

(Feature address delivered by W.R.Franklin Watty, Chairman of
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ANNUAL AWARDS GALA
DOMINICA HOTELS AND TOURISM ASSOCIATION
MAY 31st, 2008.

President and Mrs. Liverpool,
Minister George and Minister Douglas,
Distinguished Guests,
Friends.

Let me first of all thank my dear friend and fellow Portsmouthian, Mrs. Pestaina, for her kind and glowing words of introduction and welcome. We, who have grown up in that incomparable part of the country are by no means daunted by the prospect and promise of Tourism as a major economic factor in the life of the nation. Visitors from the sea and by air have from our earliest days have enjoyed the attractions of the area with us. It is no surprise that you, Judith and your family are making such a strong contribution to the welfare of this nation, through the tourism and hospitality sector. I also do not believe that you, Minister Douglas, who also hails from the former capital has been entrusted with your portfolio of Tourism by accident. Secondly, I express my appreciation to Discover Dominica and the Ministry of Tourism for inviting me to be part of their workshop this week on Community Tourism. The decision to come and share in this venture along with you while difficult to logistically manage has been entirely worthwhile.

Mr. Minister, your staff's electronic briefings and exchanges with me while still in Canada, followed by our site visits and meetings with programming and service delivery personnel here in Dominica, show the boundless enthusiasm of our people in growing the Tourism Option for Dominica. Thirdly, the Dominica Hotel and Tourism Association, through its many stakeholders are on record as solid

participants in spreading the Dominica Tourism message here and abroad. This has not been an easy task, given the many institutional and other constraints. Yet, the Association's record of achievements evidenced by various international accreditations and designations indicate a consistent record of achievement and provide an admirable platform for building a robust future Tourism for Dominica. Such recognition for a late starter in the tourism race within the Caribbean gives hope for an even more rewarding future, provided we continue to strengthen our base, expand and improve our product, extend our networks, invest with discretion, spread the opportunities and benefits of the Tourism fairly among all our citizens, while all the while maintaining the dignity and commitment of our people.

Tonight's Award Dinner is an opportunity to recognize, and celebrate with persons and organizations who, on an individual and corporate level, are rising to the challenge of service in the local Tourism sector, often at some sacrifice. It is an example that we Dominicans, in all walks of life and at all levels of employment and endeavour, could do well to emulate. At our places of work and in our social encounters, in business and commerce, our attitudes, deportment, representations and commitment will be the difference between success and failure in this extremely sensitive business of Tourism. I congratulate the recipients of awards and urge them to continue on their path to excellence. I urge all our organizations, large and small, commercial, public and voluntary to adopt the practice of recognizing good performance, not necessarily only by financial reward, but by acknowledgement of a job well done.

Taking a cue from this year's theme of "Tourism for Today and Tomorrow" I thought that I would share with you some perceptions, ideas and suggestions from the standpoint of a Dominican resident abroad. I do not suggest that this gives me any dispensation, neither is this tendered by way of apology. I merely suggest to you that someone who has worked in the field in Dominica, who has kept abreast with current issues on the subject in Dominica and the Caribbean; someone who has developed his knowledge and

practice in an external jurisdiction and who currently lectures in this area may, just may, have something to contribute and such a contribution need not be discounted for fear of “paralysis by analysis” or not be disqualified because I am not currently a resident. Indeed, I have been subject to both epithets in the past and such myopic views may continue to have some currency in certain circles. Hopefully, through a new lens and with open minds, we together, (Dominicans at home and abroad) might discover fresh and exciting initiatives and opportunities for advancing novel and unique prospects for Dominica’s tourism.

In recent years, the concept of “Sustainability” has entered into the lexicon of most discussions on development and growth. It is touted as a general panacea by advocates on all sides of national issues. All stripes of politicians place it on the tips of their tongues; bureaucrats relish in having it embellish their reports. Despite this apparent commitment, we do not appear to find it easier to arrive at consensus on any of the biting issues that plague the development agenda for Dominica! Whether addressing the plight of the agricultural sector, or mining and quarrying industries; whether addressing options for alternative energy supplies or the feasibility and viability of schools in small rural communities, the issue of “sustainability” rises as an issue in the debate. As many commentators, so many interpretations, variations and adaptations on the application of the sustainability concept to the issue of the day.

