

**NOTES**

**BY**

**FRED MITCHELL MP**

**FOX HILL**

**BUDGET DEBATE 2011**

**House of Assembly**

**Nassau**

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*(Note to Editors: these are unedited notes. Please check against delivery)*

The story about staff member who saw the Nassau Guardian this morning and said I need to collect royalties.

Reminds me of my time in primary school when the girls would walk up to me and say: “Aint you see me trying to like you.”

I always envied my colleague the Member for North Andros that former lady friend of his who shall remain nameless who works at the Guardian and wrote that whole section about me this morning. As the song writer says: “That Gal look good!” My only point is that journalism, the kind that the Nassau Guardian, The Tribune and the Bahama Journal are to practice carries with it certain ethical standards and it is unethical to write a story about one subject of which you had a close personal

relationship as if you are a disinterested party. It can be seen as malicious. But neither she nor employers seem to get the point.

And this is important because we depend on the newspapers of record, the press and the media to tell the Bahamian story; to tell it accurately, and without fear or favour.

Thank you Jimmy Williams, Renardo Curry (PLP's candidate in North Abaco) for their invitation to the third anniversary service of Rev. Deion Gibson as Pastor of the Assemblies of God in Marsh Harbour, Abaco.

Wish the best to the Trade Union Congress whose function I missed yesterday at the Mission Baptist Church in Hay Street. Wish them the best on Labour Day. I shall join the Labour Day march as usual in Grand Bahama and look forward to marking Labour Day in Freeport. We remember today the late Sir Randol Fawkes who is known in the country as the father of labour. He was most responsible for Labour Day as a public holiday. The day was chosen because of the heroes of Burma Road who led the fight for social change in the riots of 1942 on the 1st June of that year.

Make no mistake about that, the laboring classes led the way for change in the country. We owe them a great debt of gratitude today and it is the laboring class that the Progressive Liberal Party finds its groundings. I salute all working people today.

Yesterday the government began this debate with its leader taking up the whole morning. Wow! Election time coming. No more let's get out of

here I gat to go. And what it amounted to according to one person who heard it was sugar, honey ice tea.

This was followed while I was in the House by the Minister for Sports who gave a remarkable performance about minutia. Bravo! Minister.

And you know here is the difference between us. My constituents were incensed yesterday in what they thought was a rare moment of civility with this FNM government when the Minister said he would yield for me to ask a question of something in his presentation that I had missed about Canterbury Park. Only to have the Minister snap back some wise crack about I must go and visit my constituency.

That's the problem with this government. Do not know time or place.

Today, I wish to address primarily my responsibilities as the Opposition's spokesman on Foreign Affairs, the Public Service and tangentially I expect to deal with issues relating to the role of public officials; my views about the House of Assembly and how its work ought to be supported including public support of campaigns and political parties; my views about the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the teachable moment at which the country now finds itself with the selective leak of apparent U.S. Embassy private cables sent to their home base in Washington D.C. about Bahamian officials. I will also speak to the need for capital works in my constituency of Fox Hill.

Above all, I will be speaking consistently to the theme Bahamians first. In all things, the PLP puts Bahamians first. Unfortunately, the current

government has not – they put special interests and even foreign interests first. I represent a party that has a proud history of putting Bahamians first. Going forward, in the 21st century, nothing is more important than having a government that consistently, as it determines policies and priorities, puts Bahamians first.

I wish to begin speaking of the Fox Hill constituency. This constituency was first created in 1972 when Lionel Davis became the first representative in the House of Assembly for the constituency of Fox Hill. It was meant to embrace the traditional area of this island, which is a repository of African culture in the country.

The constituency is largely a middle class constituency, even though it bears the historic name which at its core shares many of the same characteristics as the inner city areas of New Providence.

When my predecessor the late George Mackey introduced me to the area, he charged me with the responsibility of protecting the cultural integrity of the Fox Hill Village. So that even though by political sleight of hand, much of the Fox Hill village has been put in the Montagu constituency largely to bring about my defeat, I continue to represent the people of Fox Hill wherever they may be. It is time therefore for Fox Hill to be restored so that the full village is represented in the one constituency.

