

Antigua prepares for referendum on CCJ

Prime minister reiterates call for non-partisan approach

The Observer



Antigua and Barbuda Prime Minister,
Gaston Browne

ST JOHN'S, Antigua (CMC) – Prime Minister Gaston Browne has reiterated the need for there to be a non-partisan approach ahead of a proposed national

referendum on whether or not Antigua and Barbuda should adopt the Trinidad-based Caribbean Court of Justice (CCJ) as its final appellate court.

Antigua and Barbuda will launch a public education programme on March 10 as the island prepares for the referendum on whether to replace the London-based Privy Council with the CCJ, which was established in 2001 by regional governments.

While St John's is a member of the CCJ's Original Jurisdiction, only Barbados, Dominica and Guyana are the Caribbean Community (Caricom) countries that have signed on to the appellate jurisdiction of the court that also serves as an international tribunal interpreting the Treaty of Chaguaramas that governs the regional integration movement.

Prime Minister Browne said that matters surrounding the CCJ in Antigua and Barbuda can be ‘divisive political issues’ and in recognition of this fact, his administration sought to have a commitment from the opposition United Progressive Party (UPP) that neither party will seek to politicise the issue.

The prime minister repeated an earlier statement that he will not proceed with the referendum if it becomes clear that there are any attempts to politicise the venture.

“It is not an occasion to test political strength ... for this is such a critical issue regarding our independence and our sovereignty, that we believe it should not be the subject of partisan politics,” PM Browne stated.

Prime Minister Browne said that his administration has adopted the philosophical position that issues surrounding Antigua and Barbuda’s independence and sovereignty will be approached in a mature manner.

“We must recognise that if we are to have a truly independent and sovereign country, we must be able to preside over our own jurisprudence. If we don’t have that level of maturity, we will not proceed,” he said.

The Antigua and Barbuda leader also expressed strong confidence in the level of justice coming out of the CCJ.

He said the judgements so far are on par with those coming out of any other jurisdiction, in any part of the world and Browne said despite that there is still much scepticism and what he termed “unfounded notions” surrounding the CCJ.

“Some believe that the quality of justice from the CCJ is inferior to that coming out of the Privy Council, but there is no evidence to support that as the quality of jurisprudence is comparable to any other jurisdiction. In fact, CCJ judgements have been utilised by the Privy Council as the benchmark,” he disclosed.

PM Browne made reference to the efforts made to ensure the independence of the CCJ noting that among other things, it is independently funded which gives it a greater autonomy than most other courts.

He also expressed the view that the Caribbean's reluctance to sever ties with the Privy Council may have something to do with the legacies of colonialism.

“There is much suspicion associated with our own: we tend to accept imported talents, imported things, and we are very suspicious and unsupportive of our own. Clearly, this is one of the legacies of our colonial past that we have to address,” he noted.

The prime minister said adopting the CCJ in its appellate jurisdiction will complete the cycle of independence for Antigua and Barbuda.

Head of the National Coordinating Committee spearheading the public education programme, Ambassador Dr. Clarence Henry, conducted a one hour taped skype interview with the President of the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council, Lord Neuberger and Lord Mance to be utilised as part of a balanced sensitization programme.

BLACK RIVER, St Elizabeth — In post-independent Jamaica, no victorious party in a national parliamentary election has ever had to list St Elizabeth South Western in its losing column.

It is, in the eyes of political analysts, the classic swing seat. Both southern St Elizabeth constituencies, South Western as well as South Eastern, have consistently had much higher than average voter turnout. In 2011 when the national average was 53 per cent, the turnout in St Elizabeth SW was 68.41 per cent. It was 68.77 per cent in St Elizabeth SE.

Often, victory margins in St Elizabeth SW have been nail-bitingly small. No one knows that better than the people's National Party's (PNP's) Hugh 'Hugo' Buchanan, the incumbent, who today faces the Jamaica Labour Party's (JLP's) young star Floyd Green.

Four years ago, Buchanan then 30 years old, shocked the analysts to defeat the high-profile Cabinet minister Dr Christopher Tufton by 13 votes, as the PNP swept the one-term JLP from office 42 seats to 21.

