

**CONTRIBUTION BY THE HON. PICEWELL FORBES, MP
FOR SOUTH ANDROS ON THE 2011-2012 BUDGET IN THE
HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY ON 1st June, 2011**

Mr. Speaker:

I am privileged, once again, to rise in this Honourable House of Assembly to speak for and on behalf of the people of South Andros, from Love Hill in the North to Mars Bay in the South. My people are feeling the onerous burden which this Government has unleashed on them over the last five years. They have come to experience the “worse of times” to use Charles Dickens words and they are crying out for help and hope. I give to the people of South Andros and to people all across The Bahamas the assurance that help and hope is on the way.

Planning for Development in a Coordinated Way

Mr. Speaker:

I give you my assurance that the next Budget, the one that will be read in 2013 will be delivered by a PLP Minister of Finance and it will reflect real priorities and programmes based on people and not things. The next Budget will place emphasis on the development of human lives; it will place emphasis on jobs; it will place emphasis on gender issues such as women’s issues; it will place emphasis on youths and the role that they

must play in this nation; and yes, it will place emphasis on crime. It will not be throwing good money after bad. It will be a Budget that is crafted with programmes at its core; it will fund programmes.

It will not, like the Budget that has just been handed down attempt to fit public expenditure into anticipated revenues without recourse to programmes.

Mr. Speaker:

On this side, we believe in programme budgeting. We will design a programme and then seek to fund it. We on this side - and soon to be on that side God willing - will promote policy driven budgets. We will fund policy priorities and not treat the Budget process as a plus and minus exercise, devoid of any human details.

Here is what I mean. People all across The Bahamas have come to experience firsthand the neglect by this Government of the Family Islands. This Government's sole and single focus has been concentrated on New Providence, and in this regard it has painfully neglected the remainder of the Bahamas. Our party believes in an even distribution of the growth of the country, especially when it comes to infrastructure and the economy.

We will devise a strategy to invest in infrastructure and programmes in our Family Islands so as to spur new growth and development. This will be our policy and our Budget priorities will reflect this. We will not be hop, skip and jumping from Abaco to Andros to Crooked Island and to

Rum Cay without rhyme or reason. Our policy, when decided upon will have universal application across The Family Islands. So when we embark on airfields improvements, including terminal buildings it will be a programme and it will apply equally to one and all. No one Prime Minister or Minister will sit in Nassau and determine on the basis of political expediency and personal spite to give or deny a programme to anyone single community. Our approach will be programmatic and policy driven.

This is what this Budget is lacking. But I am not surprise because we have a visionless Government who responds to crisis and can be referred to as the “monkey grinder” government. When the monkey grinder plays a tune the monkey will get up and dance. No music, no dancing monkey.

Mr. Speaker, we have come too far to be treated to this infantile display of Government. Around the globe there is a new approach to governing that puts people first, yet we in The Bahamas continue to use the age old formula which does not work and does not deliver services, especially to the people in our far flung islands.

Mr. Speaker:

We are talking continuously of making New Providence a world class city, according to the Prime Minister in his recent address to the nation but at the same time there is benign neglect in the rest of The Bahamas. The approach of the Progressive Liberal Party Government will be to achieve rural transformation and to put into place processes and policies to do just that. We will ensure that expenditure, especially in the Development Budget will be directed towards all sectors of the economy.

Mr. Speaker,

The last PLP government had a policy of “Anchor Projects” for every island in The Bahamas. These anchor projects were to serve as a catalyst for other forms of economic development. We see how without vision a people perish for less than five years after this ambitious programme was launched, the present Government has to look long and hard to find a single successful anchor project that it has been able to successfully introduce in the Family Islands.

These anchor projects need not be of a touristic nature only ... they can cover any areas of activities that will serve to push investments in other areas and provide sustainable livelihoods for our people. In some Family Islands at the moment, if it were not for the presence of government services, there would be no formal employment at all. What has this Government done in this regard?

Mr. Speaker,

We in the PLP when we return to power have set as a target some key goals and these will be reflected in our budgets:

1. Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger – too many of our people, especially the young and the elderly go to bed each night not knowing where the next meal is coming from or having had sufficient to eat
2. Seek an improvement in our national standard of education so as to prepare our people to compete in a competitive world environment,

including the placement of computers in classrooms across The Bahamas so that each child becomes computer literate.

3. Promote gender equality and empowerment of women
4. Improve Health care and make medical treatment more accessible to all through affordable Health Insurance
5. Ensure environmental sustainability – one of the few bankable assets The Bahamas has is its pristine environment and we should do everything to protect it, no matter how tempting the prospect to do something otherwise
6. Unlocking land for development
7. Improving law, order and justice
8. Provision of key public utilities to all of our citizens (electricity, communication- including cable television and internet – clean water and sanitation

Mr. Speaker,

We were on the road towards achieving some of these things but the last five years has given us a detour but our Party is committed to making these and other benefits available to all Bahamians, from Salina Point and Pirates Well to Grand Cay and to Farmer's Cay. Our spending priorities will fall within these parameters and not be dictated by how much money is needed for the same consumables each year.

