

House of Assembly

Nassau, Bahamas

9 JUNE, 2015

Mr. Speaker,

I rise to contribute to this Debate on the 2015/2016 National Budget. I do so as Minister responsible for ground, air and sea transport and associated matters. I do so as the Member for Englerston, a community and a people that I am proud to represent.

Mr. Speaker, I remember when our country transitioned into national Independence. I was then a 14 year old girl. I saw the introduction of a new and beautiful flag replacing the British Union Jack. I remember hearing the new song for the first time which was to become our national anthem - Lift up your head to the Rising Sun. A new dawn in our country.

Mr Speaker, it was a "heady" time. The country was imbued with optimism and excitement. There was a sense of unity which had theretofore not been experienced with such intensity and fervour.

A time of national happiness.

It was a new embarkation.

We were preparing to build our country with our own hands: to develop and refine a national identity which would take its firm place on the global stage.

We understood that we were a unique people.

We understood that we were capable of achieving anything that we put our minds to.

We committed to building a just country that would protect the vulnerable and uphold the noblest ideals of humanity

We had decidedly rejected the naysayers both internally and externally who questioned our capacity and resolve to build a new Bahamas to become the finest little country on the face of the earth. Those who said we could not do it for all the small reasons that they advanced.

This was not pie in the sky. This was a serious and infused commitment that encompassed each and every person regardless of who he or she is or no matter what their circumstance. Citizenship was the equalizing attainment. It was an embracement of who we are and what we are capable of is beautiful and limitless..

Mr. Speaker, all my life, that has become the benchmark for my understanding and vision of my country. And no one can move me from that resolve.

That was just about 42 years ago. I never knew then as a teenager that I would one day have the privilege of

sitting in this place.

Today we face new challenges in our country. We did not get here overnight. But we in leadership must keep sight of that founding vision when we attained nationhood. That same commitment that we held over the years must never weaken or be compromised. That same love, optimism, zeal and higher purpose must always fuel our involvement in public life - uncompromisingly.

Mr. Speaker, politics is an interesting enterprise: it is often the platform of convenient arguments and positions. So many voices permeating the atmosphere. I am grateful that in such a noisy enterprise that I am able to remember the founding vision.

I am guided and buttressed by the long-standing and immutable principles of the Progressive Liberal Party. It is my philosophical "solid rock" upon which I stand.

I will venture to say there is no person in this House or otherwise who can claim greater allegiance to the principles of the PLP than myself. It is why I continue to offer service to my Country.

We in Government are obligated to attain the highest quality of life possible for our people: We are obliged to enhance and stimulate economic engines so as to create new opportunities and for the full benefit of our people throughout our country; and to facilitate the full fruition of the vast human potential God has given our people from generation to generation.

We are mandated to fortify The Bahamas so that it attains a strategic positioning in the league of nations; This is especially so in light of evolving global markets and the new trade arrangements which are being constructed and driven by large and powerful nations and which are being constructed and driven by large and powerful nations and which are creating new pressures on our country.

In light of all of these mandates and in the face of the challenges my Ministry's singular objective is to create modern administrations in the maritime, aviation, postal, meteorology and ground transport sector seven within the context of fiscal constraints and other limitations and restraints.

We are pressing to create safe and secure modernized systems of transport to facilitate social and economic growth and prosperity.

These mandates of governance require systemic overhauls and fundamental reforms and comes within the context, unfortunately, of sustained neglect and deterioration over many years.

A poignant illustration can be found in the collection of 28 airports owned and operated by the Government that facilitate air transport in our country, almost all of them now require substantial monetary investment and significant human resource development.

of these 28 airports there are several airports that are now being literally strained at the seams; The terminals, inadequate in size and physically deteriorating have been overtaken by economic growth and increased demand in the islands which they service.

This can be seen for example at the Exuma and North Eleuthera Airports. Those who live in those communities

can well speak to the attendant anxiety and frustration at the overall negative impact this is having in those respective communities.

An example is the Road Traffic Department which has seen nothing but piecemeal and isolated interventions over the years such that the Department in 2015 remains mainly a manual system of operation which is archaic, inefficient and oftentimes lacks transparency.

We have a public transport system which is required to provide access throughout New Providence but with as many as 300 individual owners and in many of its manifestations on our streets is problematic to put it mildly and which is the subject of much angst and concern in our country on a number of levels.

Another example can be found the maritime sector which is crying out for a modernized regulatory framework with improved infrastructure and a move away from a Port administration which is characterized even in this day by a mainly manual system of operations and which is highly inefficient and grossly inadequate.

And yet another example is found in our Postal system that has seen little or no innovation over the many years and again with a manual system of operations and which is now to a large extent an inefficient and heavily state-subsidized institution.

And so **Mr. Speaker** this state of affairs, that of neglect and a stubborn clinging to the status quo have militated against our prosperous advancement and indeed has in fact set our country back. It now requires substantial heavy lifting and the expenditure of substantial public resources to bring about reform and modernization of these sectors which are critical to our economy and our social reality.

