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## Aspiring MLAs being groomed

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**Participants and coaches for the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) Cayman Islands Branch Organising Committee's mock parliament, which is carded for Monday, 10 March meet with past and present Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLA). Present MLAs pictured are: Rolston Anglin (second from left); Osbourne Bodden (fourth from left); Alfonso Wright (stooping, right). Past MLAs Linford Pierson (seated, left) and Gilbert McLean (seated, right). Also shown are national hero and first nominated Speaker Sybil McLaughlin (seated, centre) and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly Wendy Lauer (far right). Photo by Bina Mani (GIS)**

With senior mentors providing sustaining encouragement, this year's Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Youth Parliament promises to be an interesting event.

The Cayman Islands Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association is in high gear to ensure a smooth mock parliament performance in observance of Commonwealth Day on Monday, 10 March.

Event preliminaries kicked off with a three-day (30 January to 1 February) workshop on Public Speaking and Debate conducted by Prof Livingston Smith, PhD, Professor of Social Sciences, and Mitchell Ebanks, Student Services Coordinator of the University College of the Cayman Islands (UCCI).

This year's participants learned about different aspects of the theory and practice of debating – a first for the majority. They heard that no amount of theory could replace practical debating sessions that include effective responses to opposing comments. They also watched a video segment of the Prime Minister's Question Hour in the UK House of Commons and understood that robust repartee is an inherent part of the

Westminster type of government.

Additionally, the enthusiastic group of students from UCCI and Grand Cayman's government and private high schools benefited from a panel of experienced local judges. Their expertise was an asset for the culminating event, a debate competition.

Headed by Cayman's National Hero and first nominated Speaker Sybil McLaughlin, other panellists were former House Speaker, Minister and Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) Linford Pierson and former Minister and MLA Gilbert McLean. They offered encouragement and advice to help participants become more effective debaters. Also proffering helping hands were the Branch's Organising Committee Chairman MLA Alfonso Wright, Committee Members MLA Osbourne Bodden and MLA Rolston Anglin, and Organising Committee Secretary and Clerk of the Legislative Assembly Wendy L. Lauer.

Over the first two days, UCCI's Professor of Social Sciences Dr Livingston Smith outlined the strengths of the democratic system and the workings of Cayman's democracy, before guiding the 14 students on the practicalities of debating. Throughout the workshop, particularly during the "how to" segment, Dr Smith emphasised the need to incorporate solid research into each presentation. UCCI Librarian Lucille Kong also explained how to use the library as a source for research.

In an exercise, participants selected one topic from a choice of 25 to speak on for a few minutes. The subjects varied widely, ranging from "This House would allow same-sex couples to adopt children" to "This House supports the death penalty" and "This House would ban students from taking cell phones to school." The students' peers, coaches and organisers evaluated all presentations, suggesting areas where speakers could improve.

The final day featured three debates by the students, now divided into teams. Judges noted the strengths and weaknesses of each presentation and suggested ways to improve. Debate topics were selected as follows: "This House believes that economic growth should be sacrificed for the good of the environment"; "This House believes that the Cinematography Board of the Cayman Islands should be empowered to decide on the movies to be shown to the Caymanian public" and "This House believes that automobiles per family should be restricted to one to reduce the congestion on the roadways".

Mr Wright noted that the workshop was just the beginning.

"This was a very worthwhile exercise. We wanted to ensure that the debates presented in the Youth Parliament in March will be well-researched, strong and not too short. We are going to be working with the students all through this month," he said.

Participating students were Raven Ramoon, Latoya Davis, Salecia Samaroo and

Andrel Harris from John Gray High School and coached by Rajpal Hemraj; Jessica Kong, Duet Berry Jr, Michaiiah Bryan and Thea Bush from UCCI and coached by Student Services Coordinator Mitchell Ebanks; Annalisa Wallace coached by Linda Bernard of Cayman Prep and High School; Gabriella Mendoza Hydes coached by Lenora Mendoza Hydes of Grace Christian Academy; Owen Foster and Corrina Worm coached by Shari Wilson and Jodi McDonald of Cayman International School; Alex Cowan coached by Mark O'Brien of St Ignatius Catholic School; Alejandro Angel from Triple C School, and Taylor Myers of Wesleyan Christian Academy.

Also in attendance was Marvin Hurlston, the past Youth Parliament participant in 2006, who will also take part in March.