



**Address by Chief Minister Dr. The Honourable D. Orlando Smith, OBE
2nd STATE OF THE TERRITORY ADDRESS
Central Administration Complex
Thursday, 16 June, 2005
5:00 p.m.**

Madam Chairperson

His Excellency the Governor Mr. Thomas Macan and Mrs. Macan

The Speaker of the House

Members of the Judiciary

Honourable Members on the podium

Leader of the Opposition

Other members of the Legislative Council

Public servants

Our young people and residents from Anegada to Jost Van Dyke

Fellow BVI Islanders, citizens and residents

My fellow BVI Islanders, residents and friends:

Making the BVI Work For All

I come before you today, two years into my Government's term in office to offer an accounting of our work on behalf of the people of the BVI. These past years have been a period of great challenge and great opportunity.

We have had to confront difficult realities – from changing international laws that have threatened our financial services industry to increased competition to our tourism industry from destinations around the region and around the world. Here at home we have contended with the challenge of putting our Territory's fiscal house in order and putting in place policies and programmes to deliver for the people, grow the economy and secure our future.

At the same time, we have also benefited from important opportunities. The relative stability of the global economy has allowed for the financial markets to continue to grow and thrive; improved international security has restored the confidence of travelers to vacation abroad despite the continued looming threat of terrorism; and, above all, here at home we have witnessed a remarkable surge of energy, creativity and optimism among the people of the BVI – from the public servants whose hard work and dedication allows the government to continue to work for the people, to the youth of the Territory who every day are showing us all the vast potential that they possess.

Ladies and Gentlemen: When we entered office we recognized that the road ahead would be long and sometimes difficult. We came to the task filled with energy and zeal because we understood that our solemn duty was to tackle the toughest problems and answer the most serious challenges facing our people. And every day our strength is restored through our work with and for the people of this Territory.

The progress the BVI is making can be seen on the ground – from the new road system in Virgin Gorda to the completion of the hospital expansion project here in Tortola; from the critical new dock in Anegada to the youth development programmes in Jost Van Dyke.

Progress can be seen in the halls of Legislative Council where we have passed critical legislation from the BVI Business Companies Act which is strengthening and protecting our Financial Services Industry; to the Education Act which has given new direction and purpose to our educational system; to the new immigration policy which has finally brought order and fairness to the system for determining residency status.

Progress is evident at our ports and hotels, where tourists are coming to the BVI in record numbers, helping our economy grow. Progress can be seen in the completion of our Constitutional Review, which brought together our entire Territory for a far-reaching and critical dialogue about the future shape of our governing system and the nature of our relationship with the United Kingdom.

And progress can be seen throughout Road Town where new buildings are being built, new businesses are being opened and an ambitious beautification project is well underway. But at the end of the day that is not what progress is really all about.

This government does not and will not measure our success based on the numbers of buildings we construct, or the number of bills we pass, or the number of dollars we invest. We do not measure progress with stats and concrete. For us there is only one true measure of success, and that is the well-being and happiness of the people of the BVI.

We are resolved that the fundamental job of any government is to protect and provide for the people. We cannot deem ourselves successful unless the people of the Territory feel their lives are improving. And we understand that the true mandate of government is to create the conditions for individuals to thrive and realize their own potential.

That has been the spirit that has animated our work since day one. That is why we have conducted regular community meetings throughout the Territory, giving us the opportunity to talk to the people and hear their concerns and needs. And it has been with great pleasure over this past week that I along with my colleagues in Government, as well as supporters and public servants, have had the opportunity to travel across the Territory and speak with citizens and residents.

We have spoken with people from all walks of life about how the work we have done has impacted their lives, and to learn about the work that still lies ahead. We heard the stories of local business owners who have participated in training sessions sponsored by the Trade and Promotion Unit who are now better equipped to serve their customers – and thanks to that success are able to hire more workers.

We heard the stories of nurses and doctors hopeful that with the completion of the Hospital Expansion project they will have the space and equipment they need to provide the kind of care their patients deserve.

