

Office of the Opposition For Immediate Release

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Date: February 18, 2019

Editors: Please see links to photos of the Hon. Ezzard Miller, attached below.

Opposition Raises Concerns about Overseas Aviation Recruitment: Calls for Immediate Local Recruitment and Training Drive

The Leader of the Opposition the Hon. Ezzard Miller has expressed “deep concern” over currently progressing overseas recruitment of a relatively large batch of air traffic controllers (ATCs), pending award of two-year contracts by the Cayman Islands Airports Authority (CIAA).

Mr. Miller has called for a review of the recruitment plan, and the withdrawal and replacement of the two-year contracts with temporary employment terms. That adjustment would facilitate the launch of a recruitment and training drive to enable Caymanians to replace the selected incoming overseas officers as soon as possible, the Leader of the Opposition said.

According to sources, the overseas recruitment drive is seeking to increase the staff complement by more than 50%. This compares to a workload increase of 3.4% in aircraft movements in 2017.

Statistics for 2018 have not been published, but partial figures for the year suggest a similarly very minor increase for that year, while 2016 air traffic increased by approximately 1.8% and 2015 decreased by approximately 1%. (See statistics for international, domestic and private aircraft movements at <https://www.caymanairports.com/ceos-welcome/statistics/>; note that Cayman Brac’s 2017 figures were unavailable on the online data.)

“Based on these figures, aircraft movements for 2016, 2017 and 2018 combined should not exceed 10%,” Mr. Miller said, “still not significant enough to warrant increasing the staff complement by more than 50%.”

Meanwhile, the CIAA advertisement posted on CaribbeanJobs.com specifies that the vacancies are due to increases in local air traffic. The Leader of the Opposition said that sources confirm also that the CAACI (Civil Aviation Authority of the Cayman Islands) had also identified the need for the additional officers in its recent annual inspection and report.

“The large disparity in ratio of aircraft movements and staffing numbers makes the recruitment of such a large number of new air traffic controllers highly suspect,” Mr. Miller said. “On the face of it, this just does not seem justifiable, especially as it is very likely to place these jobs ultimately out of reach of Caymanians.”

In addition, Mr. Miller said, the CIAA CaribbeanJobs.com advertisement, which specified a closing date of January 31, 2019, noted that “candidates can expect to be offered a two-year contract initially”. The ad also listed benefits that include “a generous competency & performance-based Learning and Development Plan for eligible employees in established roles,” Mr. Miller said.

“Dangling these carrots” troubled him, the Leader of the Opposition said, “As the usual pattern is that overseas recruits, especially for government posts, take root and eventually become absorbed on a permanent basis,” Mr. Miller said. “This will ultimately block opportunities for Caymanians.”

Continuing, the Leader of the Opposition said: “Given where we are at present, the very least that I would expect is that, in conjunction with reviewing the recruitment plan and withdrawing and replacing two-year contracts with temporary arrangements, a local recruitment drive be initiated as soon as possible, along with a plan for formal and continuing on-the-job training for local recruits.”

He noted that Caymanian ATC recruits can be brought to full professional standing within one year: The CIAA’s normal arrangement for the professional preparation of ATCs is an initial nine-month professional programme offered in Trinidad and Tobago.

“In conjunction with this drive for local recruitment and training, the terms of employment of the necessary number of overseas recruits should be converted to secondments” (that is, detachment from their regular organizations to assume the temporary local assignment). “They definitely should not be offered two-year contracts that could be and often are never-ending,” Mr. Miller said.

“Once our local officers are trained, the secondments of those overseas recruits with training officer ratings could be extended as required,” Mr. Miller said, noting that the advertisement does indicate that “An on-the-job Training Instructor rating would be advantageous.”

The Leader of the Opposition noted that on taking up posts in Cayman the overseas recruits will need to be initiated into local laws, policies, procedures and operations in order to ensure maintenance of optimal aviation safety standards.

“It is ironic and totally unacceptable that rather than training our own people we are seeking to invest in the initiation and further training of an influx of new controllers,” he said, adding: “It never fails to astonish me how short-sighted we continue to be, to our people’s detriment.”

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Editor’s note: The staffing of air traffic operations falls under the auspices of the Cayman Islands Airports Authority (CIAA), while the Civil Aviation Authority of the Cayman Islands (CAACI) is the regulatory authority governing operations.

Photo links: The Hon. Ezzard Miller

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