



Cayman Islands Government

STATEMENT TO

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

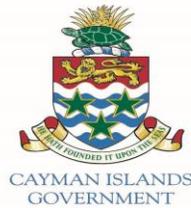
BY

HON. OSBOURNE V. BODDEN, JP

MINISTER FOR HEALTH, SPORTS,
YOUTH, AND CULTURE

27TH NOVEMBER, 2014





Statement by: Hon Osbourne V. Bodden, JP

Re: Cayman Thanksgiving

27th November, 2014

Madam Speaker, I rise to make a statement this morning in this Honourable Legislative Assembly in relation to a matter that is very near and dear to my heart, the area of Culture and specifically the promotion and protection of our Caymanian heritage.

Madam Speaker since 2011, a group of volunteers has been organising and promoting the celebration of Cayman Thanksgiving on the first Sunday in December to commemorate the official passage of the Atlantic hurricane season, which ends on 30th November. These efforts have continued to gain momentum as anyone who gives the concept of a Cayman Thanksgiving fair consideration is forced to acknowledge that there are few places in this world that have as much as we do as a community to be thankful for.



Therefore the setting aside of just one day per year, set against the backdrop of safely passing through another hurricane season, is a most fitting starting point for the celebration of Cayman Thanksgiving.

2014 is a significant year for the Cayman Islands as we mark 10 years since the passage of Hurricane Ivan and 5 years since the passage of Hurricane Paloma, two Hurricanes whose force and devastation forever changed the Cayman Islands. Such was the magnitude of Hurricane Ivan that we in Grand Cayman now measure time as either pre-Ivan or post-Ivan!

Madam Speaker, my colleagues in this Honourable House may recall that following the passage of Hurricane Ivan, I was a vocal proponent for us having some form of annual commemoration or thanksgiving to mark its passage. However with Paloma being as devastating to the people of Cayman Brac as Ivan was to the Island of Grand Cayman, I found myself thinking we would have to have two such commemorations.



Well Madam Speaker, I was more than delighted to learn of the efforts of this small group of Caymanians in 2011, who not only had the idea of creating a Cayman Thanksgiving but who also created a grassroots movement to introduce and create a new tradition which could be celebrated by everyone who lives in the Cayman Islands. And so, Madam Speaker, I am pleased to say that the Government has taken the view that the time has come for this grass roots movement to take the next step on its journey to becoming established as part of Caymanian culture by receiving the full and open support of the Government by having the first Sunday in December officially recognized and included on community calendars as Cayman Thanksgiving.

Madam Speaker, by celebrating Cayman Thanksgiving on the first Sunday in December each year, there is no requirement to create a public holiday on a weekday which would have an impact on the business community, employers, and schools. Sunday, for the most part, remains a day of rest in this community and many families have their only family meal for the week together on a Sunday. So gathering together on the first Sunday in December for a meal with extended family and friends is an easy concept to grasp.



Madam Speaker, I believe that Cayman Thanksgiving has many cultural benefits as families and friends are actively encouraged to gather together around a table to prepare a traditional Caymanian meal. Members of this Honourable House will be aware that there are many efforts underway to preserve Caymanian Heritage and Culture. These efforts have become ever more important and led by even more passionate individuals, because we all recognize that what we have known as Caymanian Heritage has the risk of disappearing if we do not take steps to preserve and promote it. One only has to open the newspaper on a Friday to count the number of elderly Caymanians each week who have left this world, taking with them knowledge and skills of various key aspects of our history and our very identity as Caymanians. It pains us all to our very core.

Madam Speaker, many Caymanians cannot build a catboat, sing four traditional songs, plait a thatch hat or bag, or even identify unique characteristics of Caymanian architecture. It would be fair to say that because many Caymanians cannot do these things with relative ease it leaves others, especially those who aren't from here and the uninitiated amongst us, to erroneously believe that we 'do not have any culture or real heritage of our own' and that there is nothing that is uniquely Caymanian.



However, Madam Speaker, while I am sure that my colleagues in this Honourable House will agree that we know such statements are not true, and in fact have been the cause of many an argument, the one aspect of our heritage which Caymanians can speak to with relative confidence is our food. Most Caymanians of any age can relate what key ingredients or dishes would be part of a Caymanian meal, and we can easily distinguish what is Caymanian and what isn't. Therefore, I believe that including the preparation and sharing of a Caymanian meal as part of the celebration of Cayman Thanksgiving is a new way to preserve and pass on our culinary history and traditions. Cayman Thanksgiving is an invitation to younger generations, and those who have made Cayman their home either temporarily or permanently, to learn how to prepare a traditional Caymanian meal.

