



The Independent



FAMILY OF MAN STRUCK MY ROSEWOOD: "WE NEED HELP"



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Weekend Warriors



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An Artist: creator of their own universe

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Belizean terrorist?

Thursday, January 26th, 2012

BELIZE CITY - The publication of a partial transcript of a statement by US Special Agent Richard S. Hahn (Ret.) this week on the internet has many Belizeans asking questions about the brother of Port Loyola area representative Anthony "Boots" Martinez' brother, Edward Vincent Martinez. In the state-



Edward Vincent Martinez



ment before the US Senate Committee on the Judiciary hearing on an appeal for clemency for members of the Puerto Rican nationalist group FALN on September 15th, 1988, Hahn said:

"I, Richard S. Hahn, am a retired FBI Special Agent. During the period

of January, 1975, through September, 1987, I was involved almost exclusively in the investigation of Puerto Rican terrorist matters. I served in New York, San Juan and Chicago during this period. While in New York I investigated bombings conducted by the FALN, beginning with

the bombing of Fraunce's Tavern on January 24, 1975. From January 1978 through December 1980 I served in San Juan as that office's bombing coordinator. My experiences there saw the emergence of the Macheteros as well as other groups. From Janu-

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Cyber attack shuts down Belize web site

Tuesday, January 25th, 2012

SAN PEDRO TOWN: Ambergriscaye.com, Belize's premier travel website has been the victim of a cyber attack that temporarily shut down the site completely. The DOS (Denial Of Service) attack targets a website by flooding their server with so many requests for service that the server crashes under the load. This attack started about two weeks ago and was countered and escalated until on Monday the calls for service took down a large portion of Viawest, the server company and ambergriscaye.com went off line.

Ambergriscaye.com is a major site with over 10,000 unique visitors everyday. Most hotels and many tourism businesses nationwide use ambergriscaye.com as a substantial part of their ad-

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Kid gloves for the well connected?

Thursday, January 26, 2012

SAN IGNACIO, Cayo - What do Ian Vega, Mike Silva and Ravell Gonzalez have in common? They are each politically well connected, have caused injury and death and are yet to face prosecution for the alleged wrongs they committed.

On December 26th 2011, an Isuzu D-Max driven by



Ian Vega



Mike Silva



Ravell Gonzalez

Belizean terrorist?

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ary 1981 through September 1987 I served in Chicago as one of several case agents for FALN investigations.

"In March, 1980 the FALN conducted a takeover of the Carter-Mondale campaign headquarters. Workers in that office were held at gunpoint while the office was ransacked and spray painted. Lists of delegates to the convention were stolen and threatening letters subsequently were mailed to many of them.

"On April 4, 1980, eleven FALN members were captured in Evanston, Illinois as they were preparing to conduct an armed robbery of an armored car. Among those arrested was Carlos Alberto Torres, renter of the bomb factory found in 1976. Also among those arrested was Edward Vincent Martinez, a national from Belize formally British Honduras, relatively new recruit to the FALN. The arrests led the location of numerous safe houses throughout the U.S. including those in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and Newark, N.J. Searches of these safe houses yielded weapons and explosives and bomb paraphernalia tied to the claimed FALN bombings. Mr. Martinez, along with nine other FALN members, was tried and convicted of seditious conspiracy. Throughout the trial the FALN members refused to participate in the proceedings, claiming that the U.S. Government had no authority over them.

"Following his conviction, but prior to sentencing, Mr. Martinez reached out for U.S. Government authorities. Mr. Martinez subsequently cooperated with the government and provided significant insight into the operation of the FALN. Mr. Martinez identified each of his co-defendants as individuals who participated in armed terrorist actions and/or the manufacture/delivery of FALN bombs.

"It is Mr. Martinez's testimony that identifies the purpose of the gathering of the FALN members in Evanston on April 4, 1980, as well as the actions at Carter - Mondale Headquarters and the Oak Creek National Guard Armory.

"In addition to his experiences in armed assaults, Mr. Martinez also provided testimony regarding being tasked, with one other FALN member, Ricardo Jimenez, to place a bomb. Although Mr. Martinez did not ultimately participate in the placing of the device, he did travel on public transportation through Chicago with Jimenez and the live device to the intended target. As they

arrived at the target late, they were unable to place the device there, and Jimenez dismissed Martinez, stating that he would take care of the matter. Martinez testified that Jimenez told him that he put the device in the washroom of a building.

"Mr. Martinez also provided information as to the functioning of the FALN. He described the FALN in court as a clandestine, revolutionary Puerto Rican organization whose goal was to build a peoples war in Puerto Rico and the U.S. through armed violence. Mr. Martinez also described in testimony, details of the rigors of clandestine operations, designed to preclude one member from knowing the activities of more than just a few others, in order to minimize risk from infiltration or government cooperation. He provided details regarding the training he received in counter surveillance

techniques, maintenance of a safe houses, false identification and disguises."

Edward Martinez who is reportedly employed as an administrator at the Ministry of Works, but who lists himself as a "Senior Building contractor and engineer at Ministry of Works" and who claims to have studied at Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, Illinois, USA, made the news here in Belize in December 2010 when he claimed that a construction worker had shorted the Ministry's building supply.

But Martinez has made the news before. On the morning of February 2nd, 2009, the pickup he was driving collided into a Ford Explorer between miles 7 and 8 on the Western Highway. The accident claimed the life of Traffic Warden Carolyn Rowland and her 8 year old daughter, and badly injured her two other chil-

dren who were also passengers in her vehicle. As far as we can determine, Martinez was never charged in connection with the tragedy.

Our reports are that Martinez was also arrested and charged in April 1999 for the bludgeoning death of U.S. Army veteran sixty-two year old Fredrick Hopkins. News reports at the time said that Martinez had led police to Hopkins, badly decomposed body between Isabella Bank and Lemonal off a feeder road after Hopkins had been reported missing for several days. It was also reported that he had confessed to the crime.

Martinez subsequently recanted his confession claiming that he had been beaten and tortured by police. The Independent could not verify the final disposition of the charges at press time.

According to the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia: "The Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional (in English: Armed Forces of National Liberation, FALN) was a Puerto Rican clandestine paramilitary organization that, through direct action, advocated complete independence for Puerto Rico. At the time of its dissolution, the FALN was responsible for more than 120 bomb attacks on United States targets between 1974 and 1983. The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) classifies the FALN as a terrorist organization."

Kid gloves for the well connected?

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Ian Vega, 20, collided with a minivan, the property of Windy Hill Resort, driven by Luis Polanco 34. The accident occurred on the Western Highway between miles 70 and 71. In the van with Luis Polanco were co-workers Erlin Puk and Reina Ruiz.

Erlin Puk sustained broken legs and Reina Ruiz sustained injuries to her chest and legs. Driver Luis Polanco who sustained severe head and body injuries died on Monday January 2, 2012 around 6:00 a.m.

Since then the family of Luis Polanco and the other injured parties have been pursuing justice to no avail. According to the wife of Luis Polanco, police have were prepared to arrest and charge Ian Vega for the accident which Police has determined to be his fault but have simply not followed through.

Vega we are told also sustained injuries and was flown out for treatment but has since returned to Belize yet the Polanco family are yet to get any compensation or legal satisfaction because as Mrs. Polanco claims, they are "getting the run-around."

The reason for the run-around sources are saying is because Ian Vega is the nephew of Deputy Prime Minister Gaspar Vega. Reports are that the young Vega was driving under the influence when he swerved into the minivan on that fateful day. Police our sources say have not taken any samples from Vega to verify if he was driving under the influence and if so, what was his level on intoxication.

This incident follows in an unsavory pattern involving politically well connected persons. In September of last year, Mark Silva, son of former PUP executive Dan Silva was accused of strangling his girlfriend, nineteen year old Maritza Santos in a jealous rage. Silva allegedly ingested the poisonous herbicide Gramaxone in an attempt to end his own life but was unsuccessful. He was flown out for emergency treatment and since then it is unknown whether he has returned to Belize to face prosecution.

Similarly, Ravell Gonzalez, former Mayor of Orange Walk Town was charged for knocking down and causing the deaths of Manuel Coto and two year old Markita Lopez at Mile 35 on the Northern Highway. Gonzalez is alleged to have been driving under the influence of alcohol. The accident occurred in June of 2008 and Gonzalez was arraigned in Magistrate Court in Belize City but never faced any further prosecution for the accident.

Gonzalez eventually gave a urine sample after much effort on the part of the police and public outrage. Following arraignment, Gonzalez was offered bail for \$6,000.00 and his case was adjourned to July 28, 2008. Our records do not show that Gonzalez was ever tried.

Vega was served with intention of prosecution however no further action has been taken by police. According to Ian Vega, his insurance has already honored whatever claim from the accident.

Cyber attack shuts down Belize web site

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vertising. Operated by Marty Casado, the website is also a leading world search engine for Maya history and maintains a huge database of ancient maps and historic texts including Maya codex as well as modern Belize history. The site contains about 60,000 pages devoted to Belize and our culture and represents probably the largest repository of Belize information anywhere.

Ambergriscaye.com is a valuable news site with links to all major media houses and blogs countrywide. It is also known for its message board that is actually monitored to control the spirit of the debates and shutting down threads when they become abusive or personal in nature. Currently the site is up and running but still under some form of attack and the message board is not up at this time. To many an attack against ambergriscaye.com is an attack against the entire tourism industry of Belize.

Family of man struck by Rosewood: "We need help"



Wednesday, January 25, 2012

PUNTA GORDA - Not much has improved for Antonio Edwards who was involved in a freak accident on Sunday, January 8th as he made his way home on the Jacintoville Road in the Toledo District with his three year old son after church.

Edwards was struck by a length of Rosewood which dislodged from the cargo of the truck it was being transported on. Fortunately the three year old escaped unharmed however Edwards' legs were broken in several areas.

Edwards was flown to the Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital for treatment and then released shortly after. Since his return home, Edwards has been suffering pains and his wife, Justina Edwards told the media that her husband's feet have swollen.

Doctors at the KHMH had initially decided to amputate both of Edwards' legs but after elected to save them. Surgery which would save Edwards' legs cost an estimated \$6,000.00 which the family cannot afford which resulted in Mr. Edwards being discharged from the hospital with only minor treatment.

It is a strange turn of events coming from the Government subsidized Karl Heusner Memorial Hospital. On Wednesday Mrs. Justina Edwards sent out a plea for financial assistance from the public to pay for her husband's surgery and to take care of their family of four children for which Antonio Edwards was the only bread winner.

Driver of the truck, Rodwell Williams has only offered minimal financial support with little over One Thousand Dollars. Williams however told the media that he has given over 4,000.00 in assistance to the family, a figure which Mrs. Edwards vehemently denied.

Driver of the truck Williams has

gone further, Mrs. Edwards claims that he scolded her telling her not to further scandalize him in the media. Williams maintains that he has given the family over \$4000.00 and has even paid for a doctor to visit Mr. Edwards at his home. That doctor, according to Williams has reported that Mr. Edwards does not require surgery because his legs are healing. The doctor also informed that should Mr. Edwards require surgery, the KHMH will perform it free of cost. Williams also told the media that he has documents to prove that Mrs. Edwards signed for more than \$4000.00 from him.

The Toledo District has been the hotbed of controversy since mass logging of Rosewood started there several months ago. To date, government is yet to curtail what southerners claim is illegal logging by persons sanctioned by or are well connected to persons high up in government.

Government issued a release following their usual cabinet meeting stating that the "Ministry of Natural Resources will conduct a stock survey and assessment to determine the remaining inventory and to determine how much illegal activity if any has taken place. The Toledo Conservation NGOs will be invited to participate in the exercise."