I have monitored many of these exchanges from afar, and I may say, unfettered by any of the colours of the rainbow, I suggest that even the most well-intentioned intervenors might benefit from some gentle reminders.

Once upon a time, we economists accepted without question the assumption of the “free goods of nature”. Clean air, abundant available water supplies, sunlight were considered as given condition (non-quantifiable and un-costed) within which societies lived, conducted their business and commerce. Social conditions, organizational structures, cultural traditions etc. were taken for

granted as external to the development effort or, if possible, were moulded and transformed to meet the directive of economics. Our natural resource endowment of land, minerals, vegetation, fish and wildlife were simply inputs into the grist mill of economic progress with little thought for issues of depletion, replacement, conversion and environmental impacts. The four gods of technology (more, easier, quicker, cheaper) were always assumed to be right and any fall-out from that gospel was justified as “the price of progress!” Today we know such reasoning to be faulted and unacceptable.

The development calculus now requires us to take explicit account of the true and realistic social, economic and environmental benefits and costs of competing plans, programs and projects. In a shrinking, borderless world where external pressures and the different international agendas of governments and multi-national corporations compete against each other relentlessly even in small island developing states such as ours, the will to ensure that we do not jeopardize the interest of our people must remain strong, and decisions in any direction must be based on solid justification. This position is neither academic or polemic; it is not semantic nicety or philosophical posturing. It is reality. No one knows our condition better than ourselves and we are the best stewards of our future. Sooner or later, we have to pay the piper. There is no free lunch. How we address these issues will be central to our national effort forward in a determined, disciplined march to a destiny of our choosing...not one foisted upon us by outsiders, whether malevolent or benign.

I suggest to you that we cannot talk reasonably about “sustainable agriculture”, “sustainable tourism” or “sustainable landscapes” without talking about a “sustainable society” and a “sustainable economy”. We cannot talk sensibly about “the environment” and ignore the human condition of our people in all its complexity nor fail to recognize ourselves as agents for change within the environment. We cannot rationally address ecological processes without understanding what they mean for the welfare of society. Such a discussion and a resulting consensus, if we are successful,

does not come quickly or easily, but have it we must for the urgent assistance and direction of the many stakeholders who depend on it for addressing their own undertakings.

So I invite you to spend a little time with me reflecting on the following:

- (1) Let us revisit the concept of “sustainability” especially as it applies to development;
- (2) Let us understand its relevance and usefulness in moving Dominica forward;
- (3) Let us test our understanding against some major development issues that currently confront our agenda;
- (4) Let us look in particular at the prospects for a “sustainable tourism” within a “sustainable economy” and society; and,
- (5) Let us conclude with a note on the role of Dominicans resident abroad in this expansive national development exercise.

By necessity, given the exigencies of time and your patience such a discussion must be general.

Sustainability in Perspective.

Post-war development efforts were directed primarily in furthering economic growth objectives. More growth was better than less and the faster, the better. The 1960's introduced the need to consider also environmental goals and objectives in achieving balanced growth. The relationship between the economy and the environment is circular and interactive, each capable of affecting the other, positively and negatively. The 1970's cautioned that there were limits to population and economic growth because of constraints posed by resource availability. The 1980's emphasised aspects of eco-development, that growth consistent with ecological principles provided a way for responsible, intelligent and sustained development. The 1990's continued the emphasis that growth and development served to better the human condition; that man is part of the ecology and further added a time dimension that future

populations, future limitations and future opportunities should all be part of present decision-making.

When we speak of “sustainable” development, we also need to address issues of social structure, cohesion and stability. A society wracked by continual bickering, dissipation of its energy in petty controversies does not allow for the ease of development, consolidation and transmission of its core values from the old to the young. False values creep in; dissonant voices inconsistent with where we want to go as a society arrive in our schools and at our doorsteps; our youth chase after false values. Even our adults adopt attitudes and practices at odds with where we wish to go as a society.

A sustainable society is one built on fairness and equity as to how the costs and benefits of development decisions are shared. No sidelining or marginalization of sections of the population because of family name or where they are from or the color of their skin or the schools they attended (if any). In a sustainable society all honest work is valued and all effort justly rewarded. Opportunity is based on merit; assistance is given only to the deserving. No scraps from the few masters’ tables to the many underneath. Yes, let risk be ample rewarded but let not endeavor of the aspiring be stifled because of jealousy, greed or ambition.

