

**STATEMENT TO THE HOUSE BY**

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**MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND IMMIGRATION**

**BUDGET DEBATE**

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House of Assembly

Nassau

**CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Good morning

It is my privilege to second this resolution this morning in support of my colleague the Member of Parliament for Golden Isles. It is my honour to support the Budget Statement of the government and to speak to some of the issues which arise particularly in connection with the work of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Immigration.

In 1988, I had the privilege of working as a lecturer for one semester at the College of The Bahamas. I substituted for Felix Bethel as the lecturer in politics and government class. That class had many very bright people that I remember. But two people stand out for these purposes today. One is Raynard Rigby, the former Chairman of the PLP and the other is the man who moved this motion this morning.

I say this many times when I speak to younger audiences: how prepared they should be to take over because time passes quickly.

I point out how from 1988 to his election as the MP for Golden Isles in 2002, 12 years had passed. So in 12 short years, he had gone student in school to Member of Parliament and Parliamentary Secretary. It is an open secret that when I was talking about his running as candidate for us I described him as the smartest man I knew. I believe the Right Honourable Prime Minister adopted that description and time has proven us both correct. There is no doubt then that congratulations are in order for a job well done in shepherding the day to day responsibilities at a political level for what was presented by the Right Honourable Prime Minister.

I therefore use that example today of how he was able to progress from a student at COB to what he is today and we are all proud of him.

This budget is about the future, the election of 2017 and what we will do to win.

In a sense my eyes are more fully trained on the future than on the present. I am trying to work on those people who will vote for us for the first time four years from now. They are today's 14 year olds. I know from experience that the election we fought in 2012 was markedly different from any other election I had fought. The question is what will be on the minds of today's 14 year olds when the year 2017 comes around.

And so the budget for me has its focus on the future. It makes the hard decisions, in order for us have a future in 2017. I do not want to retire as an opposition politician. I want to retire in the government and I want to retire with a comfortable life, knowing that I contributed to doing the best for the country and a country that will ensure that I continue to prosper with respect while I am no longer actively involved in public policy.

You will note that over the past year, I have spoken many times and in fact moved a resolution to support a Select Committee Request to review the benefits and allowances of Members of Parliament. It is regrettable that the work of the Committee was not yet reported to this House, though largely it is finished.

I had anticipated that our work would have led to some changes in this budget which would have buttressed and supported the work of Members of Parliament.

I am advised that this is likely to come following the Committee's report. However, I wish to say at this juncture to all the ones here who have longer to stay here than I have, that this is an issue that must be fixed. It is imperative for us to fix it. The PLP has to fix it. We come from the poor and the disposed. The party of the wealthy business class will not fix it. They have no interest in fixing it. We must to quote Lynden Pindling continue to make it possible for men and women of modest means to be able to serve in this place.

I have two enduring memories of public figures who were no longer in office. One is the former Minister of Education and MP for Exuma, who fell ill and presented at the Princess Margaret

Hospital and no one remember who he was and was not treated with the appropriate respect until someone intervened. And another time I remember the late Governor General Sir Gerald Cash in the Public Treasury standing on a line in the Treasury after he had left office, there to identify himself as still an alive pensioner. This should not happen. The House of Assembly, the legislature, the Parliament should be such an exclusive club that when you have departed your dignity is protected in all its aspects. The group opposite when headed by their former leader had the opportunity to do so but what they did was aid and fixed up their leader; so he is straight and no other.

Which brings me to the point that was raised in an editorial which appeared on the 30<sup>th</sup> May this year in the Nassau Guardian under the headline: Thank You Hubert Ingraham.

The editorial went on to heap fulsome praise on the former Prime Minister. I respectfully disagree with everything that they had to say in that editorial. It was one load of nonsense writing by some worthless sycophant with a critical eye to do God knows what.

I say this in the context of how the press treated the budget and the question of whether there is balance when it comes to the PLP. Notice I did not complain about bias. As I explained to one of the reporters on the Guardian radio, it is clear that there is bias against the PLP, the question is more what about balance.