"Current permits will be maintained for the rest of season which will last until June and royalty will be increased immediately in order to allow the Forest Department to hire more staff to do better policing," the release stated.

The course of action to be taken will be decided based on the results of the stock survey and assessment exercise.

"Cabinet agreed that the issuance of Rosewood extraction permits for areas that have never been harvested, may be considered will be considered," the release concluded.

Guerrero to remain UDP SP candidate



January 25th, 2012

SAN PEDRO TOWN: The UDP have put to rest any question concerning the fate of San Pedro Town Councilor candidate Severito Guerrero, it was announced on Decision 2012 on the evening of January 24th that Mr. Guerrero will remain a candidate for Town Council in spite of the controversy surrounding his discovery working after hours in front of the Elections and Boundaries Office computer in San Pedro accompanied by Elections and Boundaries Officer Marilee Squires and her son Irvin Pou.

The next unpublicized bombshell had come in an interview with PUP Chairman Milo Paz held at the PUP office in San Pedro in the morning of January 24th. Mr. Paz produced for inspection an email sent from Irvin Pou to the San Pedro PUP. In that email Mr. Pou clearly states that Severito Guerrero was present in the Elections and Boundaries Office after hours to return the Elections and Boundaries camera that had been in his possession for an unstated amount of time. This contradicts previously published statements that Mr. Guerrero was assisting with a computer problem and raises additional serious questions concerning the whole affair. Mr. Paz also stated that the PUP had not taken the nationally distributed picture and it was supplied to the PUP by an independent source.

The stakes in the controversy had been raised considerably as on Friday, 20th of January on Good Morning San Pedro

listeners were treated to morning fireworks as the Chairman of the UDP Executive Claudio Azueta and PUP Chairman Milo Paz exchanged a series of calls leveling charges of voter fraud and dirty politics at each other.

Mr. Paz raised the possibility of tampering with the voters list and raised the possibility of a conspiracy to steal the election. Mr. Azueta responded that Mr. Paz was playing dirty politics as both Parties have accessed the computer in the past and it was certainly not evidence of tampering. His charge of dirty politics was buffered by the comparison of taking someone's picture in front of a brothel and implying they are immoral and stated that the picture was taken and publicized for its sensational value. In response to public concern over the possibility of Marilee Squires losing her job both Party Chairmen said that they supported Ms Squires and would expect to see her back in her job at Elections and Boundaries Office in San Pedro. Both agreed that she made a mistake but should not lose her job. Ms Squires remains on "Administrative Leave."

In a subsequent interview Mr. Azueta reasserted his belief that Mr. Guerrero was a man of good character and had done nothing wrong. He further stated that he and Mr. Guerrero had had a meeting with Minister Farber who was assured that there was no motive except for assisting Ms. Squires who had called him in. He reiterated his position that the photos were only sensationalism and there is no way to compromise the voters list from that computer as there are hard copies, digital copies and files for each elector as safe guards and that certainly Ms Squires should not lose her job.



EDITORIAL

No so distant drums ... the next general elections

This week the incumbent UDP administration sent out its Cabinet spokesmen to begin making its case for its re-election. Essentially that message is that they are not as corrupt as the former PUP administration.

It is a stretch philosophically to describe this as a nihilistic argument but our reality is that we are being asked to choose between the lesser of the two evils called the major political parties.

The ruling UDP have been overtly and covertly preparing for national elections since last August. They have set the playing field, made much of their advantage as the incumbent, renewed their media alliances and marshalled their troops. They appear poised for the battle.

But whenever they appear all ready set to go, something seems to give them pause for cause, be it a poll, SSB write-off backfiring or mass naturalization creating audible ripples of unease. Now comes the DFC debtors' rebellion. It just might be two steps forward, one step backwards.

The Opposition PUP does not appear ready for the big one, despite their defensive pronouncements to the contrary, and their bravado-like "Call-the-election-now!" battle cry. For sure their emotional level has been raised but their on the ground activity seems curiously passion-less. After weeks of expectations the foot soldiers are figuring the money is being saved for when the date is announced so nothing much more than posturing will happen until then.

Perhaps this is the "Saafli, saafli tiga ketch monkey strategy" but we can't tell just by looking.

And all's still not well between their factions - far from it. Long-time observers consider last Tuesday AMANDALA's "Same circus - different clowns" editorial and From the Publisher column a pointed signal, may be even a cry of some pain. AMANDALA prides itself on being able to pick the winner of the elections, and being able to enjoy the sweets of that "alliance" as a result.

Picking the UDP the last time around was a win-win for Kremandala but that was then. The UDP won and favourite sons Cordel and Mark won. This time around it is quite possible that Cordel and Mark could lose and the PUP could lose. It is also possible that Cordel and Mark could lose and the PUP could win. It is, of course, also possible that Cordel and Mark could win and the PUP could lose, again. We assume the mighty Cream is hoping that the more things change the more they remain the same. The past 6 years have been very good for them.

And then there is the possibility that Mark could win and Cordel could lose.

This is why we ask where is Mark? Since spurning the leadership and being demoted from "senior deputy leader" he has virtually disappeared into some sort of self-isolation. Most observers and pundits we know continue to pencil him into the winners' column, regardless. And the scuttlebutt has it that he has been trying to organize independently.

Organize who you say? Well, there's Wil Maheia, Donecio Cho and Basilio Mes running for the PNP in Toledo East, Toledo West and Stann Creek West respectively while Fred Hunter will announce shortly that he will contest for the PNP in Belize Rural Central. Then we hear there are VIP/Independent candidates Mike Campbell (Belize Rural South), Rufus X (Belize Rural North), Patrick Rogers (Collet), Marcel Bedran (Cayo North), Francisco Antonio Campos (Corozal South-West), declared, and we expect that there will be more.

The partisans won't like it but we would be thrilled if a VIP/PNP/IND candidate made it. You would think that ALL the opposition parties, organizations and candidates could at least get together even once and explore the common cause of having a common enemy and a common goal. But this is politics, Belize-style, Dads. Ain't gonna happen.



LETTERS

SSB investigation - let us see the TOR

The Editor

If the Prime Minister had not confused us already and enough with his explanation of the SSB/Merlene Bailey Martinez fiasco, not to be outdone, Senator Hulse had to confuse us more.

What seems funny, is that the both of them, the Good Senator and the Prime Minister, seemed intent on defending Mrs. Martinez, but nigh ended up, deliberately or otherwise, making her seem increasingly culpable. Mrs. Martinez must be fuming! And perhaps with very good reason.

Think about it: the incorruptible Mrs. Merlene would never involve herself in any scheme even remotely approaching an impropriety, that would be contrary to public policy or, capable of being dubbed un-professional behavior.

So where does this leaves us? Is it not very likely that Mrs. Martinez would have sought permission from the PM before allowing her name to be entered on a list for debt forgiveness? Given her spirituality and perceived Christian charity, is it not

likely that she would have recognized the debt forgiveness scheme as intending to benefit people more deserving than a high-salaried executive like herself?

If that is what transpired, could it not also be true the PM sought to save himself from public criticism by throwing Mrs. Martinez to the wolves once he realized that his less-than-well-thought-out scheme had gone wrong?

Could it not also be that the PM made a bold and noble attempt, with his limited power of rhetoric and numbers-challenged brain, to explain it all away? But we know now that he blew it and had to send for the SSB Board to attempt a salvage operation, cost what it may.

But this letter piece is not about that - it is about the on-going investigation by the prestigious accounting firm of Pannel Kerr. Now that we know that the investigation is in capable hands, we should demand to know the exact terms of reference that was given to the investigator.

If the TOR is narrow, if it does not to determine whether the terms

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SSB reverberations

The aftershocks from the Barrow administration's unilateral decision to write off SSB mortgages continue daily. Here at the newspaper we are in receipt of a list of the staffers whose loans were apparently written off, but we have decided to desist from publishing same, pending the outcome of the investigation that the SSB Board of Directors has publicly said it has engaged the audit firm of PKF BELIZE to undertake.

If accused of being somewhat Pharasical we'll plead guilty with the explanation that at this point we hardly see the need to join in the public condemnation when we are not yet seized with all the facts. And no, we cannot say in all truthfulness that if presented with the same opportunity we might not have yielded to the temptation to remove the yoke of a mortgage from around the necks of our families.

This does not mean that the Barrow administration should not be roundly condemned for obviously being more concerned with gaining political mileage and not being properly prudential. Once again the PM's reflex to gamesmanship and unilateral action without proper consultation and discussion may cost his party votes yes, but more importantly, it seems that once again millions of the Belizean tax payers' and Social Security contributors' hard-earned money is being "squandered" on undeserving persons.



Newspaper
is published by
Adsports
@1442 Scallop Avenue, Belize City
Editor: Glenn Tillett
Admin. Asst: Katyce Flowers
Marketing Director: Marshall Nunez
Logistics: Gerald Garbutt
Printer: Norman's Printing
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Opinions

By Rhenae Nunez



JUST SAYIN'

Eat Shibbles and Bits and DIE.....Suckerrrr!

The conditions that the Public Health Department claimed it met at Maria Chang's Bakery on Castle Street in Belize City is nothing compared to that which they met at Isaray Bakery on Mahogany Street in December of 2011. The conditions there were so filthy that it warranted a shut down and the removal of some of the equipment from the Isaray Bakery to prevent any further operation.

There isn't much authorities can do to prevent unscrupulous businesses from taking advantage of society - it is par for the course that some will try to cut corners to make that extra buck, not caring who they injure along the way.

Last week's allegation by Mr. Leopoldo Pineda exposed another such purported act of unscrupulousness by a business entity; albeit that the Public Health Department authorities deemed in Maria Chang Bakery's case that the rodent infestation was "slight" and "not enough to merit a closure."

Pineda alleged that he found rat dropping in a loaf of bread that he bought from Maria Chang Bakery and that he had eaten a portion of the loaf therefore he may have ingested the faecal matter.

Pineda a few days later landed in the hospital suffering from food poisoning which he alleged he contracted from eating rat dropping in the loaf of bread.

Following initial inspection by the Public Health Department, Senior Public Health Inspector, Mark Bernard determined that the level of infestation was minimal and did not warrant closure of the bakery by the health department.

The initial findings, if you will, were pretty amazing and awe-struck I wondered "What constitutes a slight infestation?" One would think that the discovery of suspected rat faeces in a loaf of bread should have halted all operations until it could be determined that things were of a sanitary standard that would not pose a threat to the public.

There is not much by way of legislation to protect consumers from buying contaminated food. While the Public Health Act, Chapter 40 of the laws of Belize does afford

the Public Health Department to conduct inspections of premises, it still remains a shell when it comes to providing remedy to a consumer who may have been affected as in what purportedly happened to Mr. Leopoldo Pineda.

The Food and Drug Act Chapter 291, similarly does not offer much and neither does the Belize Agricultural Health Authority Act, Chapter 211.

Belize's commerce industry has been dominated by Chinese and Indians. While there have been amendments to legislations to address modern health threats that have found their way into our country from afar, our authorities have not equally grown to maintain the level of vigilance they need to therefore some like Isaray Bakery get away with a lot and it is only by luck that they are discovered and the necessary action is taken to prevent them from making us sick.

The food handling industry in Belize leaves a lot to be desired and it is a wonder there hasn't been a greater outbreak of food-borne diseases. I have seen so many unsanitary practices by food handlers that I shudder. Our authorities are just not equipped to keep up and it seems it is not a priority of the people who are supposed to keep watch. Anyone anytime can set up a stand and sell anything along our street sides without any vetting of how and where those foods were prepared.

