

CONTRIBUTION TO THE
BUDGET DEBATE 2011/2012
BY THE
RT. HONOURABLE PERRY G. CHRISTIE,
MP, P.C.
LEADER OF THE OPPOSITION
WEDNESDAY, 8th JUNE, 2011

Mr. Speaker,

I rise to make my contribution to this year 2011/2012 Budget Debate and in so doing I once again complete the contributions of the Progressive Liberal Party members of the Official Opposition.

I begin by thanking the good people of the Farm Road and Centreville Constituency for their support. For the record, I take this opportunity to confirm for all who are interested that with God's Grace I intend to be the candidate for the Progressive Liberal Party in the Farm Road and Centreville Constituency or by whatever name it is called in the next General Election.

Mr. Speaker,

Allow me to take this opportunity to extend the good wishes of our side and the good wishes of many thousands of Bahamians to Mrs. Cynthia

Pratt, the Member of Parliament for the St. Cecilia Constituency.

As I have had the occasion to say before in this place, the Member for St. Cecelia is lovingly known to everyone in this country as "Mother Pratt". I think it is fair to say, as her intervention in this debate confirmed, that she is a rarity in this Chamber for the fact that she has few known detractors of any seriousness. This is because she ensures by the life she leads that the "common touch" is always a part of her. She has always been a mentor for those who wished for one, and a friend to those who needed one.

I commend her for the book that she has written "No Equal to God's Chosen" and I am in whole hearted agreement with the description that she is a leader risen from poverty to a powerful destiny.

Mr. Speaker,

The Member for St. Cecilia has advised us all that this is her final Budget Debate. In the circumstances, I feel it is fitting for me to allow what I wrote about her in the foreword of the book to be entered into the records of this House.

"I am delighted to have been invited by my dear friend and comrade, Dr. Cynthia "Mother" Pratt, to pen the foreword to this wonderful book of her memoirs. It is a superbly crafted and stirring story of one of our nation's most accomplished daughters. It is a story that I commend to all Bahamians and all those who wish our country well, be they far or near. Indeed, the universality of the themes and lessons for living that resonate throughout this work should meet with a warm and ready reception wherever in the world "No Equal to

God's Chosen" finds a home. It is a great book, one that is destined to become a classic of Bahamian literature.

But none of that should come as a surprise to any of us who know "Mother" Pratt well. For decades now, this great athlete, this gifted health care professional, this mentor to countless young Bahamians, this compassionate servant of the people, this dedicated political leader, this fearless protector of the poor, this inspirational matriarch of the community, this patriot par

excellence, this exemplary wife and mother, this faithful friend to so many, this Woman of God, has made her mark in a way that few, if any, have been able to match. Indeed it is the breadth and the scope of "Mother" Pratt's contributions to the upliftment of Bahamian society that set her apart and makes her the truly unique personality she is. There are some who excel in one or more of the disciplines or areas of endeavor I have catalogued but in "Mother" Pratt's case, she has excelled in all of them – and continues to do so!

I congratulate "Mother" Pratt on the publication of this outstanding book. She is one of the greatest of all Bahamians and her story needs to be heard and read. Thanks to this book, it will be."

Mr. Speaker,

Before I complete this segment of my intervention, I want to say yet again that there are not enough books being written by Bahamians about Bahamians and the Bahamian journey. We have in too many instances failed to illuminate our storied past with any sort of consistency. We have given far too little

attention to enlightening our people about the forces and the people who shape us into the society we are today.

Mr. Speaker,

I wonder how many Bahamians know that Stephen Dillett was the very first man of colour to sit in the House of Assembly in 1834 or that he was from Haiti; or that he led the struggle for civil rights in The Bahamas in the 1820s or that his son Thomas William Henry Dillett was the first non white member of The Bahamas Bar and the first non white person to serve on the Supreme Court Bench over one hundred and fifty years (150) ago; or that his grandson

was James Weldon Johnson, the great civil rights leader and cultural icon of Black America in the 1920s.

