

## **Minister Rivers Announces Decision Not to Contest the 2021 General Elections**

After almost a decade of service to the Cayman Islands at the highest level of Government, the Hon. Tara Rivers, JP, MP, Minister of Financial Services and Home Affairs and the Member of Parliament for West Bay South has officially announced her decision not to stand for re-election in the upcoming April 2021 General Elections. In addressing her constituents and supporters, Minister Rivers said, "In 2013 I answered the call to serve at the highest level in public office. However, as I often indicated on the campaign trail, my intention then, as it is now, was not to *get* a job but to *do* a job. My decision not to stand for re-election, which was not taken lightly or made hastily, is in keeping with the promise I made back in 2013, which was not to become a career politician." She went on to say, "It has been an absolute honour and privilege serving the people of West Bay, and more recently my constituents of West Bay South, for the past eight years. I'm proud of all that we've accomplished together."

Commenting on Minister Rivers' service to the Cayman Islands as an integral member of both Cabinets which he led as Premier, the Hon. Alden McLaughlin said, "While I am deeply saddened to learn that Minister Rivers is retiring from politics, I want to commend her for leaving on her own terms, which politicians rarely do." The Premier also added that "It has been an immense privilege having Minister Rivers serve in my Cabinet for two consecutive terms. I will forever be grateful to her for her brilliant service to the Cayman Islands. Tara Rivers has made history and has certainly broken the mold in West Bay politics. Because of her tremendous service, our country is now stronger and more poised for the future."

In 2013, Minister Rivers made history by winning her seat as the Second Elected Member for West Bay, breaking the almost 30-year political monopoly in the UDP (now CDP) stronghold district, missing out on becoming the First Elected Member by just 100 votes. Minister Rivers was also the first woman to be elected from West Bay in three decades. In speaking about her monumental victory in 2013, Minister Rivers said, "Together, in 2013, we not only broke the mold of West Bay politics, we shattered it!"

Although having campaigned and won her seat as an independent candidate in May 2013, Minister Rivers was offered a position as a Cabinet Minister by the Premier, becoming the first independent MLA to be offered such a position since the formal (re)introduction of party politics in the Cayman Islands in early 2000s. Despite being a first-term Minister, she chose to take responsibility for some of the most challenging portfolios of the day, namely Education, Employment and Gender Affairs.

During her first term in office as an MLA and Cabinet Minister, Minister Rivers helped the Government achieve remarkable strides in educational reform. Under her leadership, academic graduation requirements were introduced for all public high schools, along with a high honours system promoting excellence. She also successfully steered the development, passage and adoption of the comprehensive overhaul to the Education Act, bringing it in line with the Cayman

Islands Constitution, setting the legislative foundation for the establishment of an independent inspectorate and quality assurance regime for all public and private educational institutions in the Cayman Islands. For employment, she piloted the policy and legislation that enacted the first National Minimum Basic Wage; and also spearheaded the first substantive review of the National Pensions Act since it was introduced 20 years ago. For gender affairs, she was the driving force behind the first National Conference on Women in March 2014, and the extension of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to the Cayman Islands in 2016, as well as the production of the historic documentary '*Her Story is Our History: The Women's Suffrage Movement in the Cayman Islands*' in April 2017.

In the 2017 General Elections, Minister Rivers once again broke the political mold by becoming the first Cabinet Minister to successfully be reelected after serving as a first-term Minister. She comfortably won her seat with roughly 54% of the votes cast that year, becoming the first MLA (later MP) to represent the constituency of West Bay South. She was once again asked by the Premier to serve in Cabinet, this time assuming the important role of Minister of Financial Services and Home Affairs.

As Minister for Financial Services, Minister Rivers has led extensive efforts to engage with local industry, media, and international policy makers, including UK and EU Parliamentarians and US Senators and Members of the US House of Congress, on key financial services matters. She was instrumental in the development, passage and enactment of the country's innovative regulatory framework governing virtual assets as well as the establishment and enhancement of Cayman's economic substance regime. During her tenure, enhanced regulatory oversight and investor protections for all forms of investment funds were developed and implemented. With the support of the Government, Minister Rivers significantly increased the budgetary and human resources of the Ministry and CIMA, and substantially enhanced the financial support to Cayman Finance by 250%, better equipping the various public and private sector stakeholders responsible for protecting and promoting financial services - the most significant pillar of Cayman's economy.

