**Debate before the Legislative Assembly concerning the Public Accounts Committee**

**By Premier Hon. Alden McLaughlin, MBE, JP, MLA**

**15 October, 2015**

Madam Speaker, by this motion we are proposing to remove the Leader of the Opposition from the committee and to add the elected member from North Side. In addition, we are proposing to accept the resignation of the Second Elected Member from George Town as chairman of the committee and in his stead appoint the member from North Side as the new chairman of the committee bringing in an Opposition member, which is in line with convention.

Madam Speaker this motion has become necessary because the Leader of the Opposition has over the past year or so consistently made derogatory statements regarding the integrity and professionalism of the former Auditor General and his office. Our concern is that those statements demonstrate the inability of the Leader of the Opposition to consider the reports and oversight of the Office of the Auditor General with any sense of objectivity. We are even more concerned now that the committee is about to consider the Auditor General’s report on the Nation Building Fund, which was created by the Leader of the Opposition when he was Premier and the fund managed by his office.

The Leader of the Opposition’s involvement in and interference with the committee’s work has made it difficult for the committee to effectively engage with the Auditor General and exercise its Constitutional mandate in examining government’s use of public resources.

These concerns are not new and have been raised in the past and reported in the media.

In a June 2014 letter to the Leader of Opposition, the chair of the committee, asked him to take leave of the committee and allow the Legislative Assembly to elect another member of the Opposition who could and would act in an objective and unbiased manner. The Leader of the Opposition has refused to resign and his ongoing interference has caused the committee to not be able to function as it is required.

Madam Speaker, the country is aware that The Leader of the Opposition has a history of bad blood with the Office of the Auditor General and the contention has not been limited only to the one who just recently left Cayman. Indeed, a 29 August, 2011, report in the Caymanian Compass outlines a statement from the Leader of the Opposition blasting the former acting Auditor General Garnet Harrison, who was about to look into the Nation Building Fund, calling him a “hit man”. Also in that same Compass report is the story that then-Governor Duncan Taylor, in a press statement, cautioned the now Leader of the Opposition to exercise restraint and said it was unacceptable for the then leader of government to make personal attacks on the Auditor General.

And according to a 28 June, 2012, Hansard Report, on page 70 the Leader of the Opposition said in respect of another report by the Auditor General, and I quote: “Madam Speaker, I know I am more targeted and I know I am more in jeopardy… Every one of them knows what the agenda is, they know the geo-politics that are being played but they sit down and grin. They brown-nose the FCO and the Auditor General, and the Governor sometimes when they choose”.

In that same session of the Legislative Assembly the 28 June, 2012 Hansard on page 79, the now Leader of the Opposition continued in this same paranoid vein saying “The aim and objective is not to get Alden McLaughlin; the aim and objective is to embarrass McKeeva Bush and his Government. That is the aim and objective”.

And, according to the 23 August, 2012, Hansard Report on page 205, when speaking of government loans, I quote the Leader of the Opposition who said: “…the Auditor General was jumping down the throat of the civil servant before they could get anything started. And he was in the papers every Monday morning criticising somebody, making it look like the whole world, the whole Government was corrupt or everybody was falling down”.

Madam Speaker, I am sure there are more instances when the now Leader of the Opposition castigated the Office of the Auditor General while he was in charge of Government. But now that he is not, his tirade against not only the office, but the Auditor General himself has ratcheted up.

Just last year on 26 June, 2014, according to the Hansard of this House on page 249, he called the Auditor General “tongue twisting”; in a 12 September, 2014, Hansard, on page 411 he said the Auditor General “cannot tell the truth when he needs to tell the truth”.

And Madam Speaker. On 15 January this year Cayman News Service ran a story in which the now Leader of the Opposition accused the Auditor General’s Office of nastiness, misinformation and false representation, saying that reports written about the accounting of his administration were spiteful.

A few months ago on 14 August in another Cayman News Service report, the now Leader of the Opposition threatened to sue the Auditor General and anyone else who published the details of the Nation Building Fund audit report, calling it a witch hunt and a means to damage him.

Madam Speaker, this is just a sampling of the Leader of the Opposition’s castigation of the Auditor General and the Office of the Auditor General.

As responsible stewards of the country, we – unlike the Leader of the Opposition – welcome the scrutiny of the Office of the Auditor General. When he brings to light issues that need to be addressed, we do not slag him off, but we put our noses to the grindstone, seek to address the issues and make them right.

And it is because of that good stewardship that the Auditor General’s Office is now able to see how Government is managing its projects and improving the public accounts records.

By removing the Leader of the Opposition from the Public Accounts Committee and naming the member from North Side as its chairman, we are ensuring the people of the Cayman Islands that the committee will continue to be fair and balanced and to again be able to get on with its work.

Regrettably, as the Leader of the Opposition has refused to take up the invitation to resign, it is felt best to allow the Legislative Assembly to make the needed changes so as to enable the Committee to better meet its charge to examine the public accounts of the Cayman Islands and the accounts and financial dealings of all authorities, offices and departments of Government, of all courts and of all Government-owned companies.

This Administration is committed to doing what is right, doing it transparently and working for the greater good of the Cayman Islands and our people. This change on the Public Accounts Committee is further evidence of that commitment.

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