

REMARKS BY PREMIER THE HON. DAVID BURT, JP, MP  
COVID19 – Shelter in Place will save lives  
1<sup>ST</sup> APRIL 2020

Good afternoon.

Amidst the noise of today's continuous cycle of information through social media, online news and even traditional news outlets, the decision-making process can become clouded in a fog of opinions and conflicting views. The responsibility of governments is to sift through that noise and rely upon clear, factual, and in this case, scientific advice to drive the decisions that must be made in the best interests of the people we serve.

From the early emphasis on personal hygiene and the introduction of the term social distancing to our everyday conversations, to the closure of schools and restricting the activities of many businesses, culminating in the recent implementation of nighttime curfews; this Government has carefully plotted a course to mitigate against the risk of community transmission of Covid19.

In daily press conferences I have reported to the people of Bermuda the details around the results of the tests conducted for this virus and the number of positive results is increasing. Whilst the majority of the positive cases are classed as imported owing to the travel history of the individuals, and to their close contacts, there are more cases emerging where the link is not as clear. This reporting caused me to ask the Chief Medical Officer for her advice of just where Bermuda is on the time-scale of this pandemic and what additional measures could be taken to further reduce the risk of sustained community transmission which could overwhelm our hospital.

In characteristic fashion, the CMO's advice was measured, thoughtful and based on her experience as a public health professional. Her advice to me and by extension to the Cabinet and the Government of Bermuda is that to effectively mitigate the risk of community transmission we must implement stricter measures to control the movement of people in and around Bermuda.

Following yesterday's meeting of Cabinet and with their full support, I met this morning with His Excellency the Governor and requested that he exercise his authority under section 14(3) of the Constitution to declare a state of emergency for Bermuda based on what is now necessary to intensify the fight against this virus. Further to that state of emergency I have asked the Governor to make regulations under the Emergency Powers Act 1963 to direct that Bermuda's residents must 'shelter in place' for a period of 14 days.

What does this mean for you? The only way we will prevent this disease from intensifying in Bermuda is if our nighttime routine of everyone in their properties is extended throughout the day. 'Shelter in place' means we must stay at home unless we must go to the store for food or medicine or to a gas station. Other exemptions will be in place for workers in essential areas and that list will be similar to the one now in place for nighttime curfew.

As I indicated yesterday, the existing curfew hours of 8pm to 6am have been renewed for a further three days and will expire at 6am on Saturday, 4<sup>th</sup> April. From the moment that that curfew order expires, this country will be under a 24hr requirement to 'shelter in place' for an initial period of 14 days. The Constitution requires that the Legislature meet within five days of a state of emergency being declared. I have confirmed with the Speaker of the House and the President of the Senate that both Houses will meet as required on Monday, 6<sup>th</sup> April at 10am and 12pm respectively.

The Attorney General's Chambers is working on the Regulations but I can indicate that they will require residents to 'shelter in place' for these 14 days, leaving their properties only if they are essential workers, in the case of medical emergencies or to purchase food or medicine. The only businesses that will remain open will be food producers or food wholesalers, retail grocery stores, doctor's offices and medical facilities, pharmacies, gas stations, the ports, utility companies like gas & water will be available for emergency service; and banks on restricted hours and only to provide the most essential of services.

Beyond the clinical public health advice and the cold language employed to give effect to this rare set of restrictions on the freedoms we all enjoy, there is a human element to all of this. It weighs heavily on me personally that these decisions stall an economy that has struggled to emerge from the global shift of 2008. Men and women across various sectors have lost jobs or now will suffer reduced income earning capacity.

There is anxiety among our seniors and those who appear to be most susceptible to the worst effects of this disease. Some families are facing the stress of personal economic impact or of loved ones unable to return to Bermuda because of travel restrictions. These are hard times and our faith in many things is being tested. But we are a hard people and we can emerge from this stronger. My colleagues and I have wrestled with how best to respond to this pandemic and in addition to my personal faith I am guided by the oath I took when I was appointed to this office: to do right...without fear.

I feel deeply the impact that this will have on hardworking men and women across the Island, not only financially but emotionally. Uncertainty is never good and this is a period of global uncertainty. But the strongest defence to uncertainty is unity. This disease and its impact does not discriminate. It does not care how old you are, whether you are black or white, what your politics may be, or even your immigration status. Fighting this pandemic demands a unity of purpose that challenges us to lay aside those things that may divide us in times of peace and to join together in a common goal of keeping this island that we all call home safe.

I am certain that this is the right thing to do for Bermuda at this time. Together we must do all we can to save lives, and the danger of waiting is not worth the money it might save. We must act decisively and we must act now. The future of Bermuda depends on us all doing our part.

Thank you for your support and thank you for continuing to work together – and together we will get through this.

Thank you.