

Yankee Rippa

Bush Serenades CARICOM

It was a swell party, President George Bush inviting the heads of Caribbean governments to Washington, finally, as his days in the White House wind down. The regional leaders, seldom consulted even though they represent what some in the Beltway call the "soft underbelly" of the Americas as far as homeland security is concerned, were given the chance to present their views, and needs.

The conference, convened just a month after CARICOM heads expressed some reluctance over pushing through a free trade agreement with the US, had that trade agreement as a centerpiece, although it was deftly surrounded by a host of issues including violence in the region, health, tourism, education and investment. One key component of the Conference on the Caribbean was face to face meetings with Caribbean nationals living in the United States.

These were well attended and focused primarily on the "brain drain" and remittances. While there was a lot of positive bonding and bridge building, as usual there was some disconnect between the reality of successful Caribbean Americans and those left at home,



OAS top brass, Secretary General Jose Miguel Insulza, flanked by Permanent Representative of St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ambassador Elsworth John (left) and Assistant Secretary General Ambassador Albert Ramdin of Guyana (right) welcome Caribbean journalists to a seminar on June 18, the day before the opening of the Conference on the Caribbean

such as in the suggestion that a portion of remittances should be used for investment rather than just to meet daily living needs. It was also pointed out that to a large extent remittances are circular, ultimately benefiting the US economy since a large portion of the money sent to family in the Caribbean travels back to the United States when it is used to purchase goods and services originated in the USA.

Following meetings with President

Bush at the US State Department, Belize's Prime Minister Said Musa attended a question and answer session with members of the diaspora gathered at OAS headquarters. He announced the President indicated he would have

Congress "review the Caribbean Basin Initiative Act and trade arrangements with the Caribbean. But not just to revive the CBI, but to modernize it, extend it in light of events that have taken (Please Turn To Page 3)



US Ambassador to Belize, Robert Dieter, Ministry of Foreign Affairs Charge D'Affairs Mike Mena and CEO Amalia Mai at the opening of the Conference on the Caribbean, IMF Headquarters June 19, 2007

Top Student



Xux-Ek Novelo of Hummingbird Elementary topped the 2007 P.S.E. (See Story on Teen Page, Pg 11)

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Ripe for the Taking

Dear Editor,

Firstly, let me say that the article, “Senate Sensation” (June 18, vol.2 no.24) in the Independent reminds me that there are still some “good people” left in Belize. I certainly hope that this is the silent majority coming out of the woodworks.....no offence.

I am a Belizean living in Toronto, Canada. I was a Metro Toronto Police Officer for 15 yrs. I lived in San Pedro for a number of years in the late 90’s and have always maintained strong ties and remained informed about my country Belize.

Belize reminds me of the U.S.S.R. and Lenin’s rise to power. Or Edi Amin’s in Uganda. Belize was ripe for the taking! Said Musa saw this and went for it.

The PUP was a well tuned machinery just waiting for a Despotic leader. Said was smart... blood-lined it into George Price’s family and Empire. As he waited, he planned and conspired, building his Mafia Organization waiting for Manuel Esquivel to make his honest mistake. An honest man is soo predictable. Musa

then set his Master Plan in motion.

Price was at least Belizean by heredity, character and thinking. Here comes this Foreign Entity... hungry, and greedy beyond comprehension. Will stop at nothing, respects nothing... a True Sociopath. He reminds me of the “Joker” in the Batman movie... The Joker says... “Wait till they get a load of me”!!!

Said Musa revolutionized Belize in a way that Belizeans could not comprehend. He implemented fraud and corruption to a level where even North American Law Enforcement and Judiciary would be baffled and not know where to start or what to do.

The problem is that Belize is GONE- stolen, taken by a very few. Even the colonial Brits are starting to look good at this point. At least they left us something to work with when they pulled out.

If Barrow wins he will be governing a bankrupt country in all respects. debts, land, no assets, liabilities etc. etc.

It will be mind blowing when the true financial damage finally comes out... if it ever does.

Two freedom fighters come to mind:. Martin Luther King, who preached a

peaceful revolution; but even he knew that his days were numbered. Let us remember his words: “Any man who is afraid to speak for freedom is already dead.” And Malcolm X who preached that only through force will change truly come. “Plymouth Rock landed on us,” he said.” He too knew his time was numbered.

It took a couple more Good Samartians... John and Bobby Kennedy before true change came.

The U.S. did change, but at a great cost!

Belize can expect the same.

Sincerely,
Charles Lawrence Payne

More Belize All Over

Dear Editor,

Have you thought about having a regional/district section of your paper which could include pertinent or interesting stories from each district or town? This could let those in the rest of the country find out what is happening in the different districts, info that might not be making the headlines. I know there (Please Turn To Page 15) 

Comments? Suggestions?

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Yankee Rippa, Bush Serenades CARICOM

■ (Continued From Page 1)

place.” Referring to the end of preferential markets for many Caribbean countries and drastic changes in relations with the World Trade Organization and European Union.

The promises come even after some banana producing islands are seeing their economies collapse and some sugar producing nations have closed their industries and even transformed agricultural land to golf courses or adapted it for ethanol production.

Prime Minister of Guyana, Bharrat Jagdeo, said there were two broad areas discussed with the US leader 1) economic well-being of the region 2) security and illicit activities, primarily drug trafficking, small arms trade, deportees and money laundering.

“We know the US will not keep these criminals here, but they should help us reintegrate them into our societies. In terms of financial commitment to fight

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Belize’s Prime Minister Said Musa was available for questions from the Caribbean diaspora community, at OAS Headquarters on June 20



The OAS’s Executive Secretary for Integral Development Alfonso Quinonez, and Acting Director of the Department of Trade, Tourism and Competitiveness, Sonia Johnny gave presentations on the importance of sustainable development



Pablo Zuniga, Dept. for State Modernization and Governance and Marguerite Sullivan, Director for International Media Assistance offered support to Caribbean journalists

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Caribbean Calling



By: Karla Heusner Vernon

I was between planes in the Miami airport and marveling at how many people were walking around talking to themselves. Well, not themselves, others on the other end of their phone line. Only there was no phone, just an earpiece they gabbed on, loudly, like schizophrenics in the streets. Even the bathroom was not safe from their snippets of conversation: "So yeah, I told him we had to break up...hey, is there any toilet paper in here or what?" As if the woman on the other end of the line could help her more than I could from the next stall...

It was like that the whole morning, hearing fragments of stranger's insu-

lated lives. I tried not to listen, but it was impossible sometimes. Then there were times when I wanted to listen, "Trinidad was great! It reminded me so much of

Hearing this conversation actually assisted me when I arrived at my destination: the Caribbean Journalism Conference in Washington DC.

As the presenters presented and colleagues collaborated, I think we all realized what a rare opportunity it is for us to get together, due to distances, expense, busy schedules. But we have so much in common, whether we are from the larger media houses which feature regional news and reporting, or small local papers just starting up.

