

## **Premier urged to form apolitical women's forum**

### **Statement from Jeanne Atherden, the Leader of the One Bermuda Alliance**

"When the Premier put out his statement which focused on Minister Caines' conduct he missed an opportunity to express his outrage as a husband and father. I know that as a woman and mother of daughters I am outraged at Minister Caines' actions.

"I wonder if, before making his statement, he asked any women how they felt not just about Minister Caines' inappropriate and sexist statement, but also the fact that Minister Caines - not Mr. Caines - thought that it was either OK or funny enough to put out on Instagram?

"From his comments it does not look as if the Premier did canvass the opinion of women because how can you say that you represent all of Bermuda without reflecting the outrage that women feel not just about the Minister's conduct but the thinking behind the conduct?

"Did the Premier ask the women in the PLP for their thoughts? I would call on them to say something publicly about this issue, to condemn it and insist that there is no repeat. Their silence so far sends out a message that either they actually think this behaviour is OK or that they are too afraid to speak out publicly.

"My statement today reflects my feelings and comments from women in this community.

"I have heard men say that women need to speak up but we also need to hear the voices of the men in this community. Men need to speak up not just as it relates to how they want their daughters to be viewed and treated, but also how they want their sons to think and behave. So where do the men of the PLP stand on this? They are silent.

"When I took on the challenge and position of Opposition Leader I said that I would work to promote diversity within the OBA. I said that I would get more women involved in the politics of the country. Change is not easy but it only requires one critical step at a time and this is why I am speaking out today.

"Premier, our women are the glue that holds this country together. They labour in our businesses and then they come home and are the primary care givers in families. We need to be doing things to promote them, not demean them.

"What we say about women reflects how we think about and value them, where we see their place in the community. We may not still be at the point of being seen as 'barefoot and pregnant' in the kitchen but we are definitely not yet at the point where we hold women in the highest regard, where we support and encourage them, where we mentor and empower, where we see them not as objects, but as worthy individuals deserving of equal treatment.

"Minister Caines' statement has been given some prominence internationally and we need to correct this perception of Bermuda. We need to let everyone and most importantly our community - our men, women and children - know that this is not who we are or where we want to be regarding women.

“Premier, we have an opportunity to make a difference. We have an opportunity to seriously look at where we are in relation to women in this community and what we can do to move our community forward. A first step would be for Minister Caines to do the right thing and resign and consign himself to the backbenches where he can reflect on the error of his ways.

“Premier, I urge you to take a second giant and meaningful step and join with me to establish an apolitical Women’s Forum to discuss women’s issues and promote the development and empowerment of women here in Bermuda. *That* Premier would be a meaningful and appropriate response to Minister Caines’ behavior and thinking.”