

Opposition says refurbished 9th still allows for Parliamentary Supremacy | Channel5Belize.com

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John Briceño

This Wednesday, the second round of consultations on the Ninth Amendment Bill will take place in Corozal. At the same time the Belize Teachers Union will be meeting in the nation's capital also on the ninth. The two events will provide a sense of what the pulse of the people is to the amended Ninth. On Monday, Prime Minister Dean Barrow, under pressure from various sectors, and after discussions with the Belize Council of Churches and the Evangelical Council of Churches, agreed to "trim" parts of the proposed ninth amendment by striking out

specific language as it pertains to the exclusion of the court from examining future constitutional legislation. Government's release did not provide any meat to the specific language that was removed, but the Council of Churches said it reached agreement to withdraw the offensive sections that barred the court from reviewing constitutional claims. In some quarters, however, there is unease that government still retains the ability to amend parts of the constitution, without the possibility of legal challenge, as long as it has the required three-quarters majority. This morning Opposition Leader John Briceño weighed in his position on the matter by describing the withdrawal as merely a cosmetic change that would still allow for parliamentary supremacy over the constitution.

John Briceño, Party Leader, P.U.P.

"In the changes that they are talking about, as it is they are saying that they are removing certain sections but in the press [release] the prime minister is saying that they are going to probably make some other additions that we have not seen. And if that is going to be the case I think that there needs to be a reset of the button. The ninety-day process, since you are going to be changing what you are proposing, you have proposed July 24th I think it was and now you're going to be changing the bill that you are going to be presenting to the Belizean public. I believe that we need to start the countdown to ninety days all over again. At this point we don't exactly what is going to end up in the bill. He has said that we are going to remove certain, the sections that Belizeans found offensive but then he, if you noticed in his press release he was very clever in using the English language because he said, if you look on the third to last paragraph he is saying that the church leaders were convinced that the agreed trimming of the language. So you di trim the language but we don't know what is going to be [in its place] what you're going to be replacing that trimming. And also the last sentence in his press release and I quote, he said, "It also reiterates that additional changes to further safeguard the bill may still be made depending on the outcome of the consultation process." We don't know what that's going to be so that the prime minister now, when the ninety days is over and we go for the second reading, can bring in new provisions into the bill, things that we have not had a chance to really study and consult and be at a major disadvantage in the whole discussion; not only us as parliamentarians but even the citizens of this country.

There's this general feeling that the people don't trust the government. They don't believe them

that they are going to [do as they] say they are going to do. Why do we say that? [Well] simply because if the prime minister was serious about nationalizing any public utility or nationalizing any company or land or whatever it is that it is already enshrined in the constitution on Section 17 whereby all the prime minister had to do was to follow the process and it is obvious that he did not follow the process and now he has boxed himself in a corner. And now in attempting to solve that problem he is now using a sledgehammer because then it's going directly at some of the basic rights and principles and freedoms of the Belizean citizen. Basically what is happening is that parliament is still going to be supreme over the constitution. There's still going to be supremacy over the constitution when you look at keeping Section 2 and the section that was removed from Section 69:9."



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