We face the same problems in terms of getting government advertising—or not getting it—as governments attempt to squash what they perceive to be opposition, or at least non-supportive reporting. What we did not know is that the OAS and the Inter-American Human Rights Commission see the withholding of such advertising, paid for from the public coffers, as a violation of Freedom of the Press and also media democracy. This last one is a term they use to describe situations in which a country's media is owned by diverse members of the business community representing a variety of perspectives, NOT concentrated in the hands of a few politically aligned owners, or media

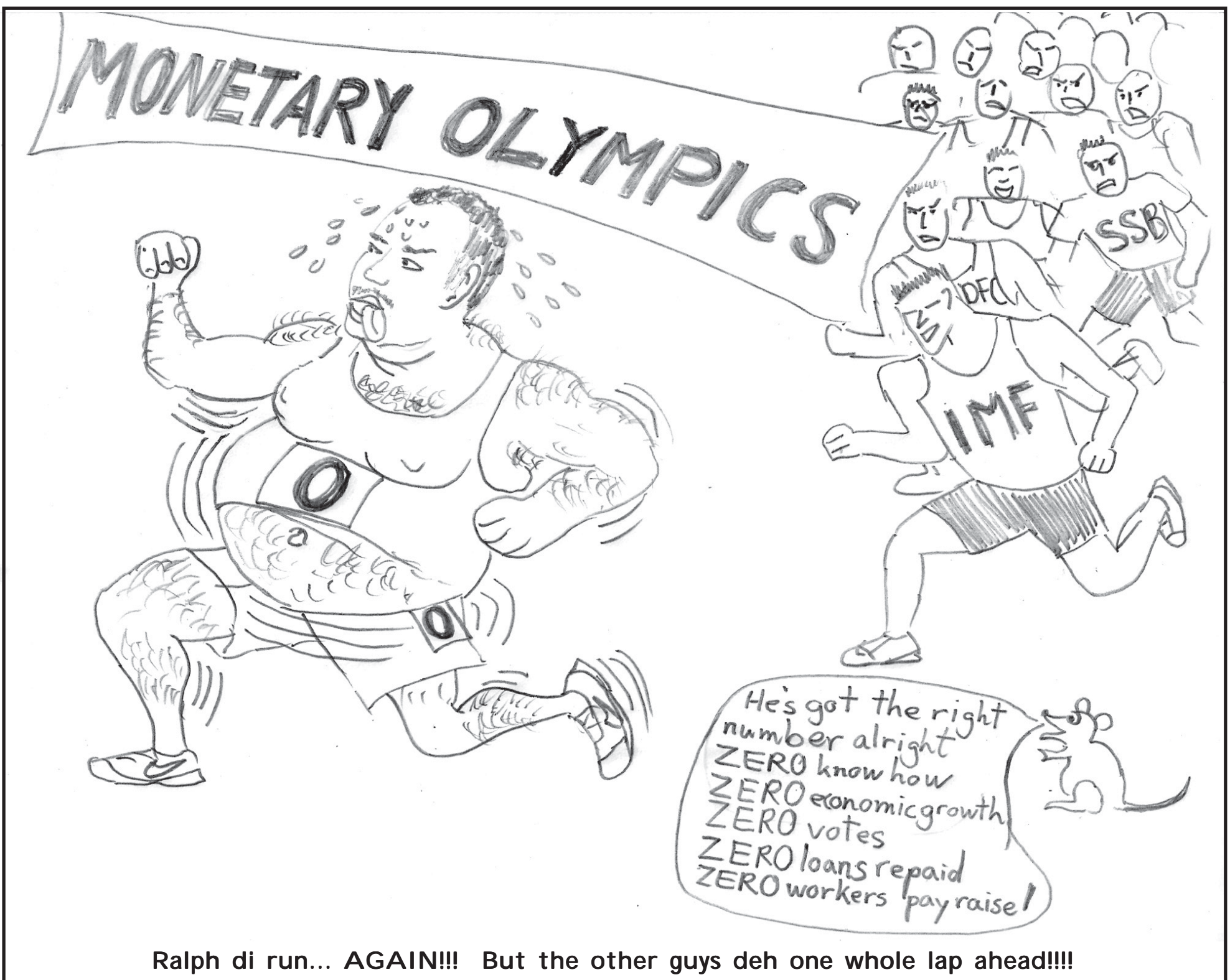
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"Whenever a government feels it is about to lose an election, they tend to blame the press."

Nairobi. Oh?No, its way down by South America....you have to fly there, like four hours. But it was cool, really tropical and well, like I said, just like Kenya. Minus the giraffes and stuff."

Hmmm, I was wondering what she would say about Belize. But it made me realize the incredible differences between how we in the Caribbean perceive ourselves and the way some Americans perceive us. I don't know if anyone in Trinidad ever compared their country to an African state, but I suppose this woman, presumably having been to Kenya, found similarities Trinidadians who had not personally made the Atlantic crossing would not necessarily see.

It was sponsored by the OAS and was the first time in a long time I had been among my colleagues of the region. The main purpose of course was to help us understand the workings of the Organization of American States and help them publicize their activities in the region. But the whole thing went way, way beyond that. There were topics on the Media's Role in Regional Integration, Responsible Journalism and Freedom of the Press, Human Rights, Sustainable Development, Violence Prevention, and one I found particularly interesting as editor of an online paper, New Media.



Bush's Answer to Blair's Caribbean Conference



By: Trevor Vernon

On November 2, 2006 the British Government hosted a conference on the new Caribbean economy... entitled 'Transforming the Caribbean economy - new avenues for investment' in London. It explored how within two decades the Caribbean economy is likely to change dramatically as preference ends and the region comes to be dominated by the offshore &

"nearshore" services sector, tourism and how to decimate the agricultural economy.

The one-day invitation-only conference, which was organised by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the support of the Caribbean Council, was aimed at the international investment community. It took place at the initiative of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair MP.

Fast Forward: The Conference on the Caribbean, June 19-21, 2007 was largely organized by the Caucus of Caribbean Ambassadors in Washington, DC, they say. But for the first time in the history of CARICOM did such a Conference include such meaningful participation by ranking participants from the Administration

of a US President.

This US based US/CARICOM HEADS Conference came in at least three concurrent parts (as did Blair's):

- 1) Experts Forum, (World Bank)
- 2) Private Sector Dialogue (The Inter-American Development Bank)
- 3) Diaspora Forum (OAS).

What Blair's commitment to CARICOM was in his one day 2006 Private Heads Conference is still unclear to many of us but certainly most clear to the heads and the British Lord who raids these parts. Blair's three part conference covered basically the same issues except the Diaspora issues.

What Bush appears to be committing to CARICOM is more equitable treatment, a renewal of some old eco-

nomie benefits, and a promise and willingness to dialogue.

What is painfully clear to many observers is that Chavez appears to have everyone in a reactionary mode. And the Bush Administration appears to want to signal to CARICOM a better deal than Chavez is offering...not unlike the two China policy that the Government of Belize appear to be wanting to play off each other. For if the masters of the universe blink, Chavez will give CARICOM both "new avenues for investment" and a 20/20 vision, simultaneously...while incorporating the Diaspora to boot.

PM Musa said a lot of euphemistic things at this conference in Washington last week but they are not worth reproducing, really.

Yankee Rippa

☛ (Continued From Page 3)
ing drug trafficking, I (Guyana) get \$20,000 to fight drug trafficking. That does not even pay my head officer. All I get is a series of lectures from the US about failing to stop what is crossing THEIR borders. The State Department says we are not doing enough, but we do not have the resources."

PM Jagdeo was not the only head of state to be frank about the need for sizeable financial support from the US, beyond family remittances but federal in nature. From the very opening ceremonies of the Conference on the Caribbean, Prime Minister of Barbados, Owen Arthur had delegations buzzing when he stated openly, "We are asking for help to build new airports, and other infrastructure, but we are not getting it.

Right now the economies of the Caribbean are being assisted by Venezuela, Taiwan and Cuba." In other words, if you want to lessen the impact of these countries which have sensitive relations with the US at best, step up Uncle Sam.