This is one way in which Bahamians first – if it matters to my community, then it matters to me, and to my party. In Fox Hill, I say Bahamians come first.

This is in part why I am in favour of the election law reform which would permit pursuant to the constitution, a legal challenge of the decisions of the Constituencies Commission under Article 70 (9) which reads in part that Parliament may by law provide for an appeal to the Supreme Court against a statement or recommendation submitted by the Commission.

This comes back to the point which I made earlier by the Nassau Guardian about the number of seats in the Parliament. There is a twofold test: that of having seats which have more less the same number of electors and then taking into account other factors such as the needs of sparsely populated areas, practicality of elected members maintaining contact with electors in such areas as, size, physical features, natural boundaries and geographical location.

I argue that this suggests that the cultural integrity of Fox Hill ought to be protected.

There is a need for significant infrastructural work throughout the constituency. The Ministry of Tourism wants to develop Fox Hill as a tourist Mecca but the government must have the will to supply the infrastructure to support it. There must be properly garbage collections, bathrooms, sidewalks, amenities.

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The Fox Hill Festival which is the single biggest celebration of African Culture in the country and which is central to family entertainment in the summer in this city is suffering from neglect from this administration. Last year, there was an increase in the Ministry of Cultures subvention but a cut in the support from the Ministry of Tourism.

We thank the public agencies who support the Festival: the Dept of Social Services, the Ministries of Culture and Tourism, the Ministry of Works and the Department of Environmental Health. But this support needs to be greater, fuller and more comprehensive. It requires a full commitment of the government to bear the costs of the Festival given its public national nature.

This is the only place left in New Providence where Emancipation Day is observed for what it is. Fox Hill Day provides the unique experience in New Providence of party day which is a tradition that should be and must be protected.

So today, I want to signal once again my commitment to protecting nurturing and supporting the cultural integrity of the Fox Hill community.

I want those little kids who are growing up at Sandilands Primary School to know that they have a great future in a community that belongs to them. I pay tribute to the Principals of the schools that serve Fox Hill: Donna Brown at Sandilands, Linda Major at Doris Johnson and Janet Nixon at L.W. Young.

Putting Bahamians first means making sure that teachers and principals have the resources they need to educate the next generation of citizens and leaders. Putting Bahamians first means a 21st century curriculum that ensures our children will not just survive but thrive in a global economy.

The Anglican Church has a line in its service which implores us all to do the things that make for peace and build up the common life. This is an exhortation to building community. I am convinced that in building community we will have safer communities and more committed citizens. That is the lesson which I hope every resident of Fox Hill finds comfort in.

So when I complain about the garbage not being collected, or the youngsters on the Eastwood Park who could not get the government to commit 580 dollars to fix a basket ball pole, I hope that this will prick the conscience of the government to recommit itself to building community – to thinking about our Bahamian children. The issues are the same in Canterbury Park where once the government cancelled the MPs allowance last year, one man who had the responsibility for cleaning the park, blamed me because the subvention was taken away. But as I explained, I decide nothing. I am only the voice of moral suasion.

I wish again to urge more sensitivity in dealing with the issues of re-routing the traffic from the Prince Charles Drive.

Bahamians must come first, not short-term political interests. Bahamians are being inconvenienced and Bahamian businesses are being forced to close because of the badly planned road works. The roads serve Bahamians not Bahamians the roads.

I wish to thank those Pastors who joined in the service of dedication at the Faith Mission Church of God led by Pastor Sherelle Saunders. It was a real community event and I thank them all: Pastors Carl Ramming, Irene Rolle, Sabrina Pinder, Warren Anderson, Mario Moxey, David

Johnson The Congoes Junkanoo group looks forward to welcoming all to Fox Hill for the Festival which begins on 31st July.

I have had this job as Opposition spokesman on Foreign Affairs since 1997. Up until the General Election of 2002 I also had allied with that Labour and Immigration. Then in 2002, I became the Foreign Minister with responsibility also for the public service and later foreign trade. Today my responsibilities include Foreign Affairs, Foreign Trade and the Public Service.

