

January 30, 2001

Presentation by Dr. Canton Davis, Cabinet Secretary and head of the public service to the second batch of recruits for the Immigration Division at the Police Academy

The Role of the Public Service

SALUTATION

I thank you for inviting me here to speak about the role of the public service. Very often I get invited to talk about the changes that we are pursuing to make the public sector more efficient and effective. The problem is that people can hardly begin to appreciate what we are doing in the public sector if they don't know what we are about.

I therefore welcome this opportunity to start at the very beginning - which is to look at our role and function. I also hope to share with you how the service has changed over time and the challenges that we face to re-define not its essential role but rather how we carry out that role.

The Jamaican Constitution is very clear in its definition of the Public Service. It states quite clearly and unambiguously that it is "the service of the Crown in a civil capacity". The public service includes all agencies of Government established by law to carry out the policies of the Government of Jamaica. It consists of those agencies that are part of the Civil Service, public enterprises established by Act of Parliament and companies incorporated under the Companies Act in which the State or one of its agencies has a majority or controlling interest.

The role and characteristics of the Public Service are also set out in the Constitution. As you know, our system of Government resembles that of the British Westminster-Whitehall model. In that model, the role of the Public Service in the strategic day to day functions of Government requires that it be independent and insulated from the influence of partisan politics.

This protection is entrenched in our Constitution by the establishment of a Public Service Commission that advises the Head of State, who is the Governor-General, or undertakes, on the delegation of authority by him, the appointment, discipline, transfer, and dismissal of public servants.

There are three fundamental roles of the public service. It:

1. Advises Government on policy options,
2. Implements Government's policy decisions; and,
3. Functions generally as the Government's administrative machinery.

Simply put, we exist to fulfill the mandate of the Government, which is to serve the people. Throughout the years, we have changed the scope of the service. In the decade of the 1950s the service focused mainly on administrative and regulatory functions. Big businesses, including our

utility companies, were owned and controlled by foreigners.

By the 1970s, the public service had expanded significantly to take over the “commanding heights of the economy”. A network of public enterprises covering a wide range of developmental and service areas were created to facilitate the new dimension to the public service which included the equitable social and economic distribution of the wealth of the nation. The National Housing Trust (NHT) and the Sugar Cooperative are examples of these enterprises.

In the early 1990s, something of unprecedented magnitude took place and is still taking place that demanded that Government reexamined its role and by extension, the role of the public service. The old values of the public service are being challenged in an era of globalisation, liberalisation and marketisation. Previously, the public service was focused on providing service to an amorphous public.

Today, our citizens are calling for a government that intervenes less and better, one that is capable of mobilizing its scarce resources to do more and one that is able to direct its investment to areas which are key to enhancing the country’s competitive position. Our citizens want Government to provide better physical infrastructure, education, and health care and to maintain law and order. They want Government to be smaller and more efficient. They want service that is faster, more responsive and caring.

The Government has acted in response to these national and global imperatives. It is concerned about the cost of the public service; or more precisely the value for the money put in it. The cost of salaries and wages to the sector has grown from three billion dollars (\$3B) in 1992/93 to thirty-five billion dollars (\$35 B) in 1999/2000. That is equivalent to roughly 15% of the gross domestic product (GDP) and 25% of the Government’s national budget. The implication of this can be fully appreciated when we understand that this is happening in a country that spends over two hundred and fifty dollars (\$250) per person on debt servicing.

The public service is talking more and more about clients and customers. These new designations suggest that our service must be caring and compassionate and fair and respectful. Most of all, we must now look at the people that we serve as individuals with feelings and needs.

The Government has introduced changes under the Administrative Reform Programme (ARP) and more recently the Public Sector Modernization Programme (PSMP) to help to re-define public services. The latter, coupled with the advent of the Citizen’s Charter initiative has positioned quality service at the heart of what we do.

The PSMP has singled out some state entities for conversion to executive agencies. We have implemented entity-specific reforms in these agencies the most significant of which is the introduction of performance management including setting targets and linking pay to performance.

