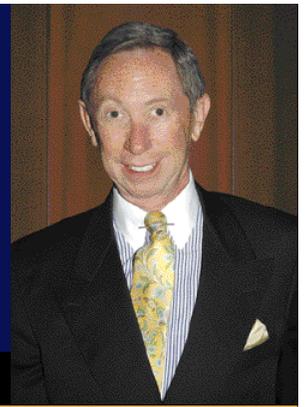


THE NEED FOR SPEED: 'SOON COME' MUST GO . . .

BY DAVID R. LEGGE



To set the scene, the best and the brightest from both Cayman's private and public sectors had gathered at the Ritz-Carlton to hear presenter after presenter look into their crystal balls to predict the future of the Cayman Islands. Each year Fidelity Bank sponsors this event, bringing in distinguished speakers from overseas.

Of particular interest to your editor were the words—and the AK-47 speed at which they were uttered—of Jim Carroll, a chartered accountant from Canada who now bills himself as a “futurist.” Carroll makes a tidy sum sharing his knowledge and insights with large corporations and audiences throughout the world.

Carroll believes—and certainly convinced many in the room—that the global velocity of change is affecting every area of our lives. He cautioned that if we don't adapt to this super-synapsed new world, well, we all recall what happened to Tyrannosaurus Rex.

To illustrate the concept of velocity, Carroll projected on a large screen an image of a charging cheetah in full pursuit of one thing or another—our guess is a gazelle (lunch)—but it makes no difference to our tale . . .

By chance, after Carroll finished his dissertation, it was time for a coffee break, and we approached our good Governor, H.E. Stuart Jack, with a smile on our face and a question on our lips:

“Do you see any irony between the cheetah on the screen and the fact that the national symbol of the Cayman Islands is a turtle?”

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All governments share a lust to extend their powers—and their civil services—into ever-increasing, and increasingly intrusive, areas of our lives. After all, just as the work product of poets is poems, the work product

of legislation are regulation and bureaucracy, which, if not kept in check, can stifle or even kill an economy. Cayman clearly is not keeping these appetites in check, and it will not be a revelation to anyone with an IQ above room temperature that the Cayman Islands need to go on a fiscal diet.

Governmental gridlock has become so pervasive in Cayman that it has become almost impossible to get even the simplest things done in an efficient, timely manner.

Legislators have created an unnavigable labyrinth of bureaucratic corridors, and no one, it seems, has a map. Immigration law has become so convoluted and complex, made even more so by a plethora of poorly written, contradictory and redundant “forms,” that no one—including those who work at Immigration—can either understand the law or explain it. Recent amendments to the Immigration Law took up more than 40 pages of single-space legalese, and the bureaucracy in place has neither the manpower, nor the brainpower, to make any sense out of it.

Think about it, would you dial 949-8344 if you needed accurate information on any serious immigration matter? All of this, of course, raises the issue that if a government cannot explain its own laws, how can it expect its citizenry to obey them?

When “everything” takes “forever” in a society, frustrations rise and the quality of life is diminished.

Everything from the renewal of a driver's license to clearing a package at customs to getting past the ridiculous number of redundant security checks at Owen Roberts International Airport has become an ordeal. Even worse, consider the plight of someone attempting something really complex—such as developing a condominium complex or putting a back porch on your



We redesigned the Cayman Crest to include the Latin phrase 'Magna Cum Celeritate' ('With Great Speed')

“swim with the dolphins” facility in West Bay. Prepare to spend months with the planning department, the environmental department, the legal department, not to mention appeals tribunals (anybody can delay just about any project in Cayman simply by filing an objection) and ultimately, perhaps the courts, (which, by the way, are also jammed and backlogged).

When David Ritch, the recently retired chairman of the Immigration Board, took over that post, he inherited 12,000 unprocessed work permit applications. Every one of those applications represented turmoil and distress for multiple parties: the companies that needed the workers and the workers whose lives were on hold. The last time we checked, the Permanent Residency Board (supposedly the “safety valve” on the onerous and odious “Rollover Policy”) had 3,000 unprocessed applications.

Nearly three years after Hurricane Ivan decimated Grand Cayman, we still have a makeshift roof on the Owen Roberts International Airport terminal, the point of entry for our stayover visitors. And yet we advertise ourselves as an upscale tourism destination.

(If Government is too destitute to repair the roof, at least one of the Ministers—we’d nominate the Hon. Charles Clifford, since he’s in charge of tourism—should call Andreas Ugland, Robert Dart, Susan Olde, Conor O’Dea or any number of generous benefactors to the Cayman Islands. We’re certain one of them would write the check before sundown. Put Dart Realty in charge of the project and we can assure you, a leak-proof roof—do you recall those embarrassing buckets strategically placed to catch raindrops in the baggage-arrival/customs area?—will be in place within two weeks.)

Successive Cayman Islands governments seem to share a common view that whenever a serious issue arises, they should 1) appoint a committee, 2) hold town-hall meetings in each district to determine “what the people think,” 3) hire a consultant, usually an academic, who will prepare a report and make recommendations (usually this part of the process takes months and costs hundreds of thousands of dollars), and 4) in many cases, “shelve” the report and do, well, absolutely nothing.

Are we being too harsh? Consider:

- How many years have we been addressing permanent moorings or berthings for cruise ships? Twenty?
- How about “modernizing” our Constitution? A decade?
- How about addressing the zillion dollar losses of Cayman Airways? Forever.
- Traffic? Education? Health care? The smelly dump?

At the risk of lecturing to our legislators, their inclination to form committees, hire consultants, take the “pulse of the public,” and otherwise cover their collective behinds is the antithesis of leadership. It might appear to the under-educated to be “democratic,” but in fact, it is the opposite.

An underlying principle of representative democracy is that the electorate selects “representatives” whom it trusts to make competent, informed, and wise choices—so we, the citizens who pay their handsome salaries—can spend our time pondering such imponderables as who might be the next “American Idol” or attending to the other complexities and difficulties that make up our daily lives.

One thing is certain: Not one in 1,000 of us has the slightest idea of how to rewrite and “modernize” a Constitution, and holding town hall meetings on such a subject is little more than a cynical political sham. The only thing worse than politicians asking for our advice on such arcane matters would be their actually taking it.

At the end of the day, if our elected members make unwise, unethical, ill-informed, or self-serving decisions, we have the option—actually the obligation—of throwing the rascals out in our next quadrennial elections. That’s the way representative democracy works.

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The next time you hear about government’s forming yet another “study group,” committee, commission or whatever else they might collectively conjure up to avoid doing what we elected them to do—lead—remember the following story:

H. Ross Perot, the Dallas billionaire businessman, was explaining why big governments almost never get anything done on budget and on time. Living in Texas, he used the metaphor of a rattlesnake:

When government encounters a rattlesnake and must decide what to do with it, he said (in approximately these words), “They wring their hands, form committees, consult herpetologists, check with the environmental lobby, conduct a few focus groups, prepare a report, draft some legislation, and eventually pass something that might be called the ‘Rattlesnake Population Modulation Act.’ ”

And what does H. Ross Perot do when he comes across a rattlesnake?

“It’s simple,” he said. “I kill it.” 