

Prayers

Friday, January 19, 2018

ELECTORAL COLLEGE
Friday, January 19, 2018

The College met at 1.30 p.m.

[HON. BRIGID ANNISSETTE-GEORGE *in the Chair*]

Madam Chairman: A meeting of the Electoral College is now called to order. I invite Members to kindly take their seats while the Clerk verifies the accreditation.

[*Verification of Accreditation*]

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, please stand for the prayer of the Electoral College.

PRAYERS

National Anthem

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Madam Chairman: Members, before we commence, I am to advise that I have received requests to be excused from this meeting of the Electoral College from the following Members, Dr. Fuad Khan, MP for Barataria/San Juan; Mr. Maxie Cuffie, MP for La Horquetta/Talparo; Mr. Ganga Singh, MP for Chaguanas West; Mr. Prakash Ramadhar, MP for St. Augustine.

ELECTION OF PRESIDENT

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members of the Electoral College, in accordance with section 28 of the Constitution of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, I have convened this meeting of the Electoral College for the purpose of holding an election for the President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Hon. Members, pursuant to section 26(2) of the Constitution, the date of the election for the President was published in the *Trinidad and Tobago Gazette*, Volume 56, No. 140 of Thursday, 21 December, 2017. Section 30 of the Constitution provides that:

“A person shall not be a candidate for election as President unless he is nominated for election by a nomination paper which—

(a) is signed by him and by twelve or more members of the House of Representatives; and

(b) is delivered to the Speaker at least seven days before the election.”

In addition, Regulation 4 of the Electoral College Regulations, 1976, requires each candidate for election to be nominated by a nomination paper which must state the full name and address of the candidate and his or her proposers, the occupation of the candidate and the constituencies represented by his or her proposers.

In accordance with section 30 of the Constitution and Regulation 4 of the Electoral College Regulations, Miss Paula-Mae Weekes, retired Justice of Appeal was nominated for election as President. The Members of the House of Representatives who signed the nomination paper in accordance with Regulation 4 of the Electoral College Regulations are:

Dr. Keith Rowley

Mr. Faris Al-Rawi

Mr. Fitzgerald Hinds

Mr. Stuart Young

Mr. Colm Imbert

Mrs. Camille Robinson-Regis

Dr. Nyan Gadsby-Dolly

Maj. Gen. Ret. Edmund Dillon

Miss Shamfa Cudjoe

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC

Mr. Prakash Ramadhar

Dr. Roodal Moonilal

Mr. Adrian Leonce

Mrs. Ayanna Webster-Roy

The nomination paper was duly signed by Miss Weekes as prescribed by section 30 of the Constitution and Regulation 4 of the Electoral College Regulations.

Hon. Members, section 31(1) of the Constitution provides that:

“The candidate who is unopposed or who obtains the greatest number of the

votes cast shall be declared elected.”

Regulation 9(1)(b) of the Electoral College Regulations provides that where “only one person stands nominated” for election as President, “such nominated person shall at the meeting of the Electoral College be declared by the Speaker to be elected”. Accordingly, I hereby declare Miss Paula-Mae Weekes elected President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

I shall now invite the Leader of the Opposition to make remarks on the occasion of the election of Miss Paula-Mae Weekes as President. Leader of the Opposition. [*Desk thumping*]

Mrs. Kamla Persad-Bissessar SC (*Siparia*): Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I am very happy to have been given this opportunity to speak today. My esteemed colleagues, today is truly a historic one for our country. For the first time in the history of our Republic, Trinidad and Tobago has elected its first woman to serve as our nation’s President. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Chair, today, as I stand to give support to a distinguished daughter of our soil, it cannot go unnoticed that we usher in a President-elect in the very week that our grateful nation paid tribute to a former Head of State, our fourth President, Prof. George Maxwell Richards. This moment in time sees us elevating into history our sixth President while celebrating the life of our fourth President. It is our hope that Madam Justice Paula-Mae Weekes will be inspired by the dedicated service and commitment to fairness and impartiality of the late Prof. Richards and his predecessors.

