

Opening address by Cayman Islands Chamber of Commerce President Barry Bodden at the Career, Education and Training Expo on 13th March 2015 at the Sir. Vassel Johnson Auditorium

- Hon. Tara Rivers, Minister for Education, Employment & Gender Affairs
- Brian Holland, Director, National Workforce Development Agency
- 37 local and international exhibitors
- Chamber members and guests
- Members of the press

Good morning.

Welcome to the Chamber of Commerce's 20th annual Career, Education and Training Expo. This event kicks off our 50th anniversary year celebrations and demonstrates our long-standing commitment to workforce and youth development. 37 exhibitors from across all industry sectors are participating in this event. I would like to thank each of them for investing their resources and time so that school leavers and students can learn about the multitude of education, training, career and employment opportunities that are available for Caymanians and legal residents.

The main economic indicators confirm that our economy is improving. In fact, the projected level of capital investment suggests that our Islands are poised for job growth which will outpace the available labour pool to fill many of the upcoming vacancies.

While the Chamber and its nearly 700 member businesses welcome this anticipated growth, we recognise that we must address the issue of youth unemployment particularly for persons under the age of 25. This issue is a national priority and we must work together to develop initiatives that will help these individuals obtain the skills required to become productive contributors in the workforce.

We see great promise in some of the directions that the Government is taking but there are some additional areas where we seek to engage in a dynamic private-public partnership to find mutually beneficial solutions to improving the employment prospects for Caymanians and to enhance the community-at-large as a place to live and to conduct business.

The Chamber is prepared to enter into dialogue with Government and has identified Workforce Development as one of the top areas of emphasis this year. Our efforts will focus on:

- Enhancing the development of our existing and future workforce through partnerships with industry associations, government and businesses;
- Expanding the Chamber's Professional Development and Training Centre to train the emerging workforce, the unemployed and underemployed;
- Developing workplace skills necessary for placement and advancement;
- Providing a clear pathway for the emerging workforce to obtain the work skills necessary to meet the growing demands of local businesses and industry.

To achieve this vision, we have identified some key measures that we believe will help to advance this agenda with all stakeholders in the public and private sectors.

There is continued debate on the total number of unemployed Caymanians and legal residents versus the numbers that are actually registered as unemployed with the National Workforce Development Agency. To correct this situation, we feel it is time to require all unemployed workers to register with the NWDA and to provide these individuals with customised attention to assess their existing skills and any barriers that they may have for work/career readiness. And, if the individuals require training beyond the agency's offerings, the NWDA should be allowed to send these individuals to external training entities such as the Chamber's Professional Development and Training Centre for customer service, numeracy, literacy and other work readiness programmes.

As someone who has spent most of his life in the construction and development industry, I believe that more needs to be done to foster an environment where Technical and Vocational



Education and Training professions are valued on an equal footing as all other occupations. This can be done through career exploration and guidance programmes at the middle school levels as intervention at the year 10 level is too late.

The Chamber is currently undertaking its 5th Salary and Benefits Survey since 1997. The survey is free for all Chamber member employers to participate and includes more than 160 benchmark positions across all industry sectors. The information gathered from this survey could be used to build a repository of career ladders and sector-based occupation information so that school students and job seekers can identify with a career goal and learn of the steps they need to take to enter and advance within an industry to fulfill their respective aspirations.

The cost of doing business is one of the top issues facing many of our members. Incentives could be provided to those companies who hire a large percentage of Caymanians within their organization. This could have a direct and positive impact to their bottom line while also encouraging other companies to increase their Caymanian employee numbers in order to receive the same incentives.

We believe that a district grassroots approach should be considered to address the unemployment issue. Some of the unemployed are capable and willing to learn practical skills in the construction sector in areas such as masonry, painting, block laying, carpentry and drywall. With a surge in construction expected, we can be teaching a practical trade that can be utilised in the construction industry. The Chamber Council is currently reviewing such a programme and will be sharing further information with Government in the near future. This initiative could be matched with a National Apprenticeship programme which would incorporate a subsidy for training wages for apprenticeships.

In closing, the Chamber of Commerce is committed to working with Government and industry partners to ensure that all Caymanians and legal residents are given every opportunity to succeed and thrive in today's competitive workplace. We look forward to further dialogue with the Minister and her team in the months ahead.

Thank you for your attention and supporting this important annual event.