How many people know the proud and colourful origins of the settlements at Nicholls Town and Red Bays in Andros? How many people know that the original settlers there were “Black Seminoles” with names like: Bowleg and Newton, McNeil, Evans and Coleby. These families hailed from the Seminoles Tribe in Florida and sought refuge in The Bahamas when Florida was ceded by Spain to the USA.

That is why Mr. Speaker, I would also take this opportunity to again salute the Member of

Parliament for Fort Charlotte who as the Minister of Education made it a point to emphasize the necessity to read books and particularly, those written by Bahamians. He is a great advocate for our cultural artisans and for those involved in promoting our culture.

Mr. Speaker,

The Bahamas has a complex history that has produced a rich historic and cultural heritage. This patrimony includes historic artifacts, sites like Clifton and other resources that reflect life in the various periods of Bahamian history. Sadly this rich historical and cultural patrimony has not been appreciated and recognized as it should be by many Bahamians.

This is painfully evident in the increasing number of historically significant resources that have been degraded or lost through neglect and destruction. Cases of endangered historically significant resources are common throughout our Island nation. There is even evidence of entire settlements in which early Bahamian pioneers once thrived being long since been abandoned and lost to decay.

That is why my Government had to acquire the Clifton site and legislate for it into perpetuity as a place that we have for ourselves, and anyone who would wish to experience a site where all

of the civilizations of our country passed through.

Bahamian history has to become a dynamic part of our National consciousness and a more vital component of our national school curriculum and our public education programmes. In this regard, I urge the College of the Bahamas to become a more commanding center for historical Research. It must not only become the primary incubator of the Bahamian story. It must also endeavour to cultivate and sustain a deeper public appreciation of Bahamian history.

For the more we know of ourselves the more we are likely to feel good about ourselves and hopefully feel more connected to each other and more inclined to be more respectful of the rights of others. It is for this reason we joined with the people and acquired Clifton.

Mr. Speaker,

I note that the Government has reinstated the programme of Constituency Allowances albeit for the reduced sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars (\$50,000).

I thought that this debate may allow me the opportunity to clarify an issue that some persons tried to exploit in respect of my

representation of the Farm Road and Centreville constituency. So as to avoid any further confusion or misrepresentation I now refer to correspondence relevant to the issue of Farm Road and Centreville and the Constituency Allowance.

- Letter dated 2nd October, 2007
- Letter dated 28th April, 2008
- Memo dated 29th April, 2008
- Letter dated 27th May, 2008
- Letter dated 10th November, 2008
- Letter dated 5th August, 2009
- Letter dated 8th December, 2009
- Letter dated 3rd March, 2010
- Letter dated 25th January, 2010

- Letter dated 10th February, 2010
- Table of allocation received 29th June, 2010
- Letter dated 30th June, 2010
- Letter dated 1st July, 2010
- Letter dated 5th July, 2010

Mr. Speaker,

When we came to office in 2002, we knew that the hopes and aspirations of a clear majority of Bahamians were riding hard upon our shoulders. We knew we could not let them down. That we dare not do so.

Whether it is accepted or not our mission and our purpose was to strive always to help the people of our country live lives of dignity in

which their material needs are met and in which they can achieve their fullest potential in a nation that places a premium on social justice, love and support for one another and the safety and security all.

That is what each of us would wish for ourselves and our families. And it is what we desired for every other person and every other family throughout The Bahamas.

The mission of the PLP was always to bring hope and healing to all those who needed it most. That is why it was the PLP that came up with National Insurance and why it was the

same party that championed National Health Insurance and Urban Renewal.

At all times, it must begin with us who are privileged to be leaders in our time – to make life better for the disadvantaged, the suffering, the sick and the affected to not be distracted from the central commitment of people before things and Bahamians first wherever feasible.

