

Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

HINDSIGHT IS 2020

I liken any government of a nation to the foundation of a house—the weaker the foundation and the more pressure that's applied, the more the cracks begin to show. And we've certainly seen many of those cracks in our own government this year.

2020 has shown us that they largely and selfishly value their own image and ideals over that of the very nation they represent. Case in point: to be so brazen as to push for the removal of Section 81 of the Cayman Islands Constitution and effectively strip the Governor of any power to veto political actions taken by Parliament that have the potential to violate international human rights law.

We wrote to the Premier numerous times at the start of 2020—long before the Cayman Islands began to feel the effects of the global pandemic—expressing our concerns surrounding the proposed constitutional reform and received no reply. That silence spoke volumes.

Later in the year, when the time finally came for the Domestic Partnership Bill to be voted on, despite the Court of Appeal's decision in 2019 that the Cayman Islands Government was to expeditiously provide a “legal framework functionally equivalent to marriage” following the ruling of the case of Chantelle Day and Vickie Bodden Bush, our political leaders, much to the chagrin of many of their constituents, ultimately shot it down. This, following them dragging their feet on the issue and proposing last-minute legislation and sending the public into an outrage over not having ample time to review it.

To add insult to injury, of course, this forced the UK Government to step in and rectify the situation, relying instead on the Governor—by the authority granted to his position through Section 81 of the Cayman Islands Constitution—to give assent to the bill and finally institute a Civil Partnership Law for the Cayman Islands and ensure that we were no longer in violation of the *European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)*.

To top it off, it would seem the members of our new Parliament want to have their cake and eat it too.

The level of unabashed pomp and circumstance on display during the public announcement of the Legislative Assembly officially “evolving” into what is now Parliament—which amounts to little more than a name change—and the complete dismissal of all charges of assault facing Speaker of the House, McKeeva Bush—or, at least, the ones in recent memory—demonstrates that the sheer amount of gall our elected officials collectively possess has not diminished in the slightest in these turbulent times.

This self-congratulatory celebration was especially in poor taste after multiple demonstrations held this year by activists, grassroots movements and the general public calling for *some* level of accountability were entirely dismissed. And so, again, our outcry seems to fall on deaf ears. All on the heels of *The International Day For The Elimination Of Violence Against Women*, no less.

Fortunately, through our legal counsel, Dr Leonardo Raznovich, who lobbied the Parliament in the UK—with the assistance of the *APPG on Global LGBT+ Rights*, *Stonewall* and Daniel Gerring, Partner of *Travers Smith—Colours Cayman* managed to stop the repeal of Section 81.

While I applaud the successes we have seen with how our political leaders have navigated the nation through the global pandemic, with all that has transpired this year, it's easy to forget and even forgive the failings of the Cayman Islands Government. However, even with everything we've overcome, 2020 must also serve as a painful reminder: it's now clear to locals and foreigners alike where their priorities lie. (Hint: It's not with our more disenfranchised communities. You know, the people who need their support the most, particularly during these times.)

Although I am optimistic for the new year, I also remain vigilant. Let's hope that 2021 brings with it a renewed faith in our elected members to do what is right rather than what is best for their reputations or, Heaven forbid, the deep pockets of their most powerful influencers.

We'll be watching.

Billie Bryan, Founder & President,
Colours Caribbean