He also cautioned his Caribbean brothers and sisters to be bold and forward thinking, and maintain their dignity. "We have not come to Washington to harken for a nostalgic past, but not as beggars either."

Indeed the Caribbean leaders made it clear they may be microstates in the grander scheme of things but they consider themselves worthy of attention, Arthur also said, "We recognize full development not as a goal, but as a right. Size does not determine destiny."



Members of the electronic and print media came from throughout the Caribbean for the journalism conference at the OAS



Guyanese businessman Wesley Kirton, Trevor Vernon, New York Belizean Deanne Romero-Williams of Carib TV and St. Vincent and the Grenadines Ambassador Kingsley Lane attended lively sessions with the Caribbean Diaspora community

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The Best Political Platform

Best Political Platform—continued from Vol.2 No. 24.

Independent Weekly readers have responded enthusiastically to our publication of a set of ideas called “Best Political Platform” developed by the online community members of the Belize Culture list-serv and Belize-Polisci. The planks presented arose from the list serv participants desire to do more than simply complain about the way Belizeans are presently governed but to make positive, proactive recommendations for political reform. Reforms the next government, whoever they may be, could implement and candidates running in the upcoming General Election (whoever they may be) could endorse if they want to show their commitment to change. The planks were edited by Bob Brotherton.

Independent Weekly is proud to endorse the effort of those who contributed and to make them available to a wider audience, both in print and online. Comments, criticisms and recommendations are welcome through letters to the editor.

4) **Auditor-General** - To enhance the effectiveness and independence of the Office of the Auditor-General, this party agrees with the Commission that:

(a) the Constitution be amended at section 109 of the Constitution to reform the appointment process so that the Auditor-General is appointed by the Governor-general acting on recommendation of the National Assembly contained in a resolution passed on that behalf;

(b) the Auditor-General be required to have specific qualifications equivalent to that of a certified public accountant, and be an active member of the Institute of Certified Public Accountants;

(c) Chapter IX, section 120 be so amended as to ensure that the budget for the Office of the Auditor-General is submitted directly to the House of Representatives and be given priority call on the Consolidated Revenue Fund;

(d) the Public Accounts Committee of the House be the medium through which the Auditor-General communicates with the House;

(e) the Finance and Audit Act be so reviewed with the aim of making amendments that increase, establish, and ensure the execution of penalties for (i) government auditors who disclose information on audit inquiries without

proper authorization, and (ii) public officers and others who refuse to cooperate with the requests of the Auditor-General during annual audits;

(f) the Public Services Commission delegate, as allowed by the Constitution, its authority of employment, promotion, and removal of staff of the Office of the Auditor-General Department to the Auditor-General;

(g) provision be made for the development and implementation of penalties for failure to present audited national accounts to the House;

(h) provision be made and resources be provided to allow the Auditor-General to contract the services of auditors outside of the public service to assist in the execution of the duties of the office;

(i) amend section 120(b) of the Constitution to state that a report be submitted to the House by the Auditor-General whether or not the report is completed and, if not completed, the reasons why;

(j) provision be made for the revision of the Finance and Audit Act to ensure compatibility with the Constitution;

(k) Revise and consolidate the Financial Orders, Store Orders and Control of Public Expenditure regulations into one document.

5) **Waiver of Fees** - This party recommends that provision be made to: (a) require that all waivers suspending the legal requirement of any persons or organization to the payment of a particular fee or charge be done only by permission of a statutory instrument and that no waivers be allowed until such statutory instrument is passed by the House;

(b) Ensure that all waivers of fees are published in the government gazette.

Plank No. 4

Planning and Environmental Protection

Whereas the pristine environment of Belize is recognized to be one of its most important and valuable assets of Belize, and Whereas the protection of the environment is one of those unique roles best suited for government, and Whereas there are certain industries that present unique threats to the environment, and Whereas the GOB does not have the adequate capacity in place to monitor the Cruise ship or the oil industry, and Whereas local communities ought to have a greater say towards influencing land development, industry, and economic development opportunities that are undertaken in their com-

munities:

1. A special business tax, placed on cruise ship companies and oil companies, shall be enacted to fully fund the regulation and management of the cruise ship and oil industries that are granted access to Belize. Such taxes shall be managed through a special fund and will be designated for the sole purpose of environmental protection and management programs.

2. Each district will be encouraged (but not required) to develop a 20 year General Plan. This plan shall be developed through the Strategic Planning Process with a broad range of stakeholders. The plan shall be adopted by a majority of the Area Representatives including Mayors of Towns and Villages, and the leader of each Alcalde, who shall also form a permanent body whose approval will be required for major development projects affecting the district. A major project is defined as one that under current laws would require an environment impact assessment before being granted a license or permit. Funding for this planning process shall be provided for and included in the budget of the general government. Towns and Villages who opt for their own Charter shall provide their own local plan development with funding of the plan development by the General Government.

Plank No. 5

Economic Development of Belize

Whereas it is recognized that the creation of job opportunities for all Belizeans is of significant priority for Belize, and Whereas it is of primary importance that the education of people match the economic job opportunities that will come to Belize in the future, and Whereas it is recognized that small businesses have the potential to provide significant economic development of Belize, and Whereas it is recognized that Belize operates in a competitive way with many countries of the world:

1) **Cooperative Village Banking** – (Offered by Bob Brotherton) This party supports the concept of “Cooperative Village Banking” where village and surrounding community residents combine their borrowing power to encourage lending of small business development funds for the development of small local individual owned business operations including farming, service shops, light manufacturing, and similar business ventures. These opportunities to finance the start of small

local business shall be open equally to men and women and all ethnic and cultural backgrounds who are citizens of Belize. This party will pass laws to encourage and facilitate the start of new small business operations by the Belize Government and offer tax relief and other means to facilitate new business development. The Town or Village Council will act as the Board for the cooperative banking and shall approve loans and shall determine standards and types of businesses to be approved that will coordinate with local planning and economic development efforts.

2) **Education and the Economy** – (Offered by Brian Keating [kobuh]) Given the interlocking relationship between Education and Economic Development this party recognizes the critical importance of a viable educational system. The prior findings of the Education Commission will be honored and put into place in the elementary and secondary systems. Post secondary education will be brought under review and a Board with a majority seating of active business leaders will be created. This board will act with the authority to approve budget allocations, curriculum, all appointments, and the award of all publicly funded scholarships. The Department of Labor shall select five industry sectors and assign priority in terms of growth, balance of payments/cash flow, tax generation, employment impact, and include government operations as one of the five industry sectors. Starting with one sector the first year, education will add an additional sector each year for the subsequent four years meanwhile creating a full service curriculum with degrees proceeding through graduate programs as appropriate which will cover the spectrum of jobs in each sector. In all cases, the curriculum content will be developed via a DACUM type study led by SME's (subject matter experts) drawn from businesses in each sector. Further, funding will be made available for a small business incubator program under the community college component. Sufficient funding will be allocated for the startup of at least three businesses each year. The selection will be on a competitive basis as judged by the CC business faculty and other faculty relative to the priority sector for that year.

