



MEDIA ADVISORY – FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**YOUTH PARLIAMENTARIANS MEET ON 11TH MARCH TO DEBATE
IMMIGRATION & NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

GEORGE TOWN, 5th March 2024

Twenty-four youth, aged 14-19 years old, from ten schools across Cayman will have their voices heard on Commonwealth Day, Monday, 11th March, when they debate two Private Members’ Motions at the 17th Annual Youth Parliament.

Held in the Chamber of the House of Parliament from 10:30 a.m. – 3:30 p.m., the annual debate is a highlight of Commonwealth Day celebrations organised by the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) and the Cayman Islands Branch of the CPA, and is the culmination of five months of training and preparations. Her Excellency the Governor Mrs. Jane Owen will be in attendance for the opening of the annual event, along with: the Premier, Hon. Juliana O’Connor-Connolly; the Deputy Speaker, Hon. Heather Bodden; the Leader of the Opposition, Hon. Roy McTaggart; and the Chair of the Youth Parliament Organising Committee, Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks.

Since October 2023, the Youth Parliamentarians (YPs) have heard from Members of Parliament (MPs), the Deputy Governor and Attorney General, guest speakers and civil servants on parliamentary procedures, effective speaking, and legislative research in order to shape and inform their debates.

Several MPs from diverse political affiliations have attended the weekly preparation sessions in order to support the Youth Parliamentarians (YPs) in perfecting their craft, preparing their arguments, and refining their skills.

“Each year I am impressed by the ideas and intelligence of Cayman’s youth,” said **Hon. Kenneth Bryan**, Member of the Youth Parliament Organising Committee. The Minister met with the youth on the government side to provide feedback on their arguments and to provide consideration on existing legislation. “They are deeply focused on their goals, bringing a vitality and energy to their causes that we should all be proud of.”

After several weeks of learning about the roles and procedures of the Parliament through presentations by the Clerk of Parliament, Mrs. Zena Merren-Chin, and the Serjeant-at-Arms, Mr. J. Kim Evans, the young parliamentarians then chose their roles and which “side of the aisle” they would sit: with the government or the opposition.

Half-way through the five-month programme, the YPs settled on two Private Members’ Motions of their own choosing after careful deliberations:



- Private Member’s Motion No. 1 of 2024: *Immigration and Border Reform*
- Private Member’s Motion No. 2 of 2024: *An Updated National Development Plan for the Cayman Islands*

Previous Youth Parliamentarians have chosen to debate topics that the government later took on for public consultation, including legislation on sexual harassment and single use plastics.

Mr. Joseph Hew, who is also a Member of the organising committee, noted that he has seen growth in their awareness of how to use Parliament to institute change. “The opposition has done a remarkable job in researching legislation and seeing ways to make a positive impact on their country – they want to learn, they want to succeed, they know that the Parliament is where that future takes shape.”

Anabella Hayden, student from Cayman Prep & High School, joined the YP programme for the first time this year, and represents George Town South with the opposition. “Being a member of Youth Parliament has allowed me to experience a mock political climate, which has greatly developed my public speaking and teamwork skills.”

The Clerk, **Mrs. Zena Merren-Chin**, and the Assistant Clerks, Ms. Nordra Walcott and Mrs. Patricia Priestley, have guided the youth each week since October 2023 in understanding the role of Parliament and procedures of the House. Mrs. Merren-Chin noted that “it is always interesting to teach students who have no prior knowledge of the parliamentary process, and watch them take on and develop the various roles in the Chamber in anticipation of the debates on Commonwealth Day.”

Additional invaluable expertise was provided by guests including: Deputy Governor Hon. Franz Manderson; Attorney General Hon. Samuel Bulgin; Solicitor General Mrs. Reshma Sharma; Mr. Vaughan Carter, Chair of the Constitutional Commission; and, Mr. Arek Nicholson and Mr. Mahipal Persaud of the Grand Cayman Toastmasters Club.

Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks, Chair of the organising committee and former Speaker, expressed her appreciation for all of the Members, staff, guests and sponsors of the annual programme. “The importance of Cayman’s Youth Parliament can’t be overstated, it provides an opportunity to invest time and knowledge to our future leaders, and gives the youth of our island an opportunity to voice what they feel is of importance on a national platform.”

Hon. Ebanks-Wilks added that the programme’s accomplishments are due to the sheer number of professionals and organisations that are dedicated to the cause. “It’s really an enormous community that makes it all happen, and I’m thankful for the staff of Parliament who have been with the youth twice weekly for the last six weeks. I would also like to thank Members of Parliament (both past and present) who share their knowledge and experience, and our valued



sponsors such as Harneys and the Ministry of Tourism who generously enable the students to be here.”

The proceedings will be broadcast live on the Cayman Islands Government’s YouTube channel on Monday, 11th March 2024 starting at 10:30 a.m. The public are welcome to attend the proceedings from the Public Gallery in the House of Parliament after signing in with security – proper attire is required.

END OF MEDIA RELEASE

The Commonwealth: Further information about the Commonwealth Day 2024 can be found on <https://thecommonwealth.org/commonwealth-day>.

The Cayman Islands Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is administered by an Executive Committee and works closely with other branches across the Commonwealth and the Overseas Territories, providing Members of Parliament and Parliament staff with a rich tapestry of resources and networks to develop their skills and understanding of issues impacting our region and Parliamentary legislatures as a whole.

Information about current Youth Parliamentarians and past debates can be found on the Parliament’s website: <https://parliament.ky/commonwealth-parliamentary-association/youth-parliament-programme/>

Images:

- “YPs Raldayne Thomas and Chad Powell JR.JPG”:
 - L-R: Chloe Reid, Jordan McDonald, Raldayne Thomas, and Chad Powell, JR
- “YPs Angelo Reales.JPG”
 - L-R: Johanna O’Connor, Angelo Reales, Aylani Morris- Seymour, Terrisha Walker
- “YPs Staff Speaker.JPG”
 - L-R: Nordra Walcott (Assistant Clerk), Hon. Katherine Ebanks-Wilks (Chair, Youth Parliament Organising Committee), Mrs. Patricia Priestley (Assistant Clerk); Mr. Christopher Clarke (Parliamentary Page).

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