I found Chang's reaction to Mr. Pineda's allegation rather insulting. It is possible that Mr. Pineda may not have been sickened from ingesting contaminated bread from Maria Chang. I think that because there was evidence of infestation at their establishment, however "slight," they could have exercised a bit more respect for Mr. Pineda and the public who are disturbed by the revelation. It is no consolation whatsoever that "no germ, virus or otherwise can survive 400 degrees temperatures lasting for 25 minutes." Come on Maria Chang, what are you telling us? Eat shit and die? We really need to do better - yay better!

Chang then goes on to make light of Mr. Pineda's eating habit but

Impartial View: Testing the temperature - diagnosis election fever

By Marshall Nunez, Sr.

The mass naturalization of thousands of Belizeans over the past couple of weeks will definitely have an effect on the next general election. The haste of the UDP to naturalize these immigrants by January 20th, which was the cutoff date for voter registration for the municipal elections, has had a significant negative impact and is a blow to the UDP chances.

Many born Belizeans are concerned about the lack of proper process and even believe that there may be some devastating repercussions because of the lack of background checks on some of the people that have been naturalized. For years the PUP has been known as the party that supports the Hispanics and the UDP has been the anti-Guatemalan party but it appears as if those tides have turned - the vibes on the ground is even that some UDP supporters are disappointed with the UDP for the way they are handling this immigration situation.

Now whether this one issue will determine the election nobody can say that definitively, but there are two major political strategies in this. One, if the UDP saw it so important to meet the cutoff date of January 20th then there is the high speculation that the general election can be held on the same day with the municipal election. The other strategy is to lure the Opposition into believing that for those people who register after January 20th may not be able to vote in the elections. The truth of the matter is that legally, under the Representation of the People Act, 30 days notice must be given before the elections is held, which technically means that you have up to 30 days before the election to register and be able

to vote in the elections.

The week following the last meeting of the House of Representative was one of the worst weeks for the UDP. The mass-naturalization issue, the SSB insider trading issue and, despite the fact that the Prime Minister assured the nation that the suspended SSB CEO, Mrs. Merlene Bailey-Martinez name was taken off the list of the loans that would have been written off, her name appeared on the list that was distributed at the House of Representative meeting.

The UDP, as I said earlier, was in a really terrible situation, and by the beginning of the week had to "bum-rush" the media to do damage control. On Monday 3 UDP ministers appear on 3 separate television morning shows. In my opinion the UDP out-strategized the PUP. The PUP, without saying much, gained some momentum last week and they should have taken advantage of the opportunity and should have aggressively pursued the media. I'm not sure if the UDP have benefited from the strategy but in elections, just as in war, you must beat your opponent to the punch. I believe that the PUP had a good opportunity to gain maximum political mileage but they failed to take advantage of that opportunity.

It appears very likely that the 2 elections may be held on March 7th, 2012. The recent polls have indicated that both major political parties has equal support and the elections will be decided by the 30% of the electorate who have not made up their minds. The battle will be for the major parties to convince that 30%. The UDP will be judged on their incompetence and their failures. The PUP challenge will be to impress on the electorate that they can unite and be viable. Again the polls have indicated that for the most part the elections will be a referendum on quality of life and our safety and security. It is time for major parties to convince the electorate which of them is most qualified to do the job.

Just my Impartial View

the simple truth is that he went to Chang's bakery to buy bread for his consumption - he did not order shibbles and bits as an extra side or topping. He obviously did not get that and there should be some compensation for the horror he must have felt when he found the dropping in the loaf. I would think that the relevant authority would be sensitive to that rather than trying to assuage a very disconcerting situation not

only to Mr. Pineda but to the public and anyone who has bought a loaf of bread from Maria Chang.

It is small comfort that the Maria Chang Bakery will follow the recommendations of the Public Health Department. Is it any wonder what would have happened had Mr. Pineda not sounded the alarm? Would that "slight" infestation had evolved into a more severe case? Just askin....

The Independent

POLITICS

TRICKLE UP ECONOMICS

By William (Mike) Campbell BRS

(Editor's note: Mike Campbell is a declared independent candidate seeking to become the area representative for the Belize Rural South constituency. His views, opinions, et cetera are his own and not necessarily those of The Independent. We will from time to time be inviting submissions from persons who are candidates in the upcoming municipal and general elections, but we expect that Mr. Campbell's column will become a regular feature in the newspaper's op-ed section.)



The GOB reports that the economy is growing at more than 2.5% annually and also reports a poverty rate that is growing and approaching 50% and a growing unemployment rate approaching 25%. There has developed a disconnect between the economy of the GOB and the economy of the private sector meaning the public at large excluding government employees. The government statistics that lead to this calculation of our growth rate includes petroleum income, head tax from cruise ships, and gaming and some other factors that do not reflect in the economy of the public in general. Without monthly statistical data on construction starts and occupancy rates, coupled with data from other sectors, it would appear that the unemployment and poverty rates are the best indicators of our economic health with the growing poverty rate being the most important economic indicator because of its political significance as it approaches becoming a majority of the population.

Poverty is easier to understand and deal with when a criterion other than annual income is used and poverty is broken into three categories. These statistical categories are percent of population that experiences food poverty, capabilities poverty or assets poverty. Obviously capabilities poverty will lead to food poverty and assets poverty. This being said capacities poverty would appear to be the most malignant as it will create the other two and should be given special attention. The transition from capabilities poverty to food poverty can be prevented by government intervention via various assistance programs. These programs can do nothing to combat assets poverty and when used alone amount to a very expensive form of kicking the can down the road. Coupled with our constantly growing work force, the historically high unemployment

rates and an immigration policy that does not have financial requirements for immigration and encourages immigrants with both capabilities poverty and assets poverty, these programs while necessary to provide immediate relief from food poverty will not be sustainable. We have a poverty rate that can be expected to rise because of growth of the work force, immigration policies and prolonged unemployment. Economic policies must be developed that address the core issues of capabilities poverty.

Capabilities poverty is caused by many things such as inferior education, lack of vocational training, lack of work ethic caused by long-term poverty and lack of opportunity in general. All of these must be target areas in any effective poverty reduction program. Of all these, opportunity must be considered the most important. Many successful business people have only a high school education but had opportunities around them that spurred them to pursue their paths in life.

As a developing nation Belize has had incredible opportunities for economic growth and indeed has experienced huge economic growth and wealth creation in the last thirty years but at the same time our poverty rate has continued to rise. Much of the problem lies in the disparity of opportunity that exists in our economy and it holds back many.

This disparity of economic opportunity stems from the conduct of our two political parties. It has long been said that in Belize it's not what you know it's who you know. This is a direct reference to our imbedded system of cronyism. The adults are rewarded with jobs and opportunities and their children with scholarships.

As soon as a politician does something for an opposition member, his own party members expect

even more for themselves and those with no political access get nothing. Most land deals, and land forms a large part of the assets of the wealthy, are non-publicized and in most cases part party stalwarts are favored.

In each and every case politicians doing favors for individuals works against the common good by denying equal opportunity. This practice has

unquestionably caused great harm to our economy and has contributed significantly to the rising poverty rate and the growing disparity between then rich and privileged and the poor and underprivileged. The economy has been heavily damaged by repeated cycles of reward and retribution coupled with exceptionally poor planning by all concerned.



LETTERS

SSB investigation - let us see the TOR

Continued from page 4
and conditions attendant were sufficient, clear and unambiguous, then one can expect a report with totally innocuous findings.

Truth be told, between Senator Hulse and the PM we now really don't know who qualified for write offs; what amounts would qualify; what original loans were to be considered, etc.

Was the investigator asked to enquire into those loans written off that were issued in

the past three years? The past two years? In last year? Was he asked to investigate and enquire into the attempts at collections that were pursued by the SSB? Were performing loans included in the write-offs?

Questions, questions and more questions, most will not be answered if the TOR did not so demand.

Let us see the TOR now! The Report and the findings contained therein will only be as meaningful as the scope of the investigation that was sought.

Name withheld by request

What the SSB handbook says

Editor
The Independent Newspaper

Dear Sir,

At page 6(c) of the Social Security handbook it states that: "All employees are forbidden to become involved in any overt political activity..."

At page 6 (b) it also speaks to national political questions which employees should stay away from. The question therefore is this: Are some animals more equal than others?

It is no secret that one Chandra Cansino ran in an open convention, why would the Board and the CEO allow this to happen? Talk about wolf in sheep clothing.

Whilst this write supports women who may try to make a difference we must have in mind that there is a policy that all staff must abide by. It is no wonder that the CEO has lost all credibility and respect by staff. In fact staff is frustrated as nothing positive is

happening at SSB. Ask anyone who is the worst CEO SSB has ever had and quickly you will be referred to the lady who attempted to get her housing loan paid for by the poor taxpayers of this country. What a shame!

The word ethics seems to have lost its meaning with her. This is supposed to benefit the poor and destitute, not those senior staff who are well paid and can pay. The interest on their loans is a pittance, damn it, so let them pay!

At page 6 (d) of the same handbook it states: "At no time will employees use for private advantage to themselves, or anyone else, information known to them by reason of their official position." Isn't the CEO guilty of this? Of course! How about the rest who ate of the apple?

How about the conflict of interest that's occurring - Does anyone know who is the architect on the Board who gets to supervise/approve all constructions? Someone needs to check his costs quickly.

SSB staff member
(Name withheld by request)

BLUE NOTES:

Attention, the Guardians of our Rights!

This topic on the public sector may become monotonous to some but I believe if our constitutional liberties are in fact ingrained in our Belizean character then we should be extremely concerned as to how we are being governed and contrast that with how we ought to be governed. In a relatively short time hence we will be expected to make two major decisions as to who will be selected to manage our public purse at both the national level and also in our nine municipalities. Thank God, this will still be done by the ballots and not by the bullets.

It is at a time like this we should recall the wise instruction of one of our great political heroes, Honourable Phillip Goldson, when he said, "The time for us to save our country is before we lose it."

As usual elections bring its own energy and money. There will be a flurry of public activities and an upsurge in spending. This is when all financial caution is thrown out the door. Rules and regulations will be bent to the point of breaking. Everything must be subordinated to electoral victory. Winning is no longer everything. It is the only thing.

Vehicle owners, pedestrians and residents generally will get relief from pot-holed streets, clogged drains and uncollected garbage after 4 years of mental pain and physical discomfort. Gangs will be rewarded over a million dollars to keep the truce at least thru the election. Single mothers so long forgotten will now be given a weekly allowance. Every public speech will be punctuated with the "poor people". Never was there so much love shown for them than for the last Christmas when just-before-the-elections gifts of turkey and ham worth over a million dollars were given to them. But that was not enough - the political benefactor had to have double assurance of their sacred votes so they dished out over seventy two million dollars (\$72,000,000) of taxpayers hard-earned money in writing off housing loans. This one was not just for the poor but also it seems for middle income earners and staff members.

Then we have the many who had given up hope in ever getting their land lease document and land titles after going to the Ministry of Lands day in, day out. And yes, those who are known not to be supporters of the present regime may never get their land documents but you can bet hundreds if not thousands will be seen on national television receiving land documents from the benevolent Minister of Lands.

But that is still not all. Factored into their campaign strategy are the thousands of immigrants whose vote will be needed to assure victory at any cost. Immigrants, mostly from the Central American countries including Guatemala, will be bestowed with Belize's highest award that of Belizean citizenship. Ministerial discretion and directives will appear to give legitimate citizenship to what is otherwise illegal by the spirit of the law.

The government to assuage what is left of any public ethics and to placate doubtful sympathizers will simply defend themselves by saying the other side was worse.