As Minister for Home Affairs, Minister Rivers also invests a significant amount of time and energy supporting national security and public safety in the Cayman Islands. Her efforts have resulted in the completion of a number of critical projects, including upgrades to the National Public Safety Communications Radio System; the implementation of enhanced offender supervision and rehabilitation programmes in both the prison and the community; significant investment in training, recruitment, facilities and life-saving equipment for the fire service; and key amendments to the Disaster Preparedness and Hazard Management Law which strengthen the Cayman Islands' resilience to hazards through the legislative establishment of the National Disaster Fund, and the launch of Phase I and II of the National Emergency Notification System.

Although her entire political career involved serving the country on a national level as a Cabinet Minister, Minister Rivers continued to serve her district and constituency by implementing and

achieving many needed district level enhancements and community events. She also served in various other national capacities.<sup>1</sup>

Notably, Minister Rivers was chosen to be a member of the Government's Constitutional negotiating team, which led to the successful agreement with the United Kingdom Government to enhance the Cayman Islands Constitution providing added protections over domestic affairs for the democratically elected Government and culminating in the renaming of the Parliament of the Cayman Islands. "From as far back as 2000, during in my first foray into politics, I campaigned heavily and directly on the need for Constitutional modernisation," said Minister Rivers. "Participating as a member of the Government's Constitutional negotiating team which led to the successful adoption of the Cayman Islands Constitution (Amendment) Order, 2020 has truly been the pinnacle of an intense yet amazing eight years of hard work, achieving numerous accomplishments for the Caymanian people and my beloved country."

When asked about the future, Minister Rivers noted that, "Although today's announcement represents an end of an era - at least for now – there are many exciting prospects ahead, including the ability to continue to serve my country, albeit in a different capacity. I am deeply indebted to the people of West Bay, and more recently West Bay South, for their continued faith and support, and for the opportunity to serve as their Member of Parliament, and for convincingly choosing me to do so in 2013 and again in 2017. I am committed to working to ensure that West Bay South will continue to have solid leadership that we can trust."

#### **Editor's Notes:**

During her time as a district representative, Minister Rivers was instrumental in organising and hosting what became the hugely popular annual 'Old Time New Year 'Family Fun Day held every New Year's Day since 1 January 2014 and every year since (except on 1 January 2021 due to COVID 19 restrictions in place at the time). In addition, Minister Rivers was instrumental in enhancing the availability of crosswalks throughout the district, creating safer pedestrian access to the Sir John A. Cumber Primary School, the West Bay Nurses Health Centre and to churches in the district. Her persistent efforts have also led to the long needed improved sea wall, dock and boat launch ramp at the Garvin Park, as well as the installation of enhanced cabanas and playground equipment for community enjoyment. With the support of the Government, Minister Rivers was also able to fulfill a campaign promise of widening the Batabano Road to create a pedestrian corridor as well as establish a new cemetery in West Bay, and extend the footprint of the Boatswains Bay Cemetery, to ensure that there will be adequate burial space in the district for many years to come. Minister Rivers has also championed the efforts to establish a crosswalk, bathrooms and enhanced parking facilities for residents and visitors alike to better enjoy the

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<sup>1</sup> See Editor's Notes for more details.

West Bay Cemetery Beach. Efforts are also under way for the establishment of a new RCIPS Station for West Bay.

Minister Rivers has continuously served as a member of the National Security Council since 2013; and she was elected and served as the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Oversight Committee of the Office of the Ombudsman since June 2017. She has also represented the Cayman Islands internationally on numerous occasions, both during her capacity as Minister of Education, Employment and Gender Affairs as well as during her current tenure as Minister of Financial Services and Home Affairs.