In an effort to balance the equation, we for the second year in a row continued a practice which we started when in opposition which is to provide a narrative for the press as to how we see the budget statement. This we did led by the Honourable Minister for

State. As soon as he was finished reading his statement and there was time for questions, the person who we think authored that editorial left with dispatch, in what seemed like contempt for the whole exercise. Not even a pretense.

So the editorial about praise for Hubert Ingraham indicates a hankering back to an era that never returns. It was an era of boorishness, insensitivity, packing people without any mercy from their jobs in the public service, selling off the national patrimony. What is particularly galling is not that they did not write an editorial saying thank you to the Member for Centreville for turning the corner on this unholy mess in which the former Prime Minister left us, but the praise of the former Prime Minister is coming from an organization which the former Prime Minister himself described as led by two men who were in his words, not mine “too damn greedy”. Yet the Nassau Guardian says thank you to Hubert Ingraham and congratulates this boorishness as leadership. They are suckers for punishment.

Eileen Carron of The Tribune who is simply pathological when it comes to her hatred of the PLP, you can understand but this we just don't get it. Mrs. Carron just can't help herself so you just roll your eyes when she writes something but for young educated Bahamians such as those who work at the Nassau Guardian, well that's a whole other story again.

I say to the Nassau Guardian :audi alterem partem. Hear the other side. How about the fact that the man who they are praising sold a well working telephone company, fully manned by trained

Bahamians, who could have bought it and run it themselves, sold it to a group of people who are not Bahamian, who seem not to have clue what they are doing; that are raking in profits at the expense of quality of service; whose mantra now is the telephone message: the party you are trying to reach is not available now; who gave away the national patrimony at a fire sale price. And we are to thank him. Have they taken leave of their senses.

How quickly do we forget? I know that the people of Fox Hill will not forget how we are notified that within less than thirty days, this phone company proposes to move their facility in Fox Hill, close it down, one supposes in the name of profits. It is rapacious. It is unseemly. It is wrong. It is unforgivable.

The Roman Catholic doctrine has something to say about this kind of behavior. The last Pope Benedict XVI wrote this in his encyclical of 9th June 2009 called **CARITAS IN VERITATE: ON INTEGRAL HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN CHARITY AND TRUTH**

*36. Economic activity cannot solve all social problems through the simple application of commercial logic. This needs to be directed towards the pursuit of the common good, for which the political community in particular must also take responsibility. Therefore, it must be borne in mind that grave imbalances are produced when economic action, conceived merely as an engine for wealth creation, is detached from political action, conceived as a means for pursuing justice through redistribution.*

Pope John Paul the predecessor of Benedict defined the common good as “*the good of all and each individual, because we are really responsible for all.*”

I would really recommend that to both the Nassau Guardian and to the telephone company. It is the common good or what the Anglicans call building up the common life.

So no I will not say thank you to Hubert Ingraham. I will simply say thank you for seeing the end of him in public life.

Our image of ourselves, that is the PLP, and how our work is portrayed to the public is something that we depend upon the press to do. We have a responsibility to manage to some extent how information is shared. We have a lot to do in that area, in building up the relationships to ensure that our message gets equal time. It is critical going forward that the nation hears our voices and not filtered through someone’s interpretive biases. It is easier than ever to do that given today’s technology.

One writer on Facebook described their own experience with the way the media deals with the PLP’s message:

*Chairman of BEC Leslie Miller announced today his plans to put 7,000 Bahamians, without power supply, back on BEC Grid. But before the chairman could speak a word, NB12 had the former defeated Minister for BEC, Phenton 'NO MORE' Neymour, in the newscast. When are we gonna hear the plans of the New Government if every-time the news comes on these ghosts and holograms of the past who plunged thousands into darkness are*

*still getting all the airtime on National Radio and TV? BOY IT TELL YA! The man who was giving out free light-bulbs when people lights were off didn't have a plan place to restore power to Bahamians for five years - ya think he gat one now? GIVE POTCAKE MILLER THE MIC AND LET'S HEAR THE PLAN BY THE NEWLY ELECTED GOVERNMENT PLEASEEEEEEEEE!*

(here include the explanation of the minister of state on the 60,000 dollars paid to ministers of state)

I believe that the work in this area of information management should evidence itself in the budgetary allocations for the Bahamas Information Services but the party machinery itself should be equipped and supported by the state in order to carry out its critical work.

