

HE The Governor's Throne Speech 2020

INTRODUCTION

Today is a historic day for the Cayman Islands. We come together to embrace changes to the Constitution that usher in a new Parliament and a new era of modernised processes of Government befitting of a 21st century Democracy.

Agreeing constitutional modernisation is a significant achievement. In keeping with this historic moment, I am pleased to begin my contribution today by passing on warm congratulations from the UK.

First, I am delighted to be able to read out a message on behalf of HRH The Prince of Wales:

It gives me great pleasure and pride to congratulate the people of the Cayman Islands on the agreement to reform and modernise your Constitution, and on the creation of your new Parliament which, together, represent an important moment for the strong and vibrant democracy that exists in the Islands. Having such fond and special memories of our visit to the Cayman Islands in March 2019, and of the remarkable warmth of the welcome we so touchingly received, my wife and I particularly wanted to send the new Members of Parliament, and all the people of the Cayman Islands whom they represent, our warmest wishes and to say how much you are all in our thoughts at this time.

Second, the UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson has asked me to read out the following message to mark this occasion:

“I would like to congratulate the people of the Cayman Islands on their constitutional reforms, which signal how far they have come in developing into a mature democracy. New powers come with a heavy burden of responsibility, which no politician should bear lightly, but I am confident that the members of the Cayman Islands Parliament will build upon the successes of recent decades, which have propelled the Islands forward as a modern democracy working in partnership with the United Kingdom.”

Finally I am very pleased that Lord Ahmad of Wimbledon, who was UK Minister for the Overseas Territories at the start of the negotiations also sends his good wishes. He said:

“I am delighted that the constitutional reforms are now coming into effect. This signals another step forward by the people of the Cayman Islands to advance the vibrant democracy they have built as the foundation for prosperity which shines as an example to others across the Caribbean. I congratulate the Honourable Premier who played a pivotal role and leaves these changes as part of his substantial legacy. I also congratulate the then Leader of the Opposition, current Deputy Leader of the Opposition, and other members of the negotiating team, for the role they played in securing a successful negotiation.

Those messages underline the highly constructive UK/Cayman dialogue on constitutional change that brought us to this point today. As UK Ministers said at the recent Joint Ministerial Council virtual meeting, the constitutional talks with Cayman were a role model for how such talks should be conducted and one other Territories could follow. The Cayman delegation demonstrated cross-party agreement and unity at those talks, which had a powerful impact on the UK and the success of the negotiations. I was pleased to play a role myself as observer in December 2018, shortly after I was appointed as Governor at the end of October 2018. I have worked closely with the Premier since then to ensure the process moved forward, including navigating the inevitable delays caused by Covid.

As well as becoming only the third Overseas Territory to have a Parliament, Cayman is now the first Overseas Territory with a Constitutional provision requiring the UK to consult the Premier and Cabinet before any UK Orders in Council are passed. This is now being made available to all Overseas Territories, who have Cayman to thank for that advance. The other changes make clearer Cayman’s autonomy in domestic affairs, which I have, and will continue, to respect fully. Work to establish a Police Service Commission, which both the Police Commissioner and I welcome, has already been set

in hand. It will provide valuable external advice, strengthening good governance and oversight of our Police Service.

SECTION 81

The negotiating team and I had all hoped that as part of these changes S81 of the Constitution, setting out the reserved power of the Governor, could fall away. As this House is aware, I was instructed to use those powers earlier this year to give assent to the Civil Partnership Law and in doing so ensure Cayman's compliance with the rule of law and international obligations. Because of that, the UK decided it wished to retain that power for the time being. Its use was exceptional and rare, reflecting the specific circumstances that arose from the UK's international legal obligations under the European Convention on Human rights. It is incorrect, as some have suggested, to see its use as implying more activism on the part of the UK.

Nor should its retention in any way detract from the significant achievements embodied in the other amendments.

Edmund Burke, a prominent 18th century Parliamentarian once said:

“Parliament is not a congress of ambassadors from different and hostile interests; which interests each must maintain, as an agent and advocate, against other agents and advocates; but parliament is a deliberative assembly of one nation, with one interest, that of the whole; where, not local purposes, not local prejudices ought to guide, but the general good, resulting from the general reason of the whole”.

