

A SPEECH
BY
THE HONOURABLE JENNIFER M. SMITH, JP, MP
PREMIER OF BERMUDA
THE CANADIAN CLUB OF TORONTO
Luncheon Meeting
Royal York Hotel, Toronto, Ontario, Canada
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Good afternoon....

To the President of the Canadian Club of Toronto, Mrs. Mary Anne Chambers, thank you for an exceedingly kind introduction.

The Right Honourable John Turner, Honourary Life Director of the Canadian Club of Toronto and former Prime Minister of Canada;

Mr. Calum Johnston, President and Chief Executive Officer of the Bank of Butterfield in Bermuda, who facilitated my speaking at today's luncheon meeting;

Other Directors of the Canadian Club of Toronto;

Senator Marie Poulin and Mr. Bernard Poulin.

Members of the Bermudian-Canadian Association based here in Toronto, Bermudian University students;

And finally, my family, my Canadian cousins Mairuth Sarsfield and Lucille Cuevas who are accompanied by their husbands, and my nieces Kara and Karli and my godson Jason,

Corporate Sponsors, friends, ladies and gentlemen:

I bring you greetings and the best wishes of the Government and people of Bermuda.

It is a joy for me to be in Toronto on this special occasion. It is also a humbling experience when I recognize in this audience, orators more skilled than I, in public speaking. I stand in awe of the list of luminaries who have addressed this august body and I am honoured to have been asked to join their ranks.

It is interesting to note that the first woman to address a Canadian Club was the author Mary Agnes Fitzgibbon, who spoke before the Hamilton Club in 1904.

Some eight years later, another female speaker, Mrs. Clementinal Fessenden, argued that the nature of a woman made her unfit for a full share of political work, she believed that a woman's duty lay in the sacred fulfillment of her destiny as the mother of man and the keeper of his home.

As one well known advertising slogan states:

“We've come a long way

On the cusp of a new millennium, we can look back and see mighty changes in the status of women.

Women in Bermuda, like women in Canada - and women throughout the world - have come a long way in terms of gaining equality with men, although there remains much to be done. Even in Bermuda, with a woman as Premier, a woman Opposition Leader, a female Attorney General and two other women in Cabinet - Bermuda's women do not yet enjoy true equality of opportunity with men - especially in the business and corporate arena.

I am especially pleased to be addressing you on what is a special occasion for the Canadian Club of Toronto – the recognition of the first five winners of your scholarships. I congratulate these young people on their achievement and the Canadian Club for supporting education in this way.

General Election

The outcome of Bermuda's General Election of 9th November, 1998 marked one of the most momentous occurrences in the almost four-hundred year history of our

Island, the most populated of the remaining British Overseas Territories and the second most isolated Island in the world.

Incidentally, Bermuda's resident population (just under 60,000) -- would probably fit into the SkyDome just across the way.

On the 9th of November 1998, a date that will be forever etched in our history, Bermudians voted for their first change of government. The Progressive Labour Party, commonly known as the PLP, won for the first time after thirty-five years of United Bermuda Party Government.

The significance of that change is felt even by our visitors who notice a new spirit of optimism and confidence that transmits itself as smiles – if it is possible - that are even more friendly than usual.

The Progressive Labour Party's overwhelming victory in that General Election moved our Island into a truly new era, one that effectively ended minority white political domination in a predominantly black Island.

It marked, in effect, Bermuda's coming of age. And the fact that the transition has been almost seamless highlights for our many international partners, the esteem in which the democratic process is held.

In voting for the Progressive Labour Party, Bermuda's electorate voted for the promise of a **New Bermuda**.

Our victory was the culmination of a carefully considered and enunciated strategy. We delivered a message that was embraced by voters, a message which offered hope for the future.

The time had finally come for a PLP Government to bring the people's dreams, hopes and best determinations to fruition.

Vision for a New Bermuda

It is this vision of a **New Bermuda** on which I will focus my remarks.

When the sun rose - and it rose brilliantly -- on the day after the election, the 10th of November 1998, the first PLP Cabinet was sworn in. Facing legal deadlines to stop the annual deletion and re-compilation of the voters list, (a key election promise,) our paramount goal was to open Parliament and amend the Parliamentary Election Act to abolish the dreaded annual voter registration.