We heard the stories of young people who are involved in the Junior Achievement Programme who are learning the basic skills of entrepreneurship and are building grand and wonderful dreams of one day owning their own business here in the BVI. We heard the stories of Small Properties owners who are involved in the Tourism Industry Service Standards programme and are gaining confidence that they can provide world class service to a global clientele. And over and over again, we heard the stories of citizens who are working hard, doing right by their families and their communities and are able to feel confident that their hard-earned tax dollars are being used for their benefit.

Ladies and Gentlemen: These stories – the lives of BVI citizens and residents whose problems are being addressed and whose needs are being met – these are the true measure of success. And let me be perfectly clear: The work is far from done.

There are still many challenges to be overcome, many problems to be solved, many obstacles to be navigated. We understand that too often the people of the Territory are not hearing enough about what Government is doing. This Government must do a better job of communicating our activities to the public. Toward that end we are in the process of restructuring our entire communications apparatus to ensure that when work is being done on the people's behalf then the people are informed about it. Our directive is clear: No job has been done well until it has been communicated well.

We promised to be a Government in the Sunshine – and we hear your concern that we have not done enough in this regard. And so I am committing here and now that over the coming year we will rededicate ourselves to making sure you know what this Government is doing before we do it, while we are doing it and after the job is done.

But at the most fundamental level the message we heard throughout the Territory is that the BVI is focused on the right priorities, we are moving in the right direction and we are not turning back.

And so ladies and gentlemen, it is with satisfaction in the work done, humility before the job ahead and with a sense of enduring hope that the way forward is today clearer than ever before that I come before you to report that **our economy is growing, our people are leading the way to progress and the State of the Territory is strong.**

Ladies and Gentlemen: The strength of our economy begins with our first key economic pillar: the Tourism industry. In this critical sector, we are enjoying a period of truly remarkable growth and development.

Over this past year, the BVI experienced a surge of visitors to our shores, including an impressive 10% increase in the number of valuable overnight visitors, with average occupancy rates in our hotels well above 65%. This success is being felt throughout the Territory from our largest hotels to our small properties. And when the tourism industry grows it creates new jobs and opportunities.

When the BVI is seen as a top destination it draws local and outside investors to undertake major capital developments – and indeed, we are on the verge of closing a number of development projects including a 5-star resort, as well as a golf course.

And when these major projects are undertaken it means contracts for our construction trades and new customers for our farmers, fishermen and other service providers. And yet even as we celebrate the marvelous achievements of the people in building this thriving industry, we know that the one great threat to our long-term strength is complacency.

So we are not resting on our laurels.

Over this past year, we initiated the comprehensive Tourism Industry Service Standards programme, which is providing training and support for every facet of the tourist experience – from the Customs desk to the check-out desk, we are making sure that the service in the BVI matches the beauty of our waters and the warmth of our spirit.

We are also expanding our efforts to market the BVI around the world. The BVI Tourist Board is to be commended for the hard work they are doing to strengthen the tourism product and to market that product throughout the world. And as we celebrate the achievements of the sector, we also look to the future and are ever mindful that the success of the tourism industry is not complete until the benefits are felt by all the people of our Territory.

Toward that end, we have recently completed the purchase of Prospect Reef. This new enterprise will serve as both a full-service business hotel that will make our Territory competitive in the lucrative convention market, and will also be a cutting edge training centre.

This training centre will provide our young people the opportunity to learn the craft of hotel management and hospitality in a real world environment. We have established a Board of Directors and the Board has just appointed a Chief Operating Officer who will be charged with overseeing the day-to-day operations and getting this enterprise up and running.

This is an ambitious project that will pave the way for a future not only of growth for the sector and our economy, but also empowerment for our people. And as surely as we are working to make Prospect Reef a Centre of Excellence for our people, we are also working to ensure that our economy expands beyond the traditional twin pillars – including a major commitment to our traditional agriculture and fishing industries.