3) **Encouraging Investment in Belize** - (Offered by Kevin Chisholm) Given the poor history of business and job development in Belize, this party rec-

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The Best Political Platform

➡ (Continued From Page 6)

ognizes the critical importance of job creation and need for business investment in Belize to create those jobs. It is also recognized that the history and culture of Belize needs to be fully understood and protected by those who may invest in Belize from foreign countries. Since passing a law to encourage business development several years ago, very little business development with significant job creation has been accomplished and improvements need to be made in this legislation that will foster real and measurable quality job creation. It is also recognized that not all business types generate the same economic impact to Belize. It is important therefore, to promote the types of business that will allow money generated through the new business to circulate to other businesses within Belize and multiply the value and impact of the money generated to the overall economy. Partnerships between foreign investors and Belizean Nationals will be encouraged with increased incentives offered to majority ownership of Belizean Nationals. Existing government offices will be reorganized to form a new Department of Economic Development designed to solicit investment, track and report the progress of investments and business development, and work with the GOB in creation of legislation to implement this policy. This legislation will include but not be limited to: (a) Requirement for foreign investors and new residents to attend the UB for a course in Belize History and Culture, (b) Improve the criteria relating to tax incentives and other inducements to encourage foreign investment in new business including the attraction of new retirement communities, medical training facilities, manufacturing and light industry, non-traditional medical facilities, and the development of unique products to be exported, (c) Plan and provide for the development of the University of Belize Business Park in Belmopan including the provision of needed infrastructure improvements, (d) Continue with the expansion of airport facilities including smaller airports located near business development, (e) Plan for and improve the development of port facilities, and (f) Utilize the Strategic Planning process in the implementation of these strategies.

Plank No. 6

Support Constitutional Amendments

Whereas the Constitution of Belize has not been amended since its original institution in 1981, and Whereas the history of government operations based on this constitution indicates the need for change, and Whereas the people of Belize need a more direct voice in government through the election of government officials and also need mechanisms to make petitions to their government, and Whereas the size of government and government budgets needs to be limited to what the people

want and can afford:

1) Elected Senate – In order to further the balance of powers and provide a more direct voice of the people in government, this party supports the proposal to provide for the “District Election” of senators. There shall be two elected senators from each District in Belize which will have equal voting rights and other equal responsibilities for their District. The terms of office shall be staggered and shall be for a period of 3 years. Senators elected to office may be recalled by a petition of the registered voters of the District and a special election set within 6 months of the receipt of the validated petition.

2) Petitions by the People – Petitions to the government of Belize for grievances and voter initiated ballot initiatives (including proposed constitutional amendments) shall be accepted by a petition of 25% or more of the registered voters of the people. District petitions shall be by

District voters. National petitions shall be from voters of Belize. Upon receipt of the petition, the petition shall be validated and placed on the next respective election ballot. To make changes in the law or recall an elected Senator by voter initiated change will then require a vote of approval of 60% of the registered voters of the District or Belize depending on the type of petition.


3) Voter Fraud – Any voter found to accept payment for any public vote shall be considered to have committed a felony punishable by the loss of all future voting rights in Belize and shall pay a fine of \$1,000 BZ.

4) Issuance of Public Debt – No debt in excess of \$500,000 BZ shall be issued by the government of Belize without a vote of 9 of the 12 elected Senators.


5) Tax Reform - This party believes that the current type of taxation system in

Belize to raise income for government debt and operations is unbalanced and places an undue burden on people of low and moderate income. It is also recognized that certain revenues are required to operate government in the provision of public services. This party will recommend the decrease in the current gas tax as a priority and will not increase any taxes unless first recommended by the auditor general after a full audit of all current government income and expenses. No tax increase or decrease shall be allowed without a vote of 9 of the 12 elected Senators. Tax reform will be initiated with the philosophy of graduated tax scales from low taxes on the poor and increased percentage of taxation on higher incomes and higher valued property. Revenue sharing with local chartered Towns and Villages based on population and need shall be considered.


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“Youths Making A Positive Impact Through Art”

Cacao Fest a Smash Success



By: William Schmidt
PG correspondent for
INdependent Weekly

Anyone who questioned if the people of Toledo could ever work together has had their answer. The recent Cacao Fest was impressive and attended by both the rich and poor, developed and undeveloped, sophisticated and unsophisticated. Belizeans from Belize City, Ambergris Caye, Cayo, Placencia and from the smallest rural villages, all came together in a spirit of goodwill and co-operation, not just to have a good time, but to promote and market Toledo’s products and services. Graig Sams, President of Green and Blacks Organic Chocolate who encouraged and aided Toledo farmers to form the Toledo Cacao Growers Association way back in 1993, flew in from London England to attend the celebration.

The corporate world was also supportive, from Love FM, Belize Bank, Tropic Air, SMART, Green & Blacks,

Bennys, One Barrel Rum, Premium Wines Travelers Liquors. The GOB, Belize Tourist Board, to the BDF, the NGO community, Earth Watch, TIDE, YCT, SATIIM, and GSW Project also participated.

In terms of the private business sector, foreign and Belizean owned resorts and businesses such as Supal & Sons Supermarket, Belize Minerals, Sea Front Inn, Toledo Farm Supply, Carysha’s Internet Café, Beya Suites, Kings Texaco Station, Arthur Johnson, IBTM Tours, Nancy’s Lumberyard, Machaca Hill Lodge, Cotton Tree Lodge, Corral house Inn, Earth Runnings, Bubut Bar, Tastee Tours, and Garbutts Marine lent their sponsorship.

Individual citizens of Toledo contributed money and labor and special mention should be made of Hiticate Lodge who was a main coordinator. The Governor General Sir Colville Young, escorted by the Belize Defense Force and Inspector of Police, officially opened the festival.

Another important achievement for the Cacao Festival was to highlight Belize’s musical talent. Again artists were invited from northern Belize as well as Punta Gorda Town and the rural villages. Jazz, blues, Bruk Down, Garifuna, Kriol, Ketchi & Mopan Maya and more, all were provided a chance to entertain. A very special and colorful highlight was the Maya deer dance.

Appropriate for the grand finale of Toledo’s first annual Cacao Festival was singing under the stars in front of Saint Peter Claver Parish Hall. Master of Ceremonies Paul Mahung told jokes and introduced Toledo’s greatest stars, Mr. Paul Nabor and the Wamalalee Group and our very own Leela Vernon, Belize’s queen of brukdown Creole culture, accompanied on accordion by her brother Henry Genus III.

Next was the award of prizes for the raffles, many locals won nights and dinners at Toledo’s finest hotels, resorts and restaurants. For some, these places would be beyond their means and perhaps even dreams. How great it was to see them win.

To end Toledo’s first annual Cacao Festival, and appropriate for its success, was what had to be the longest and biggest fireworks display in Toledo history.

I interviewed one guest, Mr. Larry Wilson from Ontario Canada, asking if he enjoyed the day tour he took with guides from Sun Creek Lodge—“Oh yes, he replied, it was really enjoyable. We visited two cacao farmers and had a delicious lunch of traditional Maya chicken caldo with fresh hot corn tortillas on top of a hill with the cool breeze blowing and a great view. We went to Blue Creek and walked through the rain forest to visit a cave and then everyone swam in the clean clear water. I met a young man who told me he was interviewing his father and grandfather and writing a history of his village, he said he had about 100 pages. I met an English woman about my age, we had a great time.”

“How is the price?” I asked. He responded, “Only 30 dollars US, very reasonable for the quality of the tour.”

Saturday night several local places had entertainment. I asked one visitor, where did you go? He said he went with friends to the Coral House Inn where he had a really good time relaxing after a busy day, the music group was on one side of the swimming pool and the people were sitting on the other side having drinks and getting to know each other, the music was very good, jazz and blues, laid back, easy to listen to while conversing. After a while they moved on to the Earth Runnings Restaurant and had a delicious dinner. “The host was most accommodating, as I have a special diet.”