We are confident in our belief that in our five years we governed for the entire Bahamas. We moved ahead with an Anchor Resort Programme, aimed at bringing progress to our Islands. We initiated a programme to place potable water in our Islands. We provided the

telecommunications links throughout our Islands towards ensuring the existence of a sound communications infrastructure for National emergencies like Hurricanes and in order to enable Bahamians wherever they are in the Bahamas to benefit from E-government from the internet, from distance learning and as we now say to the Minister of Health from Tele Medicine; we restored the runway at Lynden Pindling International Airport; we fixed the problems confronting cruise ships at Prince George Dock; we conceptualized, and brought about the discussion to remove freight terminals from Bay Street and to renew the city of Nassau while enabling Bahamians to have access to the water front and a boardwalk. We

privatized the airline industry thereby creating new jobs and ownership in the Bahamian economy; we revolutionized operations at the Lynden Pindling International Airport by appointing YVRAS as Managers and setting them off on a major airport transformation building programme; we began the expansion of the Marsh Harbour Airport by having the needs analysis done and issued a contract for a new runway and refurbishment of a parallel taxiway; – and which needs analysis provided for the Control Tower and new Terminal facilities which will soon be constructed; we made flying into some 19 airstrips in our Family Islands at night possible by introducing solar lighting.

We saw the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing the issue of crime and the fear of crime. In addition to strengthening expanding and equipping the police with the support of the Teachers Union and based on evidence of weapon possession by school age children we introduced police in the schools. We put in place a major social intervention programme with emphasis on Urban Renewal issues dealing with young persons at risk, other disadvantaged youth, the elderly, the sick and the poor; we introduced a package of major prison reforms, we introduced a pilot programme for a National Youth Service all intended to attack crime and the fear of crime;

and remember that our PLP Government was working at holding the murder rate below 60; there were 52 in 2002, 50 in 2003, 44 in 2004, 52 in 2005, 61 in 2006, 78 in 2007, Today the count is at 57 virtually on pace to double our highest amount; as a further effort in the fight against crime we built over 1500 homes more than the FNM Government had built in two terms in office; and now the Minister has finally admitted that the FNM is not perfect that they too have had defects in construction which they have had to fix; we worked to improve our educational system with special emphasis on preschools, vocational training and the development of the College of the Bahamas; remember when we commenced our

governance, the new administration we appointed found \$14 million dollars in an account that no one seemed to know anything about which was used to purchase the Michael Eldon complex and fund expenses of the College administration; and then there were much needed reforms and innovations in our primary and secondary school systems.

We were mindful of the concerns of health and the extraordinary challenges faced by Bahamians who did not have the means for private care. There can be no more sobering a thought than our colleague Minister of Health advising us that too many Bahamians were on a collision course with death – and the mind

boggling conclusion that in so many cases if you did not have money or Insurance you could die; when we introduced National Health Insurance we therefore knew it was the right thing to do and that it would be manifestly in the best interest of Bahamians – including the medical profession. We had no doubt that if the Government and stakeholders had worked constructively together an appropriate system would now be in place. But in the Lord's time and not a day before – so I guess the Member for North Andros was right when he said it is not long now.

So our record is clear – unequivocal and undeniable. When you examine how my

Government steered the Bahamian economy from the difficult times of 2001/2002 to a position where we continued to get "A" ratings from the major rating agencies, where unemployment had been significantly reduced to 7.6%; some 19,000 jobs were added – (from 152, 690 in 2002 to 171, 490 in 2007) average Bahamian household income increased from \$39,379 in May 2002 to \$43,420 in May 2006 per capita income that is the annual income each individual makes rose from \$18,958 in 2002 to \$26,659 dollars in 2007 when we left office; And, additionally my Government gave substantial pay increases for everyone in the Public Service including the uniformed services.

So we need not get into any arguments or comparisons. For we can rely on the fact that the economic indicators showed positive results and that the correct conclusion to draw from the 'A' ratings is that we received such ratings because of the undeniably satisfactory manner in which we managed the economy.

Mr. Speaker,

Our success in managing the economy was obviously influenced by my Government's success in attracting productive investment in Tourism Projects.

