

## **REMARKS**

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**YAMACRAW BRANCH MONTHLY MEETING**

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### **SALUTATIONS**

On the minds of most Bahamians are the pressing issues of crime and the state of the economy, especially the ongoing negotiations with Baha Mar which has far reaching economic implications for our beloved country.

The slow road to our Nation economic recovery could be likened to the agreement to bail out Greece when one considers the state in which the FNM left the economy of The Bahamas back in 2012. Dr. Hubert Minnis likened it to a very sick patient confined to a wheel chair, unable to stand or walk.

Much heavy lifting was mandatory by the Christie Government to keep The Bahamas out of the hands of the International Monetary Fund.

Fiscal reform was necessary to eliminate the huge budget deficits year after year and to put our fiscal house in order. The decisions were tough and unpopular but your PLP made the tough decisions.

Gaming reform was necessary as the \$700 million unregulated gaming industry threatened the country's second largest industry, financial services. That decision was also tough and unpopular but your PLP rolled up its sleeve and made the tough decisions in the best interest of all Bahamians.

The challenge of Baha Mar is nothing to the PLP as we built the modern Bahamas on a foundation of tough decisions.

### **Baha Mar Bankruptcy filing**

I offer a brief synopsis on this issue only because of the amount of misinformation in the public domain.

In the midst of an international commercial and trade dispute involving a foreign investor, a foreign contractor and a foreign bank, I applaud the government for remaining the neutral referee, focusing on the interests of the Bahamian employees and the international reputation of The Bahamas. Notwithstanding the large sums of monies owed to government agencies such as the Ministry of Finance on Real Property Tax, the Gaming Board and BEC, the government has used monies owed to Baha Mar to pay the salaries of Bahamian workers because it was not going to allow the developer to use Bahamian workers as pawns in his scheme to litigate crown land in a foreign jurisdiction. Also, the Bahamas government has invested more than \$1 billion in tax concessions to the developers and Bahamian creditors are owed over \$100 million in goods and services provided to Baha Mar therefore the fate of the property could not be litigated in a foreign jurisdiction; it is a matter of national sovereignty.

The current commercial dispute between three private entities contractually obligated to each other is highly unfortunate, but governments must intervene to protect the public interest.

The latest salvo is that Baha Mar moved for an adjournment in the Supreme Court to pursue an out of court settlement. A government delegation led by Attorney General

Allyson Maynard-Gibson is in China seeking a negotiated settlement. The government will update Justice Ian Winder on the progress made tomorrow the 14<sup>th</sup> and the court case continues on Monday the 20<sup>th</sup> July.

I only add that Sol Kersner Atlantis underwent chapter 11 bankruptcy protections in early 2012 only to emerge with a new managing partner and to continue operations so this is nothing new for The Bahamas. I remain confident and optimistic that Baha Mar will be completed and opened as the Riviera of the Caribbean by years end.

But where is Dr. Hubert Minnis in the midst of all of this? He was upstaged not twice but three times. The Chamber of Commerce and the Employers' Confederation have given on the Baha Mar matter and have written both Sarkis and the Prime Minister.

Brent Symonette publicly defended the sovereignty of The Bahamas and the dignity of Bahamians. Even Hubert Ingraham in a rare demonstration of diplomacy wrote to the China EXIM Bank to urge a speedy resolution to Baha Mar in the public interest. BUT NOTHING OF VALUE FROM DR MINNIS, BUT NONSENSE AND PUBLIC POSTURING LIKE A MOTLEY IN A MINSTREL SIDESHOW.

When offered a meeting with the PM for a briefing, Minnis refused, saying he had to consult. What kind of man or leader has to consult on an issue as important as Baha Mar? It is a no brainer – you simply meet because it is that important. After consulting he selected the worