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TRELAWNY SURPASSES PROPERTY TAX TARGET 1
TAKE THE POLITICS OUT OF PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM 2

Trelawny Surpasses Property Tax Target

Story Highlights

Mayor of Falmouth, Colin Gager, says the Trelawny Municipal Corporation must be commended for Trelawny being the only parish other than Kingston and St. Andrew to reach and surpass the property tax target for the 2017/2018 financial year. “What is even more exciting and commendable is that the Jackson Town Tax Office by which Clarks Town is served, collected 19 per cent more than its targeted amount,” he noted. “Trelawny continues to be a leader in local government, and I want to say a special thank you to the management and staff for the hard work and dedication they have shown in ensuring that our finely tuned machine continues to operate at peak efficiency,” he said.

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The Mayor, who was speaking at the official opening of the Clark’s Town Transportation Centre in Trelawny on April 6, said the municipality collected some \$340.7 million, which was \$19.3 million more than the target of \$321.4 million.

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Turning to developments in Falmouth, Mayor Gager said the parish capital “is poised to reclaim her economic and social importance and is positioned to become the tourism mecca of the region”.

He noted that the town of Falmouth and the parish of Trelawny have always played a pivotal role in nation-building and are major catalysts for the stimulation of growth for sustainable development.

“The economic impact and contribution of this parish is rightly recorded in history as it was the royal parish when sugar was ‘King’ and the wealthiest town and parish during that period.

Falmouth boasted in excess of 12 sugar factories and was the leading exporter of sugar, rum and molasses,” he pointed out.

The Mayor said it should also be noted that Falmouth is emerging as a major force in tourism, pointing to the cruise-ship pier as “the biggest of its kind in the Caribbean and one of “the leading cruise-shipping ports in the world”.

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“It is the home of the world’s largest cruise-shipping vessels and has been repeatedly voted as the favourite destination port by passengers and crew members,” he said further.

He pointed out that the parish has also produced stalwart leaders, who have not only contributed nationally but are making an impact internationally.

“These are individuals such as Rex Nettleford, William Knibb, Hugh Lawson Shearer, Usain Bolt, Ky-Mani Marley, Anita Belnavis and the former world’s oldest living person, Violet Mosse-Brown,” he said.

Take the politics out of public sector reform

At a recent forum put on by the Planning Institute of Jamaica in collaboration with the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the new Minister of Finance and the Public Service Dr Nigel Clarke reaffirmed Government's intention to move ahead speedily with the rationalisation of public bodies. He believes that this can be done in 4-6 weeks and ahead of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) schedule. The broad intention of this exercise is to hasten the economic independence of Jamaica by freeing it from the trammels of any external body like the IMF.

The minister's intention is in line with policy that had already been developed by the Ministry of Finance. But Clarke seems determined to achieve his objectives in a shorter time frame than might have been envisaged. As a new minister, he is sounding the right notes and has taken to the job with energy and as a man on a mission.

As he rightly stated in his address at the forum, for a country of Jamaica's size and economy there are far too many public bodies in existence — 190 at last count. This far exceeds that of Singapore, which has 64 such bodies, including statutory boards, and an economy which is 20 times that of Jamaica. “The complexity this introduces is simply unmanageable for a country our size and resources,” the minister lamented.

It cannot be lost on any student of the Jamaican public service since Independence the extent to which predatory politics has played a part in the proliferation of public bodies and agencies. Most of them were created in a political milieu of reward and patronage to party loyalists. The same is true of the multiplicity of government ministries and the sizes of Cabinets that we have had. For those who would not be politically blinkered it should be clear that as politics intruded itself more and more into the public sector, and became a determinant of who gets what, when and where, the need arose to create more and more boards and agencies to provide jobs and cushy positions for political lackeys.

This fact is not always reckoned with and its practice obviously has not served the country well. After each election public bodies are filled and managed by ardent supporters of the winning party. The test for the governance of these boards was party loyalty, not necessarily knowledge, skills, integrity, or competence. The net result of this is that the best talents hardly come to the forefront. The competent and effective operations of these boards are often stymied as they are made subservient to the whims and fancies of the political directorate.

It would be a Regatta Day in Jamaica when a winning party puts known members of the Opposition in managerial positions on public boards. It would be the equivalent of the angels in heaven rejoicing over the one sinner that repents. The closest we have ever come to this sort of thing was when the Bruce Golding Administration made it a parliamentary rule for members of the Opposition in Parliament to chair important government committees such as the Public Administration and Appropriations Committee. In the main, this policy has worked well — if you can forgive the usual political jingoism often indulged by an Opposition thirsty for power.

It is important, therefore, that the reintegration of public bodies into present ministries proceeds speedily ahead. Many of these entities do not require independent status to carry out their mandates. The National Land Agency, which integrated the Titles Office, Survey Department and Land Valuation Department, is a template that can guide this process. By bringing all these functions under one roof it has created a viable land information system and removed overlapping functions. No one can doubt that this has served the country well.

It is also important that divestment of public companies be stepped up. The necessary due diligence has been done on a number of these companies. Those already identified for divestment must proceed apace. I cannot believe there are not investors who are interested in these companies. More energy must be expended in getting the message out there and

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identifying prospective investors. Perhaps the terms and conditions of divestment might need to be re-evaluated. Perhaps the divestment boards may need revamping. Just a thought, Minister.

The Cabinet in January 2017 approved the Competency Profile Instrument for Boards of Public Bodies. This aims at selecting the best directors with the knowledge, track record and requisite skills to do the work. The question is, who or what will do the selection to these boards? I contend, as I have done repeatedly in this space, that this cannot be left to the politicians themselves. If I am correct that we have had a predatory assault on public boards by the political directorate since Independence then it cannot be wise that we leave this selection to a political directorate. Such a board should be the function of an independent body akin to the electoral commission to carry out this function. Such a commission should be entrenched in the constitution so it can operate as an independent body.

The Private Sector Organisation of Jamaica and other interested entities must police this one carefully. Whatever body emerges to supervise appointment to public boards must have this independence, or 20 years from now we would not have moved much farther from where we now stand.

Public sector transformation cannot only be about who sits on which board. It has to contend with the malaise and often decadent work ethic which bedevils public entities. For one reason or another public sector workers are terribly demotivated. The productivity levels of workers in the public service leaves a lot to be desired.

This is not to beat upon public sector workers, as many of them do a commendable job. But there is too much lethargy and lack of a vibrant work ethic that we find in too many of these bodies, and even ministries.

So the minister must look at the matter of ongoing training and incentives to increase productivity. Rationalisation must lead to a more competent and nimble public service. The insistence must be on quality above quantity. The quantity we have had too much of; the quality is what we should crave.

At the risk of being called a spokesman for the Andrew Holness-led Administration, I make bold to say that there is no administration that has a greater shot at the proper rationalisation of the public sector than this one. If the country fails to get it right this time around we may not get another chance in the foreseeable future.

Minister Clarke must proceed robustly ahead, no matter the headwinds he faces. If he and the Administration get it right, a decade from now not only will the criticisms become mere whispers from Mount Everest, but the country will be the better for it. I wish him well in this endeavour.

Dr Raulston Nembhard is a priest and social commentator

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