The budget allocations for the Senate and the House of Assembly are 256,000 and 2.4 million dollars respectively.

The question I ask today is whether or not these sums are adequate for the demands made on Senators and Members of Parliament. In an editorial in the Nassau Guardian of Saturday 28th May, the newspaper argued that there ought to be fewer seats in the House of Assembly. They argued that the number of seats is too high; arguing that when compared to other countries, the ratio of seats to citizens is one to 8,626 when compared to Canada which has one to 111,294 citizens.

I do not agree.

I believe that in the absence of a local government for New Providence, there is under representation in the House. Further, there is right now not a sufficient control by Parliament of the executive and this is in part because almost every member of the governing side is a member of the Cabinet. There is no back bench to speak of, so the control by Members does not exist. This is anti democratic.

The newspaper then goes on to say: “Societies get the quality of governance they pay for. We pay little for legislators in The Bahamas. If we paid more and demanded more, we might get more useful laws and better oversight from our Parliament.”

I thank them for their valuable input there. I want therefore to say that I am dissatisfied with the allocations for Parliament. That there is a time for full time members of parliament appropriately paid with adequate, office, staff and equipment.

There ought to be a system of internship where young people just out of high school or college come work as legislative assistants to Members of Parliament on their way to choosing a permanent career. Just like young people can do in the US and the UK.

I believe that there is now time for the state to support the work of political parties that occupy the House.

I believe that the premises that we now occupy are inadequate. I find that this place is too intimate. We are on top of one another. It is not possible to official business here with privacy and decorum.

The Committee system which we have here does not have adequate budgetary support. The Bahamian Parliamentary Staff is overworked and underpaid. Mr. Tynes is one of the most senior if not THE most senior clerk in ANY Commonwealth Parliament. Clerks from all over the world call him for advice. He should be properly paid. Can you

imagine and foreign Consultants being paid more than our Bahamian expert? Again, this FNM does not put Bahamians first.

Accordingly, I believe that a PLP administration ought to allow the House has its own budget, consistent with constitutional norms as one of the independent branches of the government. That is similar to what we propose for the courts. The Speaker and the staff here will control their own monies, and the clerk of the House should not have to answer to the Secretary of the Cabinet or the executive in order to carry out the work of the Parliament.

What I say should also apply to the Senate.

With regard to salaries, the salaries of Parliamentarians ought to be tagged to those of the public service, and move when the public service adjustments are given. They should be done by order and not as they are presently done which require an act of Parliament to do so.

I believe that there is a current fashion in this country which deplores the work of those in public life. Politicians it appears are the fall guys for the entire society. But we do not appoint ourselves. We are the representatives of the people of The Bahamas. With that job comes a lot of sacrifice, some social prominence and influence, but it also carries with public responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is to attend the funerals, the weddings, the christenings.

When you deprecate us, you deprecate yourselves.

We are only as strong as you the people.

The Parliament therefore should be properly supported.

In a properly funded and supported Parliament, under the PLP, Bahamians will come first. This budget comes at a time when elections will be held within a year. The Leader of the Opposition when speaking of the Budget statement called it too little, and too late, and describes it as visionless. You will not be surprised that I agree with him.

The fact is the Prime Minister's statement is exactly as we predicted last year. The Minister for Finance would increase taxes and say how we must all sacrifice in 2010-2011, then he would come along just before the election and seek to restore what he had taken away last year.

So here we are, the programme of jobs and the various constituent groups are to be satisfied and made whole.

I am advised that the government finally settled with the mid management air traffic controllers group . You may remember that when the FNM came to office we argued for decisions to be effected that we made before we left office: the prison and police pensioners; the road traffic officers; the air traffic controllers. In each case the government said that we did not know what we were talking about. They could find no record of any decision made by us.

In each case the PLP argued that these Bahamians should come first: before giving money to special interests at the Port or fixing up a company connected to the Deputy Prime Minister to build roads. Those disadvantaged Bahamians should come first.

We said that during budget time 2007: please pay those Bahamians. They claimed they could find not records. Their records are of course convenient to their purposes.