The only comment that one might consider negative, was quickly followed by a positive, when I ask a local person what do you think of the Cacao Festival? He answered, “I’ve heard some people saying it was” “a white people’s thing”, but our people had the chance and didn’t do it, so I think it was good.”

The Cacao Festival shows that we all

have something to contribute and that if we respect and help each other we can make the great and rapid progress we need. I can’t fully express how proud it has made me feel to see the success of the many different aspects of these three days and to hear so many compliments. Having been here from the beginning of the tourism industry in Toledo and personally suffering with the aches and complaints of its birth and moans and groans of its growing pains, it feels so good to see what our people have achieved, I’m sure I’m not alone in this. I’m a grandfather a few times over, so I hope our readers will permit me to say that PG now is like a loved child coming of age.

So what does it all boil down to? Well, to put it simply, American know how, to work capitalism. If you want to end all hunger and suffering in the poorest district of Belize, get the foreign business people who have come to make money in the lucrative tourism industries, to understand that if they work as hard to promote the proposed Toledo Peoples Eco Park, as they have the most successful Toledo Cacao Festival, they will help the people end their poverty. They will help create an endless stream of eco tourists and create the adequate measures necessary to lessen the potential negative affects of the new Guatemala link road and the rapid growth they are creating with the cacao web site and other marketing and promotion they are doing. And it will be beneficial to all our people and our environment.

If we want to be successful, we must establish carrying capacities to protect the district’s environment and local culture. If we don’t want to attract the potential crime problem that resorts in the tourism industry are facing up north, then we must involve the local people at all levels, once everyone is getting a piece of the tourism pie they will protect the tourists, this only makes good sense. Give our local people some credit for the intelligence it takes to figure this out, and a fair chance to participate.

The first annual Cacao Festival proves that by working together all the people of Toledo district can rapidly move from the current poverty to future prosperity.



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A Miracle in Progress



**By: Paul Morgan,
VIP chairman**

The hand of God is working in our land. Thanks to the thousands that have kept the faith and even now continue to pray for Belize. What we are witnessing in Belize's political turmoil these days, might be described by the politically wise as only high stakes politics. We in the VIP (Vision Inspired by the People) are however aware that Belize is really witnessing a modern day miracle of our nation's deliverance from the political abuses we have been suffering over the past 26 years.

"PM MUSA FAVORS AN ELECTED SENATE" says the Belize Times of Sunday, June 10, 2007. This bait was repeated by the PM himself on a Love FM morning show. If we had not been following political events in Belize for the past 26 years or at least for the past 9 years, we would

certainly have given the PM credit for wisely "favoring an elected senate". But we know better! Though we hope it is real, we see this announcement as all palabras - talk and politricks. If the PM is serious about bringing an elected senate to Belize, why does he not just start the public consultation and get it on?

We all know that both mass political parties have had the opportunity to take this step while in government, but they both have resisted any change to our constitution that will check the absolute power of Cabinet. They both know that an elected senate with a mandate to check the working of government is a big step in the right direction. Both continue to resist any change in our system that will allow the Belizean people final say over issues of national concern. Neither has, or intends, to make constitutional amendments (not just an act of parliament) to recall elected representatives who have lost the people's trust. The question then is: Why an announcement of such critical importance now?

Well, the PM knows that his party lacks credibility. The Belizean people have lost faith and trust in the PUP and so like a drowning man, the PM is stretching his hands to grab onto a rope of hope. In this effort he is trying to align himself with the views of

the so called "third parties" who have been clamoring for such political reform and are these days gaining momentum in public opinion. The Public is very aware that the Leader of the Opposition, being poised to win big in the next election, has come out squarely against an elected senate. In fact the Leader of the Opposition proposes to have a senate that is dominated by opposition members, a situation that anyone can foresee will lead to constant gridlock. As his political fortunes seem to increase lately, the leader of the opposition is no longer talking about reforming the system but is rather visibly backing away from the reform agenda. In so doing his real heart for reform is being exposed before the nation as a farce.

As these political dynamics play out, we in the VIP must advise our Belizean brothers and sisters that the most important function we should seek from an elected senate is the power to fairly, soberly and competently investigate charges of corruption brought against any member of cabinet. The membership of the senate we seek must proportionally represent a broad cross section of our Belizean society. This we know will facilitate greater transparency in government. The public will recall that VIP launched its National Direction in January 2007 which advocates for

an elected mixed member, proportional representation Senate, with half the members elected at mid-term. The advantages to this model are numerous and we will elaborate on the idea during our campaign.

Belizeans, the VIP has been asking you to resist tyranny against heavy odds. It is nothing short of a miracle that recent events have so shaped our current political reality, forcing the two mass parties to now stand before us, naked and begging. But this is a miracle in progress. It can be ended if we do not act right. Belizeans at home and abroad must act in concert to force these two mass parties to give us the political reforms we deserve. The reforms must come before elections. If they cannot do it now, then they should both stand down for elections and let the VIP do the job within six months of being elected.



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TOO WILD FOR WORDS!

Training Day at Cockscomb Basin Wildlife Sanctuary

Under the sound management of The Belize Audubon Society, these men all have an important job -they safeguard the world's only protected area which specifically focuses upon the greatest wild cat in the Americas: our beautiful jaguar.

Brought to the Belize Zoo by Wildlife Conservation Society's Bart Harmsen, all wardens got a very close up view of the jaguars at the zoo - and then they were introduced to the important Jaguar Rehabilitation Program. (These one-time livestock killing "problem jaguars" are rehabilitated into "people-liking" cats, and then are found magnificent homes in zoological facilities who are in strong need of healthy "jaguar-genes" for captive breeding programs)

Most of the wildlife in our tropical forests is nocturnal. Viewing our dramatic wild animals out there in the Belizean jungle is more chance and luck than a guaranteed event. For the wardens, each enclosure provided a "familiarization" opportunity so that they could get to observe, at their leisure, the animals who call Belize their home.

TOO WILD FOR WORDS!!!



A Cockscomb Reserve game warden gets close up and personal with a jaguar, one nocturnal animal he doesn't normally get to see in the wild.

State Department Annual Report on Two Debt Reduction Programs

The U.S. Department of State has submitted the 2006 Annual Report to Congress on two debt reduction programs expected to generate \$400 million to help developing countries protect the environment and ensure the development of their children. The programs are the Tropical Forest Conservation Act of 1998 and the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative launched by former President Bush in 1991.

Since 2000, Congress has appropriated funds for the Tropical Forest Conservation Act enabling eligible countries to re-direct a portion of their debt payments to the United States Government to generate funds locally to protect important tropical forests. To date, 11 countries in Africa, Asia and Latin America have entered into debt-for-nature agreements with the United States. These agreements will generate a total of \$137 million to protect forests in the

tropics. The Nature Conservancy, Conservation International and the World Wildlife Fund have contributed \$9.6 million to these debt-for-nature agreements.

The 11 countries which entered into debt-for-nature agreements with the United States are: Bangladesh, Belize, Botswana, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Jamaica, Panama (2), Paraguay, Peru, and the Philippines.

The United States also has debt reduction programs with eight eligible countries in Latin America and the Caribbean under the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative. These programs have generated \$165 million in grants to non-governmental organizations supporting environmental activities and child survival and development programs in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, El Salvador, Jamaica, Peru and Uruguay. Although Congress no longer appropriates funds for the Ini-

tiative, a total of \$100 million remains available in existing local programs.

For further information on the Tropical Forest Conservation Act and

the Enterprise for the Americas Initiative, see www.usaid.gov/our_work/environment/forestry/tfca.html.