This, no doubt, is a veiled violation of the Representation of the People's Act that forbids the bribing of voters. This is unduly influencing voters in a quid pro quo arrangement at the expense of the taxpayers and our democracy. But all this and more which have been happening over the years are conducive in an environment where the leader of government has publicly sanctioned the spoils system- reward your friends and punish your enemies.

We are paying 1,018 persons in military uniform to defend our country; 1,335 policemen plus judges and a Director of Public Prosecution to enforce our laws; over 5,000 men and

women permanently established plus well over 3,000 open-vote workers (unestablished) in the public sector to carry out the laws for the public good. This is over 10,000 men and women being paid over \$300,000,000 (three hundred million dollars) of our taxes - 40% of the recurrent budget to serve us, the citizens, the electorate, their employers, but what are we getting for it? We have to go cap in hand to the Ministers begging for our rights for our land leases and titles, for our right to subdivide our own land, for our right to invest in our country, begging them not to take away our private property. We go to Ministers cap in hand begging for education assistance for our children, begging for school warden jobs for poor single mothers, begging for assistance for basic health care. We go begging them to replace an essential bridge, to build our roads, to pave our streets. We cry out for help as our children are being raped and shot down in their homes and on the streets, as our elders are being terrorized. All that we beg for is to be paid from money that belongs to us, not to them. Then now that the end is here they pontificate in the most self-righteous way in further abuse of our money to perpetuate their "spoils system" to reward their friends and punish their enemies.

How do they do it? Embedded in our political culture is a high propensity for bribery to satisfy our materialistic and extravagant lifestyle aided and abetted by an immediate-gratification mind-set. Fifteen men more or less, from time to time of Ministerial status, saw our weak-

nesses and exploited them. It begins with the public officers and it begins with the top management who are politically appointed from the most subservient and from those who are willing to give blind loyalty. This goes right across the broad spectrum of the public sector. The other ten thousand plus will be manipulated by threat of losing their jobs if they do not carry out the Ministers' directive or are rewarded for willing cooperation. The Ministers' directive is in furtherance of the "reward and punish system." This culture of bribery is not only for our unfortunate poor who to some extent were made poor, but also for the rich and famous.

This article is not written as a counsel of despair but as a ray of hope that we have not lost it but this is the time to save it. Public officers look to your icons that held high the ethics of public service and muster the courage to stand up and defend the rights of us the citizens against rogue ministers whether blue, red or yellow. You got the authority from us the citizens not from them. We pay the bill, not them. As professionals stand together and we will stand with you. Do not let the few scoundrels intimidate you and subvert our democracy.

Be the true Guardians of Our Rights.

	
Job Title:	General Manager
Location:	Belize City
Reports to:	Regional Manager - Barbados
Subordinates:	5 - Direct, 10 - Indirect and 15 Contractors
Purpose:	Overall responsibility for the management of Sol Belize Limited
Key Responsibilities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop and execute annual business plans Experience in forecasting and budget planning processes Prepare and present major business proposals to higher management Accountable for P/L, Balance Sheet, Cash Flow, ROI performance of Sol Belize and for managing the Shell Brand license in country Act as senior government and key stakeholder liaison Ensure adherence to strong operating procedures to safeguard company assets and delivery of excellent customer service Implement top tier Health, Safety and Environmental (HSE) practices Ensure consistent and thorough application of company policies, procedures, across the business As leader and role model, promote an environment of inclusion, coach staff, promote learning and development Convenes and chairs management and staff meetings Ensure SOL's and Shell's corporate image and reputation are safeguarded Identify, propose and drive Sol's social investment programs Lead the application of Sol's core values across the organization and affiliated businesses within Belize Maintain a keen awareness of developments in the economic and business environment, its impact to the commercial segment and assist in developing strategies and tactics to ensure maximum business results Assist in identifying new businesses, opportunities and alliances
Qualification Requirements:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> BSc in Business Administration or relevant discipline with MBA as an advantage. Minimum 10 years of proven track record in reputable petroleum company in downstream business of which 7 years must have been at a senior management level. Demonstrated P/L and Balance Sheet accountability and results delivery
Competency Requirements/Other:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge of the Belize business and legal environment preferred. Excellent communication skills - oral and written Good knowledge of oil products business and work processes Ability to engage with stakeholders (business leaders, government officials and suppliers) Experience with related industry best practices Experience in Contract Negotiation and Execution Comply with company policies regarding but not limited to Health, Safety and Security, Personnel and Finance Proven record of delivering against stretched targets, and ability to work with diverse cultures Leadership exposure (team management, stakeholder management) Good project management skills Self-driven, with good time management skills Excellent interpersonal relationships with proven ability to manage people. Apply a keen commercial sense in all decision making Confidence in negotiating and resolving conflicts Strong knowledge of PC including word, excel and power point and internet/intranet technology Ability to communicate in second language an asset
Other Information:	Sol Belize Limited provides a very attractive remuneration and benefits package.

Application form can be downloaded from Sol website. This form along with CV should be submitted via email to: careers@solpetroleum.com and copied to: alicia.gonzalez@solpetroleum.com Only shortlisted candidates will be contacted for an interview. **Deadline for applications: 30 January, 2012**

FINANCIAL SENSE

With the Young Professional in Mind



Mrs. Judy McCutcheon is currently doing her International Masters in Business Administration at the University of the West Indies; she is also in the final stages on completing her CGA (Certified General Accountant)

While in Belize Mrs. McCutcheon worked as a Financial Accountant for a large corporation and also as an Advisor. She believes that we are all responsible for our own financial wellbeing and that we should do all in our power to ensure that our financial future is secure.

By Judy M. McCutcheon

Oh the joy of being young. You actually believe that you are invincible; but more than that, you think you know everything there is to know about everything. Those of us who are older (is there another word for this? personally I prefer the word wiser), wish we had the knowledge we have now, when we were younger; that

would have saved us from some very costly mistakes. As a young professional, you want to avoid certain financial pitfalls at all cost. Financial success can be achieved by developing and practicing a disciplined financial life style. Success is intentional and as such the obligation rests entirely with

you to secure your financial well being.

You are fresh out of college and have started your first job, or maybe you are at your second or even your third job; the fact is you have started to give to some thought to your financial future, but just don't know where to start. Financial planning could seem like a maze, especially if you have not looked at putting a plan in place before now. One thing I would advise is to find a financial planner, one that you are comfortable with, to discuss your situation.

However, here is some help to get you on your way to financial success. These are rules mind you, that must be followed to get you to that point; there are no short cuts to financial success.

- Start planning for your retirement early – from as early as your first job, you must have this end in mind. Have a plan and work that plan diligently – it's the only formula for success.

- Know what your employee benefits are – be mindful of what your employer offers, you may have to supplement what is being offered.

- Use your credit wisely – over use of credit cards is a sure way to bring on a negative spiralling effect. Remember that you are depending on your future earnings to pay for your

present credit. The ideal situation is to pay off your card monthly or keep the balance to a minimum to avoid paying large interest.

- Have saving goals – at all cost try and save a minimum of 10% of your salary in a steady stream. Remember that the earlier you start to save the better it is for you, as the powering of compounding works best over a longer period of time.

- Prepare for the unexpected – it is crucial that you have an emergency fund in place. In today's volatile economy, nine months of expenses stashed away is prudent.

- Have an investment strategy and save for the long term – the idea behind investing is to help meet your needs for wealth accumulation and management – remember if you don't save, you cannot invest. Evaluate investments based on your risk tolerance, the time frame, and your goals. Make sure that you have a diversified portfolio of investments.

- Insurance – ensure you have the appropriate amount of life insurance necessary in the event of death. Make sure that you have your car and property adequately insured – as one disaster can bring financial ruins.

- Educate your children on financial literacy – teach your kids from an early age the importance of budgeting, savings and giving. Lead by example and they will gain excellent hands-on knowledge by watching how you handle your financial affairs.

These rules are not novel; this kind of consistent disciplined behaviour is what will take you into a solid financial future and beyond.

Please send your comments and questions to mccutcheon_judy@yahoo.com



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Vacancy

**Citrus Growers Association
Citrus Research & Education Institute**



Agronomists

CGA has vacancies for enthusiastic, innovative and hard working agronomists to provide assistance and support services to citrus growers. This is an exciting opportunity for a dynamic person to work in a challenging industry. The successful applicants will be able to demonstrate an ability to play a significant role in working with growers to increase citrus productivity in Belize, be willing to work long flexible hours, including weekends, hold a valid driving license and have a minimum of a Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture or a related subject area. Previous experience in the citrus industry and fluency in English and Spanish would be a distinct advantage.

If you are interested in being a part of this exciting industry, working with CGA and you have experience/qualifications in any of the following:

- agricultural research;
- establishing and running agricultural extension programmes;
- farm management;
- implementing agricultural projects;
- participatory approaches to the development of agricultural communities;

For further details call CGA at Tel: 522 3547 / 3585 / 3535, during normal working hours.

Interested applicants should send an application (résumé and covering letter) to:

Chief Executive Officer, Citrus Growers Association,
P.O. Box 7, Dangriga, Belize.

Closing date: Friday, February 9th 2012

State Of The Arts:

AN ARTIST: CREATOR OF THEIR OWN UNIVERSE (PART 2)

By Katie Usher

In the dimly lit room which I occupy in my mother's house, I eat a *Hunts* pudding cup and think, what is my life's purpose? Was it to become a spinster in a room in my mother's house, eating pudding cups and dabbling in watercolour?

I remember when I knew exactly what it was that I thought I wanted to do for the rest of my life. In high school, somehow, I had it all figured out. I am this; I am not that. I want this; I do not want that. I like you and I don't like him etcetera. I knew what I was and I definitely knew what I wanted to be and when. But something changed. I don't know exactly what it is, but I can set a timeframe for it.

In fourth form, we read *A Raisin in the Sun* which was a lovely play from which certain elements of the plot remain with me to this day. Still the most poignant element has to be a short poem by American poet Langston Hughes. A few pages into the little book and just a couple lines long, the words of that poem stirred something in my soul:

*"What happens to a dream deferred?
Does it dry up
like a raisin in the sun?
Or fester like a sore--
And then run?
Does it stink like rotten meat?
Or crust and sugar over--
like a syrupy sweet?
Maybe it just sags
like a heavy load.
Or does it explode?"*

I shuddered as I read it. What on earth did he mean by that? A dream deferred? Simply impossible! It could never be, not when you are as determined as I am, I thought. Impossible when you know exactly what you want and how to obtain it.

Nonetheless, I felt that it foreshadowed something, or at the very least was trying to hint to some life lesson, which was best learned sooner as opposed to later. What it was I could not tell. Or even if a little bit of me was trying to decipher it, the other more dominant and over-confident dreamer shut it out. There simply can be no 'I' in lose. I placated the tumult in my mind by assuring myself that that poem had nothing to do with me, nothing to even tell me. I graduated high school shortly after and gave the book to my little cousin who was in second form. Maybe I just wanted to get rid of it because it had hit a nerve.

I enrolled in sixth form at the very last minute. I had not planned to go there. I had planned to just start college in the U.S. I guess I should have seen just then, that dreams do get deferred, and that whatever happens to these dreams thereafter is entirely up to you. I enjoyed sixth form. I met

my first love, traversed through Greek, English and German philosophy, the Belizean rainforest, and calculus (though I almost drowned there) and Spanish. I also met my second love: art. It was a deferred dream which crusted and sugared over into a syrupy sweet. I have no complaints there.

By the time I graduated two years later, I was fully aware that Philosophy, Ecology, Mathematics, Spanish and Art, though they filled my world with beauty, had not led me any nearer to accomplishing my high school dream of becoming an architect. Undaunted, I still applied for schools in America Mexico, and Jamaica. I even ventured into the possibility of a Cuban scholarship. None of these, despite my high hopes, proved successful. They wanted more; or rather they wanted knowledge which I did not have.