So that is my focus. Trying to fix this problem so that the PLP will have a better than fighting chance in 2017. To do that we have to fix this economy and the resources allocated the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Immigration under my tutelage will be utilized to do just that; just fix the economy.

When I was 18 years old, I was having a chat with Lynden Pindling in his office and I was railing against the fact that MPs had to give out hams and turkeys at Christmas time. I told him when was that going to stop. He looked quote bemused and said to me: not in my lifetime, maybe in yours. Today, I am standing here and talking to the younger ones and saying the same thing to them: not in my lifetime, maybe in yours.



The problem is find in this milieu is that the common good hardly exists, there is just plain partisan politics. Well I like a good old trashing fight in politics too, but there has to be some common good, a point beyond which we do not go because it injures the common good.

The Prime Minister said in his budget communication the following:

*“My Government continues to emphasize its commitment to higher educational standards and better outcomes, as well as more effective skills training, all of which are also vitally important to the future. My Government has allocated, in the context of the country strategy agreed with Caribbean Development Bank, over \$30 million for education and this will be primarily directed toward special education and the transition of the College of The Bahamas to University status.*

*In this Budget, my Government is also allocating \$5.5 million of our own resources to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in 2013/14 for the construction of new primary and secondary schools in*

*Inagua, San Salvador, Gregory Town and Lowe Sound. That is more than double the amount allocated last year and a virtual tripling of the sums allocated in 2011/12. We will maintain and expand these investments in future years. ”*

I recall again the story of the speech given by former Secretary General Kofi Anan at a conference I attended in 2006 in Vienna

and he warned us of the need to have specific set asides for young people.

That is what this budget is doing. It is investing in young people, seeking to improve those dreadful stats that say 30 per cent of the people under 25 are out of job.

This is unsustainable.

The difficulty is lack of skills. It is not their fault that they come out of school without the skills. Even greater than they do not it appears have the means to comprehend their deficiencies and how they can correct them. We have to do it for them and this budget is designed to do just that. Resources in training so we don't have to issue all these work permits that people are asking us for.

I say again it shocks me how unsympathetic so many our business people both domestic and foreign are to this stark reality that their profits in this country will only continue to come if here is social peace. They therefor have a stake in making sure that The Bahamas and the Bahamian people have work, otherwise their investments are doomed. I say this to Emera in Freeport, the Grand Bahama Shipyard, Club Fortuna, Quality Services who just don't seem to get it. Bahamar should take stock as well here in Nassau.

Recently, I was sharing with the Minister for Trade my experience in Qatar where the Middle Eastern countries were having a seminar on their economies. They have to create 50 million jobs by the year 2050. They spoke about the fact that the school system does

not prepare people for working for themselves and that the only way they can meet their goals is by entrepreneurship.

In other words, people have to begin working for themselves. They have to invent new business. They must have access to capital.

The Trade Minister then shared his experiences with some of the young people in his area where Mark Turnquest held a seminar on just that how to start your own business and one hundred young people showed up to listen and to learn. The government must now do its part because that is the solution in part.

There is still too much of this happening which I share in one of a number of letters sent to me this week alone:

*Good Morning Mr. Mitchell,*

*Mommy approached us (my siblings and I) telling us that she met with the bank yesterday and that they told her we're in jeopardy of losing the house due to mortgage being behind. I took her to the bank not even knowing this what the appointment was about.*

*I know I asked you times before to help with employment but now it's more important and serious. This job here... pays less than 1100. If you can recall I have Bank of the Bahamas, Commonwealth Bank and school fee to pay so I'm literally left with nothing. My debt exceeds my current monthly salary by a lot. I even still have a balance at COB.*