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Teen Page



Top Student

By: Julia Heusner

As a classmate of Xux-Ek Novelo, I always knew she would do something great and now she has came in first in the P.S.E. with a top score in Belize. She scored a 100% in math, 92% in Social Studies, 94% in science, and a 88% in language giving us a total of 93.5% ! She got a 374 answers correct out of 400 questions. Her favorite subject, as you well can see, is math.

She is now the Valedictorian of our class of Hummingbird Elementary.



Xux-Ek Novelo is also a talented flautist.

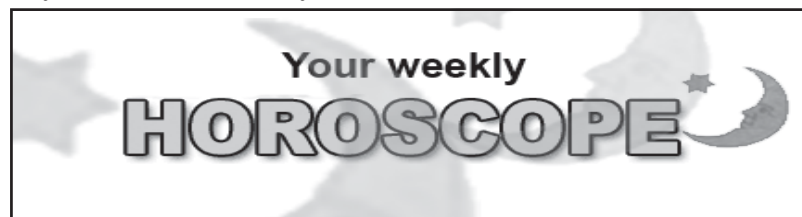
Like a average student she watches T.V , listens to music, and reads in her spare time. But Xux-Ek is not your average student because when the rest of us are at home kicking back after a long day of school and finishing up our homework she is doing her ballet classes, her flute classes, her pi-

ano classes, and Pallotti Chamber Group. All this and still finds time to study. Xux-Ek told me how she aced the P.S.E., *"I studied whenever I could, three times for the week and reviewed for four days."* When I asked her about how she is feeling about the publicity she said, *" Well, I'm kind of used to it , cause of bal-*

let shows and music shows."

In her other achievements she won 2nd place in the Hugh Parkey quiz bowl and 3rd place in the BTB Social Studies Quiz. She also won 4 golds in the festival of arts and an award of *most promising instrumentalist*.

Congrats Xux-Ek , all the teens of Belize are proud of you!



Aries (Mar. 21- April 20)

Only one more week to take advantage of the edge your Mars ruler is giving you. Mercury retrograde can slow down work being done around the house, but you suspected as much, didn't you?

Taurus: Apr. 20 - May 20

One of the happier times of the year occurs on Tuesday when your affectionate Venus ruler perfects a favorable trine with jolly Jupiter. While the two "benefics" are reinforcing each other's positive traits, now would be the time to double your pleasure, double your fun. Maybe even call your sister. On Flag Day , don't let a chance to buy, sell or trade for something of great value pass by.

Gemini: May 21 - Jun. 20

Mercury turns retrograde in your Cancer house of assets and acquisitions. It's probably too late to remind you to be diligent about money matters, the paperwork involved, plus the goods and services that'll pass through your place over the next three weeks.

Cancer: Jun. 21 - Jul. 22

The sun can help clarify the issues that need your attention. The others should be put on hold. Meanwhile you'll have an excuse to enjoy (maybe even pay for) some luxurious fun and games as agreeable Venus in your Leo money house and generous Jupiter in your house of romance and recreation form a favorable time for you.

Leo: Jul. 23 - Aug. 22

Grab the Crab. The two signs are linked this week by a harmonious tie, not unlike a colorful ribbon, that you both can wear with pride. Relinquishing control isn't easy for a fixed sign such as yours, but after your sun ruler confronts Pluto, the master of manipulation, Monday night you aren't scheduled to face another obstacle until mid-August, and that one you can easily blow off.

Virgo: Aug. 23 - Sep. 22

There are basically two arenas that Virgos should focus on during the next three weeks. For the August born: confusion over club dates, meetings, colleagues' contributions, social get-togethers, politics, union matters and the blogging they entail. For the September born: it'll be about your career, clients, employers, community leaders, parents and your reputation.

Good luck.

Libra: Sep. 23 - Oct. 22

Join the parade. Bulls, Lions and Centaurs might appear to be leading it, but the Scales is more than welcome to join the party. In fact, a committee of your peers may pay you to be the figurehead. Might be more of a hassle if you're traveling abroad or taking courses.

Scorpio: Oct. 23 - Nov. 21

Remind yourself that the annual Gemini new moon on Thursday may present an interesting opportunity to make money using other people's money, the area of expertise traditionally attributed to Scorpio. If you plan to get away for a holiday, aim for Labor Day rather than the Fourth. For the moment, protecting the bird in your hand is a better deal than the two in the bush.

Sagittarius: Nov. 22 - Dec. 21

You could be feeling the good vibes as soon as the new moon in your Gemini marriage house sends you on a mission to explore this year's version of "togetherness." Don't shy away from any offer you get while impulsive Mars in your house of romance. Hot!

Capricorn: Dec. 22 - Jan. 20

An irritating element of your scene at home could disappear suddenly, done in by a guardian angel you didn't know you had. A city ordinance? An avenging relative? Let whomever is working behind the scenes do their thing while you concentrate on a new assignment.

Aquarius: Jan. 21 - Feb. 18

Air signs, whether or not they even care, can also benefit from harmonious relations between the fire signs. Do something really nice for your partner. The one area that might not show any improvement, much less any action, is work.


Pisces: Feb. 19 - Mar. 19

Water signs might feel depleted, depressed or simply washed out by all the fire sign energy being emitted this week. There's not much you can do about it except trust that your loved ones will share their good fortune with you. Maybe you'll get the nerve to ask for more pay at work, please. Maybe even carve out a tastier piece of the pie for yourself?


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U.S./Caricom Joint Statement on the Caribbean

We, the Heads of State and Government of the United States of America and of the Caribbean Community Nations of Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, St. Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago, meeting in Washington D.C. on June 20, 2007, reaffirm our unequivocal commitment to a secure and prosperous region and future for the benefit of all of our citizens.

2. Recalling our shared history of democracy, respect for human rights, social justice, and cultural and ethnic diversity, we highlight the value of our enduring friendship and recommit ourselves to enhancing our partnership to reinforce the development aspirations that guide our mutual priorities.

3. We pledge to continue promoting the consolidation of democratic norms, values, and institutions throughout the hemisphere and to enhance accountability and respect for individual rights.

4. We agree to take steps to expand economic opportunities for our people, to address the threats of terrorism and crime, and to provide the benefits of democracy to all members of our societies, recognizing that democracy will best flourish if our societies are stable and our economies are prosperous.

5. We recognize the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy as a critical element of the growth and development strategy of the Caribbean Community.

6. We are determined to strengthen our existing trade arrangements. We acknowledge President Bush's announcement to work with Congress to extend and update the Caribbean Basin Trade Promotion Act and the 1991 Trade and Investment Framework Agreement. We further commit to the harmonization of customs procedures consistent with global standards and the advancement of technical trade cooperation.

7. We reiterate our support for Caribbean efforts to expand the services sector, and encourage a focus on the international financial services sector to facilitate a competitive means of economic diversification while remaining committed to the maintenance of appropriate regulatory and supervisory practices, consistent with the highest international standards.

8. Cognizant of the spread of HIV and AIDS and the impact on the economic and social development of our people, we pledge to deepen our cooperation in health and welcome the initiative to continue PEPFAR in the

Caribbean.

9. Cognizant that more than 95 percent of CARICOM's energy needs are derived from fossil fuels, we pledge to increase cooperation in this area to achieve sustainable, secure, and affordable access to energy for all our citizens.

