

MEDIA STATEMENT

**WHAT WAS OUR AGREEMENT WITH ROSS?**

***Roseau, Dominica, August 13, 2018*** – Given the apparent support of Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit for the relocation of Ross University to Barbados, the people of Dominica have a right to full disclosure of the 25-year agreement that allowed this to happen without notice. We need to know what are the unmet government obligations under the agreement that allowed Ross to relocate without breaching the agreement.

After 40 years of serving as a major engine of economic activity in Dominica, Ross University decided to leave and the Prime Minister found it impossible to negotiate even a phased withdrawal that would give the country at least 12 months to cushion the devastating blow and prepare for adjustments. What exactly does the agreement provide?

The Prime Minister blames tropical storm Erika in 2015 and Hurricane Maria in 2017, but the evidence is becoming clearer and clearer that Dominica lost Ross University because of his selfishness, arrogance, incompetence and hopeless reliance on self-serving foreign advisors.

The circumstances of the termination allow us to conclude that the Prime Minister failed to deliver on the investment support and public infrastructure improvements that had to be addressed satisfactorily within the context of the agreement to facilitate a return of Ross. What exactly does the agreement provide?

There was a particular concern about accreditation by the Dominica Medical Board and the future of Ross in Dominica. What exactly does the agreement provide?

The National Committee on Foreign Medical Education and Accreditation in the US is authorized to evaluate the standards of accreditation applied to foreign medical schools and to determine their comparability to standards applied to medical schools in the United States. This determination of comparability of accreditation standards by NCFMEA is an eligibility requirement for foreign medical schools to participate in the US government’s student financial assistance program and is therefore extremely important to Ross.

Yet, under the watch of the Prime Minister who made himself directly responsible for Ross, there has been no determination, for more than 10 years, that accreditation standards in Dominica are comparable to those of the United States. What exactly does the agreement provide?

Instead of coming clean with the people of Dominica to facilitate learning the lessons that will avert a similar catastrophe in the future, the Prime Minister is busy confusing the issue and creating distractions. For the majority of Dominicans, especially those directly affected by the departure of Ross to Barbados, Mia Mottley is working for the people who elected her into office unlike Roosevelt Skerrit. He felt the heat of public criticism for his woeful incompetence in keeping the vital Ross investment in Dominica and so he moved to control the damage.

Under his instructions and empowerment, his media operatives rallied Dominica Labour Party supporters to savage the Prime Minister of Barbados and blame her for the decision to move Ross out of Dominica. Skerrit’s war against Bridgetown was led by Herbert Volney, Anthony Astaphan and Vince Henderson. His supporters joined the assault without relent for an entire week, before he yielded to his Bridgetown advisors to call for peace and step up as an advocate for Barbados and the Barbados leader.

Now he says, it’s time to move on while he blames his war on others and stands tall as the single biggest impediment to moving on. Indeed, Dominica cannot move on successfully from the devastating, sudden exit of Ross University after 40 years, under the leadership of a Prime Minister who persistently elevates personal interests above the national interest and slavishly carries out the orders of self-serving foreign advisors.

The chief economic advisor of the Prime Minister of Dominica is Barbadian Avinash Persaud who serves the Barbados Prime Minister in a similar capacity. The chief political advisor of the Prime Minister of Dominica is Barbadian Hartley Henry who serves the Barbados Prime Minister in a similar capacity. The Barbadian advisors were engaged with the Dominica Leader before they accepted their engagements as advisors in Bridgetown. But neither of them resigned their Dominica positions, meaning they are now serving two masters with the full knowledge and consent of the Dominica Prime Minister who hired them first. In whose interest is this utterly corrupt arrangement designed to work?

These advisors had the inside track on the challenges faced by Ross in Dominica and were no doubt asked to advise both Prime Ministers. What was their advice to their Dominica boss about facilitating Ross to stay in Dominica? What was their advice to their Barbadian boss about facilitating Ross to relocate to Barbados? Did they even advise their bosses that they should, as CARICOM partners, meet with the owners of Ross to work out the best way forward for Dominica – a CARICOM Single Market and Economy country that stands to lose the significant development benefits of a 40-year investment relationship?

Only Barbados is benefitting from this glaring conflict of interest in which the same political and economic advisors serve masters in Bridgetown and Roseau.

A Barbadian company was among the first major beneficiaries of Dominica’s devastation by Hurricane Maria with a no-bid contract to build 1,000 homes. That same Barbadian company is among the first major beneficiaries of the relocation of Ross from Dominica to Barbados with utilization of its previously floundering housing project. What do the advisors know about this? The people need and demand answers. What did the Dominica Prime Minister and his Barbadian advisors know about the departure of Ross and when did they know it?

There must be an inquiry… there will be an inquiry into what looms before us as a conspiracy of conflicted advisors making a complete mockery of the Prime Minister and inflicting serious injury on the national interest of Dominica.

The chips will fall where the chips have to fall. And the people will get justice.

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