This we achieved, by opening the new Parliamentary Session on the 20th of November -- a mere eleven days after the General Election!

In the Throne Speech delivered by His Excellency, the Governor, our new Government pledged to involve the people of Bermuda at all levels, and at all stages, to create an inclusive framework for the building of one Bermuda, a **New Bermuda**.

Our legislative programme for the first year represents a first step in the social and economic reconstruction needed to create a land of opportunity and fairness for all.

Parliamentary Election Act

You are no doubt wondering about this emphasis on Electoral reform, so soon after winning a General Election. You may have a better appreciation when I tell you that, in Bermuda, voters were required to register on an annual basis in order to participate in a General Election or bye-election.

Failure to register, irrespective of the circumstances, resulted in the voter's disenfranchisement, resulting in the loss of the right to vote should a General Election, or bye-election, be called between registration periods. Unbelievably, that circumstance would obtain even if the individual had been registered during the past twenty years and residing at the same address!

We had always viewed the annual voter registration process as an administrative encumbrance designed to disenfranchise people and protect the status quo. Therefore, in accordance with this long-held view, and a pre-Election pledge to the Bermudian people, annual voter registration was abolished and replaced with a system of automatic registration using existing Government computer records.

As you might well imagine, this legislative amendment received wide acclaim from the Bermudian public.

Education

Bermuda's education system, traditionally modeled on the elitist system, which existed in the United Kingdom until the mid-1960's, has been through a decade of restructuring. Selectivity has been abolished in the public education system; and borrowing from your own system, we have introduced Middle Schools and two Senior Schools.

There remains a great deal to be done as we prepare our young people for careers that the increasing strides in technology have created.

My Government's vision for a **New Bermuda** includes an education system, which ensures all students can develop to their maximum potential. We recognize that if we don't ensure the computer literacy of our future workforce, we stand the risk of creating a new underclass – those left outside of the wired society of the future. [Although there are those who would argue that the wired society is here, now].

With education as the underlying theme of our election platform, and myself as our Party's first Education Minister, we have entered into partnerships with the private sector that will see our senior schools benefit from a computer curriculum and technology that will give them a solid foundation for the working world, or further education.

Further, we will see the identification of students adept at this technology in order to steer them into careers such as 'I. T.' professionals through the assistance of scholarships.

In addition, we are currently working on a pilot net-schools programme for our Middle Schools which will benefit those students who do not have access to computers at home.

Finally, tax breaks on computers for school use has benefited private and parochial school students.

I should mention some other initiatives we have undertaken in Education as well. At the pre-school level we have replaced para-professionals with trained teachers, to ensure a firm foundation in a child's early years.

At the Primary School level, we have mandated class sizes of fifteen students per class.

Beginning with the new school year in September, there will be a new form of Attendance Officer; a combination of youth worker, social worker, counselor and truant officer. To further enhance our curriculum efforts, September will also see the start of a system-wide literacy initiative to raise all reading and literacy skills.

Elderly Persons

Our concern for the welfare of the Bermudian people extends beyond the provision of the best possible education for our young people, to the provision of the best possible care for our senior citizens – the fastest growing segment of our population.

Our vision of a **New Bermuda** includes ensuring that the elderly members of our community enjoy and benefit from services that make their lives comfortable and fulfilling. To this end, we are in the process of drafting legislation to regulate Rest Homes to ensure a common standard of accommodation and care.

In addition, we have introduced fitness and other activity programmes in government run Seniors Homes, under the supervision of an Activities Director.

Employment Opportunities

Our fledging Government believes that Bermuda will realize its greatest potential only when we are able to include those Bermudians on the perimeters of society. Accordingly, our Ministries of Labour, Health and Training are working together to provide re-training, inter-personal skills training, and help, to the chronically unemployed.

Because of Bermuda's highly sophisticated business sector and our relatively small Bermudian workforce, we rely on a pool of non-Bermudians who come to Bermuda to live and work.

Our most recent Employment survey reveals a work force of thirty-five thousand, three hundred and twenty-three people, with a total of eight thousand, two hundred

and seventy non-Bermudians... including just under one thousand Canadians.

