



Ministerial Statement

By

The Hon. E. David Burt, JP, MP
Premier

ASSISTANCE TO BERMUDA DURING THE COVID19 PANDEMIC
RESPONSE

22ND MAY 2020

Mr. Speaker, Bermuda is justifiably proud of its ability to act on the world stage in all manner of ways and in several spheres. We are resilient and innovative and to a large extent we can fend for ourselves. But **Mr. Speaker**, everyone can use help. While I am certainly not old enough to remember this song, **Mr. Speaker**, and it may not exactly be my musical taste, The Beatles 1967 hit “I get by with a little help from my friends” may best describe how we have managed during this pandemic.

Mr. Speaker, early in this global event immediate action was taken to shut our borders and our airport was closed to scheduled commercial flights. This necessary action left some Bermudians stranded in countries in which they were visiting, studying or undergoing medical treatment. **Mr. Speaker**, returning residents of means sourced private jets to return them to Bermuda and in keeping with a condition precedent for the approval of such flights, they inevitably accommodated Bermudians needing to return home in seats that would otherwise have been empty.

I wish to thank the leaders in the international business sector who responded to this call and through their acceptance of our policy and

understanding the need to get Bermudians home have restored students and other loved ones to the welcoming arms of their families.

Mr. Speaker, Honourable Members will know that in an effort to shore up its own supplies at home, the US Department of Homeland Security adopted stringent measures around the export of any equipment destined for countries also fighting the pandemic. This was applied to items bound for Bermuda and we were able to call on friends in the US Congress to “unstick” a process that stood to deprive us of much needed medical supplies.

Mr. Speaker, in countries all over the world, social commentators have initiated a discussion that must serve to prick the conscience of us all. This pandemic has laid bare the raw inequality in modern society. Even the veneer of affluence we enjoy in Bermuda cannot now mask the fragility of people’s existence. To that end, what is commonly referred to as the “3rd Sector” has mounted a Herculean effort to meet the needs of people during this period.

Mr. Speaker, numerous agencies have provided meals, grocery vouchers, access to services, and support for a significant number of people in the community. To date, the emergency funds raised and coordinated by the Bermuda Community Foundation totals some \$1.84 million and \$1.5 million of that has been spent in support of the charitable objectives, including the provision of an average of 10,000 meals per week. These efforts have been supplemented by some of our hotel partners like The Loren and the Fairmont Hamilton Princess who have both kept staff employed while feeding citizens in need and our frontline workers.

This support has been invaluable and on behalf of the Government and people of Bermuda I wish to thank all donors, volunteers and supporters

for their work. I should particularly recognize Dr. Myra Virgil, Vivien Carter and Tina Nash who have skillfully led the coordination of this effort.

Mr. Speaker, I should also like to thank Mr. and Mrs. Richard and Yemi Oduntan who donated \$15,000 for supplies and PPE and also Athene for a most generous donation of \$416,000 to the Bermuda Hospitals Board for ventilators. In addition, Bermuda Hospital Charitable Foundation donated \$500,000 to Bermuda Hospitals Board.

Mr. Speaker, tangible support for our efforts here at home has come from Her Majesty's Government in the UK. Almost 200 Bermuda residents were able to make it home on two airbridge flights arranged by the UK Government at nominal cost to travelers. Further **Mr. Speaker,** in spite of the challenges of supply in the UK, Bermuda was pleased to receive to date:

- 15,000 PCR tests
- 26,000 N95 masks
- 3,000 surgical masks
- 1,000 digital thermometers
- 5,000 swabs
- laboratory consumables including single use data loggers, haztabs and sanitizer; and
- over 150,000 other PPE items like gloves and aprons.

Mr Speaker, Honourable Members should note that the cost of these items has been met from the UK's Conflict, security and Stability Fund (CSSF). Government House, the Governor and Deputy Governor in particular, have marshaled the considerable operation to realize these critical supplies for Bermuda and we similarly thank them for this effort.

Mr. Speaker, across borders and sectors in Bermuda, her people and its various institutions have been ably supported by the assistance provided by others. In many cases, refusing to accept recognition for it. Among the selfless gestures made recently **Mr. Speaker**, came from a Bermudian senior who wrote to me asking how he could surrender his social insurance pension to support someone else because his success in his working life meant that he could do without it. **Mr. Speaker**, this is a novel proposition but the sentiment is as old as we are as a people: generous, caring and sensitive to the needs of others.

As I indicated in my public remarks on Wednesday evening, this is the spirit that will carry us from the potential harm this pandemic has done to our society through the recovery and beyond. Long may it continue.

Thank you, **Mr. Speaker**.