Madam Speaker, our culinary traditions are so important to our identity as a people. No matter how modern and technologically advanced we become, for many of us there will never be anything as delightful as a local heavy cake, a fish rundown, or dare I say a pot of turtle stew.



When we think of what our food means to the next generation as a people, any of the Members of this Honourable House who have children who are away at school only have to think of the things our children beg us to cook for them upon their return to Cayman for school breaks and holidays. It is their way of re-connecting with their identity. While I never had the honour of going to sea, I have heard many a story of Caymanian seamen who were fortunate enough to sail with a Caymanian cook, oh what a blessing that was for them. In many ways, Madam Speaker, I believe our food is synonymous with who we are as a people.

I also believe, Madam Speaker, that Cayman Thanksgiving can be a simple means to start a new national conversation, bridging the generation gap and bringing families together to sit around a table and to discuss our food, culture and heritage. Caymanians are also actively encouraged to invite a non-Caymanian into their home to introduce them to Caymanian culture and to share a Caymanian meal with them (and possibly teach them how to make it). One of the most sacred rituals in human existence is sitting together and enjoying fellowship over a meal, and I think that embodying this ritual into our Cayman Thanksgiving is an integral part of achieving its goals.



From an Agricultural perspective Madam Speaker, a subject which I am well aware is close to your heart, Cayman Thanksgiving provides an additional boost to local farmers. A central theme of Cayman Thanksgiving meals is challenging us to use as much locally grown produce to prepare the meal. This concept has been taken up by many households as well as a growing number of Cayman Islands Tourism Association member restaurants who have produced Cayman themed menus using locally grown produce for Cayman Thanksgiving. These local restaurants give visitors and those who choose not to cook on that day options to celebrate their Thanksgiving in a local restaurant while bringing local farmers closer to local restaurants.

Madam Speaker, I ask Members to pause for a moment and consider the predicament we would have been in if either Hurricanes Ivan or Paloma had incapacitated our air and sea ports. We would be forced to survive off what was produced here. Madam Speaker, over the past nine years, we have seen a true revival of the Agriculture sector.

While many people are still unaware of how much can actually be grown and produced in the Cayman Islands, we are seeing an increasing awareness and I believe that Cayman Thanksgiving will help us in this area as well.



With official recognition, Cayman Thanksgiving has the potential to become a major celebration centred around Caymanian culture for years to come, and something that is observed by families and friends across the community as it becomes a part of the national calendar. From a Tourism perspective, Thanksgiving is the most popular holiday in both the United States and Canada, which are key tourism markets for the Cayman Islands. Visitors from these markets are obviously well aware of the significance of such a day and Madam Speaker I believe they will be intrigued by the opportunity to celebrate Thanksgiving "Cayman style."

Madam Speaker, I would like to briefly address any concerns that we are simply copying others. The truth of the matter is that many Caymanians have been celebrating American Thanksgiving for years, some without true knowledge of the reasons why Americans are celebrating. I take the view, Madam Speaker, that all traditions were born at some point in time and Cayman Thanksgiving is as Caymanian as it gets.

We as a community have been presented with an opportunity to create a new tradition which has real potential to be passed on to future generations of Caymanians.



Madam Speaker, today is a good day for the Cayman Islands. While Cayman Thanksgiving has enjoyed the support of Honourable Members of this Legislative Assembly since its first year in 2011, the time has now come to have Cayman Thanksgiving fully recognized and affixed to our national calendar albeit that this is not a public holiday. I am therefore happy to report to this Honourable House that Cabinet has approved the official recognition of the first Sunday in December of each year as “Cayman Thanksgiving” to mark the official passage of the Atlantic Hurricane Season. Madam Speaker, a new tradition, one that celebrates all things Caymanian, has been born.

In conclusion, I wish to thank members of the Cayman Thanksgiving Committee who have contributed over the past four years to sharing this concept with our Beloved Isles Cayman. It is my earnest hope that with the support of the Honourable House, and the people of the Cayman Islands, Cayman Thanksgiving will be a part of the cultural legacy which we leave for future generations.

Thank you Madam Speaker