Mr. Speaker,

I am grateful to be able to say that all of these sectors are on the brink of radical transformation.

We are well on the way to creating a modern national aviation administration.

We have set a date of August of this year as the date for completion of all of the groundwork for the creation of four new entities or agencies which will bring oversight and management of all aspects of the aviation industry.

The new Civil Aviation Authority will bring a purely regulatory focus to the entire aviation industry assuring the highest possible standards of safety and security at every level in our country and at all aerodromes throughout our country. This is unprecedented.

A second independent entity is to be created with day to day responsibility for the management of airports and their operations nationwide. This will bring for the first time in the history of our country a singular focus on infrastructure, commercial operations and appropriate staffing and training of specialized staff and officers.

A third independent entity will be created which will have sole responsibility for investigation of air accidents and incidents. This will bring full transparency to such investigations and their causes in the institutionalization of national aviation safety.

Finally, air navigation services will operate independently of all other functions subject only to the regulatory

oversight of the Civil Aviation Authority to bring the highest standards of quality assurance.

The draft legislation to create these legal entities governing civil aviation has been completed and I expect that the Bills will be laid in this Parliament within the next few months and in any event in advance of the August commencement date. This innovation comes as a result of the hardwork a committee that has prepared the road map to this transformation. This committee has also been engaged in dialogue and consultation with stakeholders as to the changes in train and to answer any concerns Department of Civil Aviation employees may have about their status and career paths.

No employee will be prejudiced in their current rights and benefits in the Public Service. I do expect, however, that new career opportunities for Bahamian aviation professionals will be created.

As it relates to our airport network throughout the country I have spoken previously in this House to a study that was being undertaken of the 28 government owned airports by Stantec, a Canadian aviation firm in conjunction with our own experienced officers at the Department of Civil Aviation and various Ministries and a consultant Bahamian civil engineer.

I am pleased to report that the study has been completed and the recommendations have now been duly considered. As previously mentioned improvements and redevelopment must take place in virtually every area and across every sphere at airports everywhere. This includes airports which are the busiest in the country and those airports that currently have less traffic.

Mr. Speaker, we sought obtain a holistic approach and understanding and to ensure planning is done on an informed basis, unlike some of the significant projects we have seen previously undertaken such as was seen in the substantial resources invested in the Marsh Harbour airport with limited runway capacity and hence limitations on air lift while on the same island the Treasure Cay airport with a jet runway and significantly greater capacity and potential for airlift has seen little or no investment.

It can be argued this has placed Abaco in a catch 22 position, one which seek to resolve during this process.

My Ministry has therefore commissioned Master plans for the busiest airports in the Family Islands namely Exuma, North Eleuthera, San Salvador and Governor's Harbour.

Those Master plans will include topographical studies and make 20 year projections based on anticipated economic growth of each island and its infrastructure (including other airports). We expect those Master Plans to be completed next month and will provide the framework for the redevelopment of those airports.

The Exuma International Airport where the greatest pressures are seen in particular and therefore out of necessity is on a fast track and the conceptual designs are being prepared on a parallel basis with the development of the master plan. Tender for construction will be facilitated by the Ministry of Works and we believe we will be able to break ground for the new Exuma International airport by early next year within the first quarter of 2016. The other 3 airports, however, are being addressed on a parallel basis for redevelopment.

We move now to commission master plans for Deadman's Cay, Long Island, North Andros airport and airports in

Cat Island and Crooked Island and Acklins.

Mr. Speaker redevelopment plans are actively underway for the New Bight Cat Island airport with completion of design works on 20th May 2015. The construction documents are now being prepared for an 18,000 sq. terminal.

Every airport in every community is on the radar either because economic growth has created pressures or simply because airports are necessary engines to stimulate economic growth and jump start economies.

A Cabinet sub-Committee has been formed to review the Bahamas airport study and analysis and to make final recommendations for achieving funding for a project that has been set at approximately \$179 million in redevelopment costs.

Mr. Speaker, one airport which has raised itself in priority is the Staniel Cay airport. Several weeks ago a team of engineers from the Ministry of Works and the Department of Civil Aviation visited that runway after numerous concerns had been expressed by pilots landing there and this was despite the numerous patching that had taken place from time to time.

I am advised that the state of deterioration was so extreme and the risk to aviation safety so great that a decision was made by engineers who visually inspected that runway to shut the runway down to any further aviation traffic.

I am aware that this state of affairs has caused hardship and distress to the people of that community. But I am advised that there was no other acceptable option in the circumstances. As an interim measure air traffic has been diverted to Black Point from where persons are transported by sea to Staniel Cay.

Mr. Speaker, the Member for Centreville in his Communication will have spoken about the use of Public/Private partnerships in the redevelopment of airports. This has happened sooner rather than later in the case of Staniel Cay where the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding are now being settled with Odyssey Aviation for the complete and full remediation of the runway and the construction of a terminal. It is anticipated that runway works will be completed as a matter of urgency. This will lead to a greatly enhanced modern airport facility with economic opportunities for Exumians at that facility.

