

**REMARKS  
BY  
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THE NATIONAL CHAIRMAN  
PROGRESSIVE LIBERAL PARTY  
LUNCHEON IN HONOUR OF ALFRED M SEARS BA, MIA, MPhil  
FR. MARTIN GOMES CENTER  
ST. JOSEPH PARISH CHURCH  
BOYD ROAD  
NASSAU, BAHAMAS  
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It is with great pleasure and honour that I join with the people of the great constituency of Fort Charlotte in recognizing a friend and colleague in the person of the Hon. Alfred M Sears.

He is the loving husband of Marion and doting father of three who considers the roles of fatherhood and family man his most important responsibilities. He is also very active in his church.

His contributions to the development of this constituency as a community leader and Member of Parliament leave an indelible mark on the social footprints of this community. He is a people's person and the strength of his leadership in Fort Charlotte moved his constituents to attempt to persuade Alfred to offer for public office just one more time in the run up to the 2012 general elections. I dare say that Alfred's endorsement of Dr. Andre Rollins played a significant role in the acceptance of Dr. Rollins as the standard bearer in Fort Charlotte and the confidence the constituents reposed in him.

As a lawmaker and constitutional scholar, he eloquently debated legislation from his feet in the halls of Parliament with sound reasoning and logic. When necessary and in many public forums, Alfred fiercely defended the policies of the PLP government. Needless to say I took great delight in listening to his considerable oratory skills inside and outside of Parliament.

As a trusted policy maker and fellow Cabinet colleague with dual ministerial portfolios, Alfred's contributions to the development of our beloved Bahamas are nothing short of stellar.

In the capacity of Attorney General, he skillfully engineered the removal of The Bahamas from the "grey list" while our Financial Services Sector was vulnerable and under great threat. As Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Mr. Sears led one of the largest and most aggressive construction and refurbishment programs in the history of the Ministry of Education totaling some \$80 million. This resulted in the construction of a record 532 classrooms in just five short years. I know first-hand of the volume of his work because as the Minister of Public Works, it was my ministry's responsibility to design the classroom blocks, execute the contracts and supervise the construction projects.

He negotiated the first collective bargaining agreement with the Bahamas Union of Teachers in their forty-one year history. Further, Mr. Sears negotiated the richest labour agreement in the history of the BUT, amounting to some \$23 million. He is credited with rescuing the poorly managed education loan program by establishing the proper governance structure and lending

credibility to the beleaguered program by mandating means testing procedures as a transparent method of objectively selecting suitably qualified candidates. Further, Alfred succeeded in setting the College of The Bahamas on its present course to attain university status in the not so distant future. By God's help we should have a University of The Bahamas by 2015.

Another brainchild of Mr. Sears is the annual National Education Conference where education delegates from across our archipelago came together to review the current state of education and to craft the way forward. It is my humble opinion that recommendations coming out of these meetings should form the foundation of a National Education Development Plan. I appeal to the Education Minister to reinstate this annual conference as an adjunct to the bi-partisan political committee on education as the government again reaches across party lines in fine-tuning its strategic plan for the future of education.

The Hon. Alfred Sears is a humble man but when annoyed do fondly recall his strong retort "Now look here" and sparks could ensue. Having served as Education Minister, he once again answered the clarion call to national service as he has accepted the post of Council Chairman of the College of The Bahamas. I am confident that he will finish the job he started in 2002 and lead our college to a university.

In a nutshell, this is the measure of the man the Hon. Alfred Sears – family man, scholar, politician, community leader, distinguished jurist and a Great Bahamian.

Before I take my seat and with your kind indulgence, I wish to comment briefly on several national issues.

The critics of the PLP have sought to malign its mortgage relief plan – a plan endorsed by the Bahamas Clearing Banks who are holders of mortgages. Firstly, the FNM lacks the moral authority to criticize the PLP on this because it was their poor management of the economy that is mainly responsible for the mortgage crisis today and they failed to do anything to bring relief to suffering homeowners while in office. To its credit, the PLP government committed \$10 million to assist these families and Prime Minister Christie has committed to doubling down on this to bring relief to struggling Bahamian families. I thank him for his determination and compassionate leadership.

The FNM is now saying that employment is the solution to the mortgage crisis, but they failed to create jobs – or for that matter preserve jobs during their term in office where unemployment doubled. Their poor management of the economy made the recession worse and caused a protracted recovery.