And Winston Churchill reminded us that:

“The first duty of a Member of Parliament is to do what he thinks, in his faithful and disinterested judgement, is right and necessary for the honour and safety of his country. His second duty is to his constituents, of whom he is the representative but not the delegate. It is only in the third place that his duty to party organization or programme takes rank. All these three loyalties should be observed, but there is no doubt of the order in which they stand under any healthy manifestation of democracy.”

I believe those wise words apply just as much today and can provide inspiration to present and future Members of Parliament as to the importance and weight of their role.

CAYMAN POST - COVID

As Covid-19 continues to rage around us, our islands remain in the enviable position of being largely Covid free. We have many people to thank for that from the Honourable Premier, the Minister for Health and all Cabinet members for their leadership, our Attorney-General and his team, our brilliant medical staff and officials and the public who faithfully supported the decisions of the Government. I thank Honourable Members of the Opposition for their contribution, including the Honourable Leader who attended meetings of our Hazard Management National Executive. We owe everyone a debt of gratitude for getting us to the relative normality in which we find ourselves today.

I thank the hard-working staff in my office who like so many in Team Cayman went the extra mile for everyone on these Islands. I believe Cayman can look to the future with optimism, confident that we can build back the economy better. With the UK's support, we should soon be in a position to offer a vaccine against COVID to the people of Cayman. Despite concerns in some quarters about vaccines, a strong uptake by the public will be needed as our clearest route out of this global health emergency. Our health professionals strongly recommend that we take it to protect everyone in our community, particularly our elderly and most vulnerable. As leaders we all have a responsibility to do so and be seen to do so.

UK SUPPORT

Cayman has never sought, or needed, direct financial support from the UK. That is a proud record and I know it is one the Premier and his Government are keen to maintain.

The UK does of course provide, through my office and at Cayman's request, technical support in a wide range of areas. In the last 4 years alone Cayman has received over £6.3M in funding and technical support from the UK in areas such as criminal justice, law enforcement, prisons, governance and public sector reform, public health, child

safeguarding, maritime and border security, air operations, environment and disaster management. The UK recognises that such targeted assistance in specific areas can support the Overseas Territories gain access to expertise, which is not always available in smaller territories.

I remain full of respect and admiration for how effectively Cayman provides such a vast array of services to the community here, without the advantages that many larger countries enjoy because of size, scale and resources.

The support the UK provides is part of the strong, mature and constructive partnership that exists between our two Governments. I will continue to work hard to nurture that relationship, which brings mutual benefits.

CAYMAN ISLANDS REGIMENT

One of the most obvious areas where the UK has offered support in recent times has been in the establishment of the Cayman Islands Regiment - an offer made little over a year ago by the then Minister for Armed Forces during a visit here. With the strong support of the Premier and Cabinet, we made fast progress despite Covid and the Regiment is on a trajectory toward full operational capability by next August. Many Caymanians have joined as reservists and some have had the opportunity to train at Sandhurst. This is a truly visible sign of the strong partnership that exists between Cayman and the UK. Many young Caymanians have signed up as membership offers a wonderful opportunity, not only to serve their country but also to develop new and transferrable skills. That was tested recently as Storm Eta passed through and members of the Regiment were deployed to evacuate vulnerable people from flooded homes. They performed with distinction. We can all be proud of the start the Regiment has made.

I would like to thank the Police Commissioner and all members of the RCIPS for genuinely outstanding work over the last year. Covid presented uniquely challenging circumstances but they rose to the occasion. It may not be a typical year, but excluding Covid related offences, crime is down overall by 13%. That is to be celebrated. We

continue to enjoy peace and security that is the envy of many countries in the region. I would also like to single out the Prison Director and his staff for the highly impressive response to Covid this year, minimising its impact and introducing innovative policies to maintain contact between prisoners and families. All our emergency services have performed magnificently including our fire Service dealing with the biggest and most dangerous fire in generations. We are fortunate indeed to have people with such dedication, skills and commitment to support our community at times of difficulty.