Additionally a team travelled to Moore's Island to review the runway and recommendations are being finalized for extending the length of that runway to allow for greater air lift to that island.

Mr. Speaker, the objective during this exercise is to make strategic decisions and procure the appropriate capital works at airports on each island that will assure the modern infrastructure to facilitate air traffic to these communities and thus stimulate greater economic activity and stronger connectivity within our archipelago.

Mr. Speaker, the Government has completed the installation of an \$11 million state of the art radar system: a collocated Primary Surveillance S-Band Radar (PSR), a Monopulse Secondary Surveillance Radar System (MSSR), Mode S capable: Construction is now completed on a new Approach Control Centre (APP) and all Ancillary state of the art Equipment.

The initial scope of works was expanded to include the installation of a back-up MSSR at the site of the existing

non-functioning ASR9 radar site and the supply and installation of a 3D Tower Simulator in the new APP Building at a cost of two million four hundred and ninety-one thousand nine hundred and sixty-five Bahamian dollars and twenty cents **(B\$2,491,965.00)**.

The 3D Tower Simulator will expedite the training of Air Traffic Controllers.

The recruitment of 10 new Air Traffic Controllers has been completed and these young men and women are expected to commence training in a few weeks. This begins a round of recruitment of new ATC's including controllers in Abaco which is currently underway.

My Ministry has also recruited 7 electronic technicians, 5 of whom will join our team of very capable technicians who have responsibility for the radar and 2 of whom will work from the Marsh Harbour Airport and ultimately from that airport's control tower.

Mr. Speaker the recruitment of additional technicians is the response to a long-standing recommendation made since 2006 when we experienced a catastrophic radar failure and which is finally being fulfilled. The new radar system will have redundancies which will minimize any disruptions as a result of any radar failure.

Mr. Speaker my Ministry also recently recruited the first cadre of aerodrome inspectors ever in the history of our country all of whom are now engaged in the task of certifying several of our airports including LPIA in accordance with ICAO annex 14.

Mr. Speaker this is indeed a very dynamic period in the history of aviation in our country. Never before has there been such a major and transformative restructuring or the building of such capacity through human capital in our aviation sector.

These activities do not exist in a vacuum. Airports and the aviation industry are critical to economic positioning and to economic growth. For us in The Bahamas an archipelagic state, air connectivity is key to our homogenous and cohesive cultural development.

Mr. Speaker since taking office the following achievements have been made in the Aviation sector in the Commonwealth of The Bahamas:

1) The last two phases of the LPIA Airport have been completed. This has been for me a matter of great pride as it was a former PLP administration which began all of the reconstruction groundwork for this airport: Phase 2 involved the construction of International Arrivals and house as well as International Departures. s Bahamas Immigration and Customs and Phase 3 involved Domestic Departures and arrivals Voted Best Airport in the region. Since then that airport has been voted most improved airport in the region. I am very happy to announce that on July 9th we will be unveiling at the LPIA a completed bronze cast life-size statue rising approximately 5ft 6in tall and weighing more than a ton displaying the likeness of Sir Lynden Oscar Pindling. I had promised we would have done this on the 40th anniversary but the intricacies of the process took longer than I had anticipated. The artist was selected by a Selection Committee with established criteria. Only Bahamians could participate and the final cost of the work is \$74,000.

2) The Marsh Harbour Airport was finally completed and staffed with personnel trained by the Airport Authority

and the Department of Civil Aviation. New economic opportunities are being felt with the grant of concessions in the terminal which are due to begin within the next 60 days. This was achieved despite challenges faced in the construction which ultimately led to increased cost to the Public Treasury;

3) Solar Lights have been installed at the last remaining airports namely Mayaguana, Fresh Creek, Andros, Stella Maris, Long Island, Rum Cay and Ragged Island. This is for me very satisfying as it was this Administration which installed solar lights at 18 aerodromes during the period 2002 to 2007. This now assures that throughout our country emergency flights will take place on lighted runways, a far way from what was the order of the day of the head lights of vehicles illuminating runways for the landing of planes during medical emergencies.

4) The Mayaguana runway was reconstructed and repaved and Bahamasair flights now travel regularly to that island after a break of almost 5 years. The heads of Agreement now provides for the construction of a 4,500 sq ft terminal.

5) The Government assumed responsibility for air traffic services at the Grand Bahama International Airport in a seamless transition assuming responsibility of all controllers at the Grand Bahama International Airport;

6) Terminal redevelopment at Bimini International Airport is being completed and runway extension completed from 5,400 feet to 6,400 feet and that airport made ready in conjunction with the FAA for night flights for the first time in the history of Bimini - In April 2014

7) We have engaged, trained and strategically placed managers at several airports nationwide namely Exuma, North Eleuthera, Marsh Harbour, Treasure Cay, San Salvador and Bimini.

