

*front page sub heading in the Tribune by Sancheska Brown*

DEPUTY Prime Minister Brent Symonette has accused talk show host Steve McKinney of having a personal vendetta against him and of making “ludicrous” comments in an effort to slander his name. Mr. Symonette’s comments came after he was informed that Mr. McKinney had suggested that he was somehow benefitting from the government’s extensive road work project, to the tune of millions of dollars. While admitting he did not hear the report personally because he does not “listen to garbage,” Mr. Symonette said he is not surprised by Mr. McKinney’s comments. He also said his interest in Bahamas Hot Mix, the company awarded the contract to pave the roads, has been public knowledge for years. “It is ludicrous to think that I am benefitting from delays in the road works. Steve McKinney’s history speaks for itself. I do not own any shares in that company. The shares are owned by my children’s trust, but that is public knowledge, I have investments in many companies in this country. Does that mean that I should not enter politics? I don’t think so,” Mr. Symonette said. “Bahamas Hot Mix got the contract, not because of me,” he said, “but because they are recognized and well known road builders in the Bahamas. They are qualified to get the job. If there is a bidding process should they not bid? “Tell Mr. McKinney to wake up, I am a Bahamian and I am entitled to jobs in the Bahamas just like everyone else.” Mr. Symonette said he does not understand why Mr. McKinney would make comments regarding him. Mr. Symonette implied that it could be because he is white. “If Mr. McKinney wants to make accusations about me, he should talk to me and not make remarks in a public forum. Yes, I happen to be a shareholder but I am a shareholder in many companies. So because I have personal wealth does that mean I cannot be a Member of Parliament? Why is he attacking me? There were ministers under the PLP government who got contracts that could be called ‘special interest’

but no one made a big deal about that.” This is not the first time that Mr. Symonette has come under fire for his relationship with Bahamas Hot Mix. In 2008, the PLP said they were concerned about the alleged awarding of contracts worth millions of dollars to “a company Mr. Symonette has interest in.” The official opposition then called for a clearly defined conflict of interest policy, to avoid allegations of officials collecting payment from government agencies while in office and outlined the government’s system of awarding contracts. When contacted, Steve McKinney said, “I stand by my comments.” Mr. McKinney’s comments were made on his talk show “Hard Copy” on Love 97.