



STATEMENT BY HON ALDEN MCLAUGHLIN

MEETING OF LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY IN CAYMAN BRAC

Madam Speaker it is with great pride that I rise to address this honourable house on this very special and historic occasion as we hold a meeting of the Legislative Assembly in the Aston Ratty Civic Centre here in Cayman Brac. The last such meeting was held in 2003, and with both you Madam Speaker and my dear friend, the Honourable Deputy Premier both hailing from Cayman Brac, we felt that it was again a most fitting occasion to return to Cayman Brac.

I wish to welcome the people of Cayman Brac to this meeting today and thank them for their warm welcome and excellent hospitality. The District Administration Office has worked closely with the Legislative Assembly staff to ensure that all arrangements were in place and for this I am sure I speak on behalf of all honourable members when I say thank you from the bottom of my heart for your thoughtfulness and care.

I take great satisfaction in living in a country that has become a global leader in the financial services industry, yet remains small enough that we can on rare occasions bring the business of Parliament to the people who do not live on the main Island. And to think that this can be done at little more than the cost of an airfare of \$125 on our national carrier Cayman Airways, which remains the only direct connection to these islands, and a few nights stay at two local hotels that are vital to the sustainability of this fragile economy. This is a small cost in the grand scheme of things (which we will happily quantify and publish in the near future), but a benefit that can be measured in terms of real direct economic impact on Cayman Brac.

But let us, Madam Speaker, pause for a moment and consider the other immeasurable benefits of hosting this meeting here. The people of Cayman Brac have always had to deal with the challenges of distance and separation.

The presence of the many Cayman Brac residents who have come to witness this rare occurrence bears testament to the importance of us making the extra effort to hold this meeting here today. When I look at the beautiful faces of the school children who are present, knowing that they now have the ability to see firsthand what they have only read about or discussed in class, it should serve as a reminder for all of us why we got

into public service to begin with: to leave a legacy for our next generation of leaders. Who knows if sitting in this audience today is a future Premier, Speaker, Minister, Opposition Member, Representative of Cayman Brac or community leader? School children in Grand Cayman enjoy the privilege of hopping on a bus and attending to a meeting of Parliament. Our students in Cayman Brac quite simply do not have convenient access to such a privilege.

Radio Cayman has, for many years, re-broadcast proceedings of the LA and this has been the only direct connection for the people of Cayman Brac. While we in Grand Cayman have enjoyed the advent of live and re-broadcasted LA proceedings being televised on CIGTV, it is not yet broadcast over the air to all the people of Grand Cayman and CIGTV is not available at all to any residents of Cayman Brac. So the average Cayman Bracker has never seen their Legislative Assembly at work. While satirists will undoubtedly muse at whether they are missing much, it is easy to make light of and take for granted a privilege that others have never enjoyed.

So Madam Speaker, let there be no doubt; neither I, nor my government or any right thinking member of this House has any regrets for doing what was possible and so easily achievable, especially when it means so much to the people of Cayman Brac.

Madam Speaker, it is painfully obvious that Cayman Brac is at a crossroads. Population figures are dwindling. Businesses are struggling. There still remains a number of people from Grand Cayman who are choosing to retire in Cayman Brac, but what can be said for the future of those who are from here? While some of our most successful students hail from Cayman Brac, most of them have little to no prospects for finding work here in Cayman Brac, so there is a constant brain drain.

The Government recognises the extremely fragile situation that exists and has set about working with the people of Cayman Brac to address this critical state of affairs.

So let me tell you about some of our successes.

Those of you who have travelled to the Cayman Brac Sports Complex will see that changing rooms are being built, bleachers have been put in place and the perimeter fence is up. It is envisioned that the playfield will become part of the overall Sports Tourism product of the Cayman Islands. Not too long ago CONCACAF hosted a friendly football match at the Sports Complex between the Cayman Islands and Belize Under 15 boys. Working in conjunction with a benevolent benefactor, we have a new playground

near the play field that is attracting more and more young families each weekend.

We are growing our sports development programmes, including football, track and field, soccer, swimming and cricket.

We know that to help grow the economy of Cayman Brac and Little Cayman, we have to attract more visitors to these Islands. We are in the process of completing a hold baggage screening project, which means Cayman Airways will be able to fly directly to the United States, Jamaica and Cuba from Cayman Brac and vice versa once we have the ability to properly process international flights through the terminal. We are also looking to develop new airport facilities on Little Cayman.

As for employment, Government has created six more jobs for the Fire Service in the Sister Islands. We know that our firefighters have been working under extremely stressful situations here and on Grand Cayman. The Police Service has also taken possession of a patrol boat to help protect the waters off Cayman Brac and Little Cayman.

We are also looking to create and encourage back office jobs in the public and private sectors. Recently Cayman Airways opened a new ticket office and reservation centre on the Brac and expanded its cargo facility.

The call centre will not only bring new job opportunities to Cayman Brac, but it will also offer residents and customers dedicated and specialized services for their travel needs.

Cayman Airways is also looking to lease new, larger planes to service the commuter route between Cayman Brac and Grand Cayman. A business case is being produced for the planes and we hope they can be in service by September or October.

Those of you who were fortunate enough to attend the Agriculture Show on the Brac last month are aware of the new Agriculture Compound on the Bluff. Government is also looking to expand farm wells and agriculture programmes, including the Orchard.

In the realm of tourism, we are looking to develop safe harbour marinas, sports tourism, nature and family tourism and encourage the Sister Islands as destinations for weddings.

This is what the Government has been seeking to do. Yes, there will be controversy, debate and discussion; but there must be action. While we all hope to see more inward investment in Cayman Brac, there are some small things that people in the private sector can do. I wish to use this occasion to encourage more inter-island travel, staycations, private sector board

meetings and retreats over here in Cayman Brac and Little Cayman. Every little bit counts!

Madam Speaker it was only last month that I spent a few days here in the company of the Deputy Premier to see first-hand and discuss with the people of Cayman Brac their concerns. I cannot emphasize enough how important this was for me to do.

As I recognised earlier, Madam Speaker, Cayman Brac is at a crossroads. Coincidentally, we are now entering a new phase politically here in the Cayman Islands as we see a new generation of representatives taking up the mantle of leadership in the Cayman Islands. Therefore, by holding this meeting of the Legislative Assembly here in Cayman Brac, it also serves as an opportunity for Cayman Brackers to meet and have direct access to all members of this honourable House. Because, as we have debated for some time, no matter what electoral district we represent, we are one country, one people and Cayman Brac is just as an important part of the Cayman Islands as any of the districts in Grand Cayman.

So I encourage members to make themselves available to hear the voices and views of Cayman Brackers during our next few days here. That way, when we hold debates and discussions on matters that relate to Cayman Brac, we will have direct information from the people whose futures our decisions directly impact.

To this end, I look forward to seeing Cayman Brackers at the Brac Reef hotel starting at 6:30 tonight as we hold a small reception and I encourage all Honourable members to attend. Let us put our hands and hearts together to address the needs of Cayman Brac.

Madam Speaker, as I close, I am grateful to be a part of history. This simple act of holding a meeting of the Legislative Assembly in Cayman Brac took some planning and organising, but it means more to the people of Cayman Brac than any of us can ever quantify. While it has cost us very little, it has created numerous benefits for the people of Cayman Brac. It has afforded the people of Cayman Brac the opportunity to see their Parliament at work and it has afforded us the opportunity as their parliament to hear directly from them what their concerns are at this critical stage in their development.

But simply put, today is a day to honour our fellow Caymanians, the people of our Sister Islands - Cayman Brac and Little Cayman who are an invaluable part of our beloved Isles Cayman.