8) He long talked-about discussions on the Flight Information Region have progressed. There have been several meetings between our Bahamian team and the United States FAA team culminating in a meeting in Washington between the Minister of Transport in the COTB and the US Secretary of State for Transport, Secretary Fox. We are now in the stage of settling the details for an agreement for the management of our space inclusive of the issue of revenue sharing. Mr. Speaker, I believe we are on the verge of an historic moment in the life of our country.

9) We have completed or are completing several Air Service Agreement including one with People's Republic of China, Canada and other countries.

Mr. Speaker this is the first time leadership has been deployed with such expanse throughout the nation. Several of these managers already had aviation experience and those who did not received training by the Department of Civil Aviation and the Airport Authority.

By the end of this fiscal year we expect to see a completely modernized aviation sector with stream-lined separation of function so as to bring greater focus and concentration on critical areas: we expect to see a new Exuma airport construction well underway and airport redevelopment underway at airports nationwide. A new cadre of ATC's along with the our current complement of controllers will be working with a brand new radar and Controllers in training in Marsh Harbour.

We expect these measures to fundamentally stimulate economic growth in Family Island communities and

solidify and support our cherished cohesiveness as an archipelagic people.

Mr. Speaker, I am equally excited and very gratified for the work underway in the Road Traffic Department. We have a new Controller, Mr. Ross Smith, who has been in post for just a little over one year and has hit the ground running and has initiated the era of automation in the Road Traffic Department.

This process had actually commenced under the former Christie administration and was abruptly (almost violently) halted after the 2007 elections.

The country has paid a high price for this policy decision by the former FNM administration which allowed the status quo to remain thereby further allowing the conditions for fraud and criminality and the inconvenience to the Bahamian people to persist and the fuelling of frustration and anger for users of that Department. The Bahamas was set back.

I must confess that I was very interested that in all of these circumstances that the member for East Grand Bahama chose this issue to inject innuendo in his contribution last week.

Mr. Speaker, the tendering process for this project was addressed by the Member for Golden Isles. He advised that a Committee representing technical officers from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Transport and the Road Traffic Department presided over the selection process. He described the process as open and transparent"

The entire process from beginning to end was led and overseen by the Ministry of Finance.

The selected company was Data Torque and a contract was signed on 20th May. It was a prerequisite as it is generally in this Government and certainly in my Ministry that the New Zealand firm must provide for Bahamian participation in the project.

As a consequence Data Torque contracted Network Security Consulting Group, a firm owned by a young Bahamian information technology specialist, Mr. Damarios Cash.

The contract calls for a solution design, technical specification, change management, development and implementation of solution design, testing of the system, system documentation and procurement of hardware.

The automated system is to be secure and to provide a higher and more efficient level of service to the Bahamian people, with all stations connected to a central system. Persons in Inagua will have the same level of service as those in New Providence. Data Torque had the prior experience of initiating similar networks systems in other archipelagic countries. The new system will also be integrated with key partners - such as the Royal Bahamas Police Force Police, Insurance Companies, Bahamas Customs, the Courts, Banks, etc .

The Government has contracted a Bahamian firm by the name of Smart Consulting to provide project Management over the course of this process.

Mr. Speaker,

The value of the contract is \$8.3 million.

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that the process of automation of the Road Traffic Department is already underway and is expected to take approximately 18 months. We expect that roughly by the end of next year the Road Traffic Department should be fully automated creating a more customer friendly service environment with greatly enhanced levels of efficiency. And I am pleased that in effecting this groundbreaking advance we have not only utilized Bahamians but talented young Bahamians.

Now Mr. Speaker, I do not intend to spend too much time on the Member for East Grand Bahama. He stood on his feet and asserted to the Bahamian people that the amount of this contract was "extraordinary". When he was asked how much the contract should be for the scope of works he said a remarkable thing namely "I do not have a clue". Yet he would seek to create innuendo without any basis whatsoever. Talking off the top of his head as we say in The Bahamas. And then he asserts that the people of East Grand Bahama sent him here to do that. I have met many of the good people of East Grand Bahama. I know they sent him here but I do not think they sent him here to do that. But I will speak more on this kind of slack practice later in my presentation.

In the meantime I am very pleased that we will be able very soon to deliver a standard and quality of service to the Bahamian people that they are deserving of and which is long overdue.

Mr. Speaker,

The work of the Committee established to oversee and cause for the creation of a Unified Bus System continues. The latest issue for their consideration has been the question of valuation of the public transport industry in New Providence and the Report in this regard which was undertaken by a local accounting firm has been completed. This Report is now the subject of scrutiny and dialogue within the Committee with a view to reaching a consensus and moving on to the next stage which is determining the structure or model that the new system will take. It is my view that the Committee which also comprises industry stakeholders are committed to reaching the objective of a unified bus system.

We have agreed in principle, however, in the interim to the creation of a pilot programme of a specifically designed route which will recreate many of the features we can expect to see in a transformed public transport system. We are aiming to implement that pilot project within the next several months and in any event as soon as the framework has been completed and agreed by the Committee.