In November of that year in one of their public relations exercises to clean up so called what the PLP did, they came to the House to get approval of a sum just over half a million dollars which the PLP's cabinet had approved to pay the air traffic controllers. So low and behold, there was in fact a decision. But it took until just last Friday for the full decision to be carried out. I am advised that the payments have been backdated to 2003, and some payments are as high as 96,000 dollars and that they are going be paid over a period one third of the full amount at a time.

Truly election time is coming. This side is convinced that is the only reason that it was done. But that's fine. We are certain that the people know who held it from them and who fought to get it for them.

The air traffic controllers know that the PLP puts Bahamians first and they also know that the PLP will win the next general election.

So, from the position that there was no decision made by us to settling the air traffic controllers. They also settled earlier the road traffic officers. Now all that is left is to do justice to the retired prison officers. That too was a decision that we made at the same time that we made the decision with regard to the retirement of the then Financial Secretary. But conveniently, they dealt with one but not the other.

We also learned today however of a growing concern in the uniformed branches of the service of a decision by the government to withdraw

paying for dependent insurance coverage. This has left many public officers stunned and defenseless. It should be explained and revisited.

Today as we look toward Labour Day, we salute the public service for all the work which they do for the country. We remind the service of our proposal to create an office of Advocate General in order to expedite complaints on promotions, transfers, and training support. There are too many allegations of mistreatment of public servants and no expeditious way to resolve some of the issues.

Further, we pledge to continue the work we began on public sec to reform and to allocate resources to ensure that service improves to the public.

I turn now to Foreign Affairs.

The budget allocates the sum of 23.7 million dollars to the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

The question that the people of the country must ask is whether or not they get value for money.

Last year this time, I raised the issue of the fact that someone had stolen the Ministry's domain name mfabahamas.org. This was a website that was painstakingly built during my time as minister and of which I was quite proud. It contained valuable and valued information about the Ministry's work and for the people of The Bahamas about foreign affairs matters. I think that all of that is now lost. It seems quite incredible to me that not one thing has been done to recover the information. Nor does it seem that anything has been done to start a new site which supply

similar information: routine travel information being just one such subject.

I note that there is nothing allocated in the capital development budget for the Ministry at all.

In the PLP's Foreign Affairs paper "Vision 20/20" we put forward a plan for the step by step development of foreign affairs and foreign trade in our country up and succeeding the year 2020. One of its suggestions is that there ought to be new embassies built in Belgium, home of the EU and in Jamaica to serve Caricom and EU embassies that serve us in Kingston and in Brazil. We are convinced that foreign trade is the way to increase economic opportunities for Bahamians. To do so, we will need the offices and personnel overseas. This budget does not indicate any forward planning on that score, and is therefore deficient.

What quite concerns however, is that the lack of a teaching mission for the Ministry in its work in foreign affairs. It is a central belief of the Progressive Liberal Party that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs works for the Bahamian people. Bahamians must come first. Central to its mission therefore must be an interface at all times with the Bahamian, explaining, teaching what the Ministry does and what the place of The Bahamas is in the world.

Central to the mission of putting Bahamians first was helping the straw vendors last year when the Prime Minister said that he would not help. Then when the PLP got involved in putting Bahamians first, they ended up finding lawyers for those Bahamian women.

I have helped both as Minister and non minister to ease the passage of Bahamians around the world. **I have no Bahamas Hot Mix to look out for. I put Bahamians first. The PLP's philosophy is that the passage of Bahamians must be hassle free around the world.** My relationships are built to make sure that happens. So when a Bahamian calls and says minister I am in trouble, I can get on the phone and call someone who can solve the problem.

**That's putting Bahamians first.**

I started off this intervention with some jocular thoughts on the piece which appeared in the Nassau Guardian about me this morning. I want my constituents to get copies of that paper because although the Americans have not confirmed the authenticity of its contents, they have impliedly accepted that these are their documents that the Nassau Guardian has obtained by the Wikileaks website.

So what we have is a teachable moment.

I was with the Americans this morning as they marked Memorial Day when they remember those who have given their lives in the service of their country. As I was going there, someone called me on the phone and when they heard where I was going, they said: " You still fooling with those Americans." And I said to them: " It is my job."