You may be interested to learn that many high-ranking public officers in Bermuda are Canadian, including: the Police Commissioner; the Collector of Customs; the Solicitor General; and our Economic Advisor, who is on secondment from the Federal Government in Ottawa.

Tourism

Until recently, income derived from Bermuda's thriving tourism industry contributed immeasurably to the overall economic success of the Island, helping our per capita income to be amongst the top five in the world.

Today, international business has almost overtaken tourism as the top generator of our economy. Now, we are working to develop and promote Electronic-Commerce as a non labour-intensive diversification of our economy.

It is a sad fact that the ascendancy of international business coincided with decline in our tourism industry; thus our new Government has launched a "Rescue Tourism" initiative. We recognize that the rejuvenation of our tourism product is important because of the range and variety of jobs that it offers: In addition, quality Air Services and accommodation are vital to the international business industry.

I am pleased to note that some 33,000 Canadian visitors annually contribute to that success. I must add that there is no shortage of Bermudian visitors to Canada either, especially for higher education and I understand that Bermudians can even be found at the Eaton Centre, here in Toronto, shopping till they drop!

Bermudians proudly proclaim that we are blessed with one of the most beautiful Islands on earth! The jewel of the mid-Atlantic -- deep, crystal clear blue waters; soft pink coral sand; kaleidoscopic flowering plants; lush vegetation; gentle sea breezes; world renowned golf courses and neatly maintained homes and roads. Most importantly, a friendly and caring population awaits your visit. Alluring, don't you think? If I have made you want to visit, the next direct flight, (Air Canada flight 942), departs from Pearson Airport at 8:40 a.m. tomorrow morning!

To prove how serious we are about attracting greater numbers of Canadians to Bermuda, our Minister of Tourism will visit Canada later this year as head of a

delegation of hoteliers and tourism professionals intent on promoting Bermuda as the destination of choice for the Canadian travel fraternity.

Our vision for tourism in the **New Bermuda** includes an advertising campaign with a distinctly Bermudian flavour; along with the development of new markets in such areas as educational tourism, cultural tourism, ecological tourism and soft adventure sports.

We plan to make Bermuda even more attractive to those who wish to invest in the hotel industry through co-operative efforts.

On the subject of foreign investment in Bermuda, I am pleased to note that Canadian Pacific Hotels Corporation (one of this luncheon's Corporate Sponsors) has recently purchased two of Bermuda's premier hotel properties -- the Hamilton Princess and the Southampton Princess. This Canadian Company, represented here in Toronto by this very beautiful hotel The Royal York, has already impressed staff and residents with their corporate policy of inclusion and involvement, along with quality service.

Mr. William Fatt, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Canadian Pacific Hotels Corporation, is present today and on behalf of the Government and people of Bermuda, I would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his company's significant investment in Bermuda's future.

International Business

While we work to maintain and reinforce Bermuda's status as a premier tourism destination and financial jurisdiction; our vision also includes a greater role for the island in the global network.

The remarkable growth in our international business industry continues, with some eleven thousand international companies - principally in the areas of insurance, reinsurance, investment management and trust management -- currently registered in the Island.

The **New Bermuda** involves the continuation of a successful Government/business partnership and a regulatory structure that will assist in continuing to attract quality international business to our shores.

We aim to keep our regulatory structure business-friendly, while maintaining proper regulatory controls to enhance our reputation as a first-class jurisdiction for the conduct of international business. We will continue to admit only those international companies, which meet our criteria for financial stability and the highest standards of international business practice.

E-Commerce

In the emerging area of Electronic-Commerce, legislation is being drafted to control and promote this burgeoning industry. We recognise that there are some aspects of E-Commerce that will not benefit by being headquartered in Bermuda; similarly, there are some aspects of electronic commerce which will not benefit Bermuda. Our legislation is designed, therefore, to protect our reputation as a first class domicile while ensuring that new initiatives are encouraged.

Challenges

As a new Government we are under no illusions about the magnitude of the public's expectations. So we were pleasantly surprised recently when an independent survey, commissioned by one of the Islands newspapers, revealed an approval rating of eighty one percent for myself as Premier. And a comparatively high rating for the Government as a whole after our first six months.

