

Media Release

CAYMAN ISLANDS YOUTH PARLIAMENTARIANS TAKE TOP SPOTS IN DEBATE AT TURKS & CAICOS CONFERENCE

GEORGE TOWN, 26th July 2023

The Cayman Islands' Youth Parliamentarians (YP) led both the Government and Opposition sides of the 16th Regional Youth Parliament held in Providenciales, Turks & Caicos Islands on Wednesday, 26th July.

Over twenty YPs from across the region participated in the lively debate, with the two Caymanian delegates having been selected to lead the top spots. Mr. Amani Ebanks was selected to be the Premier of the Government and led the Government Motion urging all leaders across the Caribbean, Americas, and the Atlantic, to engage the voices of the youth. Across the aisle, Mr. Alex Harris was selected to be the Leader of the Opposition and capably challenged the YP Government Motion.

“I was delighted and immensely proud to see Cayman’s YPs appointed to such prominent and well-earned positions,” said the Speaker, Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, who accompanied the YPs to the conference. “It was inspiring to hear them debate so passionately about how Parliaments can be more inclusive of the concerns collectively shared by the youth across the region.”

The YP debate was part of the 45th Annual Conference of the Caribbean, Americas and the Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA), a larger week-long conference highlighting various parliamentary concerns and best practices on the theme of resiliency. The debate functioned similarly to official Parliament debates and previous Youth Parliament debates. Members moved and seconded motions, prepared and delivered short speeches, and rose on Points of Order and Elucidation, all with the end goal of making the motion duly pass or fail.

Mr. Amani Ebanks, the Honourable YP Premier, addressed the House about the importance of empowering the youth, and involving them in the decision-making processes that shape their own lives and the future of the region. He referenced the poem ‘Our Deepest Fear’ by Marianne Williamson to touch on the fact that the youth doubt themselves. “Too often,” he said, “the visions and dreams of our youth stop at their doorstep or within the shores that they know; [...] our youths need to know and believe that their voices work.” Mr. Ebanks has served two terms in the Cayman Islands Youth Parliament, first as the Attorney General and subsequently as the Minister of Tourism and Transport.

Mr. Alex Harris, the Honourable YP Leader of the Opposition, delivered a passionate speech in which he professed the strength, empowerment, and involvement of the youth and critiqued the government for downplaying them. Mr. Harris, who won an award for best debater at the Cayman Islands’ YP

debate in March of this year, said that the government was “painting a narrative that today’s young people are helpless victims who simply cannot succeed without intervention.” He added that “our youth have never been anything but strong,” and suggested that the Government, instead of moving motions to include the youth, should simply take the initiative to include them. At the end of the debate, the motion to urge regional leaders to engage the voices of youth passed with nine “ayes” and seven “no’s”.

Mr. Christopher Saunders, MP, also attended the conference and witnessed the young debaters perform at the televised conference. “I am very pleased and very impressed with the performance and conduct of Alex and Amani,” he said. “They took the time to prepare and represented Cayman with poise, audacity, and professionalism, and it was my pleasure to watch these fine young men play such a leadership role in YP.” He added that he couldn’t recall “there ever being a situation where the leadership of both the Government and Opposition was from the same island.”

Ms. Nordra Walcott, Assistant Clerk for the Parliament, works closely with the YPs each year, overseeing the organisation of the programme and supporting the debaters as they develop their arguments. “I have worked with Messrs Ebanks and Harris in their preparation for the Regional YP,” said Ms. Walcott, “and I am immensely proud of them for debating the Government Motion so passionately, and for being dedicated, hard-working young Caymanians, lending their voices in advocating for youth and being leaders on both sides of the aisle.”

Hon. Ebanks-Wilks noted that more and more of Cayman’s capable young people will engage with politics and be encouraged to seek legislative representation if the age limit was increased. “A lot of the leaders I’ve spoken with have been discussing how to do more to promote our young leaders,” she shared. “As the Chair of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (Cayman Islands Branch) Youth Parliament organizing committee,” added Hon. Ebanks-Wilks, “this exercise has encouraged me to have further discussions with the committee to look at new ways of offering debating opportunities to our youth who no longer meet the age criteria of the YP programme.”





The Speaker noted that the Parliament frequently engages with past YPs, such as through internships. Mr. Jelani Hanson and Mr. Christopher Sanchez, who have each served two terms in the Cayman Islands YP, are both currently working at the Parliament, developing research and writing skills and learning the internal operations of parliamentary legislatures.

“The way to offer more opportunities for our future parliamentarians is through the YP programme,” the Speaker affirmed. “It provides them with enormous tools and skills to become engaged with their society, develop their network, and show them how to speak to the issues that matter most to our country.”

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<p>L-R: Amani Ebanks, Nordra Walcott, Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Alex Harris</p> <p>Photography credit: Romello Anarje</p>	<p>The Youth Parliamentarians at the 16th Regional Youth Parliament conference. Seated far left: Amani Ebanks. Seated far right: Alex Harris.</p> <p>Photography credit: Romello Anarje</p>	<p>L-R: Amani Ebanks, Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Alex Harris</p> <p>Photography credit: House of Parliament</p>
		
<p>Amani Ebanks</p> <p>Photography credit: Romello Anarje</p>	<p>Alex Harris</p> <p>Photography credit: Romello Anarje</p>	<p>L-R: Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Amani Ebanks, Alex Harris, Nordra Walcott</p> <p>Photography credit: House of Parliament</p>

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