I had to do something though, I could not be contained. I wanted to accomplish my goal, my career, at 24. I began working with the Image Factory in the summer after I graduated sixth form. Just like magic, I received an opportunity to visit Merida, Mexico, for a week. Being in that large city of 1,000,000 citizens was a thrilling experience. I could live here I thought. I could grow to love this city and make it my own.

My adventurous spirit urged me to, so I plunged in! I enrolled into an art program in a new school Escuela Superior de Artes de Yucatan, ESAY. It sounded easy. It was difficult in the beginning. I did not know the language well enough to say any more than "Donde esta la playa?" and "Soy Belicena" or "No entendi. Please mas lento, por favor." It was tough, everything I was familiar with was far away, and everything else was in Spanish, so I couldn't relate even when I tried.

There were several days where all I did was read, armed with my two dictionaries. Every small victory of understanding a chapter of E.H. Gombrich's Art History in Spanish was crushed when everyone else was half way finished with the book. I felt as though I was digging through wet sand, the more I dug the faster I sank. Still it was a beautiful world, where I understand only myself and no one else. I developed my own little tricks for communicating in this strange new world. Words I did not understand, I gave them my own meaning. They meant the world to me, my little world of misinterpreted words. Soon enough something strange happened; it was as if someone turned on the volume on the television after watching it 6 months on mute. I understood everything.

I understood the flirty sleazes on the buses, the racists comments made in jest to describe the painting of the Sistine Chapel, the lessons, everything. My world of make-believe words fell to pieces. The powerful sensation-filled experiences I

had been having with every word uttered, sung or shouted came to a crashing halt. I needed to make room for the actual meanings of all the new words.

Too few words I heard were as beautiful as I had envisioned them to be. Some were weird, some were ludicrous and some were hateful. Faced with the actual universe in my university and new city as it was, I realized that this was not what I had dreamed. It was as if my dream deferred had exploded and tiny bits of it were everywhere around me. The tiny bits were scattered all around, but with none in my heart there was no passion to continue towards it. Consequently I used their own words to write to them telling them that I no longer wished to pursue that dream. I left in 2008.

In 2011, after failed attempts at being a program officer at ICA, a secretary at KMH and even a Spanish teacher at ACC, I decided to revisit that explosion site, that dream deferred. When I got there though I realized that they had long cleaned up the mess, and there were no traces of me or my dream at the school. Initially, they could not even find any records of my being there for 3 ½ years. It was as though I had not



Kate like Alice



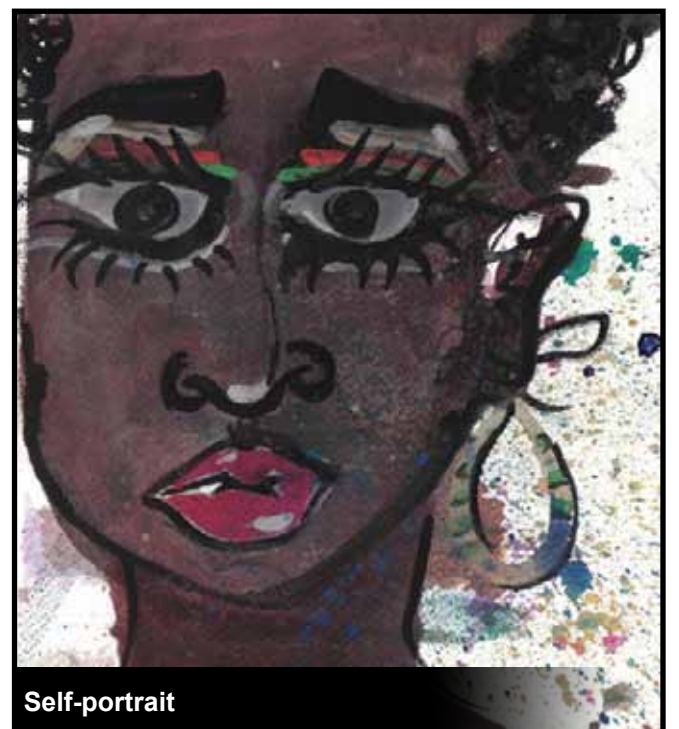
Kate at ESAY



Kate the walking experiment

even existed in their universe. The Office of Students Affairs suggested that I apply in August. Realizing that they were suggesting a rewind and not play after pause, I requested my transcript and left.

With no degree, I am back at square one; and it is not 2005 but 2012. *A Dream Deferred* holds an entirely new meaning for me. I never envisioned being so far away from my career at 25. Still, as I had mentioned before, the diagnosis of this dream deferred is entirely up to me.



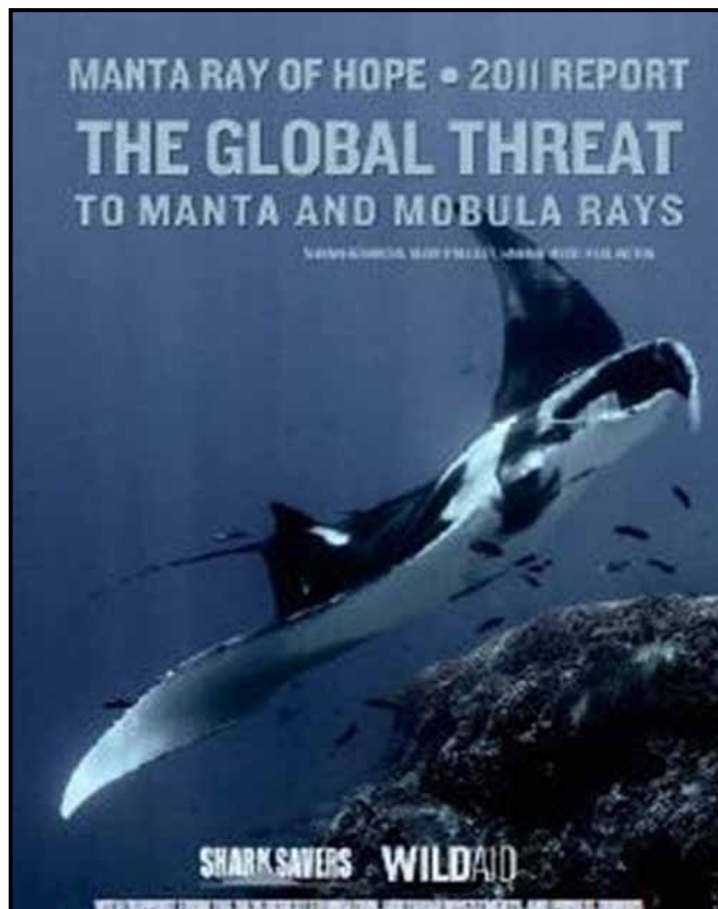
Self-portrait

The "Million Dollar Manta" Being Killed Worldwide for Unproven Health Tonics

"Anyone who has gone diving with mantas knows them to be intelligent, graceful, and engaging animals. It would be a tragedy to lose them" - Michael Skoletsky, Executive Director of Shark Savers

Manta rays are so popular with divers and snorkelers that a single animal can "earn" more than US\$ 1 million over its lifetime for local eco-tourism, according to a new report issued by the Manta Ray of Hope Project. Despite their popularity and lucrative tourism value, the report provides shocking evidence that these graceful and gentle giants are rapidly disappearing due to extreme fishing pressure that is largely unknown by the general public or conservationists.

The Manta Ray of Hope Project, a joint effort of two conservation organizations, Shark Savers and WildAid, released a comprehensive report documenting worldwide manta and mobula declines due to the trade in their gills. The report, entitled "Manta Ray of Hope: The Global Threat to Manta and Mobula Rays" provides the most far-reaching research ever conducted into



and engaging animals. It would be a tragedy to lose them."

Executive Director of WildAid, Peter Knights, adds that "Mantas can generate tens of millions of dollars of long term sustainable tourism revenue for less wealthy nations, or for a few million we can let them go extinct for an obscure and dubious folk cure. The economics and the moral imperative are clear - we need an immediate moratorium on gill raker trade and measures for complete protection to some populations and to reduce fishing pressure for others."

The gills of manta and mobula rays are dried and boiled for

preparation as a health tonic that is purported to treat a wide range of ailments. Yet the report's researchers did not find the gill

raker remedy listed in the official Traditional Chinese Medicine manual. However, that has not prevented its use as a pseudo-medicinal tonic, driven by direct marketing to consumers by importers in Guangzhou, China, the primary destination for this trade.

The report, Manta Ray of Hope: The Global Threat to Manta and Mobula Rays highlights what is known about the remarkable biology and ecology of manta and mobula rays, explains the extreme threats they face, describes the fisheries and trade that target these rays, and offers some solutions via alternative, non-consumptive uses for communities to profit from them, sustainably. The information provided in the report will enable decision-makers to move swiftly in enacting critical protections for manta and mobula rays.

Manta Ray of Hope received support from the Silvercrest Foundation, Hrothgar Investments Ltd, and private donors. Manta Ray of Hope: The Global Threat to Manta and Mobula Rays received additional guidance and data from many of the foremost manta researchers and scientists throughout the world.



both the intensive overfishing of mantas and mobulas as well as the trade in their gill rakers that are driving mantas and mobulas to the point of population collapse.

The destruction of ray populations is the result of demand for their gill rakers, with an estimated market value of \$11 million annually. That is a fraction of the value of manta and mobula ray tourism, which is estimated at over \$100 million per year, globally.

Shawn Heinrichs, Manta Ray of Hope team leader, explains, "While the gills are valuable for this trade, it is also robbing local economies and the environment of one of the most charismatic creatures in the ocean that could draw millions of dollars each year for those communities."

Lead investigator Paul Hilton added, "We first came across manta and mobula ray gills in Asian markets several years ago and followed the trail to the dried seafood markets of Southern China. It's sad to see these animals follow the same path to extinction as sharks."

Manta and mobula ray populations are severely impacted by any kind of targeted fishing because they have ex-

tremely limited reproductive biology. These rays can take ten or more years to reach sexual maturity and typically produce only one pup every two to three years. In comparison, even the Great White shark which is listed under CITES Appendix II and widely considered to be one of the world's most vulnerable species, may produce as many pups in one litter as a manta ray does over its entire lifetime.

As a result, every area with active fisheries directed against manta and mobula rays reports devastating and rapid declines in populations of these rays. In certain regions, such as the Sea of Cortez, the oceanic manta ray (*M. birostris*) has largely disappeared. The aggressive trade in gill rakers continues in several of the key range states for mobulids with the largest landings documented in Sri Lanka, India, and Indonesia.

"If action is not taken quickly, manta and mobula rays will likely face regional extinctions because of unregulated fisheries", said Michael Skoletsky, Executive Director of Shark Savers. "Anyone who has gone diving with mantas knows them to be intelligent, graceful,

OCEANA visits students in Guinea Grass



The standard six and five students of Guinea Grass Village, Orange Walk hosted Oceana's VP Audrey Matura Shepherd at a special lecture on Belize's Marine Ecosystem on Thursday, January 20, 2011. The event organized by the school was to allow the students to learn more about the wonders of Belize's marine resources. The over 60 students were shown videos taken of Belize's marine creatures and were given a talk about the importance of our marine resources during a lecture entitled From Coast to Ocean.

Of the sixty-two students present only three had ever visited the cayes and snorkeled the reef areas. This was made possible through a trip sponsored by Oceana in 2011. As Part of Oceana's continued work to educate the young population about the importance of its marine resources, especially the world's second largest barrier reef, it will be sponsoring a similar trip for the students. Twenty-four standard six students with academic excellence will be invited to participate in a one-day reef trip so they can appreciate firsthand the beauty and economic value of the reef to their heritage and livelihood and the country's wealth.