And I say to this House. Is it not fascinating to the House, and it is certainly is to me that four year after have left office, having no

executive authority in this country, a whole newspaper supplement can be dedicated to Fred Mitchell. As the kids say: “Wow!” “Awesome!”

**I got a text this morning and it was quite a moving piece. I hope I can get through this but anyway. Here is what it said from someone who I worked with as a writer at the PLP’s newspaper Ms. Pandora Butler of West End , Grand Bahama: “At church yesterday, our sermon subject was “Weak Leaks.” It was of course riding the wave of the current WikiLeaks stories in the press. The Biblical reference was the story of Samson and Delilah – how Samson revealed secrets to Delilah that eventually ruined him. During the sermon – the pastor read a quote from Cassius Stuart – saying something like he didn’t realize that his words were being recorded for future reporting to higher ups.**

**The object lesson of the sermon was that we ought to always be careful of what we say and what we divulge because not only is God keeping a record, but so is our arch enemy who seeks to find *weaknesses* in our words to use against us.**

**And so this morning when I read the two page story about *What the Americans Really Thought* of you in the Guardian, my chest swelled with pride, for the intended exposé turned out to be a public testimony to your diplomacy, tact and wisdom and to the fact that (unlike others of your colleagues) you are not in the least bit intimidated or in awe of any “superpower.” The worst that could be said of you was that you are a *Bahamian and a Black nationalist*, whom they oftentimes found to be *aloof, close-mouthed and uncommunicative*. If only that could have been said of Samson; if only that could be said of others of our politicians and leaders today! I am happy that outside and behind closed doors, you remain the**

**person I know and respect – I’m proud that you’ve been such an influential part of my life!**

**One of our Young Liberals sent me a text question this morning, with a note of concern: “What are they saying about you?”**

**My reply: they are saying that I stood up for my country.**

**I put Bahamians first.**

And you know we are a small country. I say two things on that. First, at a presentation of credentials by a South Korean diplomat to former Governor General Arthur Hanna, he said to the diplomat, Korea and The Bahamas are similar. He said we are nestled next to giants, and our independence is only as strong, or **we as only as independent as the giants allow us.**

I never forgot it.

What he was saying is what the Nassau Guardian said yesterday, although I think that they were crying crocodile tears: we need the Americans; we cannot have a falling out with them, no matter what they do.

I happen to support that, but that does not mean that when I see something wrong with what they do I am not going to say so. On so many occasions, I said to U.S. diplomats when they were asking us to do something which was difficult, this question: “ is there anything that you think that The Bahamas government has the right to say no to?’ They would laugh. Because sometimes when Bahamians came first, the answer had to be no.

And I can tell you that John Rood (a good Ambassador for his country) and I got along well on a personal basis but I never forgot that Bahamians came first.

The second point is that what I used to strengthen me in all my work was my father and mother’s basic training. Do what is right. There are plenty of powerful people in the world. You cannot do anything about that but you can do what you can do.

I remembered that when a U.S. Ambassador sprang on us at what was supposed to be a routine meeting on OPBAT some information which simply blindsided us. And we know from inside their own embassy that there was fundamental disagreement on that tactic within their own embassy.

I told the Ambassador then and there, I will go no further with this. You are not a satrap. We are not vassals. This meeting has to be adjourned.

There are many private ruminations and events which we know about U.S. diplomats and their private activities in this country. But how would that serve the Bahamian interests for me to expose that.

And that is what I admire about American diplomacy and about that country as a nation, it always pursues its interests.

We tried to tell the right wing in this country, that it was in the Bahamian interest to open that embassy in Cuba.

Thirdly, I remembered the words of the late Pope John Paul II who said that each man or woman has a right to exist. Each nation large or small has a right to exist; every people have a right to exist. That is an intrinsic right, not one that comes because you are powerful or rich. So that moral compass governed my conduct. And I hope I have acquitted myself well.