On behalf of the Opposition, I wish to welcome President-elect Weekes, and express our confidence that she will discharge her duties and responsibilities as our Head of State impartially and with compassion, striving at all times to enhance our democracy. I also take this opportunity, Madam Chair, to thank His Excellency, Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona SC for his service to Trinidad and Tobago as our fifth President. He has served our country dutifully and with distinction. In particular, I would like to commend his efforts in ensuring that a procurement board in accordance with the Public Procurement and Disposal of Public Property Act, No. 1 of 2015, as amended, has been established. [*Desk thumping*] This board is critical to ensuring transparency and accountability in the procurement of goods and services by Government.

Madam Chair, 41 years ago Trinidad and Tobago adopted a Republican Constitution giving us the right to elect our own Head of State, to govern ourselves and chart our own destiny as a sovereign nation. Significant progress

has been made in building our democracy and our public institutions, but we have much to do to ensure that our citizens are adequately served. We must continue to focus on improving transparency and accountability, and in working to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of our institutions. The Opposition, which I lead, maintains its commitment to collaborating with stakeholders in making this a reality for the benefit of all the people of Trinidad and Tobago.

Madam Chair, just two short weeks ago in that spirit of collaboration on this most important matter—the election of our sixth President—one that affects each and every citizen of our country, we agreed to accept the Government’s invitation to discuss the way forward. A team from the Opposition met with the Prime Minister, hon. Dr. Keith Rowley and his team, and we carefully considered the Government’s nominee, given the important constitutional role of the President in ensuring good governance and protecting our democracy. We maintain that the person elected to this office must be independent and fair and possess the strength and courage to discharge the functions of the office in a manner which adheres to the Constitution, the rule of law and preserves the separation of powers. [*Desk thumping*]

Deliberating on the Government’s nominee, the Opposition consulted widely and listened carefully to all of the diverse views expressed and we then took the decision to support, given that Madam Justice Paula-Mae Weekes from her record, her experience and her qualifications clearly demonstrated that she was a most suitable and deserving person for this office. Today, the party which I lead, I have the honour to lead, the UNC, joins with those in Government in supporting both a process and a candidate to become our Head of State. Our stated position of non-objection and support runs against the propaganda by a few that we oppose for opposition’s sake. If a nominee is worthy we support, and if a law is good we pass it. [*Desk thumping*]

Whilst some in the national community will continue a fervent debate on our constitutional framework and the relevance and value of existing state institutions, we commend this process, whilst encouraging further dialogue on change and development to meet the traditional imperatives of democracy whilst giving expression to the new ideals of nationhood.

It gives me particular pleasure, Madam Chairman, as I am sure it does for you, on this very historic juncture to be part of the process of electing the first female Head of State. By God’s grace and the will of people, I was honoured to serve as the first female AG, Leader of the Opposition, and humbled to be the first female

Prime Minister, [*Desk thumping*] and, maybe, with God's grace, the second as well. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chair, President-elect Paula-Mae Weekes has had a very distinguished career spanning several decades. After earning her Bachelor of Laws at UWI, Cave Hill, the LEC, Legal Education Certificate from the Hugh Wooding Law School, she was called to the bar in 1982. She then served in the Office of the DPP for 11 years, and then in private practice from 1993 to 1996.

Most recently, in 2016, she was appointed a Justice of Appeal in the Turks and Caicos Islands. Prior to that, she was a judge of the Appeal Court of Trinidad and Tobago for 11 years, from 2005 to her retirement in 2016. She became the fifth female judge in the High Court of Trinidad and Tobago in 1996, serving for eight years. In addition to this, the President-elect was a course director in Ethics, Rights and Obligations of the Legal Profession at the Hugh Wooding Law School. She was a member of the International Association of Women Judges and a member of the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association. She is also Chancellor of the Anglican Church in the Diocese of Trinidad and Tobago.

As she takes up her new position, we trust that President-elect Paula-Mae Weekes will seek to protect the democratic rights and interests of the citizens of our beloved nation. Most important, we expect that the President will ensure that any potential excesses and abuses by the Executive are curbed.

Madam Chairman, as I said, I am very pleased to participate in this historic occasion as a woman of distinction becomes our nation's sixth President. Many of us have long advocated for greater participation by women in politics and in leadership roles. It is our view that no society can achieve its potential until our women and girls, side by side with our men and boys, take up leadership roles and contribute as equals in advancing national development. Equity at all levels will enhance our democracy and ensure that our nation achieves its true potential. As I close, Madam Chair, I am certain that today's election of our country's first woman President will serve to inspire our girls and women. Today our girls can find examples of women, including your good self, at the highest levels of our nation's political sphere, and that is something we can all be immensely proud of.

