



A Tribute to the Late Colville L. Petty, OBE

The passing of a loved one is always a time of deep sorrow, and when that life has also touched a nation through years of dedicated and distinguished service, the loss is felt far beyond the family circle. For the family of Mr. Colville L. Petty, OBE, this is a time of personal grief and reflection; for Anguilla, it is an opportunity to remember and give thanks for a son of the soil whose wisdom, integrity, and remarkable foresight helped shape the development of our electoral system and strengthen the foundations of our democracy.

The late Colville L. Petty, OBE, assumed the role of Supervisor of Elections in 1987 and supervised his first general election in 1989. For twenty-six years, he served Anguilla with unwavering dedication, working diligently and collaboratively with Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, and Poll Clerks across the various electoral districts. Throughout his tenure, Mr. Petty supervised six general elections, discharging his responsibilities with professionalism, impartiality, and an unyielding commitment to ensuring that elections were free, fair, and peaceful.



His presence at polling stations throughout election day was a reassuring and welcome one. He understood the importance of accessibility, fairness, and public confidence in the electoral system. Non-partisan in his approach and equitable in his dealings with all, Mr. Petty consistently emphasized that free and fair elections are fundamental to the preservation of democracy. These were not merely principles he advocated; they were principles by which he lived and which guided his distinguished service to Anguilla. Under his supervision, elections were conducted peacefully, transparently, and with integrity.

Mr. Petty was not merely a custodian of the electoral process; he was a visionary who recognized the need for continuous improvement and modernization. In 2009, he sought to strengthen voter participation by introducing continuous voter registration, replacing the previous system of registering voters once annually. This initiative remains in place today. However, despite ongoing public awareness efforts, many eligible voters continue to delay registration until the eleventh hour, undermining the purpose of continuous registration and the timely fulfilment of this important civic responsibility.

Another matter of considerable importance to Mr. Petty was electoral boundary reform. Following the 2010 election, he recommended that Anguilla's electoral boundaries be redrawn, recognizing the importance of fair and representative electoral arrangements. He consistently emphasized the urgency of addressing this matter, believing that electoral boundaries required serious and sustained attention. More than two decades later, this important objective remains unrealized—a reminder of an issue that Mr. Petty considered essential to the continued development of Anguilla's electoral system.

Mr. Petty also welcomed and recommended the introduction of voter registration cards, recognizing their value in strengthening the electoral process. This recommendation was ultimately realized in the 2020 General Elections when voter registration cards were used for the first time in Anguilla. This milestone represents a meaningful continuation of Mr. Petty's vision and stands as a testament to the enduring value of his recommendations and the continued

advancement of the electoral system. His contributions demonstrated a clear understanding that the integrity of democracy rests not only on the conduct of elections but also on the continuous improvement and modernization of the systems that support them.

Upon his retirement in 2013, after twenty-six years of dedicated service, Mr. Petty offered these memorable reflections:

“After twenty-six years, I say farewell to the business of supervising elections in Anguilla. During that time, I supervised six general elections, and I am thankful to the several Governors who had sufficient confidence in me, to have allowed me to serve my country in that capacity over so many years. I am also thankful to our Chief Ministers who trusted my ability to manage and supervise the holding of free and fair elections. I am certain that if they had no faith – no trust – in me, they would have recommended to the Governors, long ago, that I be fired.”

These words offer a glimpse into the character of a man who understood the weight of public responsibility and valued the confidence placed in him. They reflect his gratitude to successive Governors and Chief Ministers, his appreciation for the trust they bestowed upon him, and his quiet confidence in the way he discharged his duties. His years of service were a testament to the value of public trust, professional integrity, and unwavering commitment to country.

Throughout his tenure, Mr. Petty worked diligently to ensure that elections were conducted legitimately and transparently, helping to build and sustain public confidence in Anguilla’s electoral process. He took pride in the fairness and credibility of elections held under his supervision. Yet, even as he upheld the traditional methods of election administration, he recognized that aspects of the system would eventually require modernization. In particular, he acknowledged that the traditional practice of counting ballots individually, with the process broadcast on radio and television, might one day give way to a more efficient approach.

Today, Anguilla has embraced electronic voting machines, marking a further evolution in the administration of elections. This development underscores the continuing importance of ensuring that electoral systems uphold the principles of fairness, transparency, accountability, and public confidence—principles that Mr. Petty so diligently championed throughout his career. Though electoral methods may evolve, the democratic principles he so diligently championed must forever endure.

Mr. Petty’s legacy extended beyond the conduct of elections themselves. His leadership contributed to the development of a cadre of well-trained, disciplined, honest, and hardworking electoral officials who understood the seriousness of their responsibilities. Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, Poll Clerks, and other electoral personnel carried out their duties with professionalism and respect for the electoral process, the nation of Anguilla, and the standards Mr. Petty upheld. His example helped foster a culture of accountability, impartiality, and integrity within the Central Electoral Office—one whose importance endures beyond his years of service.

As Mr. Petty expressed his gratitude to his team in 2013 upon concluding his distinguished tenure as Supervisor of Elections, we at the Central Electoral Office, together with Returning Officers, Presiding Officers, and Poll Clerks, past and present, now honour his memory with profound gratitude. We acknowledge not only his twenty-six years of dedicated service but also the enduring principles he instilled, the confidence he helped cultivate in Anguilla’s electoral process, and the example he leaves for those entrusted with safeguarding our democracy.

We bow in solemn tribute and give profound thanks to Almighty God for the life and service of a distinguished son of Anguilla—a man of exceptional vision, wisdom, and foresight whose stewardship of the electoral process spanned more than a quarter of a century. His service was marked by integrity, impartiality, and an unwavering commitment to the democratic principles upon which our nation stands. We honour the trust he faithfully upheld, the responsibilities he discharged with distinction, and the legacy he bequeaths to Anguilla. His passing marks the closure of a remarkable chapter in our electoral history, but the significance of his contribution shall remain forever woven into the democratic heritage of our nation.

Mr. Colville L. Petty, OBE, your service was distinguished, your contribution immeasurable, and your legacy enduring. You served your country with honour, upheld the principles of free and fair elections, and helped strengthen the foundations of democracy in Anguilla. Though you have taken your final leave of the office to which you devoted twenty-six years of faithful service, the values you embodied and the example you set will continue to guide those who follow in your footsteps. Your name and contribution shall remain indelibly etched in the history of Anguilla's electoral development.

To his bereaved family, we extend our deepest and most heartfelt condolences. We pray that Almighty God, our Saviour and source of all comfort, will sustain you in your grief and grant you strength and peace in the days ahead. May you find comfort in knowing that your loved one served his country with distinction and leaves behind a legacy of integrity, dedication, and service of which you can be immensely proud.

May his soul rest in eternal peace, and may his enduring legacy continue to inspire generations to come.

Central Electoral Office
Anguilla

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