ELECTIONS

I will continue to support the many institutions and Commissions that uphold our good governance, including our independent, effective and highly respected judiciary, which also demonstrated impressive innovation in administering justice this year during the period of restrictions and lockdowns.

The 2017 General Election marked the introduction of single member constituencies, which culminated in the election of Nineteen Members of the Legislative Assembly. In less than six months, the May 2021 General Election will see voters casting ballots in the first Cayman Islands Parliamentary Elections. Cayman has a strong track record of holding free and fair elections. To ensure the high standards of our democratic processes are upheld, the excellent team at the Cayman Islands Elections Office are continuing their work to plan and deliver well run General Elections in line with international electoral standards.

CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENT

Policies around climate change and the environment are quite properly devolved under the Constitution to the Cayman Islands Government. However, at the request of the Honourable Premier and Minister Hew I am exploring how UK technical expertise and experience can support Cayman's objectives in this area. Despite the financial challenges that the pandemic has brought about globally, climate change and the environment remain a top priority for the UK, which today announced a target of reducing carbon emissions by 68% by 2030 based on 1990 levels. That is the most

ambitious target in the world. I am delighted that the UK and Cayman are entering into a partnership to take work forward in this area.

The partnership will cover work in key areas including support on assessing and updating the risks that climate change poses to our islands, renewable energy and protecting biodiversity, including coral reefs. As we look towards the Climate Change Conference - COP26 - hosted in Glasgow next year by the UK, we must ensure the voices of Cayman and the region's Small Island States are heard.

WORLD - CLASS CIVIL SERVICE

My thanks, as ever, go to our outstanding Deputy Governor Franz Manderson, and his high quality Chief Officer team, for work in leading an increasingly world class civil service, and with whom I work very closely. Both the Deputy Governor and I were proud of the way so many civil servants stepped up during the pandemic – volunteering for roles outside their remit to support the people of the Cayman Islands. A team across government recently won the UK Association of Project Management's award for the social project of the year for the way in which they set up the Field hospital at the Family Life Centre. This international recognition for one element of Team Cayman's Covid response is a very tangible demonstration of a world-class civil service in action.

COMMITMENT TO CAYMAN

Two years into my tenure here as Governor my commitment to Cayman remains unswerving. I will continue to advance Cayman's interests to the utmost of my capability, balancing those against the UK's constitutional obligations. In the last year I am proud to have supported Cayman on financial services, constitutional change and the Cayman Islands Regiment, working closely with the Honourable Premier to do our best for the people of these wonderful Islands. My relationship with the Premier and his Ministers is a strong partnership based on trust and openness, which I believe is to the benefit of these islands.

As I have stressed since arriving, I urge everyone to treat all in our community with courtesy, dignity and respect, demonstrate CaymanKind at all times, not least in these difficult times, and maintain the highest standards of integrity and personal behaviour.

A C C E S S I B I L I T Y

In the second half of my tour here, I will continue to be as open and accessible as I have strived to be over the last two years. I will continue to support our wonderful community as much as I can. There may also be one or two more performances of the steel pan and I am proud – despite a serious lack of musical talent - to have somehow succeeded in increasing my repertoire from 3 tunes to 4, thanks of course to Cayman's man of steel Earl La Pierre!

C O N C L U S I O N

In conclusion, Cayman has done incredibly well in managing the global pandemic. There is so much for the people of these Islands to be proud about. I believe the future looks bright for Cayman as we build back better and I hope greener after Covid. Cayman is a beacon of excellence amongst the British Overseas Territories and the wider region. It is one of, if not the best place in the Caribbean in which to live, work and invest.

As you embark on a new chapter with the new Parliament, it is an opportunity to step back and look with pride at what Cayman has achieved in recent decades.

I send heartfelt best wishes to all Members of Parliament, and to the new Parliamentary Secretaries who will be appointed today, as you all continue your noble and vital work to make the lives of everyone here even better.

God Bless all of you and all the people of these wonderful Cayman Islands.