SPORTS

Weekend Warriors Five Series – Part II

Race two of the Weekend Warriors Cycling Club Series got underway at the Crooked Tree junction on Sunday with more than forty riders facing strong winds...and stiff competition from their rivals. And to prove that very point, minutes into the race, Scotia Bank's Barney Brown attempted to solo flight but the pack wasn't



A strong cross wind kept the peloton intact

having it and quickly organized the chase to reel him in.

Turning right into the Boom Road, a strong crosswind kept the peloton intact through the fourteen mile stretch. In fact, every breakaway effort was immediately countered and a bunch sprint at the tape at Leslie's imports seemed inevitable. In fact the only real action on the course were three sprints for extra points and all three were claimed by the Santino's Club as Ernest "Jawmeighan" Meighan took the first two at Mile 19 on the Northern Highway and at the prison while James Frampton stepped up to claim the third at Mile 10 on the Western. The extra points on the course are



Dean Belisle beats Ryan Willoughby and Perry Gibson to the finish line

crucial as they give the winners much needed 'breathing room' in the overall standings.

And those points will be pivotal as coming down to the finish line spectators witnessed yet another face off between Veterans riders Barney Brown and Horizon's Warren Coye. Brown edged out Coye for the second time in dramatic fashion, while FT/BCB Holdings "Lee" Mark Gentle pulled up third and Santino's teammates "Jack" Sutherland and Ernest Meighan rounded out the top five.

In the Masters B division, the rivalry is just as fierce and the bunch sprint did not disappoint. FT/BCB's Dean Belisle drove hard to the line to beat Horizon's Ryan Willoughby while AAA Loans' Perry Gibson rolled in third. Meanwhile, Valentine Sosa of the original Truckers Posse continues to perform, finishing first for the Veterans B category, forcing FT/BCB Holdings' Antonio Escarpeta and Truckers teammate, Michelle Lewis to settle for second and third respectively.

With those results the overall standings for the four divisions are as follows:

First 2012 sailing regatta February 12th

By Elizabeth Fitzgerald-
Public Relations BzSA
Thursday, January 26th,
2012

BELIZE CITY - If you love to sail, if you love the sea or if you just love to enjoy the natural beauty of Belize, join the Belize Sailing Association on Sunday, February 12th, at Buttonwood Bay for our first Regatta in 2012. Celebrate the Valentine's weekend with us.

The Buttonwood Bay Regatta is the first of seven regattas to be held in our beautiful country throughout 2012. These regattas are designed to bring Belizean sailors to regional championship standards, establish the rating of the participants and ensure the maintenance of national standards. It includes races for our Optikids who will be competing for a spot on the national team.

BzSA launched its Optimist Program in June 2010. This program, sanctioned by the world governing body, the International Optimist Dinghy Association, IODA, offers

sailing classes for young girls and boys from ages 8 to 14. Our current Belizean champion is Alexander Rhaburn, age 11, of Holy Cross Anglican School, San Pedro Town, Ambergris Caye a member of the San Pedro Sailing Club.

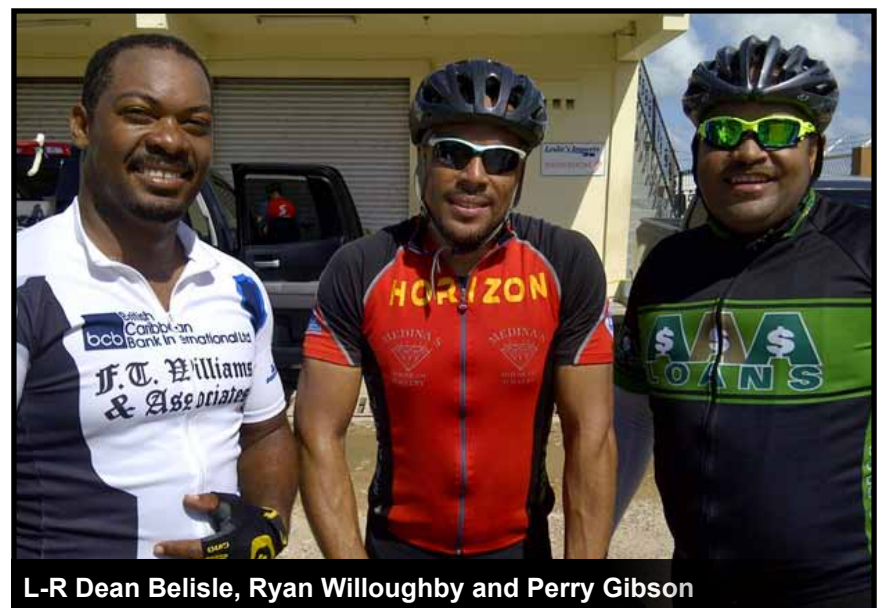
We will have races for all classes of sailors and no "one designed" boat will be turned away. Come and meet our sailors, young and maybe not so young, and cheer them on!

The Seashore restaurant is the official provider of food and beverage. They have created a special, reasonably priced menu for the occasion with breakfast starting at 7:00 am and other food services continuing throughout the day.

Enjoy the beautiful waters of Buttonwood Bay with friends, family and the Belize Sailing Association, just for the love of it!

For further information on race instructions contact Andy Aspinall, I/C Regatta as andyaspinall@hotmail.com. For any other information on this regatta or to join our organization or the sailing club nearest to you, contact BzSA at belizesailingassociation@gmail.com.

- Elizabeth Fitzgerald is the Public Relations Officer of the Belize Sailing Association (BzSA)



L-R Dean Belisle, Ryan Willoughby and Perry Gibson

Masters A -- Ernest "Jawmeighan" Meighan first with 62 points; Ronald "Jack" Sutherland second with 40 points and Halton Ritchie third with 27 points.

Veterans A – Warren Coye first with 51 points; Barney Brown second with 50 points and "Lee" Mark Gentle third with 44 points.

Masters B -- Ryan Willoughby first with 57 points; Dean Belisle second with 51 points and Charlie Slusher third with 46 points.

Veterans B -- Michelle Lewis first with 50 points; Valentine Sosa second with 41 points and Antonio Escarpeta third with 33 points.

Stay tuned as this weekend the hills between Gracie Rock and Busman Arnold will force the riders to use speed, strength and strategy to stay in the running as top contenders for best overall!

SAN PEDRO BEAT

MEXICO ROCKS MARINE RESERVE PROPOSED

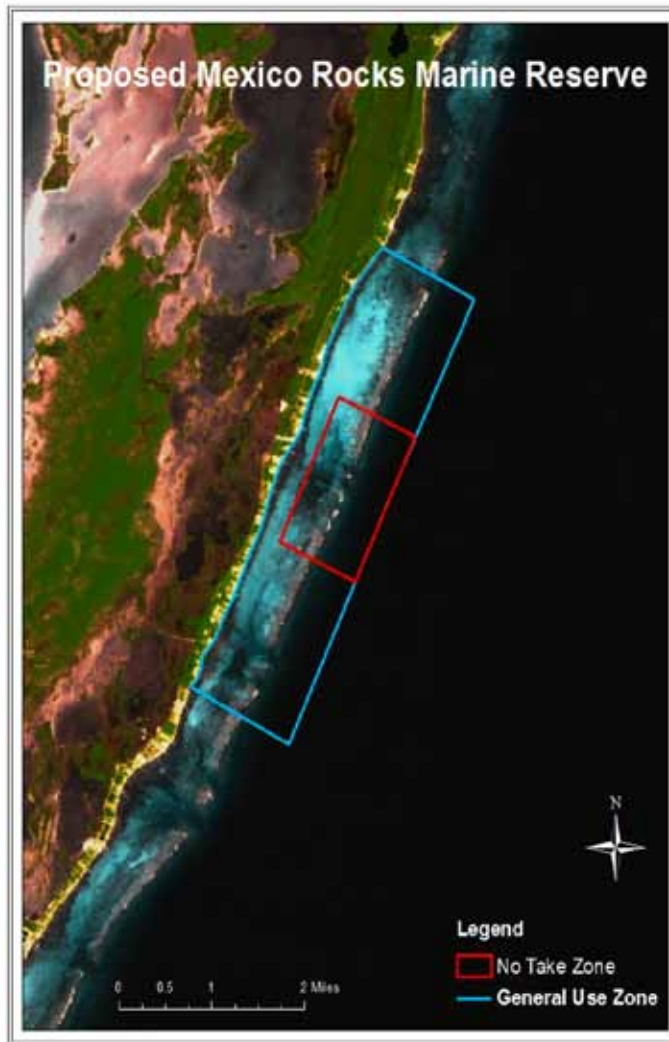
Ambergris Caye Wetlands Committee... Various Ngo's including ACCSD, Hol Chan Marine Reserve, Tour Guides Association, Green Reef and others have come together to form the Ambergris Caye Wetlands Committee. At a recent public consultation plans were revealed for three new protected areas on and around Ambergris Caye.

The first is the Mexico Rocks Marine Reserve encompassing 8.75sq miles. This area includes Mexico Rocks and surrounds up to the shore and is designed to protect and manage this unique ecology and tourist attraction.

The second is the Bajos Marine Reserve (135sq miles) located on the west of the island. It includes all of the small islands and sand bars that form vital habitats for tarpon, permit and bonefish that form the backbone of the sport fishing industry.

The third is the Cayo Frances/Mata Lagoon National Park. This will include all of both Mata Lagoon and Frances lagoon. These two ecological unique areas form estuaries and are home to many exotic species including Jaguar. The lagoons are fed mostly by caverns and are rarely frequented except during the Eco-Challenge kayak race held annually on Ambergris Caye.

The project was warmly received and after questions was approved unanimously by all in attendance. This included Hon. Manuel Heredia Jr. who expressed total support for the proposals and promised to try to help it along the path to actual designation of the areas.



(The Independent is happy to debut a new feature "San Pedro Beat" which will provide a weekly synopsis of the going-ons in La Isla Bonita. Readers should also note that The Independent is available for sale at the following newsstands: Ritchie's Supermarket, Caye Mart, SuperBuy, Island Supermarket, Lourdes Store, Rock's Center, Public's Grocery, Marina's Store, Milo Center and San Juan Internet.)

Illegal Fishing... A fishing boat from Sarteneja has been noted in the area around Salones west of Ambergris Caye catching protected game fish. The sustenance fisherman were netting large amounts of permit and making "corned fish" for sale. Permit is the most exotic of the game fish and sports fisherman travel thousands of miles to get a chance to catch one. The matter has been referred to relevant authorities for investigation and action.

Burglaries... A rash of residential burglaries have left both residents and police frustrated. Saturday night in San Pedro saw only nine officers all on foot patrol, as no vehicle was available. Sunday morning no vehicle was available to investigate reports and officers had no way to contact forensics as the phone was restricted and the code was not available to the Officer in Charge. Police and citizens alike are frustrated.

San Pedro Politics

Friday, January 20th saw chairmen of both PUP and UDP exchanging phone calls on Good Morning San Pedro discussing current events. It was announced that the UDP would not be attending the second mayoral debate unless an apology was received from the PUP by the disturbance that was caused at the end of the first debate. The PUP Chairman Milo Paz responded emphatically that there would be no apology forthcoming. UDP participation in the second debate is uncertain at this time. The PUP and Independent camps are willing to hold the second debate without the UDP if necessary. In a separate interview Mr. Santos Acosta acknowledged the problem and found it regrettable that the PUP supporters had been unable to control their enthusiasm at the very end of the debate but regarded the disruption as very minor and felt the UDP reaction was over-blown and an apology would not be warranted or appropriate.