10. We agree to increase cooperation efforts in the field of education and workplace training. We commit to strengthen teacher training by expanding the Caribbean Centers for Excellence. We also commit to strengthen human capacity in the Caribbean to meet the demands of a 21st century employment environment through partnering with academic institutions and non-governmental groups as well as through skills training for youth via the Entra-21 program.

11. We declare our intention to negotiate an agreement on cooperation in Science and Technology including Information Communication Technologies.

12. We recommit to our ongoing efforts of cooperation in the area of disaster preparedness, mitigation, and recovery.

13. We acknowledge the multidimensional nature of the security threats and challenges faced by our countries and pledge to continue to work together in the fight against terrorism, trafficking in persons, drugs and small arms, and transnational crime.

14. We also acknowledge the successful security partnership developed to secure the CARICOM Region during its hosting of the Cricket World Cup 2007. To this end, we agree to continue strengthening the Region's

security infrastructure.

15. We recognize the need to work more closely on immigration security issues in a manner respectful of national laws and government services capacity and sensitive to the effects of human displacement. We will jointly work toward the expansion of the pilot reintegration program for deportees in Haiti to include other CARICOM member states. We will develop new ways to facilitate, coordinate, and communicate between our immigration services.

16. We are heartened by the substantial progress in Haiti made by the Government of President Preval, with

the support of international partners. We recognize that Haiti will continue to require substantial regional and international support in the implementation of a consistent and long-term strategy of institution and capacity building, and pledge to work together with the three branches of the Haitian Government.

17. On the occasion of Caribbean-American Heritage Month, we pay tribute to the generations of Caribbean-Americans who have helped shape the spirit and character of the United States of America and who continue to contribute to the growth and development of the Caribbean.

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Caribbean Calling

☞ (Continued From Page 4)
moguls whose bias is apparent and whose reporters are prevented from examining all sides of the issues through commercial or political pressure.

We also discussed violence against journalists, including murders, which are occurring with impunity in Haiti due to attempts to prevent investigative journalism and at an alarming rate in Mexico due to the drug trade. I raised my concerns of the detention of cameramen, both freelance and fulltime around the time of our Belmopan protests and also assaults on journalists by police and political candidates. I was told by a panelist “Whenever a government feels it is about to lose an election, they tend to blame the press.”

I raised the issue in the hope those responsible for trying to prevent the Belizean media from recording events occurring in public spaces will remember that any attempt to censor the news and physically restrain or attack reporters can be reported to international agencies and pressure can be brought to bear through international censure. I hope those journalists who were detained, slapped, punched, or otherwise will make formal complaints, not just to local police and Human Rights Commission, but to international agencies representing journalists.

This type of harassment must be nipped in the bud as we head into another election. If we want to continue our record of free and fair elections, we must continue to allow free and fair coverage of those elections. I hope too Belize will sign the Inter-American Convention on Human Rights, for to my surprise we were told Belize is among the countries which still has not.

To say the media in the Caribbean is the watchdog of democracy is an understatement. Although some countries do not have a Freedom of Information Act, those who do have already realize it amounts to little in practice. Public servants however, have created their own free flow of information in the form of leaks. Virtually every major political scandal in Belize was brought to media and public attention by a conscientious civil servant, or one with an ax to grind against a politician. The information will

come out - but how, how transparently is up to the governments in question. You might say “as the workers begin to believe a government will lose an election they tend to blame the politicians.”

In any case, the trip to Washington was well worth our time and my husband Trevor and I were astonished at the number of people we tried to give hard copies of our paper to who said they had already read it online and had been reading it for months!

This is gratifying beyond words not only because we realize that the diplomatic community and Belizeans abroad—from Florida, California, New York, Texas to Illinois— have found us, but because it shows that the “new media” is indeed the biggest wave around and that little Independent Weekly can ride it right alongside the bigger, more established newspapers in the region. It also suggested to us that we have joined Channels Seven and Five and Amandala and Reporter and LOVE and KREM as one of the sources of news Belizeans seek out each week and that together, as a group, we form a strong, viable press presence from our corner of the Caribbean. My colleagues in Belize, with the exception of Ava Jean Diaz from LOVE, may not have been with us in DC, but they were with us. If you know what I mean.

What I hope Trevor and I can do from here on in, is to liaise more closely with our Caribbean counterparts, help each other to bring the entire region together, to see that the concerns of the people of St. Kitts and Nevis are in many ways the same as the people in Belize, that the people

of Haiti are entering a new, renewed chapter in their history, that St. Vincent and Barbados and the Bahamas and all the places so many Caribbean people know in name only are as worthy of a visit as a shopping trip to Miami.

But we also need, collectively, to reach out to Americans, these people who seem now to spend more time talking on the phone and on the internet than they do speaking to people in the same room, that it would be worth their while to leave their little bubble and explore our countries. Let them know that we have more in common with each than with countries

in Africa. But then again, maybe there are some similarities and bonds there too worth exploring....Perhaps at an African-Caribbean journalism conference....? Held, oh I don’t know, in Nairobi?

(Well, I can dream can’t I?)

We would like to thank Ambassador Albert Ramdin, Von Martin, and Ian Edwards for inviting Independent Weekly to attend the Caribbean Journalism Conference and to cover the Conference on the Caribbean along with our heads of state.

We appreciate your faith in Belize’s newest newspaper, and in Belize.

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Social Page



Wedding bells sounded once more for former SJC headmaster Andrew Lopez and his blushing bride Yolanda Therese Rivero, who were joined in Holy Matrimony at the Holy Redeemer Cathedral in Belize City on Saturday, June 23.

NOTICE

Private Property Owners Meeting Friday 6 July 2007 9AM @ Spanish Lookout

All owners, occupiers and people in possession of Belizean lands are invited to attend a very important meeting at Spanish Lookout on Friday 6th July to develop a Private Property Policy concerning oil exploration and production.

There are a number of issues affect private landholders for oil exploration and production which are not well defined, and thus do not allow the private landowner or occupiers to accurately access what rights and options are available in negotiating the use of their property. The issues have been presented in a discussion series which has been circulated to interested parties for the purpose of developing a consensus position on the issues for inclusion as part of a Private Property Policy. The goal of this policy is to establish a consistent position which clearly sets out the rights of landowners and occupiers, and the conditions for using their lands for oil exploration and production which is consistent with international practice. The intent is NOT to be confrontational, but instead to develop a positive and uniform platform from which fair and reasonable private land use agreements can be negotiated.

For More Information Contact:

mlm@btl.net

junglejim@btl.net

palmspring@btl.net



Nurse Bernadette Wade Rivas won the 2007 Public Service Officer of the Year award. Nurse Rivas has been a nurse since 1985 and is today Acting Matron at the Western Regional Hospital.



The Archives Department won the 2007 Public Service Department of the Year award.



IW General Manager Trevor Vernon and Editor Karla Heusner Vernon with Ian Edwards, Information Specialist of the OAS, Deanne Romero-Williams of Carib Vision TV and Ray Gongora, President of the Belize Association of Florida

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Free Ads! The INdependent Reformer is offering free classified ads for the month of June: 1) 20 words or less 2) one ad per person in the promotional period for free



(additional ads are only \$10 each)
3) with photo (first time free...\$10 additional for photo ads)
jpeg or tiff formats only. **Must be emailed, no disk pickup or drop off**
4) business card –first run is free for month of May, 2007, \$20 a run thereafter

5) All classified ads must be emailed to independent.newspaper.bz@gmail.com with cc to kheusner@yahoo.com and checks to PO Box 2666, Belize City. Please note: We must receive your ad by Friday at mid-day for inclusion in following Tuesday issue.