I need not list them other than to say thousands of Bahamians are benefitting from such investments today.

More importantly, however, buried on page 25 of the Prime Ministers opening contribution is a very important acknowledgement. I would urge members to read it and then ask how come this person who has been described by every negative description – “do nothing, indecisive procrastination” – could in fact lead a Government that put in a place so much that is so beneficial to the Bahamas and so many Bahamians.

In fact justice will be served if I simply read for you the words of which I speak:

“And the luxury hotel and residential resort developments at Albany in New Providence and at Winding Bay and Baker’s Bay in the Abacos continue to enjoy robust sales. Some 500 Bahamians are engaged on the two Abaco projects. Some 321 Bahamians are now employed in the operation of Albany additional numbers of Bahamians continue to be engaged on construction works.”

That is a fitting reference in support of the good works of my Government. 500 Bahamians employed in Abaco in the projects of my Government and 321 at Albany with more jobs to come.

So colleagues that is honest to God first class certification that not only did we perform great works in other islands, but the good Lord enabled us to impact Abaco the Island home of the Prime Minister in an unequivocal and undeniable way.

In the following paragraphs the Prime Minister spoke about the proposed Kerzner investment at Hurricane Hole Marina. I am reminded that

my Government ushered in the 3rd phase of Kerzner development which was then the single largest development in our history. But as we have said in a democracy some reap what others have sown.

Mention of the Bahamar development is next in the contribution. I would simply say I knew when the Prime Minister did not show up for the ground breaking ceremony he was simply acknowledging this was not his project. This project too incorporates the story of some sow and others reap.

New Stadium

Mr. Speaker,

Talking about the PLP sowing and the FNM reaping, it is appropriate for me to remind colleagues that it was the Prime Minister of the PLP Government that sat with President Hu Jintao and Prime Minister Wen Jiabo and settled the gift of a National Stadium. Through further discussions we ended up with a first class beautifully designed stadium replete with the latest technology. Just as an aside and to show how deeply I was involved in the construction details, I brought about an amendment to the plans to ensure that the new stadium would provide a special covering to provide more adequate protection from the sun and rain.

I did not, however have anything to do with the selection of red seats.

I will say, however, with respect to the announcement of a new development by Kerzner, that he advised the member for Cat Island and myself some months ago that he and Starwood would be joint venturing a high rise Time Share development with some additional marina slips and marina village like support facilities. We had a meaningful discussion.

We were pleased to see the resurgence of confidence Mr. Kerzner had in the Bahamas and

the major adjustments he had made in respect of the Bahamar development.

We know that as a player on the world tourism stage he still has the creative genius and competitive spirit waiting to be unleashed. We wish him well.

Beaches

Mr. Speaker,

Because of a commitment I had to the establishment of new and improved beaches for Bahamians, I discussed and also received a commitment from Butch Kerzner that their company would develop the facilities at the

Montague Beach. We discussed in some detail how it would be developed particularly through road rerouting to enable unimpeded access to the Beach.

The Prime Minister should advise on the commitments we negotiated with Albany to build a first class beach on the strip on West Bay Street leading to the caves, to build a recreational pond to accommodate wild life, to provide improvements to the Adelaide Village recreational facilities and to sell the Government 300 acres of land at a preferred price of \$50,000 per acre. The intention being to create a new township and provide lots at preferential prices to Bahamians.

Mr. Speaker,

On any number of occasions I have spoken in this place about my Government's commitment to providing space on beaches for Bahamians. The fact that Bahamians faced the prospect of visitors having a safe and secure beach experience made it that more important for the Government to protect such rights for Bahamians. That is why we placed the obligation for a new and improved beach in the Albany Agreement.

Further, I commissioned an Engineering company to examine every potential site on the Island of New Providence for the creation of

new public beaches and provide conceptual designs, coastal engineering analysis. Environmental resource surveys and costs for each site. Eleven potential sites were identified.

(* Read them*)

Unless we make tangible progress in accommodating Bahamians so they too can enjoy their countries resources increasing pressure for access to beaches will develop particularly as to population increases.

