

## **Notes for Fred Mitchell MP**

Amendments to the Parliamentary Elections Act to permit voting in the Caribbean and for Overseas Election Monitors

House of Assembly

Nassau

25<sup>th</sup> January 2012

### ***CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY***

First, like to offer my condolences to the family of Sir Clifford Darling.

In speaking about him I said in this place that he is an example of the social mobility in our country that was possible in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was one of the engineers of the quiet revolution of 1967. We owe him a debt of gratitude.

I wish to extend condolences to our friends in the PNP in Jamaica on the passing of the late Dudley Thompson who was a friend of The Bahamas. Worked here as a lawyer and was a soldier in the army for majority rule. He is a former minister of national security in Jamaica and was part of the defence team for Jomo Kenyatta in the struggle against the British colonial government.

Express my concern for Patrick Manning, a friend of The Bahamas, the former Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago who suffered a stroke two days ago in Port of Spain and is now in intensive care in hospital. We wish him well. Our party has sent our best wishes to his wife and family.

On Monday, the Member who has responsibility for calling elections said from his seat that there would plenty meetings of the House of Assembly, that he wants the PLP to spend all their money.

This is what we have come too, national clowning in the face of serious times.

I was canvassing my area and in the most well to do part of the constituency, I had the second experience in this campaign of sitting in darkness because the power is off.

To add insult to injury there was no water.

These folk are going to the stand pipe in Fox Hill every morning to collect water.

No one in the House is working. They have a house that is free and clear of the bank's lien but they live in darkness. Total bill \$6,700.

Today, I see where the Head of BEC is saying that he plans to ask for a rate increase.

Last night, another house: bill \$1200 dollars. No one working in the home. Power is still on but they expect that any day the grim reaper from BEC will come and disconnect the power.

Talking to young people. Serious young people, they ask the question what is in this society for them. Denied a job. Denied adequate education opportunities. You still have to know someone to get somewhere is what they think. Then I contrast that to the fun and jokes in this place.

The difficulty one has is you have no idea from day to day with this administration, a one man band, of whether you are dealing with Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde.

When this Parliamentary Elections Act was first debated, this member, this Opposition made the point that the students in Jamaica and the Caribbean were not accommodated.

But no, we were told that is as far as he was going to go. Hard headed, pig headed. Just hates to get a suggestion from the other side.

And what I mean by Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde is that you can have this bi-polar approach to public policy within the drop of a hat, the twinkling of an eye. When we were last hear as the bill was being introduced we witnessed it.

One suggestion was ushered from the Opposition about additional areas in the bill that needed to be amended, the Member said that he only intended to do what the bill before us now says. So that we suppose was that.

Only a few minutes later, the member got to his feet to say that if Members opposite have suggestions then he would be happy to have them. So who are we dealing with Dr. Jekyll or Mr. Hyde.

The point is the amendments are innocuous having conceded that we support overseas voting. There is of course no reason why the overseas voting should not be extended to those in the private sector who are posted overseas. No logical distinction. But maybe we are dealing with Dr. Jekyll on that one.

And since we are to have many more meetings of the House of Assembly, don't be surprised if we are rushed back in here with yet another amendment or amendments.

My concern remains the student community in Halifax which I believe is as substantial as the community in Jamaica with at least three major universities St. Mary's, Dalhousie and Arcadia for Bahamian students in fairly large numbers.

Halifax is three hours or so away by jet from Ottawa and two hours or so by jet from Toronto.

My other concern is the election monitoring process. I am saying again that there is a need for the state to provide the resources for the political parties to supply election agents for the voting in these areas.

Then there is election monitoring by international observers. I support that as well, having been the Chair of an election monitoring team. I know how useful this can be in the process of fair, accountable and transparent voting.

In the last observations I made in Cameroon, there was the question of the disproportionate use of the mechanisms of the state to help the political party in power.

That is certainly an observation that must be made here in advance.

I have had the advantage of discussing with my honourable friend the Member for Ft. Charlotte his views on this bill and I support and adopt his position.

It is now time though for the elections to be held. Delay is harming the country. Promotions for the police and the defence force, roads being patched up frantically and school names a changing faster than you can shake a stick at them. But I think it is all for nothing.

The issue is jobs and the economy. The issue is what are you doing about crime. I was thinking on this issue that it is getting ever closer to me.

Two nights ago, in the complex in which I live someone broke into one of the flats and was choking a female and screams spread throughout the neighbourhood at four in the morning. The assailant got away. The police were called but took what seemed to be an eternity to come and chances are nothing can be done to solve it.

On Christmas morning, as I was running at 4 a.m. as I neared a curve on the front street, I heard what sounded like four or five gun shots ring out. As I approached, a vehicle was spun around in the road and young woman was screaming out that the person in the car must stop playing and wake up, why don't you wake up she said. I retreated. I read the next morning that young BEC worker had been shot in his car and died that morning.

I remember that a Minister of the government was murdered during an election campaign.

I think of the warnings that constituents give us as we canvass the streets in the dark in Nassau, that we must be careful.

I think how people think that politicians are rich and have money and therefore are targets for the uninitiated. I thought it was so telling that photograph of the Rt. Honourable Prime Minister surrounded by policemen just to walk to the Zion Baptist Church last week.

So when this election is called this is backdrop of that election: not leadership or trust, but crime and unemployment. Crime and unemployment. The only question the Bahamian voter needs to ask themselves is: are you better off than you were five years ago.

Has Mr. Decisiveness delivered? And if he has what has he delivered. Layoffs, mortgage foreclosures, withdrawal from private school, your car being repossessed. Yes indeed quite a decisive legacy. And if you want more of that, then your choice is clear vote for the Free National Movement.

As for me and my House, we are voting PLP. All the way!

end