

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER

MR. ERROL W. BETHEL

SPEECH TO THE NATION

ON

REGISTRATION OF VOTERS

FOR

GENERAL ELECTION, 2007

THURSDAY, 15TH SEPTEMBER, 2005

Good evening fellow Bahamians,

I am pleased this evening to announce the start of a new National Voter Registration Drive.

As you are aware, every five (5) years we go through this quinquennial exercise of preparing a new voters register, in preparation for the holding of a General Election.

The current register came into force at the end of December 2001 and it will expire, if it runs its full course, at the end of December 2006.

The Parliamentary Elections Act 1992, mandates that a register in readiness must be prepared to replace the current register when it expires.

With this in mind, we propose to start preparation of the new register on Monday the 19th September, 2005. On that date registration of voters for the new register will begin in New Providence, in Grand Bahama and in all of the other Islands of the Bahamas.

While preparing a new register, the Parliamentary Commissioner has to, at the same time, **maintain the current register.**

This means that all persons registering for the first time, will have their names placed on the new register, as well as on the current register. Persons who are currently registered on the current register will only have to register for the new register.

Please note that the voters cards for the new register will not be issued at the time of

registration. These will be issued when the new register comes into force.

In the Bahamas we are privileged to have a stable democracy. We have had an elected Parliament since 1729 and, over the more than two hundred and seventy-six years since then, we have seen our democracy strengthened.

Today, we have one person, one vote and in recent times we have witnessed the process of devolution in our society where local

communities are gaining more say in running their affairs. In our national life we have endeavored to enhance the democratic process by ensuring the equality of all votes, whether cast in New Providence, or one of the Family Islands. We have done this by attempting to create balance in the size of the constituencies. Additionally, we have expanded the media. We are allowing more and more public discourse and we have incorporated the Office of the Parliamentary Commissioner in our constitution,

empowering it as an independent electoral management body.

At the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner, we have a mission statement.

That statement says:

- (1) That we will endeavor to afford every eligible Bahamian the opportunity to be registered and to vote in free and fair elections; and

(2) that we will guarantee every eligible citizen equal rights and access to the electoral system, in determining who should govern the country.

Our goal at the office of the Parliamentary Commissioner is not to become the issue, but to ensure that all citizens feel free and have the opportunity to make free decisions in fair elections. We are humbled by the awesome responsibility that has been entrusted to us and will endeavor to prove ourselves worthy custodians of the integrity and legitimacy of our

electoral system. This office will therefore endeavor to be totally impartial and transparent in the performance of its duties.

Registration as a voter is an extremely important function. By registering, a citizen adds his name to the list of electors of the country and thereby demonstrates his willingness to play his role in the development of our democracy.

At the same time he guarantees his right to vote, whenever an election is called.

Remember, in the Bahamas you can only vote if you are registered.

What are the qualifications for registration as a voter?

- (1) You must be a Bahamian citizen, at least 18 years old;
- (2) You must have been residing in your constituency for at least three months; and
- (3) You must be of sound mind and free from incarceration.

Our aim is to make a list according to the rules because we are so conscious of the fact that an election will only be as good as the voter's list we prepare.

In protecting our rights as citizens we want to ensure that only Bahamians are registered and that they are registered in the correct Polling divisions and constituencies.

We will therefore question each applicant very carefully about his or her eligibility. Persons registering are required to present proof of citizenship.

The preferred documents we request are either;

- (i) A passport; or
- (ii) A previous voters card.

Those presenting other documents and indeed all applicants will have to satisfy the Revising Officer as to their eligibility to be registered.

On the matter of where you live, we need accurate addresses for each person because there is a system in place where constituencies are based on the number of persons living in the area. Therefore, to ensure that there is some

balance and fairness in the size of the constituencies it is important that we know exactly where you live.

During the registration exercise, every effort will be made to be as expeditious as possible because we know that people value their time. Nevertheless, the public is urged to exercise some degree of patience while registering.

For the convenience of the Public, Registration

Centres in New Providence will be located at the following sites:-

- The Parliamentary Registration Office on Farrington Road;
- The General Post Office, East Hill Street;
- The Mall at Marathon; and
- The Town Centre Mall.

In addition to those fixed Registration Centres, remember that we, as an office, are accountable and responsive to you, and we are prepared to activate mobile registration units and night registration centers, as the need arises.

The schedule of Mobile Registration Units, when activated, will be properly publicized. This will give employees the opportunity to register at

various job sites that may be placed on the schedule. The public may also assist us by recommending places that we may visit.

For the convenience of voters in Grand Bahama, registration will take place at;-

- The Parliamentary Registration Department in the National Insurance Building, Freeport;

Plans are being made for additional centers in Grand Bahama. A mobile unit will also operate in Grand Bahama.

In the Family Islands registration will take place at the Administrator's Offices in all of the Islands.

When you go to register as a voter, you will, as stated before, be required to satisfy the Officer-In-Charge of the Registration Centre, that you are in fact who you claim to be.

All citizens are reminded that not only is it the right of every eligible citizen to vote, it should be taken as a most important civic obligation.

Voting in the General Elections is the only way you can influence who your Parliamentary Representative will be and to determine your Government.

In order to exercise the right to vote, and in order to meet this important civic obligation you **HAVE** to register.

Our country has a proud, widely respected and an envied record of Parliamentary Democracy.

This will only continue and be strengthened through the full participation of all eligible

Bahamian Citizens in the registration process
and by voting when elections are called.

We invite your early participation in the National
Voter Registration Drive. We look forward to
serving you.

May God bless you.