



Office of the Opposition Leader

February 13, 2014

Mr. Speaker and Members of this Honourable House.

I rise today to provide a personal explanation to claims made within and without this Chamber by the Hon. Premier Craig Cannonier, Minister Shawn Crockwell and Attorney General Mark Pettingill.

Mr. Speaker

I would like to declare my interest as a shareholder in a Betting Company that was issued a license in May 2013 under the Betting Act 1975. While this is not Casino gambling, in the interest of transparency I felt it necessary to disclose this information.

Mr. Speaker on December 13th 2013, the Honourable Premier carried over the OBA Government's Gaming Referendum Act 2013 to be debated on the next day of House business.

Mr. Speaker

I rise today because of the Premier's claim that the OBA's decision to break their promise to the people of Bermuda was motivated by an alleged threat by my colleagues and I to disrupt or interfere with the referendum.

Mr. Speaker

As I was off island for the birth of my daughter, I could not stand on my feet in this Honourable place and refute these fictions. I did however take to the radio and called the Premier's claims what I could not refer to them as in this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker

At no time did I ever say the words attributed to me by the Premier and his Ministers. For the avoidance of any doubt Mr. Speaker, let me stress, at No time did I ever utter the words attributed to me by the Premier, or his two Ministers.

Mr. Speaker

We are well aware of the rules of this House. Words like liar and referring to fellow Honourable members as liars are not permitted. They are deemed to be un-parliamentary.

Mr. Speaker

As Honourable representatives of the people, and custodians of the public trust, one of the privileges we possess is that we are immune from charges of slander.

Make no mistake Mr. Speaker, the claim made by that Honourable member and I quote, "It is clear to us that the Opposition's political ambitions have moved ahead of the people's business, and that the threat to disrupt the referendum, such as a boycott, is real," is not correct, not factual, inaccurate, and a figment of the Premier's very creative imagination.

Mr. Speaker

In September, I, as Leader of the Opposition, privately met with Premier Cannonier on two occasions, to discuss in a spirit of collaboration, a variety of issues, including the introduction of on-island casino gambling.

The Premier proposed that we consider avoiding a gambling referendum, and that we jointly, OBA and PLP, hold a press conference to issue a joint statement to that effect, to provide a rationale for the decision.

We agreed that we would discuss the proposal with our respective colleagues, to which I did by having my entire caucus consider the proposal at our next meeting.

I conveyed to the Premier that my Caucus rejected the proposal, and reiterated our previously stated position that while the majority of us support the introduction of casino gambling, that we should uphold our respective election promises to provide a referendum.

What I did not reveal at that time however was the in-depth content of those discussions. As a result of the misrepresentation of private conversation between the Premier and myself, I am now obligated to reveal the greater details of our conversations, and to do so in the light of Truth.

Mr. Speaker,

During these discussions, four main points became the focus of our attention

- 1) The Premier's various business holdings were in severe financial difficulty, and despite his ties to the business community, he had been unable to secure financial relief.

- 2) The Premier's high level of distrust with the members of his team and in particular, those OBA colleagues who were drawn from the ranks of the UBP.
- 3) I proposed the formation of a coalition government of which one sitting OBA MP had indicated a desire to join, with others showing interest. I will not reveal the name of these members as a mark of respect for our private conversations. This proposal of a coalition between disaffected OBA MPs and the PLP was made in an effort to allow our Premier to break free of the forces that were, in his mind, restricting and preventing him from making real progress for Bermudians. This offer was declined.
- 4) In rejecting our offer of a Coalition Government, The Premier revealed that there is a developer who is willing to pay him and his two cabinet colleagues (the Learned Minister of Tourism and AG) upfront for a casino license, and from that point he will be free from, and I quote, "...these rich, white, UBP boys!"

Mr. Speaker,

I have just revealed to you, the other members of this House on both sides, and the Bermudian voter, the real reason as to why this casino gaming issue, the disrespect shown to you as Speaker, and the theft of the voters democratic right, has and is occurring. Even after the revelation of a taxpayer funded political advisory document, which has revealed their plans and intentions to mislead the people of Bermuda, their course towards ill-repute has not altered.

Unlike the misrepresentation presented to the public by our Honourable Premier and his two Ministers, this is a true account of past and current actions.

Mr. Speaker

For those who may have missed the presented timeline, may I add that no additional discussions were held between the OBA and PLP on this matter until Saturday, December 7th, 2013, when I asked Shadow Tourism Minister, MP Wayne Furbert, to reach out to Minister of Tourism Shawn Crockwell, for the singular purpose of encouraging the OBA to amend their recently tabled Referendum Bill to reflect a neutral question. Subsequently, MP Furbert reported to me that Minister Crockwell was never informed by his Premier of the September meetings, proposal, and PLP Party position.

On Tuesday, December 10th, 2013, MP David Burt informed me that OBA members were claiming that Premier Cannonier and Opposition Leader Bean had struck a deal to avoid the Referendum.

I told MP Burt that the claim is false and no discussions have been held. Our position remains that the referendum question should be amended to be neutral. MP Burt then reports that the Premier asked to meet him at the Cabinet office at 5 pm, at which time the Premier asked MP Burt to have the PLP join the OBA and avoid the referendum.

MP Burt also reported that the Premier was adamant that despite my being off-island, that he was in constant/current contact with me.

This too, was false.

MP Burt repeated the PLP position of amending the question to the Premier, and reported to me that the OBA had approached 3 other PLP MPs, including our Acting Leader MP Derrick Burgess. All three MP's reported to me that they reiterated the PLP position and deferred to myself as Leader.

On Wednesday afternoon, the next day, Premier Cannonier texted me requesting that I call him. During the call, the Premier instantly suggested that we jointly avoid the gaming referendum.

I told him that it is not possible, and the best approach would be to amend the question to be fair and neutral, and then jointly undertake to educate the voter as to our collective vision for gambling, in support of a yes vote.

The Premier rejected my view and stated that the question as posed was excellent and was prepared with the help of experts.

I responded that an excellent question is a neutral one, and that the OBA should not treat the voting public with such disregard. I also stated that by bringing a "loaded" question, the OBA will create a protest vote by those persons who ordinarily would vote in favour of gaming. A 'loaded' question creates mistrust.

At the conclusion of the phone call, I clearly repeated the PLP position that the question should be amended and once done, the PLP will join the OBA in a joint committee that will lay out the vision for casino gambling in Bermuda.

On Friday, December 13th, the Premier carried over the referendum bill and at a subsequent press conference, misled the public by accusing the PLP of threatening to boycott the referendum, and plotting the demise of Bermuda.

This was the rationale provided to justify their actions. Actions which have now been revealed were concocted and orchestrated by a paid consultant.

These are the events as they occurred, and unlike the fables being spread by the Premier this is the truth.

Mr. Speaker

We are said to be Honourable within this chamber and outside this chamber as well. In closing it is most unfortunate that this episode has taken place, which has affected me personally. Enough is enough. In the midst of social and economic adversity, the people demand Truth, and they deserve leadership that they can Trust.

Thank you Mr. Speaker