

STATEMENT BY RT. HON. PERRY G. CHRISTIE MP

LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION

RESPONDING TO THE BUDGET STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

MAY 25, 2011

This is a visionless budget. We are not surprised at the Prime Minister. He had no choice with elections coming. This is a pattern of the Prime Minister before elections. He did this in 1997, and again in 2002 and he is doing it again. The Prime Minister is trying to fool the Bahamian people in this election year that he cares for them by spending the country's money.

What is glaring is there is nothing in this budget to address the issue of crime. Here we have a situation where a robbery has just taken place in broad daylight in our capital city, 48 murders for the year, 368 murders since the FNM came to power and the Prime Minister has nothing to say about crime and how to solve that problem.

With respect to the Communication itself, we warn the government that whatever jobs and funding is available to help the people of the country must be administered without political discrimination. We encourage all our supporters, all Bahamians to apply for these jobs. We will monitor the administration of these jobs scrupulously and will raise the alarm if there is any discrimination against PLPs or people who are not FNM. The history of this FNM government is to use the public purse to fix up FNM supporters and discriminate against those who do not support them.

We have been calling for these training and job creation initiatives since the stop review and cancel programme of the FNM. Mechanisms must be in place to ensure that all Bahamians are treated fairly and not have the requirement of going to their MP in order to get the jobs and the money.

We would like to put in context the background to the story of employment in the country. Since the FNM came to office some 25,000 students have left school, so the public must judge this program announced today of 3,000 person to be trained against those numbers. Further, this Budget Statement does not address the thousands of people who were laid off and have given up looking for work since the FNM has been in office. There are about 45,000 unemployed and underemployed persons and the government's proposals merely address the tip of the iceberg.

Secondly, we are concerned of the changes in the figures on the national economy of The Bahamas. Our own experts will be studying these issues and responding appropriately.

We also note that the Prime Minister is unable to offer any prediction that unemployment will change. His statement shows that there will continue to be high unemployment in the country.

We are not surprised. As usual, we saw no plan to solve this problem in the long term. This admission in and of itself is an admission of failure by the Prime Minister in managing the country's economy. Not only that, the Prime Minister acknowledged the success of the economic policies of my Government when he says he can only accomplish what he wants because of the "fiscal headroom established through prudent economic and fiscal polices, prudent policies of my Government.

The news about the public service is also not a surprise. The Prime Minister had no choice. The public service needs relief.

Too little, too late. What else can one say in response to the Budget Communication? If you want to know this government's real values, their real priorities, look to the budgets they produce when elections are not looming. Even this, their best effort to regain the trust of voters – trust they have spent years squandering – is too little, and it's certainly too late. Because in nearly every corner of our nation today, there is unprecedented suffering. Bahamians today are feeling the consequences of inaccurate forecasting, increased taxes, a struggling economy, and few job opportunities. The FNM has mismanaged this economy, and the Bahamian people are paying the consequences.

We are reminded yet again about the world economy, although in many countries, the recovery began long ago. There is no courage in this government, no one willing to admit that their failures have slowed our own economy, and worse, no vision to empower Bahamians going forward.

Last year, we warned the government that their schemes to raise taxes amounted to courting disaster. The revenue outcomes are exactly as we predicted. There is a sea of red ink, the result of failed tax policies that did not grow the economy. Instead, there were increased costs for business and the ordinary man which led to increased prices to consumers. When the government increased taxes they drove the economy further into recession, penalizing in a tangible way Bahamian entrepreneurs and the ordinary working Bahamian.

This government raised your taxes, took your money...and is now asking you to be grateful they are giving you some of it back. That's what today's Budget Communication amounted to – a political plea for your support, paid for with your money.

It is not surprising that the Minister of Finance would try to claim that he has done a good job. The question we ask however, is good job for whom? It may be over for the special interest friends who have benefited disproportionately from this government's policies. However, on the ground there has been increased poverty, hunger, homelessness and hopelessness. Nothing in this budget indicates that the government truly appreciates the seriousness of the crisis, or its effects on the vast majority of Bahamians they claim to represent.

This budget does not provide any plans or vision for the establishment of careers for the majority of the youth of the Bahamas. We heard short-term proposals for temporary employment for some, but we did not hear any vision as to the opportunities for the majority of our youth to establish and grow their careers to ultimately become entrepreneurs and owners of the economy of the Bahamas.

Our party, the PLP, is united in its determination to put the Bahamas, and Bahamians, first. Whenever possible, we will work with this government but we will also fight for what we think is right – because all too often, this government has put special interests, and foreign interest, first – not Bahamians. Our first priority is addressing crime – a nationwide crisis that demands a far more comprehensive policy than suggested by this government. It's a problem that has devastated our communities, and fixing it requires not just resources, but vision, and – above all – a government that believes that nothing matters more than giving people the security they need to live and work and play.

In addition, we will be fighting for a comprehensive jobs programme to put the young people of the country to work. We shall speak to the need for a low tax policy. We believe that the Central Bank ought to lower the interest rates for borrowing in order to stimulate demand. We

shall be arguing that there is need to provide greater support for the Department of Social Services.

We shall be arguing that there is a need for greater support of the police to fight crime. We shall be arguing for national youth service. We shall be arguing for a strengthened Urban Renewal program that is integrated with a community policing strategy that my Government implemented. We shall urge the immediate implementation of the National Health Insurance programme that we left in place.

The PLP believes that a budget exercise should be used as a mechanism to put forth and test economic development plans for the Bahamas. This government has failed to address the medium and long-term sustainability of the economy of the Bahamas and the best interests for Bahamians. Again, in the current budget, there are no plans for the development of the economy of the Bahamas for the best interest of Bahamians. The PLP does not believe this is the process that is in the best interest for Bahamians. We would use the Budget exercise to present and debate a viable long-term economic plan in the best interest of Bahamians.

We say again: too little, too late.

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