

New Year's Message

Hon. V. Arden McLean

December 30, 2019

My fellow Caymanians, residents and visitors, on behalf of the Opposition, I would like to wish you all a happy, healthy, and prosperous New Year. As we embark on this new journey, in this New Year, and in this new decade, I cannot help but reflect on the decade that just passed.

Over the last 10 years, we have seen the population of our beloved Cayman Islands increase from 56,000 to 66,000. Over the last 10 years we have also seen our GDP increase from \$3.6 billion to \$4.6 billion, largely fueled by inflation.

While these increases may sound good on the surface, we now know that this growth was unmanaged and came at a great sacrifice to our Caymanian way and quality of life. Truth be told, we continue to see the reduction of what our dollars can purchase, continued erosion of our middle class, and the challenges of the working class.

We on the Opposition bench remain optimistic that the Cayman Islands' best days are yet to come. We are also realistic in recognizing that the great resources, potential, and abilities of the Caymanian people remain untapped as a result of both the PPM's and the CDP's strong belief in trickledown economics whereby Cayman's future success is dependent on rich investors coming to our rescue after receiving large government concessions.

We on the Opposition bench reject their economic belief of trickledown economics and instead believe that the success of our country is driven by expanding opportunities for the working men and women.

The Monetary Authority's own statistics paint a trend that is of concern. We observed that loans to the commercial private sector decreased from \$755M at the end of 2007 to \$679M at the end of 2018. Unfortunately, while businesses were able to decrease their overall level of indebtedness we couldn't help but notice that loans to households increased from just under \$1.3B in 2007 to almost \$2.2B at the end of 2018. Simply put, we are becoming a population of debtors and it is important that we look at ways to reduce the cost of borrowing and increase the disposable income of our people.

We believe that for our islands to be successful we will need a healthy and educated population – two areas that this Cabinet has failed to adequately address. Over the last 10 years, successive Cabinets have proven that they cannot manage the basic functions expected of a government with regards to health and education. While I was grateful for the recent report by the Auditor General and her team, where they examined our education

system, the findings confirmed what we already knew. There is no grand plan to deliver this vital service to our children and our country.

On the subject of healthcare, the Premier has admitted the failing of his administration to adequately address this issue. While I welcome the Premier's admission of the failure of his government, it still does not address the problem that many Caymanians are still without adequate health insurance and many Caymanians are retiring with inadequate health insurance at the time in their lives when they need it the most.

During this time we have also been provided with another example of fundamental mismanagement in the form of the collection (or non-collection) of garbage. Collection has reduced from twice per week, to once per week, to, you guess the week.

The Cabinet's inability to manage our economy has also manifested itself in unprecedented traffic problems that have resulted in major loss of productivity in our service base economy. There have been numerous studies conducted on the adverse long term effect of people stuck in traffic. While we acknowledge the efforts of the men and women of the Royal Cayman Islands Police Service in helping to alleviate the traffic congestion in the short term, their efforts need to be bolstered by the development and implementation of a long term strategy to deal with this vexing issue.

We are also asking that the Cabinet use the full resources of the Government that they manage on a day to day basis and prioritize the development and implementation of a National Strategic Plan to prepare the Cayman Islands for any potential changes in the global economy, our education system, our healthcare system and our infrastructure. Most importantly, our people must be prepared for these eventualities. As such my colleagues and I on the other side of the aisle are prepared to work with the Government on the development of such a plan.

It cannot be disputed that the Cayman Islands has been one of the most welcoming countries in the world, it is also true that there are few generational families that have not been influenced by the migrant community. That is the genesis of all cultural evolution. We have always endeavored to treat everyone who comes to our shores with respect and courtesy. However, seeds of division have been sown and are taking root causing many Caymanians to feel that their cultural values and individual good nature are being encroached upon and that they are being marginalized. As I said in my Christmas message, to see Caymanians of all walks of life and residents alike stand together in the face of fierce opposition on matters that affect the future gives me hope that we have turned the corner and will work as ONE PEOPLE for ONE CAYMAN.

We on the Opposition bench have also subscribed to the view that one of the secrets of our Caymanian success story hasn't been immigration **but rather integration**. There are many nationalities that have come to our shores over the last half century that have added to and enhanced the uniqueness of the Cayman Islands through their talents, food, and music. Their

ability to integrate and assimilate within our society has played a vital role in our development and we will remain eternally grateful for their contributions. It is in this light that we call on all Caymanians and residents to reject those within our society, who for their own selfish gains, would disrupt the harmony and tranquility of our islands. Additionally, there are a small few amongst us who are engaging in discriminatory, racist and prejudicial behavior towards Caymanians and residents and I encourage them to abandon their beliefs of superiority as we are all God's children and must find a way to live together in peace and harmony to ensure the continued success of our islands. I am reminded of The Eagles song "The Last Resort" where they sang,

"There is no more new frontier, we have got to make here."

I agree!

As we enter this New Year, this new decade, let us strive to take advantage of the opportunities that are before us. Let us strive to be healthy, wealthy, and prosperous. But more importantly, let us strive to be better people, working as one...for a better Cayman.

God bless you all.