The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam, 1859:

*The Moving Finger writes; and, having
writ,*

Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor Wit

*Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,
Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.*

I begin with those words from the Rubaiyat by the poet Omar Khayyam to remind all of us that in many cases what is done can not be undone.

Mr. Speaker,

We believe that the time for the Government to have acted to bring relief was when Bahamians were being most severely beaten and battered by the depressed Bahamian economy. It's in times of crisis that Governments' are challenged to be at their most creative, at their boldest and their best. The FNM Government was not at their boldest and their best during the most critical years.

During the years 2008-2010 when Bahamians were losing jobs, losing homes, having their families torn apart, facing unbearably high electricity bills, having to live without electricity and facing all manner of hardship; instead of bringing relief during those years; this government instead chose to heap increased taxation on the backs of the Bahamian people.

This much was admitted in the Budget Communication on page 4 where the following words appear:

“The 2010/2011 Budget contained the most significant structural fiscal

action of any Budget in recent years as a means of immediately containing the debt-to-GDP ratio.”

Mere fancy words to admit that the government piled high taxes on the Bahamian people when they could least afford it.

While the budget cuts to independent schools, mail boats and charitable organizations were reversed this year and restored to previous levels; the damage has been done.

With respect to the independent schools; as a result of the cut in subvention; the school fees have gone up, teachers have been laid off, and

children have been forced to leave private schools. Budget cuts have led to mail boat service being disrupted and charitable organizations were forced to struggle even more.

So the damage has been done. The trauma that has been experienced as a result of this administration's severe austerity measures can not be reversed.

Crime

In our initial response to the Budget Communication, we further noted that to our amazement, there was absolutely no mention in the Budget Communication of any programme

to tackle the crime menace that is paralyzing this country.

We note that the member for North Abaco did recite some initiatives in opening the debate.

We have no difficulty in supporting increased resources to the police, to the Judiciary and for the provision of more and improved judicial facilities. We have noted all of such improvements announced by the Prime Minister.

We have also reviewed the elements of a crime strategy – electronic bracelets, CCTV in high crime areas, Urban Renewal of the FNM version

in 9 centres in New Providence.

Notwithstanding all of these developments the Government strategy on crime continues to be ineffective. The murders continue to increase at virtually twice the rate when we were in office, serious crimes continue to increase. Bahamians have to be terribly frightened when they hear all of the pronouncements of what the Government is doing and all hell continues to break out.

There is no evidence that the Government has a strategy that works.

Mr. Speaker,

I should say yet again in this place that the Urban Renewal programme we introduced represented our best hope for community uplift and for rebuilding of the lives of disadvantaged youth, the elderly, the sick, the homeless and the poor.

We warned the government not to get rid of Urban Renewal because without it we know there would be no sustained concentrated assault on the root causes of crime in our country.

And without a sustained concentrated assault on the root causes of crime we knew that the task of policing would become less effective as

more and more young people fall into lives of crime. But what did the Ingraham Government do?

They scrapped the programme and reintroduced their version of Urban Renewal with the lady who ran against me in the last election in charge of it.

They introduced neighbourhood policing and after that did not work they introduced the National Crime Prevention Office. They just could not bring themselves to admit the PLP had done something good with Urban Renewal.

Mr. Speaker,

The Urban Renewal programme should be free of politics. The other day the lady in charge spoke at a funeral service. She quite naturally spoke on behalf of The Farm Road FNM Association. I don't blame her. I blame those who appointed her because they ought to have known that such an appointment would divide the community and logically politicise the workings of the Urban Renewal Programme. But that's exactly how the FNM treated crime – as a political issue but would have us now agree that it is not a political issue. Does the Minister of National Security remember saying on April 27th 2007 at an FNM rally on RM Bailey Park that "there are far too many murders taking place in our Bahama Land

today." He went on to say that the FNM had the solution for crime because they were "closer to the police" and that under their leadership, they would "reduce or hopefully eliminate crime in our Bahama Land."

