

11 December, 2020

Statement by Hon Moses Kirkconnell,
Deputy Premier and Minister for District Administration,
Tourism and Transport

Tourism Stipend Programme for Displaced Employees

Mister Speaker, 2020 has been a difficult year on many levels, particularly for those who rely on tourists for their income. As long as our borders remain closed, and the flights to our shores are limited to repatriation purposes only, the ability to make a living from tourism has been reduced.

With the agreement of my colleagues in Caucus and Cabinet, the Ministry of Tourism initially funded stipends of \$600 in April, when it was still unclear how long the pandemic would last, the Ministry then funded payments of \$1000 per month.

As the pandemic continued, the stipend programme was extended further to September 2020. Displaced workers who had no other means of income were encouraged to register and the number of verified participants increased as a result.

In mid-October during the last Finance Committee proceedings, supplementary funding in the amount of CI\$9M was approved to continue the programme for three more months, from October through to the end of the year.

Today, I am pleased to confirm that the stipend payments for December were processed yesterday, (10th December) for 2,889 recipients, this should be in their accounts today.

I trust that this assistance will help to ensure that Christmas is a little brighter for our tourism workers, and will ease some of the pressure being felt due to the absence of visitors.

From March 2020 to date, government has granted over CI\$15.6M in the tourism stipend programme to help bridge the gap for our workers until tourism can resume. I am proud to be part of a government that had the foresight and determination to put funds aside for a rainy day, and is using those savings to provide a direct benefit to its people.

Since we are not yet at the stage where we can safely reopen our borders to tourists, I am pleased to confirm that the Ministry will be extending the stipend payments for an additional six months, from January to June 2021, which we estimate will be another \$18M.

I am personally very thankful to my colleagues in Government who have from the beginning of the pandemic, continued to support my Ministry's efforts to assist our tourism workers through the stipend programme.

Here in Cayman, we are blessed to be living in a relatively safe bubble, going about our business as normal, due to the

immediate and severe action taken by this government in the early days of the crisis, to protect our citizens.

But beyond our borders, it is a very different story.

As we speak, many of our source market cities are re-entering lockdowns or renewing restrictions to try to curtail the virus's spread. This paints a bleak picture in terms of when we will likely be able to bring back tourism.

But there is good reason on the horizon to be optimistic.

Yesterday, the Hon Premier announced Cabinet's approval of our National COVID-19 vaccination plan, and he confirmed that our first supplies of vaccines are expected to arrive on Island in early January 2021.

The ability to be immunized against this highly contagious virus is the game-changing equalizer the world has been waiting for.

Moreover, having a vaccine will allow us to take the first step on the road towards safely rebuilding our tourism industry.

This reassuring news will help to pave the way for our borders to safely reopen and visitors to return to our shores, restoring gainful employment to thousands of Caymanians. I know there are many within the tourism and hospitality sectors that work hard to provide a Caymankind experience to visitors, and are looking forward to getting back to work.

In the meantime, while the processes under the National COVID-19 vaccination plan are being implemented, this government will continue doing everything possible to support our tourism industry workers.

Thankyou Mister Speaker.

ENDS