In the meanwhile the Controller has put in place a much stricter inspection regime so as to ensure basic minimum standards on public transport buses. This includes a prohibition on enhanced sound equipment installed in public transport buses. He continues to hold Court every Friday to deal with infractions by operators in the industry. I remind the public that a hotline is in operation to receive complaints or to register concerns at 322-7623.

The review of the Road Traffic Act has been completed and the Road Traffic Department is working with the Office of the Attorney General to finalize a draft Bill which I hope to bring to Parliament before the end of this year. This has been a major undertaking and has been the subject of consultation with a wide range of public and private stakeholders. The legislation will provide a modern framework for ground transportation both public and private so as to promote order and enhance safety on our streets.

Mr. Speaker to build capacity for regulatory oversight and enforcement we have recruited additional supervisors

for the Road Traffic Department and this has enabled a fortified presence in peak areas. There have been several training initiatives within the Department.

Mr. Speaker, the sustained levels of traffic fatalities continue to wreak havoc in this country. The Road Traffic Department has accelerated its efforts to disseminate public education in schools, in various workplaces, in churches. In an effort to protect the most vulnerable of road users namely small children in school zones the Department in conjunction with the Ministry of Education has trained and put in place crossing guards at Yellow Elder Primary, E P Roberts Primary, Columbus Primary, Albury Sayles Primary, CW Sawyer Primary and Carmichael Primary. Additionally an audit of all pedestrian crossings at all schools in New Providence has been undertaken and provided to the Ministry of Works for urgent action as it relates to deficiencies.

The 50% duty exemption for taxis and other public service vehicles which are pre-owned 3 years of age or less.

The RTD is now undertaking traffic studies for several small islands and cays such as Bimini, Harbour Island, Hope Town, Guana Cay and Green Turtle Cay.

The production of taxi plates is currently undertaken by the Ministry of Public Works and urban Development. Oftentimes there are issues such as insufficient materials and manpower issues. The Department is now exploring other possible avenues for the production of plates so as to avoid what has now become a chronic recurring problem.

A review of franchises is underway, after which the Department will make projections as it relates to ground transportation needs.

Maritime

Mr. Speaker, we have been working on a number of initiatives to cause for a more modern and efficient maritime administration in The Bahamas, one which is safe and secure and economically self-sustaining. There are currently some 18,000 vessels registered which include mailboats, ferries, cargo vessels, commercial vessels and pleasure craft. Despite this high volume of vessels for oversight and despite the numerous ports and marinas and docking facilities throughout the country, the Port Department is essentially manual in its administrative operations. This has obvious implications to the Port's function of oversight and as to the efficiency of collection of revenue on behalf of the Bahamian people.

Efforts are now underway to automate with the Port Department

An RFP is now being completed to invite proposals in conjunction with the Ministry of Finance for the automation of Port operations. We expect that the process will be underway within the next few months.

An enhanced regulatory framework is also underway to promote greater safety and security for all maritime activity in our country.

The Attorney General has mandated that her office bring the necessary attention to this issue with a view to laying several pieces of legislation in this House before year's end. Those various Bills include: 1) the Small Cargo vessel code which will put in place safety standards for cargo vessels and crew, masters and engineers and this

will include regulations for mailboats and amendments to the following legislation:

2· Water-skiing and Motor Boat Control Act- This legislation deals with the pleasure boating activities and general safety requirements associated with pleasure boating in The Bahamas.

- Boat Registration Act- The operation of commercial vessels operating in Bahamian waters and licensing and examination of masters for the vessels registered in accordance with this Act;
- Port Authorities Act- Act governing the management and establishment of ports, the role of the Port Department, Port Controller's Function, Ministerial powers, pilotage operations, role of the New Providence Port Authority, the operations of tugs and lighters.....This Act is outdated and needs to be revised to promote growth and development, create job opportunities and ensure safety for the ports and the coastal state.
- ISPS Code- International Ship and Port Facility Security Code implementation into national law

The revision of the law will include a revision of the principal legislation dealing with maritime and port operations and management. This major legislative intervention was borne out of a determination that we could not have two inconsistent standards on the one hand a standard for the Bahamas Maritime Authority which has on its register ships of all types and sizes from all over the world from mega cruise ships to oil tankers to reefers and on the other hand a different standard for the regime for domestic vessels in our own country.

Mr. Speaker you will recall that there have been several grounding incidents at the Eight Mile Rock anchorage

The most recent high profile incident was The Formosa grounding which was laden with the chemical allocate.

Recently Orders were laid in this Parliament declaring the Eight Mile Rock anchorage as one requiring mandatory use of Pilots. As a consequence the Port Department has been able to facilitate the re-engagement of at least 10 highly trained and qualified Bahamian pilots who had been recently displaced in Grand Bahama. We consider this the epitome of a win win situation - meeting the highest safety standards while at the same time providing new opportunities for qualified young Bahamians.

Mr. Speaker we are now seeking to address the issue of the aged tug vessels which manage ship movements primarily in Nassau Harbour and Clifton Pier. The Amberjack which is perhaps more than 30 years of age, the larger of the two tugs has just completed dry docking. The Port Department issued an RFP for INSERT

Mr. Speaker to cause for greater enforcement capability in the monitoring and oversight of jet skis and other commercial watersport activity my Ministry is in the process of hiring 10 enforcement officers

The current budget has allocations in both the Port Department Budget and the Ministry of Works and Urban Development Budget for dock remediation in New Providence and throughout the country.

