

Nottage 'disappointed' with late objections to Referendum questions

By Matt Maura Bahamas Information Services

NASSAU, The Bahamas --- Minister of National Security, Dr. the Hon. Bernard J. Nottage told House Members Wednesday that he was "disappointed" that the "leadership" of the Bahamas Christian Council did not make their objections to the questions that will appear on the National Referendum Ballot known during an earlier meeting in late December, 2012. The National Security Minister said the leadership of the Bahamas Christian Council, however, waited until January 7, 2013, to let those objections be known, five days after The Order of Referendum was signed by Governor-General, His Excellency Sir Arthur Foulkes, January, 2, 2013. Dr. Nottage has oversight of the Parliamentary Registration Department - and by extension the National Referendum - as Minister of National Security. Dr. Nottage said Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie and several of his ministers met with the leadership of the Bahamas Christian Council on December 28, 2012 and dealt "comprehensively with the Referendum in a cordial, frank and candid manner." "The questions were presented to them for their review and no objections were raised," Dr. Nottage said. "They were informed of the process that would ensue, given the dates for the issuance of the Referendum Order by the Governor General and the schedule thereafter ending with the poll on January 28. "All questions which were raised by them were answered comprehensively. There were no concerns expressed with regard to the wording of the questions," Dr. Nottage added. Dr. Nottage said he received a letter signed by the president of the Bahamas Christian Council, on behalf of the Council and the Save Our Bahamas Vote No Campaign Committee on Friday, January 7, 2013, expressing their "objection to the wording of the web shop gaming question." "They alleged that the question was incorrectly worded and their specific objection was to the word 'regulation.' They indicated a preference for the word 'legalisation' in its stead. In my response to them, I pointed out that the questions, which were contained in the Order issued by the Governor-General on January 2, accurately reflected the propositions upon which the government wishes the public to vote. "More importantly, Mr. Speaker, I pointed out to them that an unlawful activity cannot be regulated and that the word 'regulation' implicitly covers 'legalisation.'" Dr. Nottage said the Prime Minister and several ministers also met with "concerned citizens" prior to determining the questions that would be put to the electorate. "During those meetings a broad range of relevant matters were discussed," Dr. Nottage said. "The Prime Minister answered all questions which were put to him by these groupings and provided all of the information they requested including the actual questions which would appear on the ballots. "These groupings, which included the President and members of the Bahamas Christian Council, now also known as 'Save Our Bahamas Vote No Campaign', which is urging voters to vote no, and executives of the group known as 'Vote Yes Bahamas' which supports web shop gaming and is urging voters to vote yes. "Neither group expressed any disagreement or concern with the questions as put to them then. These are the same questions as appeared in the Order issued by the Governor General." Dr. Nottage said the Referendum is an opportunity for eligible members of the public to be heard on the issue of whether they support the

regulation and taxation of Web Shop Gaming and whether they support the establishment of a National Lottery. “In my nationally televised address, I reminded them that, while for the purposes of the efficient management of the Referendum, they will be voting within their constituencies, the results of the Referendum will be determined by a simple majority of the total number of votes cast nationally for each question. “The Government is committed to participatory democracy and believes in the timeless tenet that public policy should consistently reflect the collective will, desires, aspirations and sensibilities of the Bahamian people. We pledge to be guided by this fundamental ethical and democratic principle through all of our deliberations on their behalf. “I have been charged with ensuring that the process is fair and transparent and I will, By God’s grace, do so,” Dr. Nottage added.