*I really need your help and or referral to getting a greater paying job to help with the mortgage and school and other loans I have. I'm graduating in spring 2014 so I'm ready for a real job and a much better paying one. Youth work is great but I have bills.*

*I don't want to lose my house so please help.*

(The story of my own father being without work. Here include the story of man saying that he never knew his wife until he had lost his job)

The bottom line is young people must get work. ( make the point about the problems that so many people have with producing simple identity documents, the cost of applying for work and how I will use the MPs vote to help those who cannot help themselves)

I want us also to pay attention to what we are doing in sports and culture. The PLP negotiated that stadium the Thomas A Robinson Stadium as a gift to the young people of The Bahamas. The Prime Minister recently thanked the President of China for the gift. The President of China offered an addition grant of eight million dollars US for various projects. The Chinese also have on offer one billion dollars for lending at concessionary terms over twenty years at two per cent interest. I see where the Deputy Leader of the FNM is nay saying the borrowing but the first thing is the Prime Minister did not commit the country to any specific borrowing but if there is to be development and there is cheap money available why not, particularly when are friends are not supporting lending from development banks to us.

Recently, the Canadian government abstained at a Caribbean Development Bank meeting to support our country programme, and the suspicion is that they like others have problems with our GDP per capita. Concessionary lending is prohibited by the World Bank for example to The Bahamas because of our high GDP per capita. We are tired of pointing out to them the problem with that measure. It you have two men on an island, one worth a billion and the other a dollar what is the GDP per capita on that island: 500 million is the answer but clearly that is not a true measure of the wealth on that island.

Our foreign policy then is to be fine-tuned with the \$24,912,000, allocated down some 495, 778 from the 25,408,122 that was allocated last year, make it our business to find money for this country.

I expect over the next year to spend substantial time in the Middle East and in Asia doing just that trying to search for new sources of funding for this country; new sources of investment. It is critical that we do so, as the traditional markets and sources appear to be challenged. This does not mean abandoning our traditional friends but in a time when our country is capital starved and there is excess capital in areas of the world outside our normal sphere of influence it would be foolhardy not to go in search of it.

I have spoken to my branch executive to help them appreciate and understand the nature of what I am about to embark. It is critical to whether we win this next election and I will be depending on the mechanisms that I have put in place to support my work while engaged in the work that I have been assigned to do. It is not

without considerable risks but I believe that it is for the better good.

I was told the story the other day of a young man who at 17 in the United Kingdom who invented an app, and became an instant millionaire. They were enthusing justifiably about his accomplishment. However, we forget that we have our own app inventors. Who can forget Usain Bolt who runs the fastest in the world and makes an estimated 20 million dollars US from his athletics. Our kids who have won gold medals Chris Brown, Demetrius Pinder can do the same thing, and so the investment by the PLP in sports and culture will be critical also to solving the issue of youth unemployment.

The issue of government contracts to young people and using the government to empower people is key to tackling youth unemployment. That is my number one focus, to get these young men and women into the work Force.

Immigration policy is going to be used to force this issue if the business sector will not get with the programme. So I am asking them to get with the programme.

I also ask my parliamentary colleagues not to go wobbly on immigration because the usual suspects are out there making noise about this policy. It is the right policy. Let them bray if they will but also let them conform. It is important that we speak in Parliament with one voice on this. Bahamians First. There will be no exceptions.

I am looking toward the day when this will be a country of three quarter of a million residents, Nassau being a city of half a million. To do that there will have to rapid infrastructure development, planning, new rules of social behavior and plenty of new capital. That then must be our next big project, a grand building plan to prepare us for the future. After all it is construction which drives spending in this economy.

In the foreign policy arena our relations remain good with all countries.

I am pleased to announce that the Prime Minister has advised the Governor General of the appointment of a new Honorary Consul to New York. He is the Customs Broker and columnist Forrester Carroll. Mr. Carroll will take his appointment on 1<sup>st</sup> July. I wish to congratulate him and wish him every success in his work there.