Over this past year, we have completed the new Fisherman's Ramp at Carrot Bay and we have convened the Council of the BVI Fisherman's Association. We proposed and passed the Pound and Livestock Brands Act to better protect farmers' property.

We have distributed grants to small stock farmers for capital assistance. And we have brought gardens back to our Primary Schools so that a future generation of young people may consider working the land as a viable career option.

Ladies and Gentlemen: These efforts at promoting alternative sources of economic activity only complement our continued commitment to the growth of our second economic pillar – the financial services industry.

Over this past year, the BVI International Finance Centre has moved to the implementation of the Strategic Development Plan for the BVI Financial Services Sector. The Plan, which was developed through a unique partnership between representatives of the Government and business community, provides action points and recommendations for both Government and the private sector on the way forward, to ensure the sustainability of the financial services sector. This example of partnership and cooperation is the best way to ensure that the needs of the industry and the needs of the public are kept in line – and that all stakeholders have their voices heard.

I am pleased to report that already a number of key recommendations have been implemented and others are in progress.

And I take great satisfaction in noting that this year more and more young BVI Islanders have begun careers in the industry and many more are now in Colleges and Universities around the world getting the training they will need to come home and take up positions of leadership in this field. And when they do come home, it is with great confidence that we anticipate that they will be inheriting a sector that is stronger than ever.

It is no secret that there is growing competition in the financial services arena, as well as increasing pressure from supranational organizations to comply with international directives.

The EU Savings Directive represented a major challenge to our industry. Under the terms of this Directive, our old dual-taxation system under which international companies doing business here were taxed differently from local companies was no longer allowed.

In order to meet this new challenge we have taken a number of critical steps including the passage of the new Payroll Tax. For the business community, the switch to the Payroll Tax has required a transition period but all evidence suggests that it is being managed well – and thanks to this step the Financial Services industry is now in full compliance with international regulation and continues to be a leader in international financial services.

And importantly, under this new system the working people of the BVI have seen their taxes reduced significantly, leaving more money in their pockets to buy the things they and their families need.

Over the past year, our corporate business has remained as strong as ever, and has in fact increased, a clear sign that investor confidence in the BVI remains high.

Additionally, in keeping with its mission to enhance and promote the reputation of the British Virgin Islands as a world-class financial services jurisdiction, the BVI International Finance Centre adopted an ambitious marketing strategy in 2004. A series of Road Shows was hosted in key financial centres in Asia, Europe, and the United States, the most recent and most successful having been held in Switzerland just two months ago.

The Asia Pacific Rim continues to maintain strong interest in the BVI. Not only did we recently have a visit of a delegation from that area but we intend to take another road show there later this year. Our plan is to establish a permanent BVI presence in that strategically critical region in the near future.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Even as we take great satisfaction in all of these accomplishments, we still recognize the work that lies ahead. If we are to continue to grow the sector and ensure that more BVI Islanders are able to enjoy its benefits, we must continue to do more to give our people the skills and knowledge they need.

In the modern world the success of states is no longer a function of size, or natural resources. Today, nations stand or fall based on their ability to produce people who enter the workforce with the skills and knowledge they need to compete in a global market.

That is why from our first days in office, improving and strengthening our education system and providing guidance and opportunity for our young people has been priority number one. And as a symbol of that commitment we are very pleased to have with us here today a delegation of students from Anegada, Jost Van Dyke and from Virgin Gorda.

Ladies and Gentlemen: We have made unprecedented investments in our public education system. That starts with improving and expanding our educational facilities. We have completed significant improvements at the Ebenezer Thomas School. Work has begun on the new Alexandrina Maduro Primary School. And in the coming months we will be finalizing a site location and plans for the new high school – and it is our firm commitment that groundbreaking will occur for the new high school within the next year.

And as we build up the physical structures, we are also revamping and strengthening the content inside the classroom.

The National Curriculum Project is moving forward. The early childhood Curriculum was introduced in all public and private pre-Primary and Kindergarten schools. New curriculum in math and English are being piloted in our Primary Schools; and a new Science curriculum is being piloted in our lower secondary schools.

