

Its origins can be found in the social failures of the first-ever PLP Government. Premier Scott's Social Agenda was meant to distance his Government from that of his predecessor.

Now Dr. Brown has dumped the Social Agenda and replaced it with The Ministry of Social Rehabilitation, which promises action at last.

The charades simply underscore the PLP's chronic inability to meet the needs of the people. Indeed, the Ministry of Social Rehabilitation is all about the government making sure the government does the job the government is supposed to do.

But Mr. Speaker, we believe that there needs to be another emphasis. Instead of social rehabilitation we need to work toward social transformation. We need to begin a process to sharpen government's ability to raise people up and to assist them more effectively, with greater efficiency, more foresight and more heart.

The process would involve community consultations and expertise in a variety of disciplines, but it must begin first with a new Quality of Life study so that we have the most up-to-date understanding of what is happening with our people. The findings and the consultations can be used to shape social policy and services going forward.

CRIME & DRUGS

Mr. Speaker,

We in the United Bermuda Party are dismayed that the PLP's best shot at dealing with law, order and anti social behavior is another study of Criminal Justice.

During this Government's eight years in office, we have witnessed the advance of new and disturbing trends in crime, particularly the emergence of gang-style violence among our young people, and the rampant use and abuse of illicit drugs.

Whether the Government knows it or not, the people of Bermuda are frightened. People are especially concerned for the safety of their children. The possibility of violence in the streets has crept into their day-to-day thinking. Families have stopped going to some public events.

Overall, people are disturbed by the sense that as a society we are heading in the wrong direction; and that not enough is being done to slow, let alone stop the problem.

Concerns extend to the judicial system, which is seen to be ineffective, and to the Police Service, which seems to be permanently undermanned.

The United Bermuda Party intends to turn this situation around.

Our plan has three objectives:

- 1. Better prevention and detection of crime**
- 2. More effective prosecution of crime; and**
- 3. Meaningful rehabilitation.**

Among other things, we pledge to get Police numbers up to full strength, and keep them there.

We will make sure that there is a visible Police presence on the streets of Hamilton and in every parish, not just to deter crime but also to reassure people that their government is committed to keeping the island safe.

We will establish performance indicators to measure and improve Police performance.

We will improve upon or rebuild Police accommodations and other facilities.

We believe that Bermuda must make sure that people who break the law understand that there is a high degree of certainty that they will be caught, punished and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

To make sure that it happens, a United Bermuda Party Government will move quickly to reform the criminal justice system, from the Attorney General's Chambers to the Department of Public Prosecutions to the Department of Corrections.

It is essential that these and other organizations have enough trained and experienced people and enough money to fight crime from the streets to the courts.

There is no room for the "softly, softly" approach that the Government introduced some years ago towards the threat of criminal drug gangs. Tough action is essential across the board.

Among other things, the United Bermuda Party Government will:

- **Increase the minimum time that must be served when a person is convicted of murder or manslaughter and sentenced to life in prison.**
- **Increase the minimum sentence for possession of a firearm or its use in a crime.**
- **End parole for drug traffickers.**
- **Take steps to better protect witnesses against retaliation.**

We will review salaries to ensure that the Government attracts the most experienced and skilled prosecutors.

Mr. Speaker, any meaningful discussion of crime must centre on the drugs problems. We see it as the root cause of crime in Bermuda.

Our strategic plan to fight the war against drugs will:

- **Introduce the most modern interdiction and detection systems available along with the latest technology.**
- **Recruit officers from abroad with experience in drug interdiction, enforcement and investigation and who are capable of preparing complex case files.**
- **Conduct a complete review of our drug intelligence systems to improve the management and use of information.**
- **Require all airlines, cruise ships, private craft and private aircraft entering and departing Bermuda to provide the same early passenger and cargo information that is given to US authorities.**
- **Review of drug enforcement performance, on a monthly basis, by a permanent independent body that will advise on changes required to operational plans or the long-term drug strategy.**

Mr. Speaker,

Beyond the crackdown required, we will bring a sharper focus on rehabilitation and education. Our plan includes:

- Rehabilitation facilities with the capability to provide drug treatment to anyone who voluntarily wants to be cured of their addiction.
- Experienced professionals with the capability of assessing patient needs and providing treatment.
- Anti-drug, anti-gang and antisocial behaviour classes in our schools geared to children in each age group from primary school right through to the secondary level.
- Random drug testing for all Members of Parliament to set an example for all Bermudians.
- A Young Offenders programme, where a young person convicted of a lesser offence is given a second chance through a Restoration Order instead of receiving a custodial sentence. This would depend on the offence.

