

**Statement by the Hon. Premier and Minister of Finance, Tourism &
Development
on Single Member Constituencies
for Legislative Assembly on
11 April, 2012**

Madam Speaker,

This Government has given significant consideration to the current national discussion on the issue of single member constituencies, against a background that this has been an issue of debate for more than a decade and much time and energy has been expended on it.

It is a very divisive issue and when combined with the politics that have been infused into the discussion, it has, and will create significant confusion in these Islands.

The Boundaries Commission says the following about Multimember Constituencies:

What are the benefits of the Multimember Districts/Constituencies? As defined within the 2010 Boundaries Commission Report, The advantages of the multimember districts may be summed up as follows:

- (1) They can more easily reflect administrative divisions or communities of interest within the country because there is flexibility with regard to the numbers of representatives per district and the size and geographic composition of the district;
- (2) They need not change boundaries, even if the population of a district increases or decreases, because the number of representatives elected from the district can be altered;
- (3) In a scenario of achieving proportional representation, they are preferred, although not all multimember district systems produce proportional representation for political parties; and
- (4) They tend to produce more balanced representation by encouraging the nomination of a diverse roster of candidates.

They also represent a better chance to have a connection with the ruling party.

The disadvantages of multimember districts are as follows:

- (1) They dilute the relationship between representatives and voters; and
- (2) They blur the accountability of individual representatives. End of quote.

Madam Speaker, it doesn't end there. Here are a few reasons why I feel that the adoption of Single Member Constituencies is not for us, and should not be implemented:

- (1) It will mean the possibility of increased demands on the country's limited resources, where each constituency will demand individual services and amenities at great expense.
- (2) People who were historically used to voting for and having multiple representatives to represent them, under the changed system would only have a single representative. So people would be put in a worse position; for most people who live in constituencies with 4-3-2- representatives – if they move to 1, their Franchise rights will be severely shrunken
- (3) It's divisive: It will be one of the most divisive paths for these islands, as it will divide our indigenous vote.
- (4) It will create deeply divided and insular constituencies
- (5) It will create vast expenses – needing 18 constituency offices, 18 Secretaries with associated resources.
- (6) With a different proposal from the Opposition for the Sister Islands – it will mean 1 Country, 2 systems – a different one for Cayman Brac and Little Cayman as against the single member district for Grand Cayman.

This only shows the hypocrisy of what is being proposed. The Sister Islands have said no to single member constituencies. So to appease the PPM's member of that district they want to give them something different. If the Opposition or anyone, thinks that Single Member Constituencies is so good for Grand Cayman, why then do they want something different for the Sister Islands?

Many other ramifications would follow, which the public is not now being shown.

My Government had previously made a commitment to hold a referendum on the issue at the same time as the next general election. However due to the deepening divide in the country caused by the way the Opposition, and the Independent Member from North Side, has used this issue, my Government feels it responsible to put this issue to the electors of this country. In our maturing democracy I feel that it's important that the public be given its full voice on this most important constitutional issue.

In this vein I am pleased to announce that the Government will hold a Referendum on the issue of Single Member Constituencies on 18th July, 2012.

Madam Speaker, our present electoral system has only improved over the years. We have a very high turnout of people voting.

- 1988 – 9455 people on the official register; 6210 people cast votes at the polls
- 1992 – 10,196 people on the official register; 8,346 people cast votes at the polls
- 1996 – 10,450 people on the official register; 8,872 people cast votes at the polls
- 2000 - 11,636 people on the official register; 8,872 people cast votes at the polls
- 2005 – 13,118 people on the official register; 10,330 people cast votes at the polls
- 2009 – 15,361 people on the official register; a total of 12,204 people cast votes at the polls

Madam Speaker, you will note from these figures that the number of people who cast votes has risen from 66% in 1988 to 80% in 2009.

My position is, if it's not broken – we shouldn't meddle with it.

And therefore, the Government will embark on a public education process on the proposal for single member constituencies which would be a significant change in a very important component of our historically strong and respected democracy.

I am optimistic that after the intelligent people of the Cayman Islands have made themselves fully knowledgeable and informed on the pros and cons of the various systems, as they have always done, they will make the right decision on this subject.

Thank you Madam Speaker.