Those are DIRECT QUOTES from Mr. Tommy Turnquest. His leader, Hubert Ingraham, while the leader of the Opposition said that the PLP was paralyzed to do anything about crime but the FNM had the solution. Guess what the murder count was when they made these

remarks were made. 24! 24 murders was too much for the PLP to remain in power.

Mr. Speaker,

Unemployment is an incubator for crime. As I reviewed the possible impact of the 3,000 plus jobs offered by the Government in this Budget I thought of the incredible positive impact \$20 million dollars would have on crime in our country if such funding was used to provide young people at risk with training and job opportunities. It can easily be argued that by targeting a class of young persons who are vulnerable and at risk for such programmes could result in greater value to society for the money spent.

This government has allowed the conditions that serve as incubators for crime to fester, they have cancelled intervention programmes directed at our at-risk young people, for no good reason they have cancelled school policing; and the damage has been done.

We can not now go back and undo the damage done as a result of the cancellation of these programmes. Bringing them back in watered down form does not make up for those lives impacted in a negative way because of the absence of these programmes.

What has been the effect of the absence of intelligence that police was able to gather by being involved in the Urban Renewal Programme? Could this intelligence have impacted the number of murders and violent crime especially in our inner city communities?

We say again and again that with we need to combat the crime epidemic with a comprehensive approach that recognizes the realities that exist in our communities and tackles crime and anti-social behavior at the root.

The FNM stopped the youth programme in Andros and promised an expanded programme

to deal with ALL the youth (not just at risk youth). So far nothing has been enacted.

The PM was understood to say that \$13k was too much to spend per individual on the youth programme in Andros. How much do we spend to keep a young man in Her Majesty's Prison? What is the value of the lives lost or disrupted and traumatized as a result of violent crime?

Finally Mr. Speaker,

I remember when the Rt. Hon. Member for North Abaco called me and my colleagues wutless because he felt we could have done more.

At the time, I believe he said if he was in that position he would hang his head in shame. I need not go further than to say nearly four years have passed and the situation is demonstrably worse in terms of crime and the fear of crime. "What goes round comes round". I am not going to ask you Prime Minister to live up to your promise and hang your head in shame or call you wutless. I know you are not going to say I am sorry. I would much prefer that you listen to us and sit down yourself with some of the Police Officers who led the Urban Renewal Offices.

Speak also to those police officers who grew up in the areas they were assigned to and who

personally on an everyday basis are in contact with young men at risk in the communities.

Ask them of the significant impact they have had in these communities with respect to anticipating criminal behaviour and stopping it. Perhaps this you would change course and go back to what we left in place.

Police Force

The member for Garden Hills argued that the PLP did not or does not support the police. That is obviously untrue and demonstrably is not supported by the facts.

Firstly, it would be extremely foolish for any political party to allow itself to be describes as against or not for the uniformed services.

We put in place the health insurance for the police.

We over saw the largest promotion of police officers in the history of the Police Force and having heard the political arguments against the exercise, we hold firm in our view that it was the right thing to do.

New Port

We have ensured that our position on this new port is known to all. We opposed placing it on

Arawak Cay. We believed that with the major investments by Kerzner, Bahamar, and the redevelopment of the city of Nassau an industrial centre at the gateway to the city was inappropriate.

We disagreed with how the shareholders were selected, their overly close relationship with the Government and the fact that there would be a monopoly for 45 years.

The fact that the entire transaction involved significant funding from the Government – some \$26 million was an extraordinary gift to special interests.

We said too little too late because we recognize that, notwithstanding the benefits to the Public Treasury and the subsequent reduction in the deficit of the proceeds of the BTC sale and the stamp tax windfalls related to the other “one-off” transactions; the underlying fundamentals of the Bahamian economy remain weak with significant challenges ahead.