The allocation includes works for the Prince George Dock which has already been the subject of continuing capital works including dredging and the replacement of fenders and the repair and replacement of bollards.

Mr. Speaker in building our own national capacity in the maritime sector we have placed a serious emphasis on maritime training. This began with the formation of the Maritime Cadet Corps under the first Christie

Administration and which has become the premier youth training programme in our country over the succeeding years. Indeed out of this has come a number of maritime programmes at the College of The Bahamas and indeed the new LJM Maritime Institute.

The Bahamas Maritime Authority has been the vehicle to aggressively drive maritime training in this country and to date has trained thousands of young people in basic maritime studies and in providing STCW certification to many teenagers. Approximately \$400,000 will be spent this year in training and in scholarships to exceptional young Bahamians.

Today Bahamians are on ships in this country and all over the world as crew and as officers and engineers. I recently visited SUNY University and met with yet another crop of promising bright young people. Most recently the Member for West Grand Bahama would have spoke about the major thrust in Grand Bahama where many young Bahamians have received placement on cruise ships a thrust which the Government will continue to pursue as a matter of policy and principle. Additionally Mr. Speaker, I have assigned an officer in my Ministry to the BMA to develop a data base in conjunction with the Maritime Cadet Corps of all Bahamians who are pursuing or have pursued maritime training and to further liaise with the Bahamas Shipowners Association to procure placement of our young Bahamians on their diverse ships which are plying commercially all over the world.

The Port has either sponsored or collaborated in training for currently serving maritime professionals including those employed in the Port Department. Most recently workshops were held on the Marine Pollution legislation, and on the conduct of investigations into maritime accidents and incidents

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry has determined that trained leadership will be brought and structured Port Administrations established as far as possible throughout the country. This is necessary for ensuring standards of safety are in place for maritime activity in the respective communities including ferries and for the proper collection of revenue for the public purse

To this end we are in the process of establishing and manning a port administration in Exuma and North Eleuthera and in Fresh Creek, Andros. We have already established leadership in Bimini and new leadership in Grand Bahama and Marsh Harbour ports.

Mr. Speaker one of the major ports in our country is the Potters Cay Dock which berths vessels engaged in domestic trade and commerce and includes mailboats and fishing vessels. I am pleased to advise that a long-overdue revitalization of that facility is underway as we speak. The redevelopment process is to take place in three phases

The First Phase seeks to provide the following:

- Improved traffic flow onto and off Potter's Cay by means of constructing wider turning radii, realignment entry point (near Maud St.) and constructing new entry/exit point (near William St.).
- Additional parking spaces (approx. 109 spaces) to replace parking on causeway.
- New Boardwalk w/ Handrail

- New Sidewalks
- Improved landscaping
- improved drainage system

The Second Phase (Potter's Cay Dock (east side)) seeks to provide:

- Bulkhead curbing around the edge of the dock
- Defined layout of roadway on the dock w/ thermoplastic striping
- Designated parking spaces for drop-off and pick-up of freight
- New sidewalks
- New landscape planters

The Third Phase (Causeway & Buildings) seeks to provide:

- Extension to the Fish & Farm Store for freight holding
- Construction of a Passenger waiting facility w/ bathrooms
- Security Booth
- Decorative sidewalks along the causeway
- Improved drainage system on the causeway

Mr. Speaker, in my first Budget presentation in 2002 I spoke to the need to develop a maritime policy to underpin our sustainable exploitation and more enlightened management of our ocean resources. From that day the process has been in train first with the assistance of experts from the Commonwealth Secretariat working with our local experts and domestic stakeholders which involved meetings throughout our island nation. A draft Policy has been completed and the final phase is a meeting with stakeholders to determine the key priority areas identified in the policy and the creation of an implementation plan with timelines. I am pleased to say that some of the deliverables are already underway. Mr. Speaker this important work will be an invaluable tool to the development of the national plan. Our marine resources hold untold potential for economic diversification in areas such as industry, science and technology and energy.

Mr. Speaker, we have much work to do in the Post Office Institution. A fundamental undertaking is the automation of the Post Office operations including the Savings Bank. I am grateful to say that that work began in earnest yesterday.

I am also pleased to say Mr. Speaker that the commercialization of the Post Office is being initiated in the establishment of services with an international Fast Mail and Package company. The final legal framework is being undertaken by the Office of the Attorney General.

Mr. Speaker the Met Department is a small but critical feature of governance in our country. The Main Objectives of that Department are to:

- maintain, extend and improve the quality of meteorological service throughout The Bahamas;
- provide public good services and commercial services to all citizens and the general public of The Bahamas;
- ensure the ongoing collection of meteorological data throughout The Bahamas for use by current and future generations;
- be the long-term custodian of a reliable national climatological record;
- fulfil the international obligations of the Government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas under the Convention of the World Meteorological Organization;
- fulfil the international obligations of the Government of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas under the Convention of the International Civil Aviation Organization;
- provide services that are sensitive to the demographic realities of The Bahamas; and
- fulfil such other weather-related national and international obligations as the Minister may direct.