Charges of voter registration irregularities such as registering voters who actually reside in other districts were strongly denied by the UDP Chairman Mr. Claudio Azueta. He stated that both parties used the

same registration process and it was all just dirty politics and grandstanding by the PUP and both he and Mr. Paz agreed that Ms Squires should not be fired. Mr Paz stated that the entire affair was UDP, Severito Guerero was UDP and it was a UDP government that had suspended Ms Squires and that he and the PUP had nothing whatsoever to do with the scandal. While staying out of the fray, Independent mayoral candidate Mel Paz has recommended that we first find out what happened and then make the decision concerning Ms Squires and related matters. San Pedro is expected to have around 6,400 voters counting the new registrations with BRS having around 8,000 voters.

Friday evening the PUP mayoral team presented their candidates and plans on Reef Radio/TV's new program "Decision 2012". The PUP mayoral candidate is Conchita Flota. Town Councilor candidates are Viane Perez, Marina Kay, Wally Nunez Jr., Mundo Nunez, Maribel Vasquez and David Aguilar. When asked about town problems most indicated that their campaigns had revealed that one of the primary concerns was the condition of the streets, schools,

healthcare, unemployment and particularly the San Mateo area and they would work diligently to address these problems and promised to fix all the streets. They also announced that they would assign responsibility for representing a particular area of San Pedro to each councilor to better communicate with the residents. It was announced that the official PUP mayoral manifesto would be released by the end of the month. The commitment to transparency and auditing the Town Board was strong and is a key point in the campaign as well as trying to get more money for San Pedro.

Tuesday night the UDP presented their candidates and plan. The UDP mayoral candidate is Danny Guerrero. The UDP Town Councilor candidates are Yolanda Parham, Carlos Barrientos, Kendrick Brackett, Gabby Nunez, Mito Paz and Severito Guerrero. The presentation started with a statement by Severito Guerrero who told the listening and viewing audience that he was completely innocent of any wrong doing at the Elections and Boundaries office and was only there to because Marilee had asked for help and he is known for helping any who ask.

They also identified the same problems, streets, unemployment, healthcare and schools and stressed

their old San Pedro family ties and their ability to work with our current Area representative Hon Manuel Heredia Jr. It was stated that before streets could be paved we needed to complete the installation of sewage service to the entire town. It was stated that it was not realistic to expect to accomplish both in the first term but they would promise to extend sewer service to the whole town during this term of office. They presented an aggressive plan for tourism development and recommended that we concentrate our economy entirely on tourism. Highlights of the soon to be released manifesto include a new cemetery, a new school, improved healthcare and a commitment to transparency and accountability. They also announced full support for the proposal to make BRS a separate District. All were invited to a big UDP rally to be held on February 15th, Nomination Day, with lots of tee shirts and giveaways.

Decision 2012 announced that next Monday night they will be hosting the PUP Standard Bearer Patty Arceo and her team. It is expected that the PUP plan for San Pedro will be revealed at that time.

It was also announced that Tuesday they would host Hon Manuel Heredia Jr. who is expected to present the UDP plans and positions.

BAHAMAS GOVERNING PARTY LAUNCHES RE-ELECTION CAMPAIGN



Prime Minister and leader of the FNM, Hubert Ingraham

Thursday, January 26, 2012

NASSAU, Bahamas -- The governing Free National Movement (FNM) in The Bahamas is getting set to officially launch its 2012 re-election campaign, with a national candidates launch event scheduled for Sunday, January 29 in the nation's capital.

Thirty-eight seats are being contested in this year's election. The constitutionally mandated

Constituencies Commission late last year reduced the number of seats to 38 from 41; the number of seats in existence in the 2007 general election.

Prime minister and leader of the FNM, Hubert Ingraham, who led his party to victory in the 2007 general election, will be seeking his fourth non-consecutive term in office in this year's election, which must be held by May 2, 2012.

Ingraham recently indicated his satisfaction with the high level of voter registration for this year's election.

On Monday, Ingraham tabled amendment legislation in Parlia-

ment that would, for the first time, enable international agencies to monitor general elections in The Bahamas.

Also on Monday, the FNM released the first of its national television ads for the election campaign, under the tagline "We Deliver"; focusing on the unprecedented infrastructural development carried out by the government during this term as a means of creating employment and bolstering key areas of the nation's economy.

Ingraham has indicated that The Bahamas' economy continues to show signs of stabilization and recovery following the effects of the global economic recession.

Newt Gingrich prepared to bomb Cuba

January 26, 2012

MIAMI, Florida - Newt Gingrich was ahead in the rhetorical war among Republican presidential hopefuls on who could be toughest on Cuba's communist regime, suggesting yesterday that he would bomb the island if there were a popular uprising.

The former house speaker and his top rival, ex-Massachusetts governor Mitt Romney, were engaged in heated campaigning in Florida days before Wednesday's Republican primary. And both were desperately wooing the state's large Cuban-American community, nearly a million strong.

Mr Gingrich was asked to explain comments that if elected, he would "not tolerate four more years of a Cuban dictatorship".

If the US planes bombed Libya, should they do the same with Cuba?

"If there was a genuine, legitimate uprising, we would, of course, be on

the side of the people," Mr Gingrich told Spanish-language network Univision.

"In that sense, I don't see why Cuba should be sacrosanct, and we should say, 'Oh, don't do anything to hurt' - you know, we're very prepared to back people in Libya. We may end up backing people in Syria. But now Cuba? Hands off Cuba. That's baloney. "People of Cuba deserve freedom."

The audience at the Miami venue where Univision held the interview broke into applause.

Mr Romney said if he were president, he would punish foreign companies doing business in Cuba.

Former Cuban president Fidel Castro dismissed the tough talk. "The selection of a Republican candidate for the presidency of this globalised and expansive empire is . . . the greatest competition of idiocy and ignorance that has ever been heard," he wrote in Cuban media yesterday.

US President offers life line for Caribbean immigrants

WASHINGTON, DC - United States President Barack Obama has offered a life line to illegal Caribbean immigrants, urging the US Congress to work with him on "comprehensive" immigration reform.

In his election-year State of the Union address on Tuesday night, Obama said he believed "as strongly as ever that we should take on illegal immigration.

"We should be working on comprehensive immigration reform right now," he said.

"But if election-year politics keeps Congress from acting on a comprehensive plan, let's at least agree to stop expelling responsible young people who want to staff our labs, start new businesses, defend this country. Send me a law that gives them the chance to earn their citizenship. I will sign it right away," he added.

Obama reminded Americans that hundreds of thousands of "talented, hardworking students in this country" face another challenge: the fact that they aren't yet American citizens.

"Many were brought here as small children, are American through and through, yet they live every day with the threat of deportation," he said.

"Others came more recently, to study business and science and engineering, but as soon as they get their degree, we send them home to invent new products and create new jobs somewhere else," Obama said.

Leading US Republican Presi-

dential candidate, Mitt Romney said that he favours "self-deportation" when asked about illegal immigrants during Monday night's presidential debate in Tampa, Florida.

"The answer is self-deportation, which is people decide they can do better by going home because they can't find work here because they don't have legal documentation to allow them to work here," Romney said. "We're not going to round them up."

Romney was responding to a question about illegal immigrants returning home and applying for citizenship.

He proposed implementing a system in which the US government would issue a card that links to online federal immigration data, so employers will know whether a job-seeker is in the country illegally.

Romney said those without cards would be pushed out of the job market and forced to leave the US.

"If people can't get work here, they're going to self-deport to a place where they can get work," he said.

In 2008, the United States experimented with a trial self-deportation program, but it was cancelled after a few weeks with only eight people volunteering.

Romney also softened his opposition to the DREAM Act during the debate, stating he would support the measure if it focused on military service. He had said earlier on the campaign trail that he would veto the bill.

The DREAM Act calls for a path to citizenship for Caribbean and other youths who immigrated illegally as minors, on the condition that they attend college or serve in the US Armed Forces.

life

(noun)

a sexually transmitted disease which always ends in death, there is currently no known cure.

POLITICS:

The Belizean Voting Behavior

By: Hubert Pipersburgh

Hubert Pipersburgh is a founding member of the Belize Rural Economic Development thru Alliance (BREDA) organization residing in LA. He earned a B.S. in public policy and management from USC and a Masters degree in Education from California State University Northridge.

He attended Queen Square Anglican Primary School and graduated from Wesley College in 1981 before immigrating to the United States.

Honest Assessment Needed

While relying on empirical data to predict election outcomes has proven to be sound, even with the utilization of regression analysis and the null hypothesis, the accuracy of such polling data is reasonably inaccurate because of intangibles that cannot be quantified. In addition, it is useful to analyze Belize's voting patterns within the context of post-independence voting behavior. It gives us a more nuanced understanding of voting in Belize as it relates to election outcomes. This understanding of voting patterns which contributes to the overall electoral process in Belize is what is most lacking.

It can be argued that a more inter-disciplinary approach is needed to gain better comprehension of Belizeans' choices in the voting booth. By that I mean sociological, anthropological, psychological, and economical factors. They are all important in an honest assessment and they are not mutually exclusive. Since independence, elections in Belize have mirrored a certain pattern—of the 5 elections held there have been three landslides. The UDP have won two and the PUP one. A closer examination of those elections showed a positive correlation between successfully outlining the issues and the outcome of the election. Perhaps, what needs to be examined are Belizeans' behaviors and attitudes while casting their ballots. What are they influenced by? What drives them to make the choices they do?

Driven By Perception

In the '84 cycle UDP brandished the issue of PUP being out of touch and corrupt. In the '98 cycle PUP's use of the Killa Vat and the retrenchment of government workers leading up to Christmas of '95 resulted in UDP's devastating loss. In the '08 cycle the UDP highlighted PUP corruption and largess with the Venezuelan moines and the Universal Hospital fiasco, along with Mr. Musa and Mr. Fonseca as the centerpieces of that argument.

Those three cycles stand out because it shows voting in Belize is of-

ten driven by Belizeans' perception or lack thereof as it relates to their choice of party. Often times they cast a protest vote which leads to these landslides. In the '89 cycle the PUP used the Coca Cola land deal to recapture momentum by dubbing UDP as greedy sell outs. The '93 cycle (which UDP won by a very close margin) is an anomaly only because PUP's top brass mis-calculated the resolve of the electorate. The people were still not convinced that the PUP had the answers to their issues. Also, they were not prepared to trust any party with more than one term in power.

Of particular interest is the '98 and '03 cycle. This was the only time since independence that either party could argue definitively that they were the true majority party. I reference this to argue that Belizeans' decisions in the voting booth are driven by very basic and primitive concerns. Their choices are based on their perceived notion that the spoils system determines their choice.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs may be helpful to explain this attitude. At the very base of that pyramid is the need for security, survival, and physical needs. Hence, physiological needs take precedence and dominate behavior. Rational choice theory and some variation of standpoint theory might also explain Belizeans' voting behavior because those are based primarily on self-interested individuals who in this case exercised their franchise against their own economic interest. In other words, their decision is based purely on what they can get and not what is necessarily best for the whole. It also reflects a growing feeling that voting does not make a difference.

The Two Party Spoils System

The spoils system recently defended by Mr. Barrow is one of the major influences in the way Belizeans' vote. Mr. Barrow has set out to ensure that the spoils system plays a central role in his quest to convince Belizeans that the UDP is now the true majority party and should be given a second term. All his major public policy initiatives and promises since the election points to that fact. In short, Mr. Barrow knows that Belizeans respond to the beat of the spoils system when faced with conflicting imperatives. Another possible explanation is that elite opinion usually drives mass opinion. Thus, when presented with conduct unbecoming of a particular party, Belizeans bypass the working through the process of resolution and summarily arrive to public judgement. The underlying assumption being

that public judgement is far more permanent than public opinion and its implications more long term.