We are providing new training opportunities for our teachers at all levels, as well as for our administrators. In the Legislative Council we proposed and passed the Education Act which is providing a framework for our progress in these areas. And as we are reforming the academic system, we are also ensuring that our educational system is relevant and responsive for those students whose aptitudes lie outside traditional academic fields.

This year marked the first time BVI students had the opportunity to enroll in the BVI Technical/Vocational Institute. At this institute, students are given the chance to take courses such as cosmetology, small engine repair, arts and crafts and computer science that prepare them for successful careers after they complete their secondary education.

In particular, our focus has been on providing young BVI Islanders with training in areas where traditionally we have had to import labour – giving them the opportunity to enter professional fields that will have demand for their skills. And our commitment to our young people does not end at the school house.

This past year has marked the first full year of operation of the new Department of Youth Affairs and Sports. This programme has reached out to hundreds of young people throughout the Territory offering valuable after-school programmes including sports, music and art.

The results so far have been nothing short of remarkable. Just this past week I had the opportunity to attend the first ever choir competition bringing together all the Primary Schools of the Territory. There I saw dozens of BVI youngsters – so full of talent, poise, energy and enthusiasm – it was an evening that those who attended will not soon forget.

Of all my memories of that fine night, I most remember the shining look of pride and happiness in the faces of the winning team from Virgin Gorda who have preformed for us here today.

Please join me in giving them a hand and congratulating them on their fine achievement.

And I am pleased today to announce that the efforts of the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports will soon be augmented by the new Territory-wide Youth Empowerment Programme – a unique partnership that is bringing together private funding and public involvement to create an innovative programme to further support the development and growth of our youth. This effort will begin with the upcoming groundbreaking of a new Youth Centre in East End.

Taken together, these efforts demonstrate one single principle: this Government is investing in our young people and opening up the doors of opportunity to them. And already we are seeing the results of this investment.

This year grades at almost all levels are up dramatically. Of particular significance – in this year's graduating class from the BVI High School 3 of the top 4 graduates were young men – an accomplishment that deserves the praise and respect of our entire community.

Just this past week, we saw the largest graduating class in the history of the Community College. That historic achievement reminds us of the vital role this institution plays in the life of our Territory. Let me be absolutely clear: we recognize that there have been administrative challenges at the College over the past year and reform steps must be taken to make it more accountable and efficient. I am pleased to say that the process of reform is underway, and already we have seen savings of 3 quarters of a million dollars.

But fundamentally, this Government remains 100% committed to the basic mission of the College and will continue to support that mission whole heartedly.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Looking at these noteworthy achievements – from the improvement in student grades, to the ever growing number of college graduates – we must recognize the men and women who are making these successes possible. So today, let us honour the public servants in the Ministry of Education and Culture who are providing direction and support to all of these programmes;

Let us congratulate the parents, coaches, instructors and mentors who are looking out for the young people of the Territory and keeping them on the right path; and, above all, let us give a heartfelt thanks to all the teachers and administrators who everyday give their hearts and souls for the betterment of our youth.

Ladies and Gentlemen: As we work to raise young people with the skills and knowledge and character they will need to succeed in life, we also recognize our responsibility to leave to them a modern BVI in which the necessary conditions for success exist.

Part of that effort includes ensuring that the BVI they inherit will have the necessary infrastructure to move forward in the coming century.

Toward that end, we have made strategic investments throughout the Territory.

We completed the badly needed new dock in Anegada and commenced with critical upgrades to the airport there including new lighting; we finished paving the new road in Virgin Gorda connecting North Sound and the Valley, allowing cars and trucks to move with ease and safety; we have launched an ambitious project of repatriating lands -- including Long Bay on Beef Island, the Spooner Estate, Prospect Reef, as well as the Virgin Gorda Airport.