Letters to the Editor

➡ (Continued From Page 4)
are things happening in San Ignacio/ Santa Elena and the surrounding area that just aren’t making it into the papers, even the local paper (The Star, perhaps because it is a bit biased to the UDP and thus, the current town council). I think this info needs to be addressed not just for those living in the said communities and surrounding areas, but for the rest of country.

Maybe there are similar issues happening in other towns. But, perhaps more importantly is the fact that if such issues are being discussed at the national level it may shame ‘the-powers-that-be’ in the communities do something about what is happening (or not happening).

Thanks,
A. Morrice
Editor’s note—Independent Weekly’s staff is very small at this point, so we welcome any assistance we might get from readers in the districts. In terms of editorial policy, we

will consider printing anything verifiable that comes to us without a partisan bias. If we begin to receive enough material from people willing to report on a regular basis, IW will be more than happy to create a fulltime regional section. Our format does not include “hard news” items such as crime reports; our focus is on opinion pieces, commentaries and current event items, particularly as they relate to political reform and better governance.



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It is hard to win when the referee and linesmen are members of the opposing team and your fans are not allowed to attend the game.

Here is how GoB/MoE/QADS chose the books for the Infant Division for the Textbook Programme.

Experts in the Caribbean made a schoolbook evaluation form.

MoE/QADS is in the process of writing a learning to read book called Fast Phonics.

MoE/QADS used the expert made evaluation form to evaluate their own partially written Fast Phonics book. Their evaluation of their book turns out very good.

MoE/QADS used the expert made evaluation form to evaluate BRC's learning to read books. Surprise! BRC's books came in second to MoE/QADS' Fast Phonics book.

Is there a possibility that there was bias in MoE/QADS' evaluation? What would have happened if the authors of BRC had done the evaluation?

When BRC suggested to QADS that testing children's learning was necessary to determine the value of a book. QADS said that it was not necessary because the evaluation form was made by experts.

BRC asked MoE/QADS if schools could be given a choice of books in the Infant Division. The answer was that the Cabinet (GoB) would not allow a choice.

MoE/QADS knew that if a choice was given an overwhelming number of schools would choose BRC. They knew that the only way that they could get their not-proven Fast Phonics books into the schools was by force. Is it possible that MoE/QADS suggested "no choice" to Cabinet?

When the list of chosen books was first presented, MoE/QADS claimed that the most widely used books were chosen. That claim was not quite accurate.

MoE/QADS also said that the education partners were included in the choice. When the partners got together, they realized that the claim was not quite accurate. If some partners had been included, there were only a few and they were carefully selected.

GoB/MoE/QADS chose Fast Phonics because they had the power to do so, even though they had to break the policy of including partners in such a decision.

Teachers using BRC's reading claim that their children are learning to read using it. That is over 80% of the schools in Belize. BRC takes two and one-half years to teach children how to read using the phonics symbols of the English Language.

In the USA, a company called SRA has developed a successful phonics based reading series. The first two years are designed to teach children how to read. It takes SRA two years to teach US children how to read under the following conditions:

- SRA is designed for children who have preschool and kindergarten and begin first grade (Infant One) at the age of 6.
- SRA is designed for children who speak English, have parental help in learning and live in a reading environment.
- SRA is designed for children who are in a class size of 17 or less and have a teacher who is a fully trained university graduate with a degree in early childhood education.

SRA believes it takes two years, under the above conditions, to teach children how to read. All other learning to read books take a minimum of two years.

MoE/QADS claim that children, in a much more difficult learning situation, need only one year to learn how to read. All the phonics symbols SRA teaches in two years are taught by MoE/QADS' Fast Phonics in one year.

MoE/QADS claims that their experts cannot be wrong. They are willing to gamble one-half million taxpayers' dollars and our children's learning to read on their claim. Let them demonstrate that their claim is accurate by being in fair competition with BRC. If Fast Phonics proves to be better, schools will choose Fast Phonics and BRC will either improve or be eliminated.

GoB/MoE/QADS you owe it to the children of Belize to present concrete evidence that Fast Phonics is better than BRC before you give Fast Phonics free to all schools and go to schools telling them not to use BRC. MoE/QADS needs to demonstrate to the public that children using Fast Phonics are learning to read better than children using BRC's reading.

By eliminating a book that teachers claim is helping children learn to read and replacing it with an unproven book, GoB/MoE/QADS is gambling with our children. GOB/MoE/QADS should have completed their book and used it in pilot schools for more than two years before declaring it the only book to be used in the country. There are indications that Fast Phonics is not teaching children how to read but only getting children to memorize phonics symbols. If Infant One children are not learning to read, that inability will show up in the second year of school. A pilot school teacher said that she taught BRC and Fast Phonics and that they complement each other. She went on to say that Fast Phonics cannot stand alone and that BRC is needed for children to learn to read.

Crude Facts

The Spanish Lookout Oil Field

Belize Natural Energy started oil production operations in the Spanish Lookout oil field in late 2005. Since that time, the Spanish Lookout Community has benefited significantly both economically and socially, directly and indirectly from BNE operations.



Separation unit and storage tanks at Iguana Creek



BNE conducts its operations on less than 1/4 of a percent of the total land area in Spanish Lookout

BNE manages the Spanish Lookout field with some 7 million barrels of proven reserves. The 5 wells yield a combined average of 3,200 barrels a day. During 2006, 806,264.81 barrels of crude oil were produced.

Economic Impact

During the short time BNE has been operating in the area, the company has directly paid Spanish Lookout businesses including civil works contractors, hardware vendors, fabricators, electricity suppliers, crude oil truckers and many others more than 8.8 million dollars for goods and services.

BNE pays the owners of the land where the wells are located an annual rental fee for the land used by the company. BNE pays for the use of community roads and for damages to crops, fences etc. BNE has paid Mennonite monitors to be present while work is being carried out. Furthermore the Spanish Lookout community will also receive from the Government of Belize 5% of royalties paid by BNE.



Social & Environmental Impact

TRAINING:

Spanish Lookout residents have benefited from participation in First Aid training. The company is currently planning an advanced First Aid course to be delivered by the Red Cross and an oil measurement course through Caleb Brett Intertek, a world renowned oil measurement provider. The Spanish Lookout community and Government of Belize have been invited to participate.



FIRE-FIGHTING:

BNE has provided fire-fighting assistance to communities in and around the Spanish Lookout area. During the last dry season, the company put out 3 fires within Spanish Lookout and two forest fires in surrounding areas. This was done using BNE's fire fighting equipment and company personnel based at Iguana Creek at no cost to area residents.



Oil storage and truck loading bay at Iguana Creek

BNE has over the short period of exploration and production operations moved to minimize its presence in the Mennonite Community respecting the community's wishes. As such a pipeline was installed that gathers all the oil produced from the field and transports it to a central facility outside of the community and there is no flaring, venting or trucking of crude oil being conducted within the community.

Flaring occurs exclusively at Iguana Creek



A small maintenance crew works in rotating shifts at the 5 well sites on a 24hr basis.

OIL LANGUAGE 101

PIPELINE: a system of connected lengths of pipe, usually buried in the earth or seafloor, that is used for transporting crude oil and natural gas from a producing area to refineries or terminals. <http://www.maverickenergy.com/lexicon4.htm> | A Dictionary for the Oil & Gas Industry, PETEX

BNE's pipeline passes underground from the well sites in Spanish Lookout to the Central Gathering Facility at Iguana Creek.



PIPELINE MARKER



INSERT # 4
June 2007