Today Buchanan — son of the legendary Donald ‘Danny’ Buchanan, who held St Elizabeth South Western for four straight terms spread over 18 years — is again the underdog. His problems stem in large part from disunity within the PNP’s constituency organisation, accentuated by an internal challenge to his leadership last September from former banker Ewan Stephenson. Buchanan held off Stephenson’s challenge by just 14 delegate votes.

Buchanan and his team have had to spend time concentrating on internal “healing”. It’s a process, local analysts say, that is far from complete, though Buchanan is expressing confidence about today’s contest.

“I am very confident,” Buchanan told the Jamaica Observer following a spot meeting in New Town, just outside St Elizabeth’s capital Black River, on Monday night. “At the end of the day, the people in South West St Elizabeth understand that the People’s National Party is the best choice and that a PNP member of parliament is a better choice than a JLP member of parliament, hands down,” he said.

For Green, a former head of the JLP youth affiliate Generation 2000, the election in St Elizabeth SW will turn largely on what he describes as poor representation by Buchanan.

“At the end of the day I have run a campaign that’s not focused on political parties, but it is focused on the type of representation that people deserve and South West has a fine history before this — of excellent representation — representatives who served not only at the local level but at the national level,” Green told the Observer while on the campaign trail Tuesday.

Inevitably, Green also targeted the disunity within the PNP camp. “This is a member of parliament about whom it’s not only I who have said that he is not doing the work, his own side has said that he is not doing the work;” Green said.

Yet, Buchanan points to numerous projects that have been completed under his watch. He listed no fewer than a dozen road projects which he said have been done or ongoing as a result of his representation. None is more noteworthy than rehabilitation of the long-awaited Mountainside to Watchwell road, which has been in total disrepair for years. A vital link in the drive from the northern and central areas of St Elizabeth to the thriving south coast tourism community, Treasure Beach, the Watchwell road, as well as sections further north to Lacovia, has been the subject of several roadblock demonstrations in the past three years.

It was with a sense of satisfaction and achievement that Buchanan participated in the launch late last year of a \$100-million project funded by the Tourism Enhancement Fund to upgrade the Watchwell Road.

Buchanan also points to the Black River Market, which was completed in late 2014 after a long struggle to raise funding, among his major achievements, even while conceding that the project started under Dr Tufton's watch. The project eventually cost \$93.9 million.

On Monday night, Buchanan identified a range of other projects, such as basic schools, water projects, and the Treasure Beach Sports Park — including the Donald Buchanan Sports Tourism Centre — among those for which he has successfully lobbied for government funding. He takes special pride in the sports park for which his late father was instrumental in acquiring land and which Buchanan now describes as “the number one sports complex in Jamaica outside of Independence Park ”.

While droughts and chronic water shortages are major problems in farm-rich but arid southern St Elizabeth, Buchanan identified successful water projects, not least, the Burnt Savannah/Knoxwood domestic scheme done in mid-term.

Prolonged droughts over the last two years had weakened underground water sources and made life more difficult, said Buchanan. However, plans were in place to expand water distribution and to eventually set up two fully irrigated agro-parks in the Hounslow and Little Park areas.

Attention was also being given to the feasibility of irrigating water from the Black River for the St Elizabeth plains without undermining the river's economic status in terms of tourism and fishing, he said.

“At the end of the day, I believe the people want somebody who perform and that is why I will be re-elected, because people see the work that I have done and they believe that I will continue to grow and I will be a better member of parliament (MP) in the second term,” said Buchanan. “To tell you the truth, I am happy that I was challenged. I believe that it has made me a better person; I believe it has made me a better representative,” he added.

But, while conceding that Buchanan has completed some projects, Green cited what he described as a lack of vision going forward.

“A lot of the projects were not envisioned by him, they were not started by him, and while I applaud him for completing some of them... I think people would like to see some vision,” said Green.

He cited water scarcity as a major weakness in Buchanan's period as member of parliament. “We have been through two years of terrible drought and we haven't had a lot of advocacy from the MP,” said Green. In fact, according to Green, it's the election that has motivated Green to pay attention to a number of areas, including water.

“A lot of the work that has been done has happened over the last few months and it was a mad rush, a scramble to get some work in before the election,” said the JLP candidate.