Mr. Speaker,

Bahamianisation

I will return to some of these themes in more details but Mr. Speaker there are some broader issues of which this Government is guilty of and one of them is the issue of Bahamianisation. During the debate on the Mid Year Budget presentation I expressed some deep concerns that have been relayed to me by the average man and woman on the street about the drift that this Government has taken with respect to its immigration policy.

At that time I said, and it is worth repeating, that at a fundamental level this crisis about Bahamianisation is about our national identity. It strikes at the core of who we are as a people and as a nation. I submit that as a nation, we are still uncertain about who we are. We have become tentative and dependent. We have the power and the institutions created to empower the people but we have serious psychological insecurities. We do not have that “Can Do” spirit. Instead we have an attitude that foreign is good and foreign is best. It is a psychological dependency that has made neo-colonials even after all of these years. For the good of the nation, we must rid ourselves of the foreign dependency syndrome. This is a serious state of affairs for any country to be in. In short, coming up on thirty-eight years of independence we have become more dependent.

Successful societies around the world are those societies that have put the welfare and homogeneity of their people at the forefront of their national endeavors. The attitude of the Government should be: he/she is a Bahamian let us give him the first opportunity and if he fails let us find another one and give him a second opportunity.

Instead, the prevailing attitude seems to be let us give the foreigner the first, second and last opportunity and if he fails find another foreigner. Why is this so? Is it because of insecurity, jealousy, resentment or an incipient fear of the success of fellow Bahamians? Whatever the cause, it has had a dampening effect on the aspirations of our people.

Mr. Speaker, since I uttered these words in this Honourable House of Assembly less than three months ago hundreds of Work Permits for non-Bahamians have been approved or renewed. What is going on and when will it stop. What will happen if just for one month, the Hon Member for St. Ann's' and the Minister responsible for Immigration were to say I will not approve a single permit for anyone in any category. Would the Bahamian economy ground to a halt? I think not! Will the offshore financial institutions cease to function efficiently? I think not! Will the hotels both large and small stop their operations? I think not! Will the family who has a foreign maid and gardener not be able to make it? I think not! Admittedly, our education and health care sectors might feel the pinch but apart from these sectors it will be no great loss.

No, what will happen is that if there is no alternative, then the employer will have no other choice but to turn to a Bahamian and I can assure you that the clock will not stop ticking; in fact it will not skip a beat and we will all be the better off for it.

Finally, Mr. Speaker, ironic as it may sound, this syndrome of dependency on foreign labour and the open door open immigration policy being practiced by this Government has contributed to the flow of illegal immigrants. The illegal immigrant comes in, having seen how the legal ones have been accommodated and they come through nefarious

schemes hoping that if I remain hidden long enough and if I can prove my worth, then it is only a matter of time before I will be legally sponsored. I can guarantee you, Mr. Speaker, that less than one-third of immigration documented work force entered The Bahamas legally on first arrival. The rest were documented after arrival, against policy and the law.

Our economy and bank system are losing millions through remittances. If you do not believe me get the statistics from the Central Bank representing the formal currency exchange sector only. Then there is the black market exchange. All of this is aided and abetted by a permissive and uncaring Government.

We must put an end to this syndrome and the time to do it will be coming - most assuredly. Bahamians are crying out for their rightful place in their own country.

Mr. Speaker.

Unlocking Land

As a member of this place and one who has put oneself to the front as a leader I have a responsibility to provide for my people in every which way. One area where I am constantly being approached about is the access of the ordinary man and women, often young people to land.

One would have thought that after thirty-eight years as an Independent country we would have had a national land policy. But we do not. Land is still being given out on the basis of preferences, and usually political preferences to those who lease need it. We need a land policy and one of the first things the new PLP Government must do is to craft such a policy. The present situation is scandalous and bordering on criminal in its approach. To think that there is no independent and transparent approach in place in this day and time is unbelievable.

There are several things which must be done immediately:

- All land must be immediately catalogued into various categories such as State owned Land (Crown Land); Government Land (land in owned by the Government) customary or community land; and land which is in the ownership of families over generations which we call generation land
- The process of application must be simple and transparent; presently, it takes years to get an application from one step to another unless friends in high places facilitate the process
- There should be a Lands Board which is independent and transparent and not subject to political influence; the idea of having a political person approving a lease or a crown grant is abhorrent in this day and time.

Mr. Speaker,

The system needs fixing if we are going to unlock and unleash the potential of Bahamians to live and create prosperity in their own country. You can write it down. The PLP Government will fix the process and create a policy.

Mr. Speaker

The Young

The only Party which cares about the youth of this country is the PLP. Every single initiative that has ever been introduced in this country that has had an effect on the young is the PLP.

It was Sir Lynden Pindling in 1977 who created the first Ministry of Youth and Sports. By this single action, Sir Lynden showed the nation that he knew the potential of youth as a force in education, sports, business, culture and in community affairs just to name a few areas of endeavors. I venture to say, that every single programme being administered by the Minister of Youth is the same programme that were rolled out over twenty odd years ago.

