



HOUSE OF COMMONS
CANADA

Peter Goldring

*Member of Parliament
Edmonton East*

October 15, 2009

Benjamin Kissin [mailto:ben_kissin@coconetme.org]

Dear Mr. Kissin,

Many have written to me about The Turks and Caicos Islands. I have long had considerable interest in the Caribbean, The Turks and Caicos Islands and their relationship to Canada, even before being appointed by Stephen Harper as the Opposition Foreign Affairs Critic (Caribbean Region) during the 38th Parliamentary Session in 2004. In government I have had an advocacy role with respect to the Caribbean region for several years and am serving as both Vice-Chair of the Canada-Caribbean Parliamentary Committee, director of the Canada-Cuba Committee and Vice-Chair of the Mexico and Argentina Committees, as well as a member of the Foreign Affairs and International Development Committee in the House of Commons. I also have monitored elections in the region, specifically Haiti and Guyana.

In the summer of 2005, using my own funds, I travelled to Barbados, Grenada, St. Lucia and Dominica to see first-hand the effects of Hurricane Ivan and reported to Parliament. I also took the time to meet with political and business people about the evolving geopolitical and economic climate of the region. I first travelled to The Turks and Caicos Islands in 2003, again using my own funds, to gauge public opinion of the islands' prospects, touring both Provo Island and Grand Turks Island. I, of course, have visited since.

Discussion of a partnership between Canada and The Turks and Caicos Islands dates back to 1917, and Prime Minister Robert Borden. Talk of some form of union or formalized association with the islands was noted and then shelved. Concurrently a similar initiative was made by Britain that Canada help with the governance of all British colonies in the Caribbean (then called the British West Indies). Successful pursuit of these talks would have resulted in Canada having more formal partnerships and linkages, not only with The Turks and Caicos Islands, but with approximately 12 English-speaking Caribbean countries today.

In more recent years, movement for a Canada-Turks and Caicos partnership or union was encouraged in 1974 by then New Democratic Party Member of Parliament, Max

Saltsman, a rather ironic name given the island's historical industry. The Turks and Caicos Islands was a significant source of supply of very necessary salt for Canada's Atlantic fishing industry, obtained by water evaporation in substantial salt works. The Turks and Caicos Islands coinage depicts Dutch style windmills used to pump seawater for its historically most important industry, salt panning. The islands of course had moved on from the salt panning industry and were looking for the economic development and tourism that association with Canada might have brought. The Trudeau Government of the day, however, rejected Mr. Saltsman's proposal.

In April 1986, during the time of the Mulroney Government, The Turks and Caicos Islands once again approached the Canadian government. A five member Progressive Conservative Committee formed by

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Winnipeg MP Dan McKenzie and chaired by Ottawa West MP, David Daubney, established plans to hold hearings on the issue before reporting to the party caucus. Mr. Ralph Higgs and Mr. Delton Jones were the primary persons traveling to Ottawa from The Turks and Caicos Islands to state their case and addressed the Progressive Conservative sub-committee on external affairs. The hearings were to determine whether to hold further exploratory talks with the islanders and representatives of the semi-autonomous British Colony. In the end, once again, Canada opted not to pursue union with The Turks and Caicos Islands. The reason not to consider association most certainly was not the distance from Ottawa (the riding of Edmonton East is further from Ottawa than are The Turks and Caicos Islands).

In late 2003 I joined with businessmen Brad Sigouin and Richard Pearson of "A Place In The Sun" in once again promoting the association concept.

I most certainly do not advocate the "annexation" of The Turks and Caicos Islands, as this term is one that is associated with colonialism, implying the "taking control of land or territory by sometimes forceful means, without the peoples' consent or agreement." Nor do I advocate a union with the islands unless there is a clear and determined great majority of overwhelming will by both countries' citizens for such an association. This has not yet been determined. I do advocate an economic partnership, of one form or another, being negotiated between Canada and The Turks and Caicos Islands. This could mean partnering with the islands by establishing a free trade association with them, or perhaps establishing some sort of customs union.

I believe a Canada-Turks and Caicos Islands economic partnership or union represents an historic opportunity for Canada to have a new and positive influence in the greater Caribbean region. Partnership with The Turks and Caicos Islands would better formalize the "special relationship" Canada already enjoys in the region and it would provide many mutually beneficial opportunities for both sides that would go far beyond Canadians merely having access to a tropical vacation destination. The Turks and Caicos Islands, specifically South Caicos Island, has the possible potential to be the principal deep-water trans-shipment centre for Canadian trade coming both to and from the entire Caribbean Rim region and beyond.

With the evolving geopolitical climate of the Caribbean there are many strategic issues to consider along with the mutually beneficial economic opportunities. With a Canadian platform of trade transshipment from a deep-water port on Turks and Caicos' South Caicos Island, Canada from its Atlantic ports would benefit greatly by a partnership and engagement.

The Turks and Caicos Islands are strategically located at the doorway to the Caribbean and beyond. As a consistently stable British territorial country it has the inherent stability required of a platform partnership location. It is about 200 kilometres off shore from Haiti and a somewhat similar distance from Cuba.

Canada has in the past staged its troop deployment to Haiti from The Turks and Caicos Islands. One could only imagine the great opportunities to directly engage the emerging Cuban economic interests from such a regional base of operations. In addition to much greater trade and economic development in





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the region, the platform would also serve as a regional base for democratic development efforts as well as disaster assistance. The hurricane that devastated Grenada, Haiti and other islands underscores the need for regionally locating disaster assistance. From a very understandable, practical reason, if Canada is much more engaged economically and politically in the region it has greater capacity for emergency relief as well.

Exciting possibilities for both Canada and the Turks and Caicos Islands exist with a greatly increased cooperative association. Overall, a closer association with the Caribbean, specifically with The Turks and Caicos Islands, could only enhance trade, cultural, humanitarian and security interests for all concerned. Canada's founding fathers did not falter in their vision of a country of many diverse regions united together for peace and prosperity to the benefit of all. What is now required is the political will and vision expressed both by the Canadian people, as well as those from the Caribbean region, to make increasing cooperation happen.

Mr. Ralph Higgs of The Turks and Caicos Islands still envisions a close formal association. He now is Director of The Turks and Caicos Islands Tourist Board, and has kept the vision of closer association with Canada alive and well for 25 years. Canada should listen to the reasons of today for the mutual benefits of such an association.

Canada's future in the Caribbean should be one of enhanced political, economic, and humanitarian relationships. A Canadian platform of distribution and engagement in the Caribbean would help pursue this goal.

Thank you again for taking the time to correspond with me about this issue.

Sincerely,

Peter Goldring,
Member of Parliament
Edmonton East