Madam Chair, as I close, our country is facing a challenging period on many fronts, but as we are all aware, our motto is, Together We Aspire, Together We Achieve. It is time for us to work harder to truly reflect this maxim. It is time that we come together to heal our country. Each of us has a role to play and we must unite in our effort to make our country a better place, of one which we can be very proud. Together we can meet the challenges that lie ahead and work towards

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solutions for them. Let us all draw on our resilience and imagination as we seek to succeed in this challenging environment. I welcome, and we welcome, together with you, Madam Chair, President-elect Paula-Mae Weekes, and look forward to working with her in the months and years ahead. May God continue to bless our great nation. I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: I shall now invite the hon. Prime Minister to make remarks on the occasion of the election of Miss Paula-Mae Weekes as President. Hon. Prime Minister. [*Desk thumping*]

The Prime Minister (Hon. Dr. Keith Rowley): Madam Chairman, today we gather in this august House to clear the way to welcome Madam Justice, retired, Paula-Mae Weekes as the sixth President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Having been moulded and fashioned by our primary and secondary school system, and disciplined by her family's love, she graduated with her LLB from the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill. Citizen Weekes went on to earn a Legal Education Certificate from the Sir Hugh Wooding Law School at St. Augustine. She was called to the Bar in 1982. Her earlier career days saw her holding the professional skills in private practice, as well as serving in the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Justice Weekes is a trained and experienced judicial educator, having become a fellow of the Commonwealth Judicial Education Institute in 2000. Additionally, from 2011 to 2016 she was the course director in ethics at the Sir Hugh Wooding Law School. Over the years she has been responsible for developing and delivering many programmes in Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States. Madam Justice Paula-Mae Weekes served for 11 years as a Justice of Appeal of the Judiciary of Trinidad and Tobago before retiring in 2016. Prior to that she presided in the Supreme Court of Trinidad and Tobago as a puisne judge for a period of nine years.

In August 2012, the Judiciary presented Justice Weekes to act as Chief Justice in the absence of Chief Justice Ivor Archie. Madam Chairman, since then this star citizen was observed to be on a trajectory to this historic zenith as we in this honourable House today are proud to receive and present her as the sole nominee for the post of President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

It is noteworthy that Justice Weekes was the fifth female judge to be appointed to the Criminal Division of the High Court. It is even more noteworthy, and most definitely trailblazing that she is now poised to become the first female Head of State of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] Madam Chairman, as a young nation we can indeed be proud of the fact that our

democracy and all our governance systems are open to all our citizens. Today, for the first time a woman is set to hold the highest office in the land.

Madam Speaker, I still remember the excitement I experienced as a boy when I saw the first woman bus driver. I distinctly remember the pride I felt when we produced the first female commercial pilot, and only recently those moments returned when I saw a picture of our first female commercial airline captain, now retired, as she lit up the pages of our national newspapers.

As a man with a wife, with sisters, daughters, a granddaughter, female cousins, nieces, and thousands of females whom I represent, I feel especially pleased and proud. [*Desk thumping*] But let us not forget, Madam Chairman, that we in Trinidad and Tobago are no strangers to having women hold high office, my colleague is representative of that. [*Desk thumping*] The tapestry of our nation's history is woven with life's threads of many formidable women who have helped this nation to develop, to thrive, to overcome and to soar. While many of them may have been well known and their names recorded in history books, countless others would have in the past, and continue each and every day to do yeoman service in helping to build our nation in their homes, on the sporting fields, at their places of work, and throughout their communities.

I see this, Madam Speaker, as the perfect opportunity for the young people of our nation to sit up and take notice. This is a fitting time, as good a time as any for our young people, and indeed each and every citizen, to recommit to being the best that we can be. Justice Weekes' story serves as a living example that nothing is beyond our reach in Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*] The simple truth is that hard work, dedication, discipline and good character in this land of Trinidad and Tobago, no accomplishment, no accolade, nor position is beyond the reach of anyone. Good woman that she is, today she is selected and celebrated only because she was deemed to be the best person for the job [*Desk thumping*] as measured by a variety of exacting yardsticks. Indeed, even as we speak right now in this august Chamber, future nominees for the position of President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago may very well be looking and listening, and that today, Madam Chairman, is quite sobering, because all that we do here is ultimately meant for their benefit, their encouragement, and even their inspiration.