While all of these investments have been made with their own specific objectives in mind, they are all bound together by one common principle: wherever possible, the land of the BVI should be used for the benefit of the people of the BVI. And it is in that same spirit that we have embarked on an ambitious project of beautifying Road Town. This work is well underway. We have improved parking and traffic arrangements, improved our sidewalks and have planted flowers along our roads.

In particular, I would like to thank the hardworking young people of Rotaract who have made a personal commitment to assisting in this important work.

There is still much to be done, but we are already seeing the first results and it is with great pleasure that we see that a new Road Town is taking shape that we can all be proud to call our Territory's capital. And I am very proud to announce today the appointment of Eugenia O'Neal as City Manager charged with guiding the further development of our Capital.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Let me say plainly – I understand that there are still serious challenges that must be addressed. In the area of electricity, we recognize the need to improve the reliability of service. Toward that end, the Electricity Corporation is in the process of negotiating for the purchase new state-of-the-art engines and we hope to have these in place within the year. We have already received tenders that are currently being evaluated. The terms of the loans to purchase the equipment is awaiting Executive Council approval.

In the area of water and sewage we are making progress, as well. The East End sewage project is continuing. \$10.3 million have been approved for treatment plants in Road Town and East End/Long Look and sites has been chosen. Construction of the collection system is well underway. The Road Town phase of the project will be commencing shortly.

On the critical issue of telecommunications, we are moving forward with our programme of liberalization. We have appointed an expert in the field who is charged with establishing a new telecom policy that will deliver on our basic goal: better service at lower prices.

Ladies and Gentlemen: We recognize that there are those in the community who have felt frustration that Government funding for various capital projects has not flowed as easily as in the past.

I understand these concerns and I take them seriously. There is no doubt that people can have a fair expectation that Government contracts will serve as part of the overall economic vitality of our Territory. But, ladies and gentlemen, we made a promise – to get value for the people’s money. And we are going to keep that promise. That does not mean an end to large government projects – but it does mean an end to waste.

That is why I was so pleased to announce just yesterday the Government’s decision to acquire a \$10 million loan from the BVI Social Security Board to be dedicated to the construction and maintenance of roads throughout the Territory. This grand project meets the criteria of wise government spending.

First, it is a true need – not just work for work’s sake. The future of this Territory demands a robust and reliable road network to allow for safe and swift travel. We have seen in Virgin Gorda what a dramatic impact an improved road can have on people’s everyday lives.

That is a model that we will seek to replicate across the length and breadth of the BVI from Anegada to Jost Van Dyke. Second, the project is within our means. The acquisition of this loan was based on a financing plan that ensures our ability to repay the loan without cutting into other critical priorities over time. And finally, the money will be used to not only meet a critical territory goal, but will also serve as a source of work and opportunity for our people.

This large scale construction project will mean contractors throughout the Territory will have the chance to do important work through petty and large contracts for the coming years. We look forward to working with them to move this endeavour forward quickly and efficiently. And of all the areas where we are investing the people’s money, none is more critical than our efforts to improve and expand quality healthcare service throughout the Territory.

This past year has been a time of significant achievement in this regard.

We have just completed the construction of the new Hospital Expansion Project. This cutting edge new facility nearly doubles the size of our hospital and will be home to some of our most up-to-date services including a dialysis unit, an emergency and trauma unit and a modern diagnostic laboratory. And over the course of this coming year we will finalize plans for the construction of the New Peebles Hospital, which will then be tendered and work begun.

Beyond the Hospital we have also worked to strengthen care throughout the Territory. We have sent new doctors to Virgin Gorda and have improved clinic facilities in all the Sister Islands. We have put in place plans to build Helipads on Jost Van Dyke and North Sound to allow for emergency evacuation services.

And in order ensure the efficient operation of the entire healthcare system, we have, for the first time in our Territory's history, established a BVI Health Services Authority that is charged with making sure that our healthcare dollars are being used wisely and strategically. And as we improve our healthcare services, we are also working hard to promote prevention and healthy lifestyle choices. We have appointed an expert Programme Director to head up our fight against HIV/AIDS.

