



Ministerial Statement The Hopkins Report and Resultant Actions

Mr. Speaker, just two weeks ago I rose to talk about the oath we swear as Assemblymen. I urged Members opposite not to lose sight of why we are here.

Unfortunately, I need to rise again today to repeat the oath.

Mr. Speaker, the reason for my speaking today can be found under the heading *"It's been slow work on the people's business"* in the May 4th edition of the Bermuda Sun newspaper.

The Honourable Member, the Leader of the Opposition, is reported as saying (in reference to the Hopkins Report): *"That was five years ago and yet only at the start of 2012 was the Government bringing Professor Hopkins recommendations before the House. The failure to move with urgency on education is not a one-off."*

Now, I'll grant you **Mr. Speaker** that members should be able to talk about the government, politicise issues and generally take advantage of any missteps of their opponents. What they cannot do – **Mr. Speaker** – is ignore the facts in order to score cheap political points.

Mr. Speaker, that honourable member was speaking of the debate on the Joint Select Committee report on education reform which took place in February. If that honourable member had listened when Party Whip MP Lovitta Foggo spoke to her motion, he would have heard the Member talk about the progress that had been made in the five years since the Report.

His colleague, the Shadow Minister of Education, the honourable member Grant Gibbons, who was elected to this House in a Bye-Election on **14 July 1994**, and was a member of government when the 1996 Education Act creating Middle Schools and Senior Schools was enacted, certainly could have told him about the amendments made to that very same Act which were debated and passed in this House on 8 August 2008.

A mere one year after the Report was submitted in 2007!

Mr. Speaker, last week, I said that we have a responsibility to lead and to inform. This week, I want to add that we also have a responsibility to inform ourselves.

Mr. Speaker, we've all heard the saying: *'ignorance of the law is no excuse'*. Legislation was passed in this House before that honourable member was elected and he has a responsibility to know about it.

Mr. Speaker, I wasn't alive during slavery – but I know that it happened. I know that my ancestors were sold at auction, transported on slave ships and hunted down if they tried to escape.

Mr. Speaker, it was during the honourable Deputy Speaker's (Member K. Randolph Horton's) tenure as Minister of Education that the EDUCATION AMENDMENT ACT 2008 was debated and passed.

With its passage Government repealed the post of "Chief Education Officer", created the post of "Commissioner of Education" and set out the functions of the Commissioner. In addition, the role of the Board of Education was expanded and the number of persons on the Board increased to make it representative of the various groups who have a stake in education.

The amendments also provided for accountability in the education system and for curriculum and performance standards that are benchmarked against international standards.

In addition, the amendment extended the school age from 16 years to 18 years.

Mr. Speaker, it was clause 8 of the **2008 amendment, that inserted provisions in the 1996 Act** for School based accountability – Performance recognition – Identification of low performing schools and measures to be taken to improve their performance – Identification of students at risk and measures to address this – Development of academic standards – Development of curriculum standards – and Testing of students.

Mr. Speaker, when we know the facts we should bear in mind the Oath we have sworn:

“I being a Member of this present Assembly, do swear by Almighty God to use and employ my best endeavour therein for the general good, without any respect to private interest, gain or advantage, striving to discharge a good conscience in all equity and integrity during my continuance therein.”

I repeat ***“...to use and employ my best endeavour therein for the general good, without any respect to private interest, gain or advantage...”***

The Honourable Dame Jennifer Smith, DBE, JP, DHumL, MP
Minister of Education - Friday 11 May 2012