



Development Planning Unit

Government of the British Virgin Islands

Speech From the Throne - 1999

Delivered by: His Excellency the Governor,

Mr. Frank Savage, CMG, LVO, OBE

At the First Session of the

Fourteenth Legislative Council of the Virgin Islands on

Tuesday, 24th August, 1999

Honourable Mr. Speaker.
Honourable Members of the Legislative Council.

Mr. Speaker, I should like to extend to you and to all Members of this Honourable House warm Greetings in the name of our Head of State, Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth The Second, Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and of Her Other Realms and Territories, whose Representative in this beautiful Overseas Territory of the Virgin Islands I have the great honour and privilege to be.

Before I deliver the Throne Speech I crave your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, to address a few words to this Esteemed and Honourable House, and to those watching the proceedings here, or on television, or listening on the radio.

This is my first speech from the Throne since my arrival as Governor in July 1998. It is a great honour to deliver it particularly as it will probably be the last Throne Speech this century and the Speech outlines the Government's plans for the start of the new Millennium. It is necessary for me to explain for those not familiar with our Constitution that I am here today at the invitation of you, Mr. Speaker, to deliver a speech on behalf of Her Majesty The Queen, in whom the executive authority of the British Virgin Islands is vested and who is part of the Legislature of the British Virgin Islands. As Governor, I am reading the speech on Her Majesty's behalf, hence references in the Speech to My Government; that is, Her Majesty's Government and not the Governor's Government.

As Governor, I see it as my duty to work closely, wherever possible, with all members of the Legislative Council. I wish to re-affirm today that I stand prepared to work with each and every member of the Legislative Council in the pursuit of the good governance of our beautiful Territory.

THRONE SPEECH

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members of the Legislative Council, during this term, My Government intend to press forward with the overall development of the Territory while seeking to ensure that stability and confidence are preserved. They will continue to monitor and protect the vital financial services industry while at the same time striving to maintain a high level of fiscal responsibility.

My Government greatly value their links with the United Kingdom and the European Union and their close working relationship with the US Virgin Islands, Puerto Rico and the Member Countries of CARICOM and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States. My Government will work assiduously to develop ever closer ties with all our Caribbean neighbours.

Mr. Speaker, the activities of Financial Centres across the globe continue to be under constant scrutiny and review. My Government is resolved to protecting and nurturing the industry which is so important to this Territory. Bills in respect of compulsory investigative powers and the Association of Registered Agents Code of Conduct, will be brought before this Honourable House, as will provisions to amend the Banks and Trust Companies Act, 1990, the Company Management Act, 1990, and the Insurance Act, 1994.

The recent White Paper has a requirement to establish an independent regulator or Authority to strengthen yet further the probity and integrity of our regulatory systems. My Government is committed to reviewing the requirement and will bring forward the necessary legislation at the appropriate time.

The guiding principle behind these initiatives is to maintain the international competitiveness of the British Virgin Islands as a Financial Services Centre and to ensure that all sectors related activities conform with agreed international standards.

My Government will continue to develop tourism, including the provision of supporting physical infrastructure.. They will also continue to implement the recommendations of the report on the National Tourism Development Strategy. They will encourage and promote local participation in the Tourism Industry particularly in areas such as hotels, villas, gift shops and boats for day charters. My Government will explore increasing the number of visits by larger cruise ships during the summer months.

My Government will continue to pursue the aims and objectives set out in the Memorandum of Co-operation and Partnership agreed with the British Government which was signed by both parties on 9th September, 1998 and was laid in this Honourable House on 6 October 1998.

The drafting of amendments to the Constitution for the Territory is expected to proceed over the remainder of the year. The amendments will be based on the Report of the Constitutional

Commissioners 1993 and on the various reports which were subsequently commissioned. Mr. Alan Hoole, the consultant employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to undertake this task has already started work and was recently in the Territory for discussions on all related issues. It is expected that a statement of fundamental rights and freedoms will be included. My Government will continue to push for changes to the composition of the Legislative Council to provide for a fifth Minister and also for a Deputy Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Speaker, My Government remain committed to ensuring that the Territory continues to be as free of major crime as they can make it and that they are committed to providing the necessary resources to enable the Commissioner of Police to achieve an overall reduction in crime right across the spectrum.