The Prime Minister has also directed the appointed of Marilyn Zonicle, the Under Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be an Ambassador at Large. This is a well-deserved honour and I wish to offer my congratulations to her as she continues to do her work for and on behalf of the country.

We are the process of undergoing significant changes in the way we do our work at the Ministry which will require the movement of personnel in the coming weeks. There will not likely be any further specific announcement about these save when the circumstances dictate. All the required clearances are in place and

I hope to be able to say something more definitive about our structural changes by 1<sup>st</sup> July. The idea is to make the Ministry more relevant to the constituencies it serves and more adaptive to wishes of the government and this its minister.

I recall my conversation with the late Prime Minister and national hero of Jamaica Michael Manley who when he lost office said that one of the issues was the public administration during his time sagged under the weight of the activities and changes which he proposed. I think of this often as we try to make the Ministry more adaptive to a rapid and less deliberative response what is placed before it. Critical in my view is the need for officers to understand that they are in the business of serving the public and should respond and adapt to the phrase the customer is always right.

One thing I still do not understand how it is possible to work at a high level in a public agency, especially the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and not know what is in the press for the day even at 12 noon in the day.

I believe I have a loyal team and leadership in the Ministry. We have the authority to hire additional staff and the complements in protocol and foreign service officers should be increased within the coming weeks.

The Foreign Service Orders have now been drafted and are before the Cabinet for approval. Subject to that, the orders are to come into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2014. The orders will include the award of Foreign Service Medals for those who have given extraordinary service to the Ministry. It will for the first time, create a Foreign Service with rules that are separate from the Public Service. We



continue to have serious challenges in this area of the lack of understanding by the public service of what foreign service officers do and the ranks which they require to carry out their jobs with the requisite allowances. We continue to be unable to keep foreign service officers in post because of the inability to compete with the private sector in wages and allowances.

Key to our foreign policy will be the continued management of the relationship with the United States of America, our closest trading partner and ally. The relationship is a complex one. Our interests are similar but not the same. We live in an American hemisphere and an American culture and yet we have our separate juridical and cultural identity. We are small and they are large. This is not often understood by all. I have just concluded discussions with the American authorities about our concerns with regard to the gun violence which is wreaking havoc on our streets for example and what further steps can be taken by them to assist us in stopping this violence. It is a matter which plagues their society as well.

We have a stake in making sure that our views are heard on this and other issues and we welcome the fact that the US has announced that they will sign the small arms treaty at the United Nations as a first step in tracking how manufactured weapons make their way from the US to jurisdictions such as ours.

I explained it to the Canadian minister who visited the other day speaking to issues that she raised that sometimes we get the impression that our traditional partners take us for granted.

Our concerns about visa free access to the United States continue to be addressed. We believe that The Bahamas should be a country whose citizens can enter the United States visa free.

We continue to express our concerns about what appears to be arbitrary decisions made to deny Bahamians visas to visit the United States, most of these are addressed satisfactorily and we continue to have good working relationship with embassy personnel here.

We have raised the issue of processing of visas with the Canadian government as well. Some review and improvements have been promised.

We thank John Dinkelman the Charge at the Embassy for his work.

I wish to touch briefly on the immigration budget. Please make note of the following:

1. **Apparent Decrease in budget for Trainee Immigration Officers is not a decrease of 2,585,550 at head 30 post 9 page re 190.**

We have permission to hire one hundred and that process is almost complete. I wish to advise that \$1.08 million dollars was placed in our budget to hire 60 officers at \$18,000.00 each per annum. Ministry of Finance has advised that under their new policy, this along with all other capital purchases were taken out of our budget and placed in a global capital pool in Finance budget. To access this the department will

again have to request approval from Ministry of Finance. Other capital items removed from our budget included the rebuilding of the dorms at Detention Centre, Vehicles and arms and ammunition and are in the Ministry of Finance's budget.

The items listed by me account the largely for the apparent decrease in the total overall allocation of monies to immigration from 18,889, 973 last year to 15,979,522 some 2,910,321.