Therefore we conclude that development must be crafted with some thought for social and environmental considerations. That “sustainability” seeks to maximize the long term net benefits of development in such a way that future generations are compromised as little as possible by the decisions we take today; that societies should be enabled to seek a higher standard of living for all of its citizens but not at the expense of thoughtless destruction to the environment; and, that economic and social progress must be tempered by the capacity of natural systems to support such programs without irreversible damage. IN EFFECT “SUSTAINABILITY” IS NOT ANTI_GROWTH, BUT PRO RESPONSIBLE GROWTH.

This is a tall order, and one which bears no contradiction. It is a goal we set ourselves demanding principles, clearly stated and faithfully followed. It is a unifying rather than a divisive theme.

Relevance for Dominica.

Little time needs to be spent on basic truths about the Dominica situation. As a small island state with a rugged topography, high interior rainfall, luxuriant vegetation, abundant wildlife, extensive coastline, rich marine life, limited alienated land, primarily an agricultural economy (though transitioning), high levels of land fragmentation, scattered settlements, high infrastructure costs (physical and social), high unemployment, high emigration rates, the reconciliation between pursuing economic growth options within a framework of good environmental management is an intimidating challenge. This country should be rightly proud of some bold though isolated steps in expanding opportunity through education; in enhancing services in the health and welfare fields and measures taken in conserving our best natural resource areas. However, sectoral decisions on physical infrastructure building (roads, docking facilities, airports); on service delivery of water, sewerage, energy; on manufacturing and processing; on mining and quarrying appear on too many occasions to have pitted pro-growth advocates against conservationists each promoting their interpretations of the public good and neither relying (or at least revealing) cogent and defensible information on their respective positions.

In my view, the time is long overdue for a publicly acknowledged and accepted framework encompassing all dimensions of national development which is cohesive, integrated and within which programs and projects can be assessed. The nature of such a framework I leave to public and technical evaluation, (and ultimately political decision) but it cannot be an assembly of disjointed, isolated special sector or service announcements, each as an independent silo, none indicative of their environmental cost, incapable of intelligent assessment and trade-off, and not susceptible to monitoring and

evaluation for performance. With a truly national development programming agenda in place, choices become clearer, priority setting becomes easier, adjustments for the unexpected become more traceable.

Such a framework will play and accommodate social, economic and environmental factors against each other and will outline a process for providing truly defensible conclusions on when, where under what conditions major projects should proceed. THIS NOT TO SUGGEST THAT POLITICIANS WILL HAVE THEIR HANDS TIED AND WILL NOT BE ABLE TO MAKE DECISIONS, WHICH RUN CONTRARY TO THE TECHNICAL AND COMMUNITY-FRAMED RESULTS DERIVED. BUT THOSE CONTRADICTIONS SHOULD AND WILL BE KNOWN, AND ANY EXPLANATIONS CAN BE PROVIDED, AND BE SUBJECT TO WHATEVER CONSEQUENCES THAT MIGHT FOLLOW.

Some Recent Examples.

In recent years there have been a number of issues which have risen to the fore and which have attracted widespread public debate. Among these I make particular mention of the merits of an international airport for Dominica, the Oil Refinery proposal and an effective power supply for Dominica. All of these may encompass information to which I am not privy, but that does not and should not suspend public opinion and debate. As more information becomes available, then the merits can be revisited.

The case for and against an International Airport encompasses issues of needs (why is it necessary); timing (when is required); location (what is the optimal siting); justifiable costs (land, construction, operation, borrowing fees); expected revenue stream (landing fees, charges on traffic, concession rentals). In addition, such a facility must be seen within a broader context of its contribution to the national agenda. This might include expanded access to metropolitan markets for time and temperature sensitive cargoes such as horticulture and the expansionary impacts on the agricultural sector; easier access to Dominica as a destination for stay-over

tourism, and an impetus this gives rise to in hotel accommodation and the whole range of businesses in the hospitality industry. Also, the attractiveness of Dominica as a convention and conferencing center, as a sports venue would increase. Lastly, despite the rise of electronic communication, trade and commerce and personal service industry (education, wellness) continues to place great reliance on business executive access especially for new and emerging markets or in new and unique products. Transactional costs in this area need to be reduced if Dominica is to take advantage of such opportunities.