While it is widely thought of as a ceremonial post, the job of President does in fact hold significance in the overall governance of Trinidad and Tobago. Unfortunately, it is only when things do not go well and we are faced with the inconveniences, and sometimes dire consequences, that we are forced to acknowledge that the Office of President is much more than a ceremonial

humbug. According to the Trinidad and Tobago Republican Constitution, the President is the Head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, and the repository of all Executive authority. Moreover, while the President does not sit in Parliament, he or she is responsible for giving assent to Bills before they become law.

The President is also responsible for the summoning, prorogation and dissolution of Parliament. The President is responsible for casting an eye on the operations and behaviour of the Government of Trinidad and Tobago. The President's authority is exercised within certain constitutional parameters, and most of his or her constitutional acts are implemented in accordance with the advice of or after consultation with another authority, usually the Cabinet, the Prime Minister, or the Leader of the Opposition.

2.00 p.m.

The President appoints 16 Senators on the advice of the Prime Minister, six on the advice of the Leader of the Opposition, and nine Independent Senators in his or her own discretion. Certain senior officials and commissioners are also appointed by the President. These and other responsibilities of the Head of State impact the governance of our nation; as such, it is public service of the highest order.

It is my view, Madam Chairman, that taking up the mantle of service to the public is a clear demonstration of one's patriotism. Madam Justice Paula-Mae Weekes is eminently suited to carry out these duties, to bring calm and confidence to our national governance, and to demonstrate that necessary ingredient of good judgment, which is the unscripted recipe for a successful undertaking of this very solemn assignment.

Public service is expected to be rooted in selflessness and boundless faith in our destiny. Even as there is deep independence in this office, success diminishes the I and amplifies the we. It exalts nationhood and fuels the fires of hope through prayer, and it emphasizes and protects institutions over individual interest. Public service is noble, necessary, and I dare say, very demanding. It is my unyielding hope that all of us gathered here today, we are always cognizant of that, as I am, that Madam Justice Weekes has been brought throughout her long and distinguished career.

As the sixth holder of the office of President, Justice Weekes will have the benefit of respectable legacies of those who went before her. She will be able to draw from their good examples and learn from their mistakes, taking from

whatever she can as to effectively dispatch her duties as Head of State of Trinidad and Tobago. This joyous occasion of her coming into office should not only be a source of pride for all of us, but should provide us with an impetus to reflect on ourselves, to quietly and inwardly examine our own thoughts, our own purposes and actions, to see how we measure to the sterling qualities brought to us by Justice Paula-Mae Weeks. We may very well find that if we are, or think that we are newly minted plastic bottles, it is time for some rethinking and reset in this very House. The nation will benefit from such an exercise and it will be a fitting welcome to a President who will encourage us along the way, along the rocky road which leads to and from this place.

Our citizens expect, and I dare say, deserve representation of the highest quality in every sphere of public service. I for one am of the firm view that that is exactly what we can all look forward to over the next five years and beyond. [*Desk thumping*] The fact that Justice Weekes is unopposed as the sole nominee is a clear indication of this, and I thank all my colleagues on both sides for this cooperation and collaboration in this commendable outcome. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman, let me also take the opportunity afforded me here today to thank outgoing President, His Excellency, Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona SC, ORTT, for his service to the people of Trinidad and Tobago. As I have previously stated, public service in all its forms is indeed a noble undertaking. And whenever citizens agree to serve in public office it is more often than not an indication of their desire to assist our nation to reach our fullest potential. [*Desk thumping*] As such, I wish to publicly thank President Carmona and wish him and his family all the best in their future endeavours. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman, lest you believe that I am biased in my fulsome praise and welcome of our new President-elect, permit to put on the records of *Hansard* some of the views of others who do not have this floor, but who have effused their welcome to and satisfaction with our nominee. One public commentator, a legal luminary, a colleague of hers said, and I quote:

“In her professional life as lawyer, judge and senior tutor, she has demonstrated that she possesses the necessary ability, merit and integrity in the performance of her duties...she will be an excellent President of our country.” [*Desk thumping*]

The commentator also said that she will be:

“Fair and fearless.”

