

LEGISLATURE IN FOCUS!



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A
Knight
IN SERVICE

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A 21-YEAR-OLD KNIGHT IN ST. KITTS & NEVIS

Since early childhood, Mr. Mauriel Knight, Deputy Clerk (DC) of the Office of the Clerk, National Assembly of St. Christopher & Nevis, has been passionate about understanding the government, particularly Parliament. This interest led to learning about government ministers and global leaders while staying updated on global affairs. In 2017, he attended the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association's Regional Conference in St. Kitts and Nevis, where he accepted the role as Sergeant at Arms during a Regional Youth Parliament Sitting, igniting a deeper interest in parliamentary procedures.

By 2019, DC Knight joined the St. Kitts National Youth Parliament Association (SKNYPA), becoming vice president later that year. His involvement included debating at a Regional Youth Parliament Sitting in Trinidad. In 2021, he was elected President of SKNYPA, making history as the youngest leader of the twenty-year-old organisation. This role involved coordinating youth participation in policy engagements and leading parliamentary Sittings.

In December 2022, at just nineteen, DC Knight was appointed as the Federation's youngest Deputy Clerk, officially starting in February 2023. Committed to promoting youth involvement in legislation and researching the Federation's parliamentary history, he expresses gratitude for the opportunities afforded to him and the support from family, friends, and mentors, particularly from the Hon. Lanein Blanchette and Ms. Trevlyn Stapleton.

HEY, YOU, IGNORE THE NAYSAYERS AND DRIVE CHANGE

Having been involved in legislative processes for nearly two years, DC Knight reflects on his journey, noting that the full impact of his role has yet to fully sink in. He finds joy in explaining the importance of the Federation's Legislature, which is crucial for representing the values and concerns of all citizens. Sharing procedural and historical legislative knowledge is particularly rewarding, as it contributes to the civic education of society.

DC Knight expresses gratitude for the opportunity to inspire peers and youth across the region, despite the challenges posed by bureaucratic structures. He encourages young people not to be discouraged by naysayers who doubt their capabilities based on age or appearance, emphasising that, when equipped, they can drive significant change.

As a young Parliamentary Officer, he stresses that effective governance stems from a deep desire to serve, underscored by dedicated work, stakeholder engagement, research, and sacrifices. He also believes that bipartisanship is attainable, arguing that many national issues transcend political affiliations, necessitating unified solutions for the greater good.

COLLECTIVE ACTION IS KEY: ACT NOW!

His drive for service has long been fuelled by a desire to help others learn, whether by explaining educational concepts or sharing fun facts. As he evolved, this passion advanced into a commitment to represent and assist his community. A keen interest in politics and history further ignited DC Knight's desire to engage in public service, particularly through the St. Kitts National Youth Parliament Association, where he could develop skills in parliamentary procedures and debate.

This journey culminated in his role as Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly of Saint Christopher and Nevis. He emphasises that while meaningful change may seem challenging and often requires significant resources, collective action is key to achieving sustained impact. DC Knight advocates for addressing small issues with "small solutions" as a way for young people to contribute to substantial community change, encouraging others to take action despite resource limitations.

DON'T FEEL DISCOURAGED...TOUGH TIMES DON'T LAST, TOUGH PEOPLE DO

Youth recognise the importance of their contributions to national development, and their voices can be amplified through continued empowerment and a deeper understanding of their societal value. Regional leaders need to create opportunities for young people to engage in decision-making processes. In St. Kitts and Nevis, Cabinet-Youth Engagements serve as a platform to show that leaders are listening to the youth. Young people may feel discouraged if their concerns seem unheard, so it is crucial to provide forums for their participation. Social media can play a significant role in amplifying their voices, facilitating education, and gathering meaningful feedback.

