

## Business supports Young's selection

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THE business community has expressed optimism regarding the selection of Stuart Young, Member of Parliament for Port of Spain North and St Ann's West, as Prime Minister-in-waiting.

By the end of February, Young will succeed Prime Minister Dr Keith Rowley and lead the People's National Movement into this year's general elections.

Rowley made the announcement in Tobago yesterday, stating that the entire PNM caucus has thrown its support behind Young.

In response to questions from the *Express*, Kiran Maharaj, president of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce, congratulated the minister on his appointment.

'We have worked with him in the past. We found when we did work with him in another portfolio that he was very willing to collaborate and very open to discussions, and there were some positive results in that regard. So, from a private sector perspective we will continue along that to work collaboratively.

'We also know that he does have a task before him given the current state of affairs of our country, but we feel that he does have the interest of Trinidad at heart from everything we have seen, and we wish him well, because we know there are several issues facing the country at this time,' said Maharaj. She added that the chamber looks forward to seeing how it progresses.

Arima Business Association president Christian Rampersad said Young's appointment was not surprising.

In a telephone conversation with the *Express*, Rampersad said: 'This is not a surprise. He has been groomed into the position; he was the minister of everything. We'll see what happens, and the Constitution states that if he does not do well, he can be replaced.'

Rampersad also took the opportunity to stress that he has not seen much done under the state of emergency (SoE). 'I am not seeing much on the SoE front but the consensus is that it is to gather intelligence-so we will see what they find, and then we can criticise,' said Rampersad.

President of the Downtown Owners and Merchants Association (DOMA) Gregory Aboud stated that while the association does not comment on elections, they have had extensive experience with Young in his role as Minister of National Security, including substantial interactions from the downtown city centre.

Aboud said during that time 'we determined that Mr Young was quite passionate in his approach to the issue of safety in the city and generally speaking with respect to all of National Security. Probably his most noticeable characteristic was his passion for the job. If he was to bring that into his new role, I think it will do the country well. I think the country is looking for passion in the management of the country's affairs, and certainly we're looking forward to that with Mr Young in his new role.' Aboud wished the minister success in his new role.

Congratulations also came in from the Fyzabad Chamber of Commerce for Young.

President of the Chamber Angie Jairam stated that 'any substantial expectations from Mr Young in an election year will be unfair to him, as his tenureship will be a few months. As

a southern business chamber, we look forward to any efforts geared toward development and improving the business communities.'

President of the Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce Baldath Maharaj noted that Young has consistently demonstrated strong leadership capabilities- 'particularly in his management of critical portfolios such as Energy and National Security', he said.

Maharaj went on to state that Young has extensive experience in the oil and gas sector, which positions him as a strategic choice for this role 'given that the energy sector remains the backbone of Trinidad and Tobago's economy. His deep understanding of this industry, coupled with his ability to navigate complex negotiations, could provide the stability and expertise needed to steer the country through ongoing economic challenges,' said Maharaj.

With respect to the business community, Maharaj said the community has long advocated for a more robust and business-friendly environment. He added that they are hopeful that Minister Young will 'prioritise the issues that directly impact economic growth and investor confidence.'

'Trinidad and Tobago faces significant challenges, including crime, supply chain inefficiencies, and foreign exchange shortages, all of which impede business operations. Minister Young's background in energy provides him with an understanding of the vital role of private- sector partnerships, which we hope will translate into broader support for economic diversification. It is critical that we reduce our reliance on the energy sector by investing in industries such as agriculture, manufacturing, and technology to create a more resilient economy,' he said.

Expressing his expectations, Maharaj stressed that under Young's leadership, he would like to see targeted initiatives to support small and medium enterprises, which are the backbone of local economies in communities like Chaguanas.

'These businesses require access to financing, grants, and streamlined regulatory processes to thrive. Additionally, addressing crime with innovative and community-focused solutions is essential to improving the business climate. The ease of doing business must also be a priority, with a focus on reducing bureaucratic delays and enhancing access to resources such as foreign exchange,' Maharaj stated.

Maharaj expressed confidence in Young's proven track record, saying he has managed critical sectors of the economy, which suggested he has the capacity to lead effectively; but Maharaj noted it would take collaboration, innovation, and determination to navigate the socio-economic challenges facing Trinidad and Tobago.

Meanwhile, president of the Greater San Fernando Area Chamber Kiran Singh believes the Prime Minister has addressed the question of succession by 'appointing Minister Young, who has been holding very important ministerial portfolios in the country. He's picked a young, able-bodied, intelligent individual with strong knowledge in law and finance.'

Singh outlined several areas he believed highlighted Young's capabilities for the role: 'If anyone can boost business among our crop of politicians, it's Minister Young. Firstly, he comes from a finance background and he's the son of one of the country's most successful bankers.'

Additionally, Singh pointed out Young's role in the energy sector, saying he is an 'architect of the Dragon gas deal-which shows he's adept at high stakes negotiations. I have the confidence he will do more than a good job.'

As for his expectations, Singh said the soon-to-be PM will bring his energy, enthusiasm and diplomatic skills to the job, as he has already been doing, including to immediately address crime and stabilise the economy.

'I think he has already shown he has the characteristics of a good leader, with sober judgment and (being) a skilled politician to handle the cut and thrust of the dynamics of our politics. I have no doubt he will succeed,' Singh said.



'INTEREST OF T& T AT HEART': Kiran Maharaj, president of the Trinidad and Tobago Chamber of Industry and Commerce.



'SUCCESS IN NEW ROLE': Gregory Aboud, president of the Downtown Owners and Merchants Association (DOMA).



'STRONG LEADERSHIP': Baldath Maharaj, Chaguanas Chamber of Commerce president.



'SUBSTANTIAL EXPECTATIONS': Angie Jairam, president of the Fyzabad Chamber of Commerce.



'CONFIDENT HE WILL DO WELL': Kiran Singh, Greater San Fernando Chamber head.