Following an important review of the Royal Virgin Islands Police Force by a Police management team, My Government will provide funding for the addition of 9 uniformed officers and 10 civilian posts in each of the next two financial years, to ensure that the Police have the necessary

manpower to combat the increasing sophistication of international criminals. This will also result in more Policemen and Policewomen returning to Community Policing and to the streets of the British Virgin Islands. The war against drugs is of paramount importance. My Government is pleased that the British Government will shortly resume air patrols with the Police Aircraft and that they have pledged to support the continuing work of the Police Marine Branch.

My Government place great emphasis on playing an important role in the international fight against drug trafficking and cross-border crime and will, early in this session, introduce legislation to bring into effect the Agreement signed in July 1998 between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States concerning Maritime and Aerial Operations to suppress illicit trafficking by sea in the waters of the Caribbean and Bermuda (More commonly known as the Shiprider Agreement).

The Police Advisory Committee will be reconstituted to ensure that it represents a broader spectrum of Community opinion, with more women on the Committee. The Police have already started to take a harder line on all reports involving domestic violence and child abuse. This will continue, and the Police are under orders to prosecute offenders of these twin crimes which do so much to debilitate our Community. Mr. Speaker, we must protect, and respect, the women, children and families of our Community. There are plans for local Community groups to work more closely with the Police particularly in the area of youth activity. There will be proposals submitted to you to consider the establishment of an ad hoc Committee of the Legislative Council to enable Members of this Honourable House to have an opportunity of regular, meetings with the Commissioner of Police.

My Government will bring forward a draft bill to cover integrity in Public Life in accordance with the terms of the Memorandum of Co-operation and Partnership.

My Government is pleased to report that the Office of Disaster Preparedness has been recognised as a centre of regional excellence in the recent review of the Caribbean Overseas Territories by the Department for International Development of the United Kingdom Government. But there will be no complacency and they will continue to seek to improve further this essential Government Service to the public.

A comprehensive Bill for Disaster Management is now in its final stages of preparation and will be brought to this Council. The Anti-Discrimination Bill which was withdrawn in the last session will be re-introduced. Pensions Act Review Committee is meeting to draw up instructions for the drafting of a new Pensions Act which will also be introduced during this session.

My Government are committed, Mr. Speaker, to ensuring that the public of the BVI gets an improved service from the Public Service - the aim is a faster, fairer, more courteous and more cost effective Public Service and to this end, the previous Council appropriated funds for a Public Service Development Programme which is already in progress. They expect that a thorough review of all aspects of the public service and measures for sustainable improvement in the delivery of services to the public will result from this important review. This is in keeping with the Memorandum of Cooperation and Partnership. Furthermore, in line with the Memorandum, the Performance Management Programme has been introduced and we look to see the fruits of that programme demonstrated by better overall performance throughout the Public Service.

My Government will continue to explore the eco-tourism potential of Anegada by establishing specially protected areas. Land titles will be granted to the people of that island in accordance with the recommendations contained in the Renwick Reports, in areas other than those so designated.

My Government will continue to support small enterprises through appropriate seminars and the Micro Enterprise Development Programme. A Consumer Protection Bill will be introduced.

My Government has already set up a Y2K Steering Committee to address the matter of possible

problems which could result from failure of some date-sensitive computerised equipment at the change to the new Millennium. I am sure that Members of this Honourable House will be pleased to learn that our Y2K project has won international acclaim for its scope and coverage. Ongoing activities include public education, equipment testing, replacement upgrading and verification as well as contingency planning.

During this session, the H. Lavity Stoutt Community College will celebrate its 10th Anniversary. My Government will continue to foster the development of this institution. Construction of the Learning Resource Centre is presently underway. Immediate plans include the provision of facilities for the Marine Studies and Hospitality Studies programmes. A Virgin Islands

Studies programme is being developed to promote and expand our understanding of the culture, history and environment of our society and the islands on which we live.

My Government proposes to introduce legislation to repeal and replace the existing Finance Act and introduce new financial regulations. The processes of tendering and procurement are also to be affected by substantive legislation, the intent of which is to modernise the legislation in keeping with advancements in financial administration and the automation of Government operating systems.

A Bill to repeal and replace the Customs Duties Ordinance and a new Bill, the Customs Management Act, will be introduced. Such legislation will serve to enhance the management capabilities in the Customs Department and impact positively on revenue.

My Government is currently reviewing the tax laws of the Territory with the intent to making amendments where necessary. The areas currently under review are Land and House Tax, Income Tax and Stamp Duty.