What more can a people ask in the President? Our bishop holds her out to his

country as a citizen who, and I quote:

“...would do a good job at whatever the job requires. We know she gets about her business and is not into frivolity.”

She has guided herself, she has guided the Judiciary, she has guided the young people at the law school, she has guided the Anglican Church. Now she is called to guide this nation through undoubtedly turbulent times. Her steady hand, her firm demeanour, her humility, her love of nation, all her sterling qualities are just what this nation needs, particularly at this time. We should be so lucky.

Madam Chairman, I am humbled to ask all my colleagues in this place and across the nation to receive this citizen and this moment with positive vibes, and let us all go forward with that faith and well-founded expectation of good. And may Almighty God bless and guide this nation of Trinidad and Tobago. [*Desk thumping*]

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, in accordance with section 32(1)(a) of the Constitution and Regulation 9(2)(a) of the Electoral College Regulations, the required instruments shall be signed and sealed later today by the Speaker.

Motion made and question proposed: That this Electoral College be now adjourned sine die. [*Hon. C. Robinson-Regis*]

Madam Chairman: Hon. Members, before putting the question, I wish to seize this opportunity to convey expressions of appreciation to His Excellency, President Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, ORTT, SC, and congratulatory remarks to the President-elect Miss Paula-Mae Weekes, retired Justice of Appeal.

In her remarks to the Electoral College when it was convened on the 15th of February, 2013, then Prime Minister, now Opposition Leader, Kamla Persad-Bissessar, paid regard to the devout Christian upbringing of His Excellency, President Anthony Thomas Aquinas Carmona, SC, ORTT, and to his positive response to the call to service of our country. It was recorded then that His Excellency, in answering that call, was required to re-chart the course of his life and the lives of his family. His Excellency’s actions may have very well been scripted in the interpretation of the parable of the Good Samaritan, delivered by the late Martin Luther King Jr. on the day prior to his assassination in his iconic speech, “I have been to the mountaintop”, and I quote:

“The first question that the priest”—and—“the Levite asked was, ‘If I stop to help this man, what will happen to me?’ But the Good Samaritan...reversed the question: ‘If I do not stop to help this man, what will happen to him?’”

His Excellency stopped to help his nation by offering himself in service in February 2013. As a nation we accept that service is always associated with the image of the Good Samaritan, and inherently involves sacrifice and a diminution of self. During his tenure, His Excellency dutifully discharged the various constitutional and ceremonial responsibilities of Head of State, but also maintained his accessibility to all spheres of national life, from diplomacy to sports and culture, from education to the environment. He shall leave his own indelible mark on the Office of President in the passion he displayed for youth and his belief, and unswerving commitment in creating opportunities for the contribution of young persons to national affairs.

For his service to country as Head of State from 18th of March, 2013, and which shall expire on 19th of March this year, I wish to extend on behalf of the Electoral College and on my own behalf, our gratitude to His Excellency for giving of himself in service. [*Desk thumping*]

I must also place on record our appreciation to the family of His Excellency. Being ever mindful of the fact that his two children, Christian and Anura, would have transformed from children into adolescence under the microscope of public scrutiny, and who were required to share the urgings and demands of having the society of their father with the demands and trappings of his office. I therefore thank them for the tolerance, patience and self-denial which were required at that time. [*Desk thumping*] I wish His Excellency and his wife and his children, best wishes for the next chapter of their life journey.

Before I conclude, I must join with the contributions of the Members who preceded me, by extending heartfelt congratulations to the elected President, Miss Paula-Mae Weekes, retired Justice of Appeal. This election is indeed another historic milestone in the development of our young Republic. And if I am guided by the comments in the public domain, it is one that our citizens have been eagerly anticipating.

Additionally Members, not only was there one nominee, but that nomination of Miss Paula-Mae Weekes was proposed by Members of both sides of the House well, and this has not escaped the attention of our nation as one of the occasions of participatory democracy and cooperation at work. For having presided over and participated in this momentous meeting of the Electoral College, I am deeply humbled, and express unabashedly my personal delight in the election of the first female citizen to the Office of President of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

I thank you. [*Desk thumping*]

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Question put and agreed to.

Electoral College adjourned accordingly.

Adjourned at 2.15 p.m.