

CAYMAN ISLANDS

GOVERNMENT

Statement to the Legislative Assembly

Response to the Leader of the Opposition Regarding Premier's Support of OMOV/SMC

Delivered Friday, 22 May, 2015

Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA

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Hon Premier's Support of OMOV/SMC

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

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Madam Speaker, I wish to provide a response to the Leader of the Opposition with regard to his comments during his debate this past Wednesday, where he stated as if it were fact, that I do not support the electoral reform now underway and which was requested by myself on behalf of my Government and the majority of Members of this Honorable House.

Indeed Madam Speaker he went so far as to say I should stand side by side with him and oppose the electoral reform process and the move to OMOV & SMC.

There is an ancient saying Madam Speaker that goes like this:

"Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth."

The Leader of the Opposition understands full well that if he can repeat something enough times, however far from the facts he is straying, there will be those who may start to believe him; and if unchallenged then myth can be thought of as fact.

But his wandering around the facts will not go unchallenged and I will return both him, as well as the media who report these myths, to the facts.

I will start Madam Speaker by reminding the Leader of the Opposition that OMOV/SMC has been a position of the Peoples Progressive Movement for many years. It was the PPM that lead the charge for this during the UDP's first term in Office. It was also the PPM who ensured that the provision to bring about electoral reform was included in the new Constitution; as were

several other protections that are now taken for granted – including limiting the Premier to two consecutive terms in that office; and the ability to initiate a People's Referendum. All of these we fought tooth and nail with the UDP on - and because we succeeded this country is the better for it today Madam Speaker.

So on this issue I and my Progressive colleagues, past and present, are on solid ground Madam Speaker.

In more recent times I helped to draft the OMOV/SMC Referendum Petition and was amongst the very first to sign it. I, together with the Progressives, worked to assist the OMOV movement and indeed hosted a strategy weekend where we brought in individuals knowledgeable in such things to give advice on how to move this forward and to organize at the grass roots level so as to have a chance with a People Initiated Referendum being successful.

And it was the Progressives Madam Speaker and our Members who worked on the ground prior to the UDP hijacked OMOV/SMC

referendum polling day to bring out the troops and get people to voting stations.

So yes we played our part over many years in promoting OMOV/SMC. But despite this Madam Speaker, over time I and others did hear from some individuals in the public their concerns around having constituencies that are deemed too small and that could lead to individuals getting elected on a few hundred votes. That concern is a real one Madam Speaker, and I have to say that this needs to be recognized. But a concern is not a self-fulfilling prophecy – but a concern is worth noting.

And so because of this concern it is true Madam Speaker that in February 2014, in response to a Private Members motion, that I suggested that myself and the Government had heard these concerns and suggested support for a hybrid system that included OMOV & SMC – with a fewer number of single member constituencies but ones with a larger number of constituents; combined with the concept of “At Large Candidates” where a

certain number of individuals, say three or four, would be elected on a national or ‘at large’ basis.

I gave my reasons at the time – namely to allow for the ability to have individuals elected at the ‘local, single member constituency level’ with each elector having one vote, and to then allow for Candidates to run and be elected on a National level, but also based on the electorate voting once for the ‘at large’ candidate of their choice. The Hansards of February 26, 2014 will show that I stated:

“The benefit and attraction of that is that it provides a balance where constituency interests get properly represented but also you wind up with a cadre or category of representative in your Legislative Assembly that is less concerned about parochial constituency issues, having been elected on a national mandate, and are then able to put forward a perspective, which is not limited in the way that a representative from a very small constituency would be.”

I went on to add that:

"…we are absolutely committed to equality of franchise and to having a system in place which represents that in time for the 2017 elections."

I did go on to re-iterate that perhaps we should consider a hybrid system but at no time did I ever indicate that I did not support OMOV or SMC. But I added that this is a matter for the entire House and, indeed, more broadly, for the entire country to think about and to talk about.

In the months that ensued this option was discussed in the press and elsewhere and truth be told the proposed hybrid "at large candidate" option did not seem to find wide favour in the country and there remained a strong preference in many quarters for strict OMOV/SMC. So the idea of 'at large candidates" was dropped.

Madam Speaker, I will add that I also said early last year, that a mere eight months after taking office, this Government's focus was on improving the economy, improving peoples lives, and improving Government finances – these over and above any considerations regarding electoral reform.

There are some who will pretend that we said during the Campaign that electoral reform was our first priority – but this would be very untrue Madam Speaker. We did say that it would be introduced in good time for the elections - but the economy and Government finances had to be the focus and we are where we are today, in such a good position, because of this disciplined and sensible focus.

Hence, Madam Speaker, in September last year, after charting the course for improved Government finances and with the 2014/2015 budget approved, we felt comfortable in announcing that the time had come to move forward on the reform process, and that in doing so we in the Progressives stuck to the position

that we have held for a decade – to introduce OMOV & SMC. I would add that the Independent Members of Government Madam Speaker had previous to that also confirmed their support in a letter to the press. So in my Caucus Madam Speaker we had full support to progress the issue. And of course we know that the two members from the Eastern Districts also supported it Madam Speaker.

And so on behalf of the Government on September 10, 2014, I presented a motion to ask this Honorable House to consider moving to OMOV/SMC. Madam Speaker the Resolve Clauses in that motion read as follows.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT: the Legislative Assembly agrees that the Governor should be invited, in accordance with section 88 of the Constitution, to appoint an Electoral Boundary Commission;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT: following the making of an Order by the Governor, pursuant to section 89(6) of

the Constitution, for the determination of the boundaries of the electoral districts of the Cayman Islands, the Government thereafter submits to the Legislative Assembly a Bill to make the necessary amendments to the Elections Law (2013 Revision) in accordance with the said Order to enable the establishment of single member electoral districts in the Cayman Islands, with each elector having one vote;

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT: the process be completed in good time so as to ensure that the General Elections due in 2017 are conducted on the basis of single member electoral districts with each elector having one vote."

That motion Madam Speaker, as everyone in this House knows, was passed by an overwhelming majority, and the Governor was asked to appoint an Electoral Boundary Commission. That Commission is now a long ways down the track and proposes to deliver its report in the next few months.

Apparently the Leader of the Opposition is now gravely concerned at the prospect of facing an election based on single member districts. I feel sorry for him but that is a reality to which he must reconcile himself.

As I said during my Policy Statement contribution – this Government is one that has a plan and is disciplined and is delivering on that plan.

We are delivering on improving the economy.

We are delivering on restoring stability and confidence.

We are delivering on a national minimum wage.

And I can reassure the Leader of the Opposition and the Country that we are also delivering on our plan for electoral reform. And no amount of myth making by the Leader of the Opposition or his allies in the press will change that fact.

Thank you Madam Speaker.