

Remarks by Fred Mitchell MP
At Pineyard Steel's Luncheon
Freeport, Grand Bahama
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Check against delivery

I am pleased to be here. This has been a very pleasant visit to Freeport and to Grand Bahama. I have not been here in two weeks because of my international and legislative duties but most Fridays I am here.

Some of you may remember the genesis of the decision to come here every Friday. It was an attempt on my part to be sure that in a tangible, physical way, the government at a political level was seen to be working in Grand Bahama and a part of the whole cloth of The Bahamas.

It struck me in my days as an activist and as an opposition politician that decision making was too Nassau centric and that in Nassau, the rest of the country was very much out of sight and out of mind. I have sought to bring that consciousness to the Government. In the process not only has the relevance of the decision making improved but I have on a personal level enjoyed an enriched life, having learned new things, new relationships and discovered new aspects about the lives and situations of many that I knew before.

This visit is one such visit. In a sense I entered blindly, as a public official coming to visit a training facility. What I discovered however was an old acquaintance who in his former life was a waiter at the Crystal Palace in Nassau. He remembered me and I remembered him. It is to that passage in time, long ago that I owe this visit and this occasion.

I am delighted to be here and flattered by the fulsome praise of my work and effort since I got here. I am delighted to have met Edney Anderson again in this incarnation and to have met his wife and those who are his friends and supporters including the wife of our Consul General in New York Dr. Valencia Carroll and students.

What he has put together is impressive by any measure. The question is what can we do to help? It seems to me we must help. Today's event is designed in part to raise capital so he can help others.

I described to the press last night that I refer to these confluences as "Dickensian moments", named after the writer Charles Dickens. Mr. Dickens who was an English novelist in the 19th century, used to write his novels as serials in a newspaper. That is why his novels are often so long. Each week in the days before radio and TV a new chapter would be written and people would line up to see what would happen to the characters, just as we do today when watching Empire or Scandal.

So a character would appear at the start of the book, then disappear and then later in the work turn up suddenly transformed into a new and successful person. One of the features of his work also was that at some point a dispossessed soul would come into great wealth and fortune by the intervention of a surprise benefactor.

So for reasons that I think are obvious Mr. Anderson is a benefactor to many. For many reasons this is a Dickensian moment and suffice it to say I am happy to be here.

I want to encourage the community's support of what he is doing. In my official capacity, I commit to engaging the private sector to see how there can be synergies with the work he is doing so that those who come out of the school can go straight into productive work.

Immigration work policies are much discussed in these days as this country struggles to protect the integrity of its work force in the face of international best practices and the globalization of trade. It means that the Bahamian worker must be competitive if industry is to survive in Grand Bahama. It is certainly cheaper to hire a Bahamian worker than to import a worker from overseas. My job is to be the gatekeeper of that effort. It is not an easy work.

Mr. Anderson preaches about excellence, commitment and consistency to his students. It is training which is most helpful for Grand Bahama

where welding is a skill that is being imported into the country from overseas.

In the early days of my tenure, I made the point to one of the companies here that they had to recognize that they have a stake in solving this issue of training because it was socially unsustainable that Bahamians would be behind the fence looking in while outsiders did jobs that Bahamians knew they could do.

Indeed it is not a new point since it was the founder of country who made the point in Freeport in November of 1969 at the opening of Borco when he said that if the social order did not bend it would be broken.

Happily I think most people have gotten the message.

More however needs to be done.

Training is important. The relevance of the training to what is required in the work force is also important.

Mr. Anderson is deeply conscious of that need for both training and relevance.

We need to help him and his team to enable his dream by assuring him of official support, policy support and enabling access to capital for his enterprise.

The Prime Minister recently hosted the Heads of Government meeting in Nassau. He had the former Prime Minister of Jamaica P.J. Patterson come to speak to his fellow heads about human development and how to solve youth unemployment and the sense of hopelessness amongst youth. Key to this is training and education. Each day the government sits and seeks to make decisions to enhance these training opportunities. It is clear that education is the key to lifting people out of poverty. Jobs are a key social elevator to a better life for our people.

It is important then that Mr. Anderson and his school succeed.