This country afforded me, paid for my education, the best that was available. I did not choose Harvard on slack. I went there because the Americans said that was their best institution. And I succeeded in their best institution. So what the Bahamas can now ask itself in the full glow of hindsight, is did they get value for their money. I believe they have and I have more to give.

That education allowed me to be more confident than ever that this is country and a party that puts Bahamians first.

So if the worse that the Guardian/ Wikileaks/ The Americans can say about you is that you stood up for your country, well I think you have done well.

So I remember the saying in the country when you dig one grave, dig two.

These leaked cables go to the heart of our relationship with the United States. It seems to me central to the mission of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is that of creating a narrative around which Bahamians can interpret these events.

These are largely untested, gossipy cables, the equivalent of a diplomatic version of The Punch. As I say the American will only say they deplore the use of confidential information. They do not vouch for their authenticity. But implicitly they seem to say they are ours by the statement of deploring the use of confidential information.

The problem is that it may be necessary for the Embassy here to disassociate themselves from these matters so that they are not taken as an official view of events.

It strains credibility to me that U.S. professional diplomats, a person so high as a Deputy Chief of Mission who was actually sitting in the seat of the Ambassador would accept and adopt uncritically propaganda lines from the Free National Movement.

That is simply not a professional report.

Let us take just one issue the allegation that as a party we more interested in public relations than substance. The list of substantive matters in the alleged cable itself belies that statement.

But further, one of the things that is always done before a meeting ends is that you agree on what will be said about what happens in the meeting, so that one side does not say something about the meeting that the other side did not want to make public.

And I had another specific concern, because on a previous occasion when I met with a foreign diplomat and we released information about the meeting, this government and this Prime Minister ordered that Ambassador to come to Nassau and threatened to have him recalled, having the then Foreign Minister publicly dress the Ambassador down in public. So the question of the public relations was a serious one for each person's protection.

The same issues with regard to Wikileaks is happening as we speak in Jamaica. The public there is betwixt and between as well between fascination and revulsion. Fascination at all the gossipy bits, despite the Americans saying they won't comment. Most citizens believe it is their handiwork.

Revulsion at the fact that their public officials would be so open a callous with regard to the information that they share with the American diplomats. In fact, here in Nassau, many people are astounded that the former Leader of the Opposition and now Prime Minister the Member for North Abaco would so loosely and callously spill all his guts to a junior U.S. officials. They wonder if it is possible for a former President

of the United States to spill his guts to junior Bahamian diplomatic officers about his own people.

And with regard to that, I have worked with every Prime Minister this country has produced. Each of them could rely on me implicitly to execute whatever they wanted faithfully, completely and expertly. So I remember the 1992 event when he had just become Prime Minister with a storm barreling down on the country and only Obie Wilchombe then a News Director telling the country what to do. I spoke to the new Prime Minister in his hotel suite in Freeport and said to him that the country needed to hear from him because nothing would be taken seriously until he spoke. And he said what he usually did: why don't you draft something. Which I did and a few minutes later from his hotel suite by phone, it was broadcast to the country.

And in the face of that, he could then allege that the people who were in the Christie Cabinet were incompetent and had their own agendas. As the kids say "Wow" There is a word for that. It begins with T. So I shall continue to think of these cables as alleged.

**I can tell you also in connection with the public service, that the police commissioner was reeling yesterday. Again, that someone who this country trusted for our national security, a former Commissioner of Police could be quoted as spilling his guts out to junior U.S. officials. Again I say allegedly. We have to hope it is allegedly because no self-respecting Commissioner of Police would do any such thing.**

Perhaps we will see if the former Commissioner Mr. Ferguson will sue because most certainly he could not have sold his country out like that.

**However, it causes us to think back to the incident of the baggage handlers when we tried to explain to the country the protocols we met where the police could deal directly with the U.S. on operational matters without checking with the political directorate. Perhaps it may all now make sense to the country.**

The point I make however in all of this is that this is a teachable moment. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Minister has had nothing to say to Bahamians about what this means.

**We urge the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to use this budget to put Bahamians first.**

These alleged cables do not change the fundamentals with the United States. The relationship is as sound as ever. That is why on behalf of my party I made it a point to go to the Memorial Day service yesterday as I have always done. It's my job. I was trained to do it. It is my duty for my party and for my country and nothing can deter me from that.

