



OFFICE OF THE
PREMIER
CAYMAN ISLANDS GOVERNMENT

2020 New Year's Message

By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA

Happy New Year fellow Caymanians, residents and visitors!

This past year has been an eventful one for our Islands. From the ongoing Celebrate Cayman events to the popular Kaaboo music festival and the very successful Royal visit, there has been much to celebrate this past year. As a country and a people, we also have much to be thankful for as we say goodbye to 2019 and welcome 2020.

I am thankful that we have gone through another year safe from hurricanes. Unfortunately, some in our region were not so lucky. Hurricane Dorian, a dangerous category 5 storm caused

much devastation in the Bahamas. As we have done in previous years, our national carrier Cayman Airways assisted with flying needed relief medical supplies into Nassau. We also assisted with the use of our RCIPS helicopter and crew to help evacuate victims stranded in remote areas and to deliver food and supplies to those in need.

The resources we have available to us in terms of Cayman Airways, our helicopters, uniformed officers, and personnel trained in hazard management are vital to our safety and security but are also valuable resources for our neighbours in times of need. This is proof again of the increasingly important role the Cayman Islands is now playing in the region and is something that I know all Caymanians are proud of.

I believe that the Cayman Islands Regiment, once up and running, will be another source of pride for Caymanians and an important resource to our islands and to our neighbours.

We can also be proud of an economy that is continuing to grow from strength to strength with businesses, large and small, across all sectors performing well. Because of our buoyant economy, more Caymanians are in work and in 2019 we achieved the lowest Caymanian unemployment rate 4.8% in over a decade.

The economic prosperity that these Cayman Islands have built and enjoyed over the decades, including during the two Administrations that I have had the honour to lead, is a great achievement and one that all of us can be proud of because we built it together through our willingness to innovate and the entrepreneurial spirit that defines Caymanians.

It is up to us as Government, business and individuals, to maintain that economic prosperity. In so doing we will protect our progress as a country, our political and financial stability, and our social cohesion that is so important. All of this has been hard won

over many decades but can be easily lost should we take it for granted.

However, as we have also seen over the decades, a growing economy comes with challenges - these days that includes traffic woes. In 2020, the National Roads Authority will continue working to smooth traffic flows at critical junctions and to increase capacity. These improvements once completed will help bring relief to commuters as we reduce congestion.

In the New Year work will also begin on determining the best solution for an improved, fit for purpose, public transport system that will negate the need for the growing number of cars on our roads.

Also to be completed in the New Year are the Constitution reforms approved by the UK, and debated and passed in the Legislative Assembly in early December. I am grateful for the way my colleagues on the Government and Opposition benches

united to pass these important reforms ahead of the December 12th UK election.

These reforms will provide us with increased autonomy and underscore our right to manage our own affairs without undue interference by the UK. They also mark the continued acknowledgement by Her Majesty's Government that the Cayman Islands has developed as a mature, self-governing democracy.

These constitutional changes come as we continue the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of our first written Constitution in 2020 when we gather at Heroes Square at the end of January to celebrate National Heroes Day. This year we will honour the men and women involved in shaping that first Constitution.

There are other important constitutional matters to be settled in early 2020 when our Legislative Assembly must turn its attention to the issue of 'same-sex partnerships' and our Courts consider

the Judicial Review on the People-Initiated Referendum on the cruise berthing and cargo port project.

Both issues have proven to be divisive ones. I hope that whatever the outcome on each that we all accept the decisions and come together as Caymanians and residents and continue the work to build and grow our Islands for the benefit of all our people - not just the privileged. A more just society is, after all, a better society.

Regarding 'same sex partnerships' as I have said previously it is important that legislators determine the best way forward for our Islands and find a solution that works for Caymanians. If we abrogate our responsibility to do so, we must accept that the UK will legislate for these islands as the Court of Appeal has suggested they do. That would be the worst possible result for these Islands, not just with regard to same-sex partnerships, but more generally.

I remain confident that the cruise berthing and enhanced cargo dock project is supported by most Caymanians and that once the referendum is over, we can continue the work to move that project forward.

If I am wrong and most of the electorate decide at the referendum that they want to see the cruise berthing and cargo enhancement project halted then the project will be stopped and the Government will accept that result.

But if I am right that most people support the project, and so the 'No vote' fails to reach the required threshold, then I call on those opposing the Government's case to accept the result for the project to go ahead.

This does not mean that the day after the referendum there will be dredging in George Town Harbour. Instead, the work to determine how best to mitigate the environmental concerns will continue.

What I hope is that those opposed will work with us on the ambitious programme of environmental mitigation that the government has from the start insisted on as part of the project.

Cayman will get a better result if we can come together to work for the benefit of our Islands. It is only by continuing to work together that we can ensure our future success.

As Cayman continues to grow and to thrive, we must ensure that no Caymanian is left behind. For that reason, in the new budget, the government has continued to prioritize help and support for the most vulnerable members of our community.

This New Year begins with good news for elderly seafarers, veterans, those in need of financial assistance, and some long-serving civil service pensioners who will all again see their monthly income rise in January from \$750 a month to \$850 a month. We plan a similar further increase for January 2021. In the lifetime of my Administration, we will have increased the

incomes of over 2,000 of Cayman's most vulnerable and hard-pressed households by at least 73%.

We are also providing additional support for Cayman's seniors by reducing or waiving duties on a range of items for those aged 65 and older. Through these measures, many of our seniors will have a little more money in their pockets at the end of each month.

Also going into effect in January is a 5% cost-of-living salary increase for civil servants in well-deserved recognition of their hard work and dedication to public service. It also recognises that over the past year food, housing and utilities have gotten more expensive. This salary increase will benefit the many Caymanian families in our civil service who work hard to teach our children, nurse our sick, keep us safe and perform many valued services needed to keep our country running.

I expect that this cost-of-living salary increase should also spur private sector employers to stimulate wage growth elsewhere in the economy. If businesses are profiting from this booming economy, then they should share that benefit with their employees – the backbone of a business.

This coming year will also see the extension of the government's scheme to help first-time Caymanian home owners so that the first \$400,000 of the purchase price of a new first home will be free of stamp duty. That amounts to a saving of \$30,000 for many young Caymanian families. This is a start but more work will be done in 2020 to address the need for affordable housing solutions across all communities.

This unity Government has shown our intention and our ability to complete the work we promised to do, including completing the key infrastructure projects we started.

The New Year will see 'capping' begin on the George Town Landfill. This is an important first step in ending Cayman's unsustainable reliance on the existing unlined landfill. Instead, we will see increased recycling, as well as creating energy from our garbage with the construction of a modern waste-to-energy plant.

The coming year will also see progress being made in East End on the long-term mental health facility, which we expect to open in the second quarter of 2021.

Works will also be visible at John Gray High School, Bodden Town Primary School and the new Sunrise Adult Training Facility. And work will also continue on modernising our airport and on the George Town Revitalisation initiative.

All of these are possible because of our strong economy.

I believe in a strong and prosperous future for Cayman. I have worked toward that all my political life. I have confidence in the

vision, strength and fortitude of the people of our Islands and in our ability, if we work together, to build that future.

The coming year will undoubtedly also bring plenty of challenges. However, if we face 2020 with our ambition for our country renewed; with our support for each other steadfast; and with our faith in God unswerving, then this will also be a year of continuing opportunity for Cayman as a nation and for Caymanians as a people.

On behalf of my Government, and from my family to yours, I wish each of you a very Happy, Healthy, Peaceful and Prosperous New Year. May God continue to find favour with our beloved Cayman Isles.

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