These challenges include:

- Unemployment remains very high particularly among young people
- Prospects for job growth remains “muted” i.e. they is no relief in sight for the unemployed

- Thousands of persons have become discouraged and have completely given up looking for work
- People continue to flock to New Providence looking for work; impacting families and adding to the congestion in New Providence
- High unemployment leads to reduced consumer spending which means even less money flowing into the public treasury through taxation
- Tourism earnings remain “soft”
- Construction remains weak with significant reductions in new construction starts; this affects those

who have only basic skills and would find work in construction

- Banks and financial institutions have experienced high default levels
- Rise in mortgage delinquencies a symptom of people struggling to meet their obligations and a contributor to anxiety over the possibility of losing the home.
 - Government revenues continue to underperform and have consistently fallen short of estimates in every budget period

- Even after one-off transactions and proceeds from BTC sale, we have in 2010/2011 a total deficit of \$206mil
- Borrowing continues to rise, we have before us a resolution to borrow \$220million
- The proceeds from the sale of BTC and the one off transactions (stamp tax from the sale of VOPAK etc) are extraordinary events that can not be relied upon to be repeated
- The debt level remains very worrisome particularly the fact that debt service is now the largest allocation in the budget surpassing education and national security.

- Debts service \$285mil
- The rapid rise in the foreign currency portion of the debt that must be paid back in foreign currency.
 - Foreign currency debt 2007 - \$296.13million
 - Foreign currency debt 2010 - \$797.8million
- There is widespread despair amongst Bahamians about the lack of opportunities in the Bahamas for Bahamians with their perceived only options being “a government job or working in the hotel”. Young people are making the decision to remain abroad having completed their education.

A temporary jobs programme will bring some relief; but is too little too late.

It is very curious that the government would introduce a new method of calculating GDP in the middle of the budget process.

It introduces skepticism about government's motives and unnecessarily brings scrutiny to the Department of Statistics and causes the public to possibly question their independence.

This is grossly unfair to the dedicated professionals in that department. The government should protect public servants

and not leave them open to such criticism. The point will be made that the government is making these adjustments to increase GDP and thus lower Debt/GDP ratio and paint a picture that the Bahamian debt crisis is somehow improved by a mere the stroke of a pen. Some people may get the impression that since this administration can not contain the debt problem, they simply changed the numbers!

These adjustments should have been done as an exercise separate from the budget process.

We called for fairness and impartiality in the administration of the jobs programmes. We warned the government that they must not abuse this programme to the detriment of non-FNMs. So we ask the questions:

- How will the \$25million be apportioned amongst the various segments of the programme?
- What is the structure?
- What are the end objectives?
- Who will oversee and administer this programme?
- How will the administrator be chosen?
- What will the administrator be paid

A PLP government would have managed the capital spending differently. We would have:

- Scaled down the road project
- Give the work to Bahamian companies
- Ensure that smaller contractors and independent contractors have a piece of the work
- Intervene earlier to provide incentives to the private sector to support employment; (we spoke of a wage subsidy when the first layoffs were being discussed by Kerzner and were roundly condemned)
- Focused investment in productive industries to create employment

- Prudent economic policies of the Christie government enabled the government to do what it is doing this is admitted in the budget communication.
- We empowered the taxi drivers on Exuma through the Exuma Transit Services instead of letting one of the big companies come in. this is an example of empowering Bahamians.

The Disabled

Mr. Speaker,

I am in agreement with the Government's capital works to improve the health plant. It is what we would have been required to do with the advent of National Health Insurance.

I was especially pleased about the works to improve the facilities at the Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre. This is where significant numbers of Bahamians have to seek medical, psychiatric and psychological services.

The disabled in our community are a special category of Bahamian deserving of special services.

One of my regrets on demitting office was that even though we worked hard on building on the progress of our predecessors still not enough was done for there are parents who have to struggle mightily to cope with their disabled child and in some cases children.

My Government left in place a comprehensive set of recommendations from a Special Education team led by Louis Symonette a former Permanent Secretary.

We prepared legislation which required further review because it will usher in a paradigm shift in the rights accorded to the disabled.