Mr. Speaker,

The United Bermuda Party believes that more can be done to make the lives of all our young men and women, most of whom are a credit to themselves and their families, more productive and rewarding.

Among other things, we would include music, art, drama and sports in the curricula of our schools so that we broaden the horizons of our young people as they grow up.

We will develop a National Sports Strategy with a view to, developing our youth, improving the quality of life and attract major events to Bermuda for economic benefit.

We will complete the community youth centre in St David's.

TOURISM

Mr. Speaker,

We were struck by the Government's statement on tourism that it will "continue to move towards the development of destination resorts where the discerning visitor will visit, and where those who want to be with the discerning visitor will visit as well."

Visitors who want to be with discerning visitors?

Mr. Speaker, it is a bizarre statement that reminds us it is time for the Government to get out of the tourism business.

In the years since they came to power, the PLP has presided over a catastrophic decline in tourism. The years 2001 to 2005 were the worst year-to-year performance since the start of mass tourism in the 1960s.

The recent move to lower airfares is a positive development, but it is small potatoes against the backdrop of an industry that has nowhere to go but up. The fact is that the PLP have been a disaster for Bermuda tourism.

The decline and fall of tourism as a major industry has implications for the wider economy, making us dangerously dependent on the success of international business alone.

Mr. Speaker,

It is essential for the security of the country that we reverse this alarming drift toward a one-horse economy. Bermuda cannot give up on tourism. It is what we know, it is what we do and it is part of who we are, but we need to get the Government out of the way.

Mr. Speaker, no restoration of tourism will take place with the PLP at the helm. They do not have what it takes. The record shows it.

The United Bermuda Party believes that any recovery must begin with the formation of a Tourism Authority. Let's put professionals in place to run things.

We also believe there is a vital need for a fully funded on-island tourism appreciation programme that restores the value of tourism in the hearts and minds of our people.

GOOD GOVERNANCE

Mr. Speaker,

The United Bermuda Party believes the people deserve a government that is open, honest, accountable and responsive.

The past eight years have seen little of that.

They have been years when too many questions have gone unanswered and the smell of corruption has lingered; when public concerns have been ignored and political leaders talked down to people.

The United Bermuda Party believes it is time for radical change. It is time to make sure that our government reflects core values that Bermudians share – honesty, integrity, fairness, openness and mutual respect. It is time to take steps to **protect ourselves from ourselves** and to connect government to the spirit of public service.

It is time, Mr. Speaker, to reform our democracy, to make sure that power is always in the hands of the voters, and that all governments going forward know it.

The United Bermuda Party mission is very clear: We want to change the political culture of the country.

We will open up government in ways that are unprecedented for Bermuda.

We will strengthen the voice of the people in the governing process.

We will take steps to improve government accountability, which means holding public officials accountable for what they do and what they don't do.

We will pass a **VOTERS REFERENDUM INITIATIVE** allowing a binding referendum to be initiated by the electorate if a petition for a referendum contained the signatures of 25% of registered voters.

We will pass a **WHISTLEBLOWERS' ACT** to protect the right of public officials to speak up about government misdeeds without fear of retaliation.

We will encourage full participation in elections through a system of **ABSENTEE BALLOTS** that would allow all registered voters to vote if they are off the Island at the time of an election or the day of the advance poll.

We will take steps to ensure that our elected and public officials conduct themselves in a manner that all of us can support. We will adopt a **CODE OF CONDUCT** for all Parliamentarians that set forth ethical guidelines for public transactions and behaviour.

We will introduce a Bill for **FIXED-TERM ELECTIONS** every five years to eliminate political manipulation of the public agenda.