Mr. Speaker, a Bill to amend the Pound Ordinance has been prepared and will be placed before you. This amendment will aim to control stray animals, thereby bringing long awaited relief to farmers, property owners and all who use our public roads. It will provide for an increase of fees for impounded animals and for judgement in court relating to stray animals. My Government has also reviewed the Dogs (Injury to Persons, Cattle and Poultry) Ordinance and a proposed amendment will hopefully, when enacted, bring relief to livestock farmers from stray dogs and to the general public from aggressive dogs.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, my Government is in the process of repealing and replacing the Labour Code Act. This new Labour Code will ensure fairness in the work place and remedy injustice both to employees and employers.

The issue of access to our waters for fishing is important to My Government. Proposed Fisheries Regulations will strengthen the implementation of the Fisheries Act of 1997. It will require everyone fishing in our territorial waters to be licensed and will provide penalties for anyone fishing here without permission.

My Government intends to introduce legislation to deal with the proper inspection of meat products for local consumption as well as for export. Funds have already been approved for a slaughter house to be built on Virgin Gorda this year. My Government is determined to ensure that animals are slaughtered in the most hygienic way, so as to protect the health of the Community.

My Government are now reviewing the Land Surveyor's Ordinance to address the matter of cadastral surveying practices, and also with a view to broadening the Land Surveyor's Board to ensure that other professions are represented.

My Government will continue to review the issue of Non-Belonger Land Holding Licences to ensure that persons who hold them comply with all the terms of the licences.

Mr. Speaker, My Government is seeking to be included in the United Kingdom's ratification of the Protocol concerning Specially Protected Areas and Wildlife (the SPAW Protocol). Inclusion in this Protocol would make the Territory part of a world wide network which aims to preserve and manage threatened and endangered ecosystems, species and habitats in a sustainable manner, so as to prevent them from becoming endangered or extinct. The Territory's environmental policies and legislation, relating to threaten species, will be reviewed and updated.

Mr. Speaker, My Government continues to place great emphasis on improving services, training and staff development, and the drafting or review of relevant policies and legislation wherever necessary.

In addition to training and the development of qualified staff, the Library Services Department commenced free Internet services to the public in February, 1999. The Department intends to extend similar services to other branch libraries.

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, since the construction of the dual carriageway has encroached on the designated site of the National Information Systems (NATIS) project, it has become necessary to review the project and conduct a feasibility study for the present site. A Bill for a Libraries, Archives and Museum Act designated to complement the NATIS project, will be brought before you.

Mr. Speaker, My Government are committed to ensuring that British Virgin Islanders will be able to obtain a first class education so that they will be equipped to cope with the changes of the coming Millennium both at home and abroad. In this light Mr. Speaker, My Government has already put the wheels in motion to evaluate the "First Five-Year Education Plan" and also to conduct a comprehensive education review which should examine the policies, practices, programmes and provisions of the systems.

My Government will further:

- continue planned maintenance and building programmes to upgrade and expand all public schools as necessary;
- officially adopt the relevant sections of the "Model Education Bill For The OECS," and incorporate them into the Education Ordinance;
- seek assiduously to provide alternative education for those who, for whatever reason, have left the regular school system;
- introduce Spanish in the Primary Schools as a pilot project in September, 1999;
- continue to support the "Special Education" Pilot project in Virgin Gorda;
- expand the facilities and programmes at the Eslyn Richiez Learning Centre;
- launch a training programme under the auspices of the joint Department for International Development, the University of the West Indies, and the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States' Primary Teacher Project for the training and upgrading of all Primary School Teachers and Principals;
- extend Computer Studies to all Primary Schools;
- continue the training of administrators through participation in OECS seminars and conferences;
- complete the compilation of the documentation and tabulation of all Education Policies;

- finalize the policy on Early Childhood Education;
- review the secondary education certification;
- participate in the UNESCO Project "Education For All (EFA) - 2000 Assessment";
and
- review and upgrade the policies governing the terms and conditions of the scholarship grants.

Mr. Speaker, the area in Road Town known as the "Afro Tree" has for too long been a cause for concern to the students and teachers at the BVI High School and to the community as a whole. The Police have recently taken decisive action to remove those persons who commit illegal acts outside the school and who set a shameful example to our students. My Government is also working to find a permanent solution to this vexing problem. The Public Works Department have already been approached to construct an appropriate decorative wall around the Afro Tree similar to that around the Legislative Council and Court building and legislation is being prepared to prohibit certain illegal activities within a prescribed area of all schools in the Territory.