2. **Operational Cost for Detention Centre**

Total operational cost for Detention Centre July 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 to present omitting June is \$271, 520.17 which gives an average monthly cost of \$24, 684.

3. **Repatriation Cost**

Total repatriation cost of illegal Immigrants by air from July 1<sup>st</sup> 2012 to present omitting the month of June is \$973, 553.84.

Repatriation Cost January to May 2013 is \$463, 063.36.

The item for repatriation has been increased this year from one million to one million two hundred thousand . We think that this fairly anticipates the demands which we will expect during the ensuing year.

Number of immigrants repatriated January to May 2013 stands at 1433. 1042 Of which are Haitians and 391 other nationals.

Mr. Speaker, I have had the advantage over the past two months to visit with many foreign nationals. I note all the problems that we have with crime and all. I had occasion to point out after the Americans issued an advisory on The Bahamas that people forget that we issue advisories on the United States when each year at Christmas time we warn Bahamians about how they shop in Miami and how to avoid being robbed while shopping in Miami. We think therefore people are intelligent enough to know that The Bahamas is not consumed by violence as a result of an advisory by the US State Department.

It is however to know of the critical importance of image and the experience which visitors get when they come to this country.

I am pleased to report that wherever I have gone, the image and memories of our country are good. I call it the ah ha moment.

That moment when you say you are from The Bahamas and they say : “ Ah ha!”

I recall sitting in Morocco at the Ministry of Tourism there and the Tourism official blurted out from across the table: It’s better in The Bahamas.

Or arriving in New York just last week, tired from a long flight and the customer inspector looks at my passport and says: why so serious you’re going to The Bahamas, that’s paradise.

Or speaking in the well of the legislative houses in Illinois and each representative or state senator that I met telling me without exception that they had been to The Bahamas and what a great time they had.

This we must protect. That is why the success of this budget is so critical. The Prime Minister describes it like this:

*We are also strengthening the*

*foundations of the economy to secure steady growth and private sector*

*employment creation. In this way, we are positioning my Government to*

*have the resources with which to implement, over the full course of our*

*mandate, initiatives that will strengthen law and order, promote*

*stronger growth and job creation and solidify our firm commitment to*

*maintaining and reforming our social safety net for the effective delivery*

*of relief to the disadvantaged and needy in our midst.”*

I identify with all of those objectives. Fox Hill is foremost on my mind. Each day trying to get one more person hired, another road fixed, another school repaired, another child a scholarship, to fix national insurance payments, just to listen. I think I have the Prime Minister's commitment to finish the Community Centre from the monies kindly allocated by China. I want the government to buy the Junkanoo shack for the Congoes so they can have a permanent home. I invite all of you to the Fox Hill Festival which begins on Emancipation Day and ends on Fox Hill day. On Wednesday 7th August, I am to give a lecture at the Mt. Carey Baptist Church in Fox Hill about the history of the settlement and its people. It will

be televised nationwide and a reception will follow. You are invited to join us.

I am deeply aware of the impatience with the processes of government, the house repair programme that needs to be done, the jobs for their kids. It will with the help of god get done.

Those who know me, know that my views are much more radical privately than I could ever express and remain comfortably within a group like the PLP. Public policy is often too deliberative and it appears that public administrators are not sensitive to what our party requires. But I am satisfied that the PLP continues to be the best repository of the national interest of the Bahamian people and I certainly glad to have lived long enough to see the back of Hubert Ingraham. That alone is worth all the trouble on this road less travelled. It has indeed made all the difference. The Bahamas is simply a more civilized place since he is no longer in its public policy.

The PLP therefore and for whatever little that it is worth continues to have my support and I am honoured to work with all colleagues. I trust that we continue to support the liberal values I espouse and the right to treat all people with the respect they deserve judging them by the content of their characters. I have been a victim of prejudice all my life and so I know it when I see it and I mean that it must stop with us.

The hymn writer describes the act of community in which politicians like myself participate in as acting:

*above the storms of passion, the murmurs of self-will.*

There is no doubt then that the people of Fox Hill should know that I will serve them to the end.

I commend this budget to the House.

End