The Department therefore is focusing on

- Training and re-training of Meteorological Officers to ensure competence to pass quality management standards as set and will be set by WMO and ICAO for Aviation;
- Populate the Department with sufficient trained and qualified staff to prevent staff shortages that have existed for over 15 years;
- Develop the Freeport Met Office to be a backup hub for Nassau; You will note this critical component in the meteorological network was shut down by the previous administration and reopened in 2012 by this administration
- Better and more timely maintenance and repair of the AWOSs and AWS network - which is essential to more accurate forecasting and identification of Severe Weather;
- Proper Database for the storage and instant retrieval of Meteorological and Climatological Data Sets - at present the process is too slow and disjointed and Forecasters do not have access to the Data which is stored only in the Climate Section.
- Make all of the Forecasters and Climatologists more visible (and thus the Department) - through heightened involvement and participation in Disaster Management trainings, workshops, meetings, talks, etc as hosted by NEMA, USAID/OFDA, CDEMA.
- Ultimately to acquire A Doppler Weather Radar for the SE Bahamas - is as essential as it is for the Central

and NW Bahamas which have coverage and thus much, much better forecasting and severe weather identification.

- Mr. Speaker, the engagement of 6 new officers is underway, 5 are to be engaged as Observers and one forecaster for the Freeport Office. They will all eventually be sent to the Caribbean Institute of Meteorology and Hydrology in Barbados to attend the Meteorological Observers Training Course for World Meteorological Organization certification.
- Over this last fiscal year the Met Department has acquired Munro anemometer systems which have the capability of giving instantaneous wind directions and speed forecast to the Forecast Office and Control Tower simultaneously

Installed of Automatic Weather Observers stations at Bimini International Airport

Installed of emergency management weather information network systems at locations in Spanish Wells Harbour Island and Rock Sound.

Over the next fiscal year the Department will install 3 new sea level monitoring systems. It will

1. Replace and upgrade AWOSs in Exuma, Mayaguana, Crooked Island and Inagua
2. Install newly acquired Sea Level Monitoring Stations in Nassau, Lee Stocking Island in the Exumas and in Inagua. These Sea Level Monitoring Stations will enhance the Department's capability to accurately measure the sea level, as well as monitoring sea level rising around The Bahamas.

Many of our nation's scientists are housed in this Department and we continue to build capacity by the recruitment of our finest and brightest young Bahamians We have made some notable achievements .

Some progress made include:

- 1) Two US farriers visited in January. While here they shod a number of surrey horses at the rest area and provided some training to the surrey drivers and owners on proper foot care for the horses.
- 2) Two surrey drivers have been provided scholarships and are attending a specialized farrier school to learn how to shoe horses properly. this is expected to not only improve the shoeing of the surrey horses but also is expected to allow other horse owners and stables to locally receive quality foot care as currently some are still bringing in foreign farriers to shoe their horses. They are expected to return this month.
- 3) Increasing the fares charged by the surrey operators after more than 47 years from \$6.00 per hour or 50 cents

per mile to \$15.00 for adults and \$10.00 for children. As the surreys are allowed to carry a maximum of 2 adults and 2 children fourteen year old or younger. This means that surrey operators can receive up to \$50.00 per ride if they carry the maximum number of persons. This is important in establishing the industry on a sound financial basis as the previous fare was woefully inadequate and obviously encouraged the owners and drivers to violate the law by charging more than was.

4) The pipes and water dispensers for the surrey horses at the rest area have been repaired and the horses are now able to drink what they need when they need it, especially on hot summer days.

5) An Enforcement Sub-committee has been established and has met to improve the coordination and communication between the Cab Board and the agencies involved with enforcement. The Sub-committee is seeking to include the provisions related to the surrey violations to the ticket book used by the police so as to make it easier for the police to enforce the Act.

6) Identification of a possible site for a communal stable for the surrey horses. This is a critical first step in developing this idea into reality to ensure the proper care of the surrey horses. A number of challenges remain including developing a plan, finding the funding and developing a management plan to establish it as a sustainable entity.

7) the Port department has improved its system of providing Port identification badges. this will ensure that only persons working in the industry are allowed in the area at the Port where the surreys are.

There is a lot more that needs to be done in order to re-establish the surrey industry as a "brand" for the tourism industry.

We have come a long way in addressing many of the challenges resulting from years of neglect

Mr. Speaker:

This is my thirteenth year of contributing to the national Budget Debate of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. 8 years on this side in government and 5 years on the other side in opposition

I have been privileged to do so through the auspices of the people of the Englerston Constituency, who elected me to stand in this place.

I am acutely cognizant that this privilege is not for my self-enjoyment but a manifest obligation and duty based

upon Trust to carry out my function with a high degree of responsibility.