True leadership and representation must stem from a genuine desire to serve. Acknowledging that leadership is challenging and often isolating, he stresses the importance for aspiring leaders to first identify their passion—be it for the environment, poverty alleviation, or even cooking. Following this, introspection is essential to recognize their desire to serve. He firmly believes that during the toughest times, it is this deep passion and commitment to service that will motivate and reinvigorate young leaders to persevere.



Mr. Mauriel Knight Speaking at the 17th Regional Youth Parliament Sitting held in Georgetown, Guyana in September 2023. [Credits: Parliament of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana]

YOU(TH) HAVE THE POWER

DC Knight believes that recognising shared challenges can inspire collaborative change and foster early diplomatic skills. He asserts the role of Youth Parliaments in promoting youth governance and leadership, providing platforms for learning, advocacy, and open dialogue as well as Student Congresses are vital for students to identify issues and propose solutions.

He commends global Youth Advisory Networks for connecting young people with decision-makers, emphasising initiatives like the United Nations Youth Advisory Group and the CARICOM Youth Ambassador Program for their contributions in giving youth a voice and a seat at the policy-making table.

HOW CAN YOUTH LEADERS BE CREATED?

It is DC Knight's hope to see significant development in youth governance over the next decade in two key areas. Firstly, secondary and tertiary students, to cultivate curiosity about civic processes, such as understanding how their country's Legislature operates. He believes that youth can only assume governance roles by proactively equipping themselves for these responsibilities. He addresses the issue of tokenism, arguing that it can only be eliminated when young leaders effectively demonstrate their willingness and capability to serve.

Secondly, DC Knight aspires for a paradigm shift among leaders who currently discourage youth participation. This discouragement may manifest not only as outright hostility but also through delays in implementing agreed-upon policies or unnecessary criticism. He stresses that both current leaders and those they govern must recognise and accept the inevitability of youth taking on decision-making roles. By fostering this understanding, a more welcoming environment for youth leaders can be created.

DEMOCRACY DOESN'T END ON ELECTION DAY...

Civic education is essential for youth empowerment and fostering inclusivity in national decision-making. He highlights the importance of the belief that "democracy doesn't end on election day," emphasising that there are many avenues for civic participation that often go unrecognized. He argues that legislatures and government institutions must proactively educate citizens about their processes and functions; without this knowledge, citizens, particularly youth, may feel disempowered to engage in policy discussions.

Young people's lack of understanding of vital systems can jeopardise the integrity of those systems. To encourage civic participation, DC Knight advocates for educational reform, particularly an expanded Social Studies curriculum that covers the branches of government, the electoral process, and civic responsibilities. He also proposes that schools implement practical initiatives, such as Student Councils and Representative Assemblies, to give students hands-on experience with governance and leadership training.

The responsibility lies with educators and school management to facilitate these initiatives, allowing students to propose and implement meaningful changes. When students see their proposals taken seriously, it will motivate them to identify other areas for improvement, fostering a culture of advocacy and civic engagement that extends beyond the classroom. These practical lessons will serve as valuable assets in empowering youth to participate in governance.

THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY DEPENDS ON YOU(TH)!

Inaction must become a thing of the past. For young people to instigate change in political systems, they must step out of their comfort zones, despite the challenges that come with change and the common resistance to it. Change should be driven by enthusiastic youth who first understand existing processes and then propose and implement innovative ideas.

Change must be paired with a passion for service, and he encourages young people across the region to rise up in service. While electoral politics may not appeal to everyone, every voice is important in the legislative and civic processes. Young people can make a difference through simple actions, such as identifying solutions to local issues or supporting those in need within their communities.

By mentoring youth, assisting elders, and providing perspectives to policymakers, young people can contribute significantly to their communities, national development, and the wider region. This highlights the importance of recognising that, while elective politics can be daunting, there are many other ways to engage in civic processes. The future of democracy relies on this active participation.

