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PRESS RELEASE

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From: Hon Roy McTaggart, Leader of the Opposition & Political Leader of the Progressives

Minister Kenneth Bryan's admission that his Government is playing games with the public.

My fellow Caymanians, yesterday, as reported by the Cayman Compass, Minister of Tourism the Hon Kenneth Bryan, on a local morning radio talk show, shamelessly revealed that the government's plan to cut the tourism stipend from \$1,500 per month to \$750 per month starting in November was a 'scare tactic' on his part to try to get displaced tourism workers to start looking for jobs. In other words, he and the PACT Government were playing games with the public.

Minister Bryan acknowledged that *"the stipend originally had been put in place to protect and provide financial aid to people who were left without work when the borders closed last year."* And he added that the political negativity from the announced cut *'forced me to pull my hand because the truth is we intend to give them the \$1,500 in November and December.'*

This is an incredulous admission from the tourism minister. The Minister and his government have seemingly committed a cruel hoax on Caymanians who found themselves needing assistance during a global pandemic through no fault of their own. No different to the many hundreds of Caymanians who received other forms of Covid-19 related assistance from the government, including access to free quarantine facilities.

The announcement by the PACT Government of their intended cut to the tourism stipend caused many Caymanian stipend recipients unnecessary added stress and concern as to how they would manage their financial affairs after October, in the runup to the Christmas holidays.

I know because my colleagues and I in the Opposition heard their valid concerns first-hand. I suspect that Minister Bryan and his PACT colleagues heard from them as well. And so, as the Minister has confessed, the political negativity from it forced his hand.



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The Minister is attempting to make us believe that his government never really intended to cut the stipend. It was a mere 'trick' to get stipend recipients, who he thought would refuse to work once tourism returned, to find work. Now we in the Opposition have greater faith in our people than that. We know that if work is available, then the vast majority of displaced tourism workers would prefer to be employed. We also know that the \$1,500 stipend is small compared to what most of our displaced tourism workers, including tour operators and taxi drivers, earned monthly from tourism.

Let's consider the government's stated intent regarding the tourism stipend:

A May 5th press release from the government noted, *"Minister Bryan confirmed that the (stipend) payment would be re-evaluated once the timeframe for safe border reopening was established."*

On July 6th, the Cayman Compass reported that the Minister announced that the \$1,500 monthly stipend would be reduced to \$750 from November, in part to incentivise people to take opportunities that come up.

During the government's presentation of their Strategic Policy Statement in mid-July, Premier Wayne Panton confirmed the government's *"intention is that the tourism industry will be back up and running again in time for our traditional high season in November – which is when we plan to taper the stipends payments."*

The PACT Government's 100 Day Report, published on July 31st, stated the government had *"Announced the continuation of the tourism worker stipend of \$1,500 per month through October 2021."*

In addition to the above, the government's stated intention to reduce the tourism stipend to \$750 starting in November was mentioned on several occasions and reported in the press. These comments and the Premier's confirmation during the SPS certainly gave the impression that they intended to reduce the stipend in November. It would therefore appear, given Minister Bryan's admission, that the Government went very far in deceiving the public.

With Minister Bryan's admission to these 'scare tactics', he and the PACT government should be ashamed for carrying out their cruel hoax on the Caymanian public, especially on those unfortunate Caymanians who are unemployed through no fault of their own. A hoax that the



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government dragged on for over two months. Hoaxes and scare tactics are not the way a responsible government behaves!

Whatever the truth, our hard-hit tourism workers can determine for themselves whether the PACT Government is as people-driven, accountable, and transparent as they claim. Indeed, the entire populace can be forgiven for wondering what other hoaxes and scare tactics the government is employing?

As I noted in my response to the Government's Strategic Policy Statement in July, I was happy to hear that the government was continuing the stipend. However, I implored them to not cut the stipend amount without the country being open to tourism and tourism establishments back in business providing full employment for our people. We knew that tourism would not return in full by October, and the stipend would still be needed for several months thereafter. In fact, given that tourism will not return in any meaningful way anytime soon, the government should increase stipend to \$2,000 as we also suggested and requested.

Whatever the reason, the PACT government, in the end, have understood the wisdom of our advice to not follow through on the plan to reduce the stipend and thus inflict even more distress on those Caymanians who continue to be hurt the most by the ongoing border closure.

What they now need to do is to apologise to the country for their cruel hoax and to use the upcoming finance committee meeting to increase the tourism stipend to \$2,000 per month.

May God continue to bless our beautiful Cayman Islands and to keep us safe during this hurricane season.

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