We will hold a referendum on amending the Constitution to:

- Ensure that no changes can take place without a referendum supported by two thirds of registered voters and two thirds of the Members of Parliament; and to
- Give people the power to remove a government from office by a two-thirds vote, if they lose confidence in them.

We will arm Parliamentary committees with powers to investigate government activities. We will open their meetings to the public and make sure their membership is bipartisan.

We believe these measures can form a foundation that will give Bermuda better, more responsive and accountable government for generations to come.

BRIDGING THE GREAT DIVIDE

Mr. Speaker,

There is an old proverb that says, "In Union there is Strength." After years of public service I firmly proclaim that unless we as a country come together and stand united we will never fulfill our full potential but instead we will continue to harvest sentiments of

fear, frustration and division. We all know that where there is division there can be no lasting progress.

I for one can visualize the realization of a unified Bermuda, whereby its leaders combine their efforts to solve the problems of this beautiful Island. If I can dream of a United Bermuda then I know there are roads that can lead me there. Roads where there would be constructive dialogue with all Bermudians seeking solutions for the pressing issues which confront us today. Roads where there is respect for our differences and no tolerance for the polarization and alienation of one another.

I cherish the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities.

My friends the most divisive factor in Bermudian life and Bermudian politics in particular relates to us pulling ourselves apart, either because of race or just because we have a difference in our political views.

There can be neither peace nor sustained prosperity in Bermuda until this crucial issue has been fully addressed and resolved. We must break the chains of any remaining vestiges of racial discrimination in Bermuda **once and for all**.

There cannot be a White Bermuda and a Black Bermuda; we must build a **Bermuda of One People of many races**.

I am convinced that the problem cannot be solved by one group standing across the river shouting abuse at the other. Neither can it be solved by the other group turning a deaf ear to the cries of those in pain. Both groups must reach out to the other.

Mahatma Gandhi said that we must be the change we wish to see in the world. So we must embark on a process of soul searching and consultation among ourselves and with the people of Bermuda to reach consensus on what must be done to fully achieve reconciliation and equity.

To this end we recommend:

1. Political leaders set the example and be held accountable for their actions. We call on the PLP to sign a code of conduct between all parliamentarians to ensure that no Member of Parliament will use racial slurs and will encourage its party members to follow suit.
2. Arranging a top level conference of business leaders with representatives from the Government and the Opposition and key members of our community to devise a strategic plan to ensure the eradication of racial discrimination and the promotion of equality for all.
3. Recognizing education reform as an urgent national priority. Nelson Mandela was right when he said that **‘Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.’**

4. Enacting our Economic Empowerment Bill which:
 - Sets aside 20% of Government's spending on goods and services for small businesses (approximately \$60 million).
 - Provides for the training of small business persons on how to bid for Government contracts.
5. Developing adequate and effective programmes to train individuals within our criminal justice system to be productive and contributing members of society. This would include tangible after-care assistance for those who are struggling with the addiction of substance abuse.

Mr. Speaker,

I believe that my background allows me to understand the dreams, concerns and aspirations of Bermudians from all walks of life.

I want to help make this country a better place. Flare and oratorical skills are useful, but competence, commitment, sincerity and bve for your fellow man are necessary to help restore a caring Bermuda.

I bring these qualities to the table. I will say what I mean and mean what I say. I will say what I intend to do and do it. My word as a leader in this country has always been reliable and will continue to be so.

The programme I have enunciated this morning and the criticisms I have leveled reflect much of my belief in how a government can be the change we want.

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda needs real change. We need a **PEOPLE-CENTRED GOVERNMENT WITH A SERVANT LEADER** that can be trusted; that listens and responds promptly and meaningfully to the wishes and needs of the people.

The United Bermuda Party that I lead will offer such a government. We will return values of honour and integrity to public life, and you can rest assured that we will return the people's agenda to the top of the agenda.

We have plans to improve the lives of our seniors, the education of our children, the safety of our streets, the future of our young people, housing for families and the needs of the hard-pressed.

We believe we offer a better chance for a better future.