Satisfying those who believe that Government has unlimited financial resources, or who expect overnight solutions to long-existing problems, is a major challenge faced by Governments everywhere. But, we also face some complex matters with international implications:

The environmental clean-up of the former U.S. military base lands;

OECD requirements concerning Bermuda's financial services industry;

And the U. K.'S recently published White Paper on its future relationship with Overseas Territories.

All these are matters which concern our new Government.

Clean-Up and Development of Former U.S. Base Lands

Following the closure of the U.S. military bases in Bermuda in 1995, soil and groundwater contamination and asbestos hazards -- which will cost an estimated \$55 million to remediate -- were discovered on the base lands.

Significantly, both Canada and the United Kingdom also operated military bases in Bermuda until the mid 1990's, and although some environmental contamination was found on the Canadian and British bases, in each case Canada and Britain "did the right thing" and cleaned up their environmental hazards.

Thank you, Canada!

Contrarily, Bermuda officials have been striving to gain U.S. acceptance of its responsibility for these environmental hazards for the past three years.

Since the U.S. base lands cover some 10% of our available land. The environmental clean up is a prerequisite to development of this significant land resource, hence the importance and urgency of resolving this issue.

You might be interested to note that your own one hundred million-dollar agreement with the U. S. to fund the environmental-clean-up of former U.S. bases at Argentina, Nova Scotia, has given our own efforts hope and impetus. Bermuda is the only country, apart from your own, that falls under the 1941 treaty between the U. K. and the U. S.

Our hope, therefore, is to follow your example.

OECD Requirements

As small as we are, Bermuda is a world player, and as such, we are subject to global pressures. One such relates to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]. This organization's current initiative, aimed at financial services industries and offshore domiciles, are being dealt with by a number of initiatives enacted by our new Government.

Together with our international business partners, we are working to ensure that Bermuda is recognised as the first class financial jurisdiction that it is.

White Paper

As a British Colony – now titled Overseas Territory – Bermuda is affected by the British Government's recent White Paper **Partnership for Progress and Prosperity: Britain and the Overseas Territories**, which was presented to the Parliament by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Robin Cook, in March of this year.

You may be assured that our Government, as it considers a response to the White Paper, is taking into account the best long-term interests of all Bermudians.

Discussion on this issue is scheduled to take place in our own Parliament, during this session.

Canadian Connections

I cannot conclude my speech today without some mention of Bermuda's connections with Canada.

When I think of our two countries, I cannot help but wonder what is the more striking: the contrasts - or the commonalties.

Perhaps it is the differences that most readily spring to mind:

The enormous landmass of almost ten million square kilometers which make up Canada, compared to the twenty-one square miles which make up Bermuda.

The stereotypical Canadian image of ice and snow, contrasted to the sun and pink beaches of Bermuda.

But these are mere geographical features.

When we look at our respective societies, a number of similarities and cultural ties appear.

Both Canada and Bermuda have traditions that reach back to our shared British heritage.

We have similar political and legal structures.

Educational opportunities bring hundreds of Bermudians to your shores - McGill, York, Western Ontario, Queen's, University of Toronto, Acadia, Mount St. Vincent and St. Mary's are among the universities attended by generations of Bermudians. In addition, many Bermudian students attend Canadian prep and boarding schools, my own nieces and godson among them.

There are also many organizational affiliations between our two countries: local accountants are accredited by the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants; Bermuda's King Edward VII Memorial Hospital is accredited by the Canadian Consul on Health Services; and the Methodist Church in Bermuda is affiliated with the United Church of Canada.

Finally, there is the very long history of friendly relations between our two countries.

Conclusion

And so, ladies and gentlemen, I invite you to come - see the **New Bermuda** --

We are closer than the Caribbean,
We speak the same language,
We offer great opportunities for business and investment.
A highly skilled workforce,
An excellent infrastructure,
Superb communications
And a marvelous living and working environment.

Come for a vacation, come for pleasure, come for business,
You won't be disappointed.

My Government has pledged to work tirelessly towards the creation of one Bermuda, a **New Bermuda**, in which all its people are respected and valued.

With God's help and the continued support of the Bermudian people, we are confident that we will succeed.

Thank you.