But the discussion of any and all of the above would be incomplete without a discussion also of whether or not the airport itself or its derived impacts are advantageous to the society and economy. Would an expansion in the horticultural trade, growth in stay-over tourism have impacts on other sectors of the economy, what are they/ how can they be addressed? Are our roads, medical facilities etc sufficient to accommodate these additional loads?

In addition, the environmental costs and benefits associated with such an airport (pre-construction, during construction and post construction) on land, water, air, wildlife require consideration.

All of these might be placed in the scale against the costs and benefits of doing nothing (of not building such a facility) or the merits against a next-best alternative.

Such a documentation, if responsibly undertaken provide little room for political negativism, public posturing or philosophical stances. Neither a commitment to a moderate nature island image nor an aggressive commitment to increased employment opportunity, laudable as both may be, is a sufficient basis for deciding such issues.

The Oil Refinery prospect for the island and the ensuing debate is still reverberating within our community. At the present time, I will limit my observations to the misfortune that the process appears to have been unpardonably faulted. In a democratic society, information sharing and public consultation lies at the root of policy

formulation and decision making. My specific comments on this matter are available on the DAAS web-site under the byline "*FRANKLY SPEAKING*", in which I conclude that there are too many unknowns for an intelligent public to come to a particular determination on this proposal at this time. Certainly, available information on the general case as well as assessments on specific cases given one pause. One may observe that even within more sophisticated societies having rapid response control, containment and remediation measures and procedures available to them, as well as monitoring and performance protocols, regulations and penalties the risks (particularly the environmental) appear substantial. How would an Oil Refinery for Dominica address these matters of record and what benefits would be sufficient to outweigh such concerns, if proven? With out the evidence for and against, judgement must be suspended!

Lurking under the radar at this time in addressing Dominica's growth and development is the matter of Power Generation and Distribution. While it appears that management, operational and service (including rates) are household irritations, major continuing shortfalls in generating capacity threaten to hijack any serious efforts in any and all other sectors. In my humble opinion, this issue require the highest priority attention. Years ago, in considering electricity expansion to the North of the island, the option of a fossil fuel alternative was selected as a then lower capital cost alternative to hydro. How have things changed! Today, exciting new options are on the table including mini-hydro (private and public) plants, wind generators, geo-thermal systems and solar systems all capable of feeding surpluses to the national grid are on the table, all having proven feasibility. In the alternative or together with these, the Operating Authority (DOMLEC) must move or be prodded to move in the direction of a self-sufficient national power supply. Which alternatives, with what implications and at what cost must be the subject of discerning study but that exercise cannot be delayed much longer.

Major programs such as described above and smaller projects of lesser impact should routinely be subject to formal social, economic and ecological review, the intensity of which would depend on the significance of the subject. In fact, the process can be considerably abbreviated for smaller standard projects which might follow a standardized format for information, analysis, public discussion and decision making. Of course, and it must be re-iterated that all programs and projects need to be securely anchored in the overall national planning agenda.

A "Sustainable" Tourism.

Despite an abundance of technical reports and policy papers on this sector and energetic efforts by staff at all levels to make the available policy directions work, one walks away with an impression of uncertainty and drift among stakeholders. Certainly, initiatives have continued in the private sector and may even have accelerated in recent times towards an expanding tourism and one must admire those who have taken the proverbial bull by the horns. It will also be enthusiastically admitted that government has moved to promoting and supporting new and in some instances, exciting initiatives. Yet still some reservations persist. Because of time, I will list a few issues of interest.

1. The role and function of Tourism is still not clear vis-à-vis other sectors of the economy. Is Tourism viewed as a replacement sector to make up the decline in agriculture? Is Tourism viewed as a transitional or bridge sector in the transformation of the economy to a new Services-based economy? Is Tourism expected to be a major net-revenue earner for the nation for example, in servicing national debt? Are the benefits of Tourism seen primarily as a source of employment? In my view, the way in which we answer these and other related questions will color our response to the bold tourism initiatives on the table.
2. A number of Tourism initiatives are presently under active consideration and implementation all of which have much to commend them. They include Cruiseship Tourism; Stayover

(hotel-based) tourism: Residential Tourism (in its own right); Residential-cum-Resort Tourism; Community based Tourism; with prospects for further new programs in Agro-tourism and/or Rural Tourism.