Secondly, I thank the government for and urge them to bring to Parliament the Borrower's Protection Act that will ensure fairness when a lender is exercising its power of sale over a mortgagor's residence and will also address the major issue of salary deductions which contributes to thousands being left with little take home pay.

Also, the Credit Report Act must be brought to Parliament as soon as possible my brothers and sisters as it contains provisions allowing the Central Bank to supervise the credit reporting industry and the licensing of credit bureaus by the Central Bank. This new structure is intended bring greater order to unregulated lending institutions.

These are the policies of the PLP government to bring greater consumer protection and fairness in the market place in the area of contract administration and in particular, the banking, and retail and mortgage industries.

In the area of crime, the party notes a reported overall decline in serious crimes by some 13% and especially murder that recorded a decline of 26% year-to-date over 2012.

We commend the efforts of the courageous and patriotic men and women of the Royal Bahamas Police Force who put their lives on the line daily under dangerous and difficult circumstances to keep The Bahamas safe. We also commend all of the stakeholders in Swift Justice Program who are committed to making the administration of justice in The Bahamas the most efficient and effective in the Region.

While there is much work to do, these positive statistical trends represent good news for The Bahamas but what is good for The Bahamas is not necessarily good for the FNM. Further, these trends support the effectiveness of Urban Renewal 2.0, Saturation Patrols, Rapid Response Strike Forces and the Swift Justice Initiative, all components of Project Safe Bahamas – a key plank in our campaign platform, The Charter for Governance.

It is regrettable however, that the leader of the opposition continues to trot out untruths that are mere political talking points with no connection to reality. Even though the success to date in the fight against crime is an inconvenient truth to the likes of Dr. Minnis and the FNM, they are reminded that the facts do matter.

While some among us of the ilk of Dr. Minnis prefer to ignore reality, hide their heads in the sand, live in a parallel universe and show hatred for the truth, the PLP remains confident that the gains the country is making in the fight against crime will make for a better, safer and stronger Bahamas to the benefit of all Bahamians. The serious challenge to further reduce crime in particular New Providence continues.

I turn my attention to the administration of justice. Our esteemed Attorney General, Senator Maynard-Gibson recently revealed that there has been an 18 percent increase in the conviction rate due mainly to a restructured and reinvigorated Swift Justice Program.

She produced statistics showing a 42% conviction rate from May to December 2012 and a conviction rate of 60% year-to-date 2013. She is to be commended for her vision and tireless efforts to improve the administration of justice.

She recently said, "We're also moving in the right direction in disposing of matters before the courts. You will see that in less than 12 weeks we were able to dispose of 23 matters with only five judges."

"We can project that if we continue on that course, that by the end of the year we will easily dispose of at least 200 matters, and that is our target," she said.

It is important to note that there are only 12 judges in the country with five of them being in the Supreme Court in New Providence and one in Grand Bahama. I am heartened to learn that the Attorney General will cause a conference to be convened shortly to address this matter as a shortage of judges adds to the backlog problem.

In closing, I call on the members of COBUS to utilize the forums made available to them by the government to facilitate all forms constructive engagement. The Minister of Education is making good on his promise to meet with the student union once per month to discuss all issues of concern to them. The Prime Minister has an open door policy and has demonstrated a willingness to meet with diverse constituencies on matters of national concern. Parliament is not the place to air grievances as it makes a mockery of democracy.

The actions of Dr. Minnis and the FNM to incite these students to create a political spectacle is shameful, harmful, irresponsible, reckless, is unbecoming of the leader of the opposition and must be roundly condemned. I remind Dr. Minnis that when Bahamians registered their disapproval of the sale of 51% of BTC to Cable and Wireless, Dr. Minnis and the FNM government ordered the use of the police riot squad, attack dogs and barricades to deny them access to Rawson Square and the former Prime Minister refused to meet with the demonstrators.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I have spoken my peace.

So on behalf of the Office of the Chairman of the Progressive Liberal Party, I commend you the Hon. Alfred M Sears on your excellence in public service, nation building and congratulate you on this high honour and recognition bestowed upon you by those you so faithfully served.

I wish you all the best in all of your future endeavors and May Almighty God continue to bless you and guide your path according to His will for your life.