An Executive Agency is a department of Government whose Chief Executive Officer reports directly to the portfolio Minister and who has been granted financial and human resource autonomy. These agencies have some basic characteristics:

- Their responsibilities, aims and objectives are clearly defined and are contained in a Framework Document which is approved by the relevant Minister and Permanent Secretary;
- They implement the policies of their respective Ministers;
- They set annual performance targets which are approved by the relevant Minister and Permanent Secretary;
- The Chief Executive Officer has full responsibility for the performance of the a agency in relation to the agreed targets and objectives;
- The performance of the agencies is monitored by their respective Ministry;

Full details of the targets and the performance of the agencies are published and are available to the public.

The successes of the first set of agencies provide compelling proof that we have taken the right path in transforming the public service. These agencies have achieved 80% of their Key Performance Indicators. They have reduced turn-around times in the delivery of their services, increased productivity, earned more revenues and gained on average 84% customer satisfaction rating.

In addition, they have increased accountability and greater transparency. The performance records of these agencies as well as their financial activities are available for public scrutiny through published quarterly and annual reports.

Four more entities will become full executive agencies on April 1, 2001. These are the National Land Agency, the National Environment and Planning Agency, the National Works Agency and the Jamaica Information Service. The Jamaica Customs Department and JAMPRO will be modernised along the lines of executive agencies but they will not be designated as executive agencies.

With respect to the Citizen's Charter initiative, twenty-one state entities have published Charters and many more have implemented first step customer service improvements. The last Charter to be launched and the first for this year was that of the Jamaica Constabulary Force. These Charters set out the standards of service that customers of a particular entity should expect and the recourse that is available if these standards are not met by the specific entity.

The Government's desire to improve the quality of its public service involves reducing waste.

The Report of the Task Force on Reducing Waste in the Public Sector (popularly known as the Orane Report) and the KPMG report on the Ministries of Health, Education, Finance and National Security and Justice are the principal instruments by which Government is pursuing efficiency and waste reduction in the public service.

Several ministries and departments have implemented the various recommendations outlined in the Orane Report. These include the implementation of the advance card system to replace gas coupons, the introduction of rental and space rationalisation initiatives, the rationalisation of overseas missions and offices, the implementation of initiatives to reduce utility charges, allowances paid to some category of workers and overseas and domestic travel. Since 1999, the sector has realised just under two hundred million dollars (\$200M) by implementing these recommendations.

We have been no less zealous in implementing those recommendations contained in the KPMG reports. The Ministry of Education is seeking to re-deploy its teachers in a way that will result in a better quality of education to our children. We also want to introduce performance management in our schools as we believe that our teachers must be held accountable for the quality of our education.

The Ministry of Health has established its four Health Regions and has established performance contracts called Service Level Agreements (SLA's) with these Regions. We believe that our health workers working from the Regions must be held accountable for the quality of health care that we offer to our people. The Ministry has also and is continuing to divest non-core services such as laundry, catering and security. The Ministry's head office can now focus on broad issues of quality, standards and policies.

Work has also begun at the Ministry of Finance and Planning which will have far-reaching implications in the way it carries out its functions and its relationship with other state entities. Much of these changes will become evident in the new financial year.

The KPMG recommendations have also been implemented in the Ministry of National Security and Justice. We have seen the introduction of Night Courts, changes in Court reporting and the introduction of alternative sentencing. The renewed emphasis on community policing and the civilianisation of the Immigration and Passport Division are examples of the far-reaching changes that have been undertaken by the Police Force.

While the essential role of the service is not likely to change over time there is a distinct move to having a public service that focuses on the core functions of Government-those functions that for social, economic and security reasons, are better carried out by the state. There is also a pre-occupation with greater transparency and accountability and renewed emphasis in Value for Money.

The reform initiatives being undertaken by the Government are designed to have the desired effect of reducing the size Government while at the same time improving services.

In closing I would like to say that the civilianisation of this Division did not come about because

our policeman and women did not do a good job. In fact, the Immigration and Passport Division is one of the few places in Government about which we got consistent positive reports from the public. I want to thank these men and women who worked beyond the call of duty in unfavourable conditions to provide an important service to the public. I expect no less from you.

This Division carries out an important and sensitive job. It is critical to our national security and it is of vital importance that you perform your duty with the highest level of integrity. You must help us to re-define the public service and to firmly establish a new culture of quality and caring service.

Thank you.