This involvement reminds me of another effort by Mr. Terrance Archer of Tereve College and the struggle to establish that institution here in Freeport to training people for the public service.

It shows the dynamism of Freeport and Grand Bahama. Mr. Anderson spoke last night about creating opportunities out of chaos; of seeing the present economic circumstances of Freeport not as a bad thing but as an opportunity to create something out of nothing.

That is the story of the success of so many of the generations of Bahamians before us. Since I have been coming to this city many giants have passed on; the framers of the modern Freeport and Grand Bahama: Sonny Martin, Lofton Cooper, Jeffery Thompson; Alton Wallace, Edward St George; Garnet Levarity; Warren Levarity; Jack Hayward; Wallace Groves; John Martin. Some like Hayward Cooper and Albert Miller are still with us.

I risk calling names because there is a message that I want to leave especially with the young people and the young men in particular who Mr. Anderson's programmes are designed to help.

The great story of this country is that of social mobility. You can begin in one socio economic group at your birth, live through trying circumstances and end up being a success story. In deed Mr. Anderson is just that. He wishes to bequeath that to you.

So much of life is simply showing up, putting the left foot in front of the right foot.

I often tell the story of Sidney Poitier who is by far the most internationally famous Bahamian. He rose to the top of the world in his profession from a simple, humble beginning in Cat Island. His formative years were spent in The Bahamas and he credits his mother and father for giving him the grounding to be able to do what he did. He credits the good fortune of running into a man when he was working as a janitor in New York who simply took a liking to him and taught him how to read. Recently he told the Prime Minister in his Los Angeles home: were it not for that man, I would not have been able to accomplish all that I have. Today history records him as an Oscar

winner, a director, film producer, an author. Yet he remembers when for entertainment he used to sit on the lap of his sister Teddy on the porch in Arthur's Town as she told him bed time stories while the coconut barks burned to keep the mosquitoes away.

And I speak of Sir Albert Miller who rose from being a constable on the police force, denied for political reasons being the Commissioner of Police, but rising to be one of three Co-chairs of the Grand Bahama Port Authority while simultaneously being its president. He was knighted by the Queen. He was born in 1926 and within six months of his birth he was being taken home by boat with his mother and the 1926 hurricane came upon them. They were shipwrecked. He fell overboard. He was rescued as a six month old baby from the waters. His mother was so traumatized by the event that within a year she died. He never knew her. He was raised by his sister.

He tells the story of how he got his first piece of land. He used to give his constable's pay cheque to his sister every week. She would give him spending money. One day he saw an ad in the newspaper advertising land for sale. He wanted to buy but didn't know how to start. He mentioned it to his sister. She told him that if he wanted to buy land he could, because she had been saving his pay and he had enough money to get the down payment. So said so done. That was his start. Today, he is by far one of the wealthiest Bahamians and an icon in our land.

My point is: look where we have come from. Look where we can go.

This land into which my father was born in 1919 was much poorer, filled with racial and other prejudices. Yet men like Clifford Darling, the late Governor General left his home in Chester's, Acklins in the 1930s and headed to Nassau. He was a barber, taxi driver. He was inspired to challenge the political order, even though he was the wrong colour and the wrong class and had very little education, having left school at 14. Yet he helped to bring about a political revolution in our country, was a Minister of the Government, a Member of the House of Assembly, the Speaker of the House, the Governor General. When he died, the entire Government: both civilian and military marched behind his coffin to the graveyard.

The women can take comfort in the example of Cynthia “Mother” Pratt who remembers when he was a little girl and could see the holes in her clapboard house that allowed the light to come in from the outside. She ended up being a nurse, a teacher, a sports trainer, a Minister of the Government, a Member of Parliament, the Deputy Prime Minister and acted as Prime Minister for six months during the illness of the Prime Minister.

That ladies and gentlemen is the country we are working to bequeath to you.

I hope that it is a country that you believe that you can embrace. It is a rich legacy, full of hope and courage, and rising up from despair.

Mr. Anderson, his supporters and friends are now working to ensure that legacy, and we are glad to be here today if it can help to assist in building the dream.

Thank you.

God bless you all.