I am grateful to the people of Englerston for delegating to me their Voice in this Honourable House.

Mr. Speaker, during my years of service in this House I have sought to be faithful to the ideals of the Progressive Liberal Party.

It will be no surprise to say I am greatly disappointed in what appears to me to be a most casual practice on the part of some: engaging in advocacy which but for the rules of the House would be deemed defamatory as it relates to the character and contribution of other members.

This seems for some to be almost the order of the day for some in these proceedings.

Mr. Speaker, It does not take much to throw mud.

Indeed almost any fool can do that.

I was reading somewhere recently a quote which said that one of the easiest things in the world to do is to incite fear and anger: I see a lot of that happening in this House by the all too frequent gratuitous assertions and the baseless innuendoes.

But I have a question for those who seem to motivated by this style of politics:

Can you Inspire a people?

Do you have Ideas about your country that can Stimulate a people to Action?

We can all pander to what we think are populist ideas simply because we think it will go down well with members of the electorate and for that reason only. We can all, if we were so inclined, speak out of both sides of our mouths in the hope the Bahamian people will not figure it out.

And We can all seek to simply exploit the fears and concerns of our population because it is an easy horse to ride.

But is that truly what leadership is about?

Do you have a vision for your country or is your specialty calling someone a "teef"?

Mr. Speaker, we know that Bahamians have gone through a very difficult period in the last several years: many have suffered extreme hardship: people have lost their businesses: people have lost their homes: people have had to pull their children out of private schools or University because their resources have dried up.

We have seen sustained levels of violence for many years: many are wounded and hurting having lost loved ones, children and fathers and mothers.

Many have been pushed further into poverty with all of the attendant misery.

All of these may be political issues but they are not political footballs.

This is especially so when we know that there is no member in this House who can claim that they are politically disassociated from these negative phenomena.

I am particularly amused when I see some of those opposite with sincere faces (especially on TV) espousing on these matters with apparent purity of heart.

Mr. Speaker I know it is alleged that Bahamians have short memories but it was just 3 years ago that they were in office and we as a people saw some things including the acceleration of violent crime and homicide in particular: we saw the crash of our economy and the thousands of people displaced through loss of employment: the many people who lost their homes and businesses.

Now we see the armchair experts who the Bahamian people voted out of office proselytizing on every issue. As many people would say "You gotta love politics!"

We hear the Member for Central Grand Bahama list off exhaustively the construction projects 2007 to 2012 in what he says was the modernization of The Bahamas but while they were in a building frenzy Bahamians were falling through the cracks. Indeed I remember standing in this place and telling the then Prime Minister that while he was allegedly taking the country forward he was leaving his people behind. It was during this period of modernization that we saw record unemployment numbers, a jump in juvenile crime by 80%, a decline in Education, an increase in poverty and a massive spurt in crime and violence.

Mr. Speaker I would bet my bottom dollar that most Bahamians are fed up with the Noise and the Belligerence and the Profiling and are looking for solutions at a time when our country is facing challenges on so many fronts.

We should be cautious in how we wish to ride the political horse.

Indeed, I believe the highly-charged political environment and its concomitant divisive energies are the last thing that our people want at this time.

As a rule I veer away from a preoccupation with my political opponents. They are not my focus.

Unless of course I have been put into a position where I must defend myself or defend the truth.

In Government I am very aware of my duty to account to the people of The Bahamas for my stewardship.

I do not take it lightly, therefore, when a member in this House through snide and slack comments seeks to create innuendo which no matter how you pretty it up or try to legitimize it through allegedly lofty purpose is essentially in its nature Vicious.

I repeat Mr. Speaker, we can all engage in this kind of thing against our opponents if we were completely out of ideas or if our approach to leadership is simply to inspire hatred and fear.

In truth such behaviour is irresponsible and in my view falls short of the high standards we are expected to exhibit in this House.

Mr. Speaker, that is not my style. I seek to incite confidence and stir up patriotism and stimulate love.

I am not saying that one should not criticize but you need to bring more to the table than just that, otherwise you are engaging in kindergarten politics at a time when our country is in a big league reality.

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the focus that is brought in this budget to my constituency by virtue of the announced duty exemption of building materials in certain communities. This initiative is to incite and stimulate physical redevelopment and renewal. I am grateful for the focus and the allocation of resources to create meaningful employment for our young people, many of whom live in the Englerston constituency and who are anxious to play their role in the mainstream of our national economy.

Mr. Speaker, I end as I began. We have a great country. We have challenges but we cannot become challenged as a country because of this. This place belongs to all of us black, white, healthy, sick, rich, poor, bus driver, farmer, doctor, lawyer, disable, able bodied, people of all ethnic origins.

Thanks to the Ministry of Transport, Permanent Secretary, Directors, Controller, Consultants, rank and file - exemplary service and contribution.

I ask the people of Englerston and Bahamians everywhere to hold faith in your country. We are working very hard to build a better and stronger Bahamas. This Bahamas our beloved Bahamaland.