As our country dedication increasing resources to health care it is important for as to be mindful of a compelling need to ensure that the disabled in our country also have the right to share in the resources of our country and that in very many cases there is suffering and hardship afflicted on parents who simply cannot afford to care properly for their disabled child.

I remember visiting the Garvin Tynes School with the Minister of Education and observing a young man with severely bowed legs.

Without hesitation both the Minister and I agree that something must be done to surgically repair the child's legs.

I recall my Governments' commitment to ensuring that Bahamians benefitted from the Free Eye Care Program offered by the Cuban Government. We made it clear to Bahamians we did to U.S. Officials that we would not stand in the way of the Bahamians experiencing their right to access this Free Programme which included transportation to and from Cuba.

I believe that some 1,000 Bahamians from throughout the Bahamas benefitted from the Programme. I had the personal experience of being at the Airport when a school friend returned from Cuba certifying that as a result of surgery she could now see properly.

The post World War II Bahamian economy created jobs for the masses in Tourism and the hotel industry as waiters, bellmen, housekeepers, entertainers, taxi drivers and this attracted thousands to New Providence.

The Pindling era established a middle class as thousands of professionals took positions as doctors, lawyers, hotel managers, tourism professionals, engineers, architects, educators, accountants, veterinarians and the list goes on.

In the 21st Century Bahamas we must advance into a new era of technological development and job creation.

The Bahamas will face the same challenges as Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad, Guyana; that is the inability to provide employment opportunities for university graduates.

Yet, it is these university graduates, which will form the core of a highly trained workforce that may aspire to rival India and the other emerging nations of the world – even Singapore.

In the coming years, more and more of the jobs in the Global Village will be created by

industries and companies which are information and technology based – companies like Microsoft, Apple, Face book, Goggle, You Tube, Twitter, in essence, the world of Social Networking.

Bill Gates is a second homeowner on Harbour Island; he also owns Microsoft, which is the largest software company in the world, and it has made him a billionaire many times over.

AITD

To move toward this reality, the Bahamas should investigate what opportunities will accrue if we were to establish an agency for information technology development (AITD) to

attract information technology firms like Cisco Systems, Intel, Texas Instruments, General Electric as well as Microsoft, Apple, Google, etc.

The Bahamas must participate as we did in Tourism and Financial Services in the era of Globalization of Innovation and Technology.

As a development agency specializing in information technology this agency will perform its role as a public/private sector partnership entity and will undertake the following activities:

1. It will have oversight over the growth and development of information technology industries
2. It will identify information technology companies with the capacity to be located in The Bahamas
3. It will provide funding for Bahamians with innovative technology related projects
4. It will encourage joint-venture arrangements between multinationals and smaller companies wishing to engage in projects with Bahamians

5. It will facilitate companies to design and manufacture hardware and software for product in the information technology industries.

Conclusion

Mr. Speaker,

Given the incredible increase in serious crimes led by a seemingly uncontrollable murder rate, it obvious that we are at a dangerous juncture.

Our people need help and they need it fast. Too many Bahamians are sinking in a sea of disrepair. The social stability of our country is at a tipping point.

We continue to be burdened by unemployment and a growing sense of hopelessness by too many Bahamians.

We have the additional burden of crime and the fear of crime. Unless relief comes soon will be in grave peril. We cannot go on like this.

We sincerely hope that all of the developments and all of the new jobs will have some impact. But we know that since the FNM commences their governance some 25,000 students have completed secondary education.

Where are they? What is going on in their lives.

The Government needs to lay out a road map on how it proposes to get us out of this hell hole we are living in right now. What do we say to the thousands who will not be admitted to the new programmes. Times will be even harder for them.

The Government must do better at our dispirited citizens – they must be inspired to keep their hopes alive – to not lose faith and to have the confidence to hold on and not give up.

Mr. Speaker that is our message. We will tell our people it will not always be like this; that although things are bad right now

compassionate Government is on its way just around the corner because come the next election the PLP will be back to lead the country to better and brighter days.