This has led to the watershed electoral cycles that I have discussed so far. Political parties in Belize are often times undone by their own actions such as corruption, nepotism, cronyism, and disastrous machine politics. Image matters more than substance. For many Belizeans, the major parties are superficial and unresponsive to their major concerns. The elitist character of these parties obstructs a broader view of what democracy really is and the role that citizens must play to make it meaningful. Thus, for the disenfranchised and marginalized masses, electoral democracy becomes an empty charade unless accompanied by structural reforms to our system of governance and jurisprudence. Worse still, the party apparatus is indistinguishable from the government itself.

Myopic Tendencies

Historical irrefutable evidence shows that both political parties in the context of the Westminster model that was grafted upon Belizeans take advantage of the spoils system. This pattern of behavior perfected over the past thirty years have created and solidified a culture of voting that perpetuate myopic tendencies and self-degradation. Both parties points out the flaws and weaknesses of the system when

they are in opposition, but quickly develops a kind of selective amnesia towards said flaws when handed the reins of power. A classic case in point: the mass registration of immigrants that we are now presently witnessing just before the announcement of a major election. To this end, it illuminates the fact that our entire political structure in Belize undoubtedly is the problem and in need of serious reform if Belize is to ever make that great leap forward.

The Belizean electorate isn't sophisticated and/or informed or aware enough to absorb and discern the complexities of the politics involved and therefore are easily swayed to support the parties who appear to address their physiological concerns most effectively leading up to elections rather than the party who proves to be most effective and qualified. This is evident in their voting patterns since the country's independence where they continue to rotate one corrupt regime after another. They appear completely inept in how to create and maintain a successful government. This naiveté has been the key factor in them obviously electing corrupt individuals devoid of any moral compass ever since. Politics vs. government ... government is what runs a country and politics is what runs the government. Surely government administration should take precedence over politicking.

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New Premier football league kicks off next weekend

Kick off is next weekend as the Premier League of Belize (PLB) launches its 2012 competition. The Premier League of Belize is the nation's top league formed by amalgamating the Super League and the FFB tournament. The concept of the top football league of Belize has been in the making since May 2011 but all the football controversies that ensued affected the progress of the league. Remember that in June after the Minister of Sports/Sport Council had their differences with the FFB it ended up in a situation where FIFA officials had to come to Belize to intervene and later ended up with Belize being temporarily suspended from FIFA. Despite the football brouhaha Belize will have its top league. The head of the PLB, Maito Perdomo was elected on December 28th, 2011 and along with his executive has set February 4th as the start of the tournament. The

12 team tournament is scheduled to conclude on May 6th to be in line with the FIFA CONCACAF champions' tournament that is scheduled to start on May 15th, 2012.

The competition will have 2 groups of 6 teams each. Each group will play a double round robin format after which the top 2 teams will go to the playoffs. The number 1 seed from zone A will play the number 2 seed from zone B in a home and away series and vice versa. The 2 winners from the semi-finals will play in a home and away finals.

Zone A which is the northern zone is comprised of FC Belize from Belize City, Juventus out of Orange Walk, Belize Defense Force out of Cayo, World FC out of Cayo, San Felipe Barcelona out of Orange Walk, and San Pedro Seadogs from San Pedro. Zone B which is the southern zone is comprised of Hankook Verdes from Cayo, West Lake Police

from Belize City, Paradise/Freedom Fighters from Punta Gorda, Belmopan Bandits from Belmopan, Placencia Assassins FC from Placencia and San Ignacio United FC from San Ignacio.

The teams from Orange Walk will play their games at the People's Stadium, the Belize City teams and San Pedro will use the MCC Grounds as their home field, the Cayo teams will play at the Norman Broaster Stadium and Marshalleck Stadium, Placencia Assassins FC will play at the Placencia football field and Paradise/Freedom fighters will play at the Toledo Union Field.

Mr. Perdomo informed us that the PLB does not have a corporate sponsor as yet but that the Minister of Sports is sponsoring the first prize of \$25,000. We also learned that the Minister of Sports and the sports director has agreed to do some upgrading at the various fields

especially where improving the light conditions are concerned.

It is worth noting that the Corozal District has no team in this league although Corozal won the first ever semi-pro football competition in 1992 and Dangriga, who could be described as the Brazil of Belizean football, also does not have a team in this competition.

Registration of players commenced a week ago and will continue for the next month. Players are allowed to move around the league during what could be described as the trading period as long as the processes are legit. Teams are allowed to register 40 players including 4 foreign players of which only 3 can be on the field at any one time, and 2 under 17 players who must play an accumulative 300 minutes in the first round of the tournament.

Mr. Perdomo believes that the league will be sustainable but he is appealing to the Belizean public to come out and support the players. This he promises, will be a very exciting competition.

The first game of this new season will be between the West Lake Police and Placencia Assassins FC. The West Lake Police will feature brothers Lenox "Criminal" Castillo and Darwin "Cayo" Castillo. The roster also boasts the Jimenez brothers and the Makin Brothers. We are not familiar with the Placencia Assassins FC but definitely we will have the roster in the next issue of The Independent.

At The Independent we want to encourage you to support the team in your area. We wish the teams the best of luck and we hope that the league is a sustainable and successful one.

UK, ARGENTINA FACE OFF AGAIN OVER THE FALKLAND ISLANDS:

Oil in Falklands Islands renews territorial tensions

LIMA, Peru — As the possibility of an oil rush in their icy waters grows, the Falklands Islands are once again at the center of a diplomatic spat between the United Kingdom and Argentina.

Several British energy companies are now carrying out deep-sea exploration around the islands in the South Atlantic, known to Argentines as "Las Malvinas" and which were the scene of a brief 1982 war that cost the lives of 904 soldiers from both countries.

One company in particular, Rockhopper Exploration, this week announced its discovery of what analysts believe may turn out to be a huge oilfield at its Sea Lion prospect, in an area known as the North Falklands Basin.

Rockhopper says it expects to shortly invest around \$100 million in developing the field.

Meanwhile, two other companies have towed a huge drilling rig,

the Leiv Eiricsson, from Greenland half-way around the world to make the most of the southern summer and continue their offshore search.

So it may be no coincidence that the long-running tension between Buenos Aires and London over the islands has once again flared up.

This week, British foreign secretary William Hague held talks with his counterparts from the South American trading bloc Mercosur, which includes Argentina, about access to their ports for vessels from the Falklands.

Hague described the talks as "productive and honest" and claimed that Chile, Brazil and Uruguay had all insisted they would not participate in any economic blockade of the Falklands.

He also claimed that the three countries would continue to allow ships from the islands to dock in their ports — provided they were sailing under other flags, in line with

a decision adopted by Mercosur last month.

Argentina's foreign ministry immediately responded, claiming that its neighbors were simply maintaining existing Mercosur policy by refusing to recognize the "illegal" Falklands flag. It also called on the UK to honor several UN resolutions that call for dialogue to resolve the islands' sovereignty.

The fate of the Falklands is one of the last unresolved issues from the disintegration of Britain's huge 19th Century empire. They have been under British control since 1833 although Argentina has always claimed that the islands — which lie 300 miles from its coast but thousands of miles from the British Isles — belong to it.

Most Britons had never heard of the remote, windswept archipelago until 1982 when the Argentine military dictatorship, desperate to shore up its popularity, invaded them, sparking a brief war which saw Britain retake the islands.

The British government now says that the islands' tiny population, which overwhelmingly wants to remain part of the United Kingdom, has the right to self-determination under international law.

Argentina, however, focuses on the force used by Britain in the early 19th Century to occupy the archipelago and London's refusal to hold wide-ranging talks about the dispute.

LIQUOR LICENSES NOTICES

Notice is hereby given that Aspen Gabourel is applying for Publican Special Liquor License to be operated at "Club Malibu", Dangriga, under the Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Ordinance Revised Edition 2000.

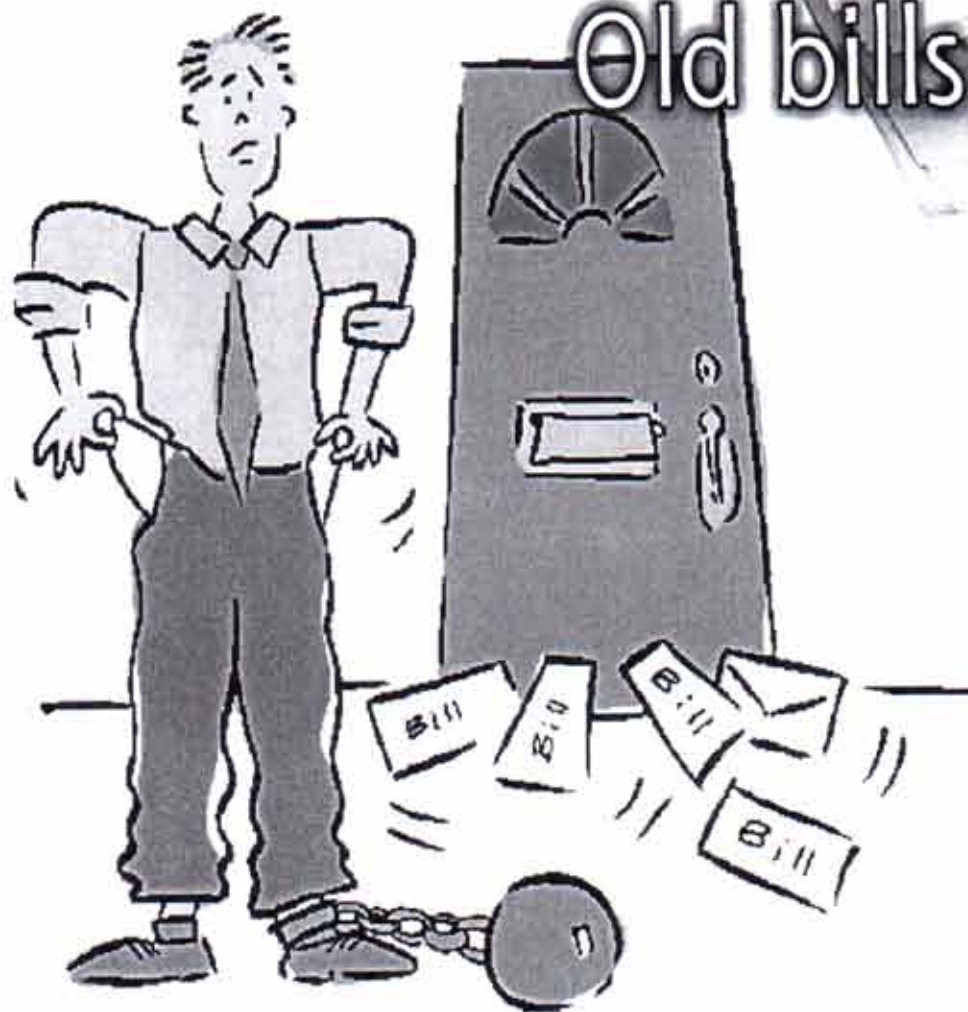
Notice is hereby given that Yaci Chen is applying for Shop Liquor License to be operated at "86 Peanut", 77 Cemetery Road, Belize City, under the Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Ordinance Revised Edition 2000.

Notice is hereby given that Christian Riveroll is applying for Publican Special Liquor License to be operated at "Chap's Bar & Grill", 1668 Seashore Drive, Belize City, under the Intoxicating Liquor Licensing Ordinance Revised Edition 2000.

CHRISTMAS GONE!
NEW YEAR DAY GONE!

And now....

Maaga Season
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School fees,

Light bill,

Water bill,

All kinda bills!



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