But the country can learn from this. Our public officials including myself can learn the cautionary tale of being careful with your mouth... not to let these positions cause you to show off and forget who you are where what you represent.

Secondly, that Bahamian public officials must stand up for The Bahamas at all times. Bahamians must come first.

Thirdly that Bahamians should not allow their opinions of themselves be governed by their ability to travel to the United States.

**You know that it is the policy of the PLP that we ought to work for visa free access to the United States. There is no reason why Bahamians ought to need visas to go to the U.S.**

In one of the alleged cables in Jamaica, one of the officials at the U.S. Embassy there said that since Jamaicans thought that a U.S. visa was so valuable the visa could be used as leverage against Jamaica to force Jamaica to do something that it would not ordinarily do.

Heretofore the U.S. has formally denied that visas were used in that way. But that is why I say it may be necessary for the embassies to disassociate themselves formally from their selectively released alleged cables.

But here in The Bahamas, too many Bahamians think that a political party is judged by whether or not Bahamians have the ability to travel to Miami. All governments of The Bahamas are acutely aware of it and do not forget it. You remember the headlines accusing us of jeopardizing the pre clearance lounge in The Bahamas- all for political propaganda.

**Bahamians then should think. Here we have a press that does not support the PLP. They oppose the PLP. They have now used their resources to get these so called cables. They do not get an independent panel to edit and release the information. Instead they arrogate to themselves the right to selectively choose what to**

**release. Now in a situation where there is support for the FNM why would anybody not be surprised that the PLP is the subject of these attacks with the same tendentious propaganda and slogans of the FNM now repeated in the mouths allegedly of U.S. diplomats.**

This is a teachable moment. And I call on the Ministry to use its resources to teach the Bahamian people about their country and its role in the world.

Paul Adderley when he was Minister of External Affairs believed that he would only talk to them on formal matters. Within the PLP when I began my march to the job I have, I tried to urge that we had to have a private knowledge of what the U.S. was thinking. There is public diplomacy and private diplomacy. The private is just as important as the public.

I found that my personal relationships with U.S. diplomats achieved much for both our countries. I would invite the country not to get into a tizzy about this but to see the whole thing in its proper context. We require both the public and the private diplomacy.

**I have known every Deputy Chief of Mission, every Ambassador to this country from the U.S. and I have never betrayed any confidence whether in government or out of government. This dates back to 1978 when I was the Director of News and Public Affairs at ZNS when I first met a man named Perry Shenkel, who was DCM back in 1978. Relationships are important and they help the country. It's what you do with those relationships. That relationship continues today.**

Some of them have developed into more personal relationships than others right up to today's Ambassador and DCM. But I have always tried to remember, I am working for my country.

Bahamians come first.

**Our opponents have filled this budget statement with their favourite buzz words. One of them is decisiveness. They are seeking to replay the election of 2007 where the PLP caught unawares did not react the foolishness of their propaganda. But no matter what the buzz words this time, there is a cold hard reality which can be found in the answer to the question to each voter: are you better off than you were four years ago?**

**The song writer says: look what you could get when ya tired of what ya got.**

**That same song writer says: you gat swing... no big thing... you just get swing.**

**The fact is the Member for Farm Road and Centreville when he left office, his leadership provided near full employment, no worries about car payment, mortgage payment, paying your children's school fees. Now today what has decisive leadership given us: lots of pretty roads that can't finish paving, can't keep the children in school because you have no job to pay the fees and any moment now the man is coming for your house and your car. Look what you can get when you tired of what ya gat.**

Our opponents like to say it's the world economy. They take no responsibility for what has transpired in the economy over the four years they have been in office. There is a rule in law called the benefit and burden rule. You can't get the benefit without the burden. You must take the good with the bad. So if it's the PLP's fault where we were in 2007 then it's the FNM's fault in 2011.

**Bahamians must come first. The PLP will win the general election because under the PLP, Bahamians will come first.**

**Thank you very much indeed.**

End