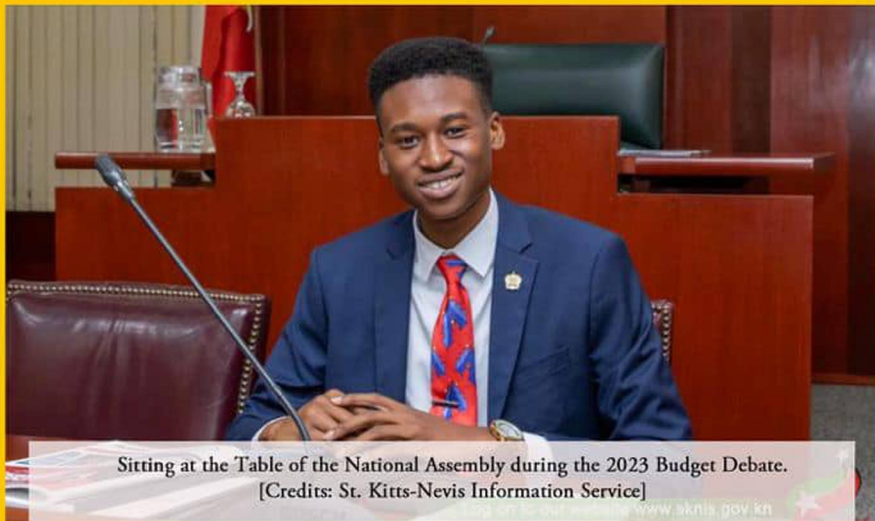
So, come on youth throughout the region...

It is OUR time NOW!

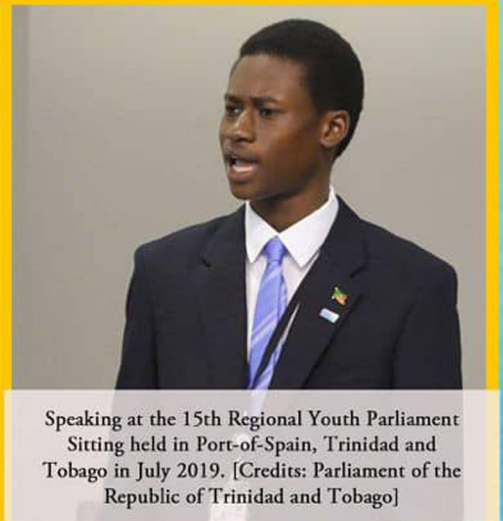
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Serving as Delegation Secretary at the 46th Conference of the Caribbean, the Americas and the Atlantic Region of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association [Credits: Mrs. Shonica Campbell of the Parliament of the Cooperative Republic of Guyana]



Sitting at the Table of the National Assembly during the 2023 Budget Debate.
[Credits: St. Kitts-Nevis Information Service]



Speaking at the 15th Regional Youth Parliament Sitting held in Port-of-Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in July 2019. [Credits: Parliament of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago]



At the National Assembly Chamber during Black History Month Celebrations



With the Hon. Lanein K. Blanchette, Speaker of the National Assembly of Saint Christopher and Nevis and Ms. Trevlyn Stapleton, Clerk of the National Assembly.
[Credits: St. Kitts-Nevis Information Service]



With Ms. Jihan Williams, Former Deputy Clerk of the National Assembly
[Credits: Hon. Dr. Geoffrey Hanley]



With students of the Tucker Clarke Primary School (Mr. Knight's alma mater) who visited a Sitting of the National Assembly. Also pictured are Hon. Lanein Blanchette, Speaker, Hon. Dr. Terrence Drew, Prime Minister, Senator the Hon. Latoya Jones, Deputy Speaker and Ms. Trevlyn Stapleton, Clerk. [Credits: St. Kitts-Nevis Information Service]



Welcoming the Hon. Marci Ien, Canada's Minister of Youth and H.E Lilian Chattergee, Canadian High Commissioner to St. Kitts and Nevis for a Tour of the National Assembly Chamber. [Credits: St. Kitts-Nevis Information Service]