As part of the Programme's multi-faceted campaign to fight the spread of this terrible disease a major educational initiative has been launched targeting those most at risk, particularly our young people.

Similarly, we are working hard with educators, community leaders, the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports and others to combat the plague of drugs and to drive it from our Territory for good. While we seek to protect our young people from these twin scourges, we are also making sure that adequate resources are dedicated to provide dignified and proper care for our seniors. Just a few months ago a contract was signed for the construction of a new Road Town Senior Citizens Centre, which is scheduled to be completed by the end of this calendar year.

Ladies and Gentlemen: In all these areas – developing our economy, providing opportunity for our people, improving education and healthcare, creating a modern infrastructure – we are confident that we are on the right track. We see the progress that is being made and are hopeful that the people of the Territory are benefiting in their everyday lives. But we also know that there is still much to be done. And nowhere is the sense of continued challenge more apparent than in the area of crime and personal security.

As we complete our second year in office let me say bluntly that I am not satisfied with the state of security in the Territory today.

Ladies and Gentlemen: This Government will not rest, will not relax and will not be satisfied until this problem is mastered. As a start, we will soon be bringing forward new legislation to stiffen penalties for any person convicted of illegal possession of a gun or the use of a gun in the commission of a crime.

Quite simply, our tolerance for guns is zero. And let this message ring out: if you commit a gun crime in the BVI you are going to Balsam Ghut and you are staying there for a very long time.

Ladies and Gentlemen: Over these past two years, my Government has worked hard to earn the trust and respect of the people of this Territory everyday. We have never once taken for granted the faith you placed in us. And there is no doubt that there have been mistakes and missteps along the way. No great enterprise ever proceeds free from all flaws. But we have persevered. And we have done so because at each step of the way we have been able to draw strength and renewed purpose from the people of this Territory.

This Government believes with great passion in the potential of the people of the BVI.

We believe that when given the necessary tools and provided the appropriate conditions, the people of the BVI can thrive on the world stage in any field. But in order for that to happen, the Government must do its job, first. In order for the people of the BVI to realize their goals and aspirations they need the laws in place that will allow them to operate in the world markets; they need the skills and knowledge to compete; they need the security that is the basic birthright of every citizen and resident of our Territory; and they need an economic infrastructure that allows individuals to turn energy and creativity into entrepreneurship.

So as we look ahead to the coming year we reaffirm our commitment: To make the BVI work for all.

Making the BVI work for all means providing a hand up to those who are in need, making the BVI work for all means ensuring that basic services such as quality healthcare are never denied to anyone based on income, making the BVI work for all means joining together to make smart investments in our future; and above all else, making the BVI work for all means creating a Territory in which all the sons and daughters of our soil have the opportunity to realize the fullest extent of their God-given potential.

And in that spirit, I would like to spend a moment talking about the Prospect Reef project, which I mentioned earlier and which I am sure is familiar to you all. I return to this project not just to reiterate my belief that Prospect Reef will soon become a Centre of Excellence for our entire hospitality industry, as well as a successful enterprise that will improve the entire BVI tourism product.

I believe all this to be true. But beyond the direct benefits that all BVI citizens and residents will enjoy from the success of this project, I want to talk about what this endeavour symbolizes for this Government and this Territory.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I have said this before and I say it now – we here in the BVI must recognize our fundamental realities – we are not a Territory rich with oil; we do not have great deposits of gold, or iron, or other valuable minerals; we do not have vast tracts of land for farming.

What we have in the BVI is our waters, our natural beauty, and our people.

The seas and the sunshine are God's gift to the BVI; investing in our people and empowering them to realize their potential is our responsibility to one another. Here in the BVI we cannot afford to be complacent about our future. We cannot afford to be unimaginative about our possibilities. We cannot allow ourselves the luxury of standing still.

We, the people of the BVI in this time and place, are summoned to secure the future not just for our children – but for our grandchildren and their children. In every choice we make, in every dollar we spend, in every policy we enact our obligation is to ask: “what will this mean for the BVI three generations hence?”