The last PLP administration attempted to take this process even further with the introduction of the Urban Renewal Programme throughout The Bahamas. The programme provide community centre where young people came to learn computers, music, dance, after school programmes of literacy and numeracy. It was a safe haven for children of all ages who had a safe place to congregate and recreate safe from the horrors of some of their communities. But in a spate of vindictiveness, spite and arrogance, this Government discontinued the programme and only left open the ones where they could provide employment for some of their followers.

We need to have programmes for our young people. They need a safe place. They need to learn skills other than those that they can pick up in the classrooms.

Mr. Speaker,

The children of the middle and upper class have their private swimming lessons, dance, music lessons and gymnastics and after school academic coaching. Why cannot this happen through the initiatives of the Government for the underprivileged?

A sad commentary on this is that the Government through the direct and personal intervention of our beloved former Prime Minister Christie was able to get many of the churches on board; various churches made their church halls and buildings available and they were even financial contributors to the Urban Renewal Programme. They wanted to be a part of this social outreach.

We need to engage the community again. It was this present Government that commissioned several crime commissions and reports and did nothing with them. But if one were to look at and implement the recommendation of the various crime reports the one thing that comes glaringly through is the need to do something positive with our young people.

Mr. Speaker,

The PLP administration which is coming will pick up the pieces and seek to restore that which has been lost. We must rescue all of our youth.

Mr. Speaker

Community and Constituency Concerns

This is the last Budget before we go into a general election and I cannot enough thank the good people of South Andros for electing me as their representative. I have been with them all the way and they have supported me through thick and thin.

It is on their behalf that I raise some issues which need to be brought to the attention of the Government in this Budget:

Central Andros (Love Hill to Behring Point)

- library facilities with government assistance
- more funding for local government
- centre for abused or indigent children
- funding for small and medium size business
- tourism promotions inclusive of Andros sites, lakes, bights, harbors, fauna, historical sites, food, people, etc.
- re-awarding contract for construction of new Primary School in Fresh Creek

- Science and Technical/Vocational teaching and expansion at Central Andros High
- Bridge repaired in Fresh Creek
- Dock repair in Behring Point (by Bishop Raymond Mackey)
- Improved sporting facility
- Land title issues dealt with
- Sporting facilities improved, with track and field in Fresh Creek, with a growing population
- Improved health-care; tele-medicine initiative could assist here
- Improve internet and cable services

Mangrove Cay District

- docks repair in Lisbon Creek – resurfaced and removal of old sunken vessels
- repair of dock in Little Harbour
- sporting facilities improved – track and field in the road
- basketball facilities improved
- library announced
- funding for local government
- funding for vision and dreams of young people in medium/small size enterprises

- should be given quota to fill with these applications for loans or funding
- back road in case of natural disasters, flood tide or hurricane
- after school programmes for young men and services of a youth officer
- Empowerment thru funding for fishing/marine industry with craw-fish season being upon us.
- Port of entry status
- The need for the island to have its own Island Administrator

- **Let Mangrove Cay have its own local residents handling the affairs of BEC, BATELCO, Water & Sewerage, free from the dictates of South Andros.**

South Andros (Driggs Hill to Mars Bay)

- bridge repaired in Little Creek and Deep Creek
- library facilities
- community centre
- senior citizen home getting more government assistance via subvention
- old clinic at the Bluff to be used by police, present office leaks
- allocate moneys to upgrade local government centre at the Bluff
- expand Congo Town airport
- funding for local government

- Junior high school – shock factor for young people from primary to High School
- New subdivision
- Timely payment of food stamps given by social services
- Improve and expand bank of the Bahamas services
- Gasoline costs in all of Andros along with food, freight should be monitored consistently
- Replace teachers at High School due to transfers or retirement
- Computer access improved (once per week is not sufficient)
- Sporting facility/gymnasium at High School; has a great camp started by Danny Pratt
- Dock fixed in Kemp’s Bay
- Potable water from Bluff to Mar’s Bay
- cable

Mr. Speaker:

As I bring my contribution to a close I just want to re-enforce what I have said in my presentation. This Budget is a budget of sums. The Government simply added up the sum total of what they had to spend, see how much taxes they could raise on the back of the Bahamian people and then took away what the various Departments require. That is all this budget is about. It is a sums game.

Mr. Speaker:

As for the Capital/Development Budget it is fragmentary. The Government should be awash with money from the sale of BTC but this is not reflected in the capital spending programmes in any intelligible manner. As I said before, it is a Budget that hop and skip all over the place. It is evidence of lack of planning on policies and priorities. What is emerging is departmental needs rather than national needs. It has not taken account of the programmes and policy that will engender evenness of growth to ensure that The Bahamas as a nation reaches its maximum potential.

Mr. Speaker:

It is not a Budget that any caring and visionary Minister of Finance would bring to the floor of this Honourable House, especially in these times. This is sad, because after all these years, one would have thought that the Government would have gotten it right. There is nothing for them to be proud of and each and every member should hang their heads in shame for what they have inflicted on the Bahamian people over the last four plus years.

I join with my Party and the next Government in stating as boldly as I can, that we will get it right next year!

Mr. Speaker, I thank you.

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