

Premier's Press Statement regarding Government Motion on Electoral Reform

September 3, 2014

I am very pleased to announce today that the Government will bring a motion to the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday September 10th, 2014, on the subject of One Elector One Vote, and Single Member Electoral districts. The aim is to ensure that this change will come about in good time for the next general election.

This motion delivers on our promise in the Progressives election Manifesto regarding *"Amending the Elections Law to establish single member electoral districts in good time for the 2017 elections, thereby giving effect to the desires of the majority of Caymanians who participated in the One Man One Vote Referendum"*.

Of course there are also elected members of Government who did not run as Progressives, and who we invited to join us in governing, but who also campaigned on one, or both, of the ideals of voter equality and Single Member Electoral districts.

Today I am pleased to say that the Progressives led Government stands united in support of both of these ideals. Collectively we are satisfied that given the platforms we campaigned on, coupled with the voices of over 5000 Caymanians who voted in favour of the referendum motion, that we do have a mandate to carry out these changes.

It is worth noting that once adopted this change in our voting system will also satisfy the first recommendation made by the Election Observer Mission in their report to the Country, following the election in May of 2013, for the need to introduce what they termed 'Equal Suffrage' – that is "one person one vote or equal number of votes".

As many of you may know the concepts of equality of vote or franchise and single member electoral districts have been the position of Progressives for more than a decade; long before it became a talking point for those new to the political scene. This Government also recognizes that despite the Progressives maintaining this position over many years, there are Caymanians and some residents who have had, and continue to have, some reservations regarding this change.

We have listened to these concerns, and considered them carefully. But after reflecting and discussing amongst ourselves for some time now, we are all of the view that this change is needed to bring our voting system into the modern world. No system is perfect, but we believe that it is right to provide voting equality to all citizens and with it to ensure that a voter can look to one individual as his or her representative. It is also right that we ensure, as best as possible and practical, that electoral districts compromise roughly the same number of voters.

We have not ignored the concerns of fellow Caymanians who want to ensure that as we move forward we do so in the surest fashion – being careful that what is implemented is done in the best and most reasonable way possible. Indeed, those of us who support voter equality and single member electoral districts also urge this approach.

As such the Government motion will ask the Legislative Assembly to invite the Governor, under section 80 of the Constitution, to appoint an Electoral Boundary Commission, and for the Commission to be charged under section 89(6) of the Constitution to determine the boundaries of the Electoral Districts of the Cayman Islands. Once the work of the Commission is done the Government will submit to the LA a draft bill to make the necessary amendments to the Elections Law (2013 Revision).

Copies of the actual Government Motion have been supplied to the media and will be placed on Government's website today.

I would like to address the question of why a new Boundary Commission is required. This is not only a requirement under the Constitution, but it is also needed because the voters list has swelled by over 3,000 new voters (over 20%) since the 2010 Boundary Commission report was published. This is too large a number to ignore and mandates that a new Boundary Commission be appointed to carefully consider where the changes have occurred and to recommend where boundaries should be drawn to ensure equality of voters in each electoral constituency. We cannot rely on a 2010 Electoral Boundary report that is now outdated.

I would also point out that this approach has the full agreement of Cabinet and that the Attorney General's Chambers has been consulted on the approach and have assisted in the drafting of the motion itself. So we are satisfied on legal and constitutional grounds regarding the approach that the motion calls for.

I know full well that whilst there are many who will cheer this cautious approach, understanding that we need to get this right and cannot take short cuts, there will also be those who will accuse us of delaying the process so that it cannot occur in time for the next election. To those I say this is simply not the case. It is our intention that this entire process will be complete by mid-2015 – almost two years before the next general election. We must get this right – it is too important a change to do otherwise. Of course we will also ensure that there will be an appropriate public education campaign conducted to ensure that the public participates in the elections next time around fully prepared and understanding the new process.