“He (Buchanan) should have made water more of a priority,” declared Green. “Let us say he wasn't able to achieve expanded water reach ... I would have expected by now to at least see a plan; he should have laid a plan in front of the people giving details: how will it be achieved, how much is it going to cost. That will be one of my first priorities, to outline a (water) plan ... both on the domestic side, and irrigation water on the farming side,” said Green.

He noted that there had been various studies, including one by the National Water Commission in 2010, regarding the loss of water, said to be about 20 per cent, through “antiquated pipes”. Green said that should he become MP, water would become a major initiative, with a major push to see how and at what cost the precious commodity can be distributed throughout the constituency. A scheme using the Black River as a water source would be among those.

He spoke of a 1970s study which had advocated pumping water to the “hills” to be gravity-fed to the farms on the plains which had been shelved because of high energy costs.

He suggested that the realisation of wind farms in the Santa Cruz Mountains had the potential to change all that. “I want to lobby to see if we could get renewable sources to power that idea,” he said.

Green also spoke of plans to increase employment through agro-processing with expansion and additions to the GraceKennedy packaging plant which now operates at Hounslow. St Elizabeth SW could become the agro-processing centre of the Caribbean, he argued.

He also sees “vast potential” for call centres and heritage tourism.

“We want to make Black River into one of the business processing outsourcing hubs; we want to continue development of Black River into a cultural heritage tourism destination,” he said.

He identified development of the birthplace for former Prime Minister Donald Sangster and a long talked about board walk in Black River among projects that could make a difference.

The shrimp village of Middle Quarters should have a “proper development plan” to make business more sustainable, he argued.

Girlfriend Of Slain Escapee To Be Tried April 6

The Gleaner

Christopher Thomas

WESTERN BUREAU:

Trudy-Ann Stephens, the woman said to be the girlfriend of one of six inmates who escaped from the Freeport lock-up in Montego Bay, St James, last November, will stand trial in the Montego Bay Resident Magistrate's Court on April 6.

Stephens is charged with harbouring a fugitive after she was reportedly seen leaving a premises in the company of escapee Benjamin Stephenson last December. She was given the new return date and had her bail extended when she appeared in court on Wednesday.

When the case was mentioned, the court was told that two outstanding statements had been submitted for the prosecution's case file, and a trial date could be set.

"The matter is set for trial on April 6. Your bail is extended until then, and the officer is to warn the witnesses," Resident Magistrate Sandria Wong-Small told Stephens.

The allegations against Stephens are that on December 11, 2015, a police team was carrying out an operation in search of the six escapees in Spring Mount when they saw Stephenson and Stephens leaving a house together.

Stephenson, who was facing a murder charge at the time of the jailbreak, was subsequently killed in a shoot-out with the police.

'NOTHING MORE TO SAY'

Stephens, while being taken into custody afterwards, reportedly said under caution, "Mi nuh have nothing more to say, everything is in my statement."

Stephenson and the other five detainees - Shaniel Luton, Kelvin Hodges, Randy Murray, Marcus Robinson, and Gregory Roberts -- were discovered missing from their cells at the Freeport Police Station on the morning of November 30, 2015.

Murray and Roberts were later recaptured and Hodges was shot and killed during a confrontation with the police.

Luton and Robinson remain at large.

Man sentenced for slapping babymother



A man who claimed he busted his babymother's face out of vexation was ordered to pay a fine of \$10,000 or spend six months in prison when he appeared in the Corporate Area Resident Magistrate's Court on Monday.

The court heard that the accused, Lorenzo Hamilton, used his hand to hit the complainant in her face, causing her nose to bleed. He was later charged with assault occasioning bodily harm. He pleaded guilty with explanation.

When Senior Resident Magistrate Judith Pusey enquired about the explanation, Hamilton began, "Mi and her di deh and her phone start ring, and she only a look pon the phone and a laugh. So me tell her fi answer the phone and she only a laugh and nah answer, so me get vex."

He continued, "That cause some friction and me start get edgy because me easy fi get ignorant, and a so me box her," he said.

When asked why he should not go to prison for his actions, Hamilton said he has a child to take care of. However, Pusey was not dissuaded.

While handing down her judgement of \$10,000 or six months in prison, she said, "I have my little one to take care of, too, but no one cares about that if I get up and start boxing down people."

- S.W.

The End