3. Despite this proliferation of Tourism types and programs, a thorough assessment of tourist sites on the island has yet to be undertaken as to their ecological sensitivity, carrying capacity and measures for best management practices.
4. Depending on which Tourism type leads and the expected change in emphasis for each type as it emerges, so also will site designation, routing and use co-ordination/collaboration change. With two cruise ship berthing ports, exposure to the Dominican experience from both centers is crucial and tourist user satisfaction should not depend on the luck of the draw.
5. In an attempt to balance off this exposure, there should not be desperation in including any and everything that might have some interest. Some tourist sites currently designated have no general interest; and in my view, some current interesting sites should not be exposed to tourist traffic, at this time.
6. Some current tourist programs appear to be dictated or at least significantly influenced by external (donor) conditions almost to the extent of undermining their initial intention and effectiveness. The idea of Community Tourism is a laudable one, undergoing growing pains and requires, in my view at least, considerably more community development support and less initial emphasis on and requirement to be financially self-sufficient.
7. Dominica urgently needs at least one flagship Tourist resort, designed sensitively for Dominica, located with some sensitivity to serving all regions of the island, preferably with an upscale golf facility. There should be the option of a complementary second Flagship resort with both being an attention getter and draw-card to the island.
8. I have discussed at length my views on Residential Tourism elsewhere, and at this stage, permit me two observations. Residential tourism institutionalized by policy and programming requires the availability of an acceptable level of basic community standards and facilities. Secondly, Residential tourist sites

allowed to range at large across the country sets off a land price inflation spiral to the detriment of continuing agricultural activity.

9. The issue of profiling the tourist and a programming of tourist promotion to fit the tourist to the Dominican attraction does not yet appear high on the agenda. Given the current almost exclusive reliance on cruise ship tourist that does not appear to be a local issue. However, many sites are now experiencing degradation through over-use from a low return clientele. In my opinion, a more focused promotion to fit client to our special sites will likely yield richer dividends.
10. I strongly applaud the prospect of an Agro-Tourism thrust which, if designed and implemented properly, is sure to be a highlight of a uniquely Dominican experience. This might be combined with the more viable of the Community Tourism sites for programming and marketing and depending on details, community tourism sites with low revenue earning capacity might be encouraged to also operated assured profitable agro-tourism sites.
11. In addition to our attractions of feasts and festivals, an additional interest needs to be placed on our built cultural heritage. There are still several vanishing landscapes and sites which cannot long withstand the ravages of weather and climate. Once lost, they cannot be easily replicated. I trust that I do not embarrass one such admirable opportunity which under a variety of arrangements can be reclaimed to both private and public good. This is the Bois Cotlette estate house, works, and grounds the merits of which I hope to document in a review memorandum to the Ministry. A second illustrative anomaly exists in the Au Pac area of Vieille Case where lands and buildings with low moderate to low merit have been designated as a Community Tourist Site. Only to find that abutting it is the home of our former illustrious Premier, Hon E.O.LebLANC. Anywhere else in the world where people appreciate and honour their heroes, this home if it could be acquired should be designated, preserved, and made available for public viewing (along with the existing, adjacent Community Tourist Site as a place of National and Historic significance).

Having now over-taxed your patience, I will conclude with sincerest thanks to the Community Sites Workshop participants who shared so openly and honestly with me and from whom I learned so much this past week. Despite efforts to separate us as Dominicans whether at home or abroad, we share a common heritage and a lasting love for this country. Unlike many of you, I have this opportunity to provide candid comments, some critical, some laudatory, without fear or favour, and I would be most insincere if I did not do as promised to you, in fulfillment of my professional obligations. We, your sons, daughters, relatives, school mates, friends who have had the benefit of the outside experience stand ready to partner with you and to come to assist whenever and wherever able. Forgive us if at times we appear negative or critical. In most cases that is not intended. As someone once said, Time is not on our side. Our children, proud Dominicans, too, demand that we contribute so they have footstep to follow in adding their measure to their inherited island home. We will not be deterred or dissuaded. In a brief presented to government some four years ago, Dominicans resident abroad outlined ways and means by which they could make their services available, if only they were invited to do so. Except for the establishment of a Ministry for Diaspora Affairs and clarification of the Policy for Returning Residents, the silence has been deafening. It is, however, in that spirit of citizenship and service that despite my commitments I dared not say no to the invitation to be here today. Let us hope that Re-Union 2008 marks a change in attitude towards an active policy of bringing or scattered Dominican family home as full partners in the journey together.

Thank you again for your patience.