Mr. Speaker, My Government is committed to ensuring that our Youths have greater opportunities to occupy themselves in sports and recreational activities. To this end, my Government has pledged to:

- introduce legislation to establish a sports and youth Affairs Department;
- conduct a feasibility study of all recreation grounds and sports facilities;
- effect extensive repairs to enhance recreation grounds throughout the Territory;
and
- further expand the sports and recreation programme both at the school and community levels by producing and implementing a sports and recreation Master Plan.

It is also the wish of my Government to preserve the rich, cultural heritage of the British Virgin Islands. To this end, the construction of the first phase of the Museum has been designated as a Millennium project.

Mr. Speaker, Sir, legislation to provide for the right of access by the physically disabled to all buildings and public places will be introduced.

The concept of providing for a system of parole for prisoners serving some long-term sentences has been accepted in principle and a Bill to provide for such a system will be introduced during this session.

Funds are already in the 1999 Recurrent Estimates to provide for a system of legal aid and the enabling legislation will be introduced during this term.

My Government is concerned about the hardship being caused as a result of increasing medical costs at home and abroad. They note also the growing numbers of our citizens who are hospitalized in Puerto Rico from time to time. National Health Insurance requirements have been widely discussed and a more concentrated effort will be made to introduce such insurance during the life of this Council.

Mr. Speaker, the primary objectives for the improvement of health care services for the Territory in the new Millennium will be met by:

- the integration of the Peebles Hospital extension project into the planned new hospital

project;

- the recruitment and training of the necessary qualified staff, and improvements to the services provided by the major clinics throughout the Territory.

A bill for a Medical Act will be introduced during the life of this Legislative Council.

My Government will continue, and expand, its programme of domestic home care for the elderly and shut in. Payment of ex-gratia awards to retired non-pensionable Government employees will continue.

My Government recognizes the importance of the family unit and will continue its efforts to support and strengthen it. Legislation and enforcement procedures relating to domestic violence and sexual crimes against minors will be re-examined and strengthened as required. Efforts will continue to increase public sensitivity to these issues. The Women's Desk will be strengthened so as to help it to continue and expand its invaluable service in this area. Measures will be implemented to provide assistance and effective relief to abused children and battered spouses. Non-Government Organisations such as the Red Cross and the Family Support Network are to be commended for their invaluable work in this field and deserve our support.

In an effort to improve the Environment, a Bill to provide for the disposal of derelict vehicles and boats by the Solid Waste Department will be brought to the House during the year.

Water connections to residences along the Ridge Road will continue to be vigorously pursued.

My Government will continue their Road Improvement and maintenance programmes throughout the Territory.

Work on the Beef Island Bridge is to commence in the near future. The tendering process for improvement works at the Beef Island Airport including a new Terminal Building has started and construction should be underway before the end of the year. My Government is making a point of exploring ways to facilitate local participation in this project.

An amendment to the Motor Vehicle regulations to allow additional information to be added to the driver's licence is to be introduced.

New Building Regulations are also to be introduced which will provide administrative and enforcement mechanisms relating to building practices and the use of acceptable materials and building systems.

My Government will introduce a new Merchant Shipping Act to consolidate existing legislation relating to shipping.

In an effort to address the problem of safety at sea, my Government will introduce regulations to provide for a Marine Safety Council.

In order to improve further, and to meet ever increasingly more stringent international civil aviation standards, my Government will provide funding for additional fire officers and security officials at Beef Island Airport.

The British Virgin Islands Electricity Corporation Regulations are to be re-examined.

The Telecommunications Act and the Cable and Wireless (West Indies) Limited Telephone Ordinances are both to be reviewed.

Other measures will be laid before you.

Mr. Speaker, the year 2000 will mark a milestone in the life of this Honourable House in that it will

be the golden or 50th Anniversary of the restoration of the Legislative Council. My Government is therefore considering, among all the other celebrations planned, appropriate ways of marking this milestone, and welcome ideas from all Honourable Members.

Mr. Speaker, Members of this Honourable House, I pray that the blessings of Almighty God may always be with you and guide you with your important work on behalf of Our Beloved Territory and its Community.