That is an enormous responsibility. But also an inspiration.

For when I look ahead to our future – 10 years from now; 20 years from now; beyond that, even – I am filled with a sense not of limitation or fear but of possibility and hope.

I look into the future and I see BVI Islanders owning businesses that are competing on the world stage – and doing it from right here in the BVI. I look into the future and I see young BVI Islanders attending world class schools, one and all. I look into the future and I see every BVI Islander with access to the highest quality healthcare – here in Tortola – but also on Virgin Gorda and Jost Van Dyke and Anegada.

Ladies and gentlemen: I look into the future and see our Tourism industry in which local people don't just work in our leading businesses, but own them and run them. I see a future where the managers, head chefs, and CEO's of our leading businesses are BVI Islanders – and their work is making the BVI the envy of the region and the world. And that is where Prospect Reef comes in.

We will not take up positions of power in tourism or anything else unless we earn it. In order to make sure the next generation of leaders is made up of sons and daughters of our soil then we must start planning today. The graduates of Prospect Reef are going to enter the world with the confidence and skill they need to realize this vision – and the talent to change our Territory for the better. But in order to get there we all must be prepared to work hard and to sacrifice. Because this hopeful tomorrow that I see – whether in education, or healthcare, or tourism – none of it will come to us for free.

We as a people shall earn our future through work, through wise investment and through sacrifice. And, as for me, I would not have it any other way. I do not want a BVI that costs us nothing.

I do not want a future that we don't have to build with our own two hands. For only by working for our own tomorrow will we as a people know the pride and self-fulfillment that are the truest hallmarks of a free and proud and independent people. And I know that this sense of optimism and hope is shared throughout our Territory.

Nowhere is it more evident than among the fine men and women of our public service. These dedicated professionals are the backbone of everything that this Government has accomplished or will accomplish. They are truly the fuel that powers our Territory. Their skill, dedication and talent make our achievements possible. But beyond the professional discharging of their duties, what separates them out is their shared commitment to a vision of a better BVI.

Let me today say directly to all the men and women of the public service: the people of the Territory thank you; your Ministers thank you; and, above all, I thank you. And beyond thanking you, I call on you to help lead the way forward. We have so much yet to do – only by working together as one team, one family will we realize our best potential. And ladies and gentlemen: There can be no higher calling for a public service, for a Government or for a people.

We are building a brighter tomorrow for our children. And so even at the hard times, let us be joyful in our labour. Let us recall generations past who endured so much to bring us to where we are today and let us find in their example the strength to push ahead.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I close this evening on a personal note. These past two years have been an enormously exciting time. Waking up each morning and heading off to do the people's work is an honour and privilege that I find new energy for each day. Above all, I draw my greatest joy and inspiration from the work we are able to do to reach out to our young people and point the way to a better future for them.

Every time I see the young faces of our children so full of confidence and expectation I am filled with such pride, such hope. For me, this is the true meaning and mission of Government. My friends: We are here to serve but for a short time. That is the destiny of men and of Governments.

In the end we will be measured not by the votes we receive, not by the roads and buildings we leave behind, not by the laws we pass or the policies we effectuate – ultimately we are judged by a higher standard. We will be judged by the numbers of lives we have impacted and by the kind of world we leave as legacy to our children. And we will be held accountable to history.

Did we leave our Territory stronger than when we found it? Did we lift up our people and create hope and opportunity? Did we inspire our youngest to achieve all that they were capable of?

In these questions I am reminded of the words of the poet who once wrote: *Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got a hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.*

Let us all seek together to make the torch of our beloved BVI burn more brightly than ever – so that when we look back at the work we have done we can say with satisfaction and pride: we left our Territory in better state for the next generation – and we have confidence that they will leave it better still.

No legacy can be prouder. No mission more honourable. No goal more worthy.

Together we shall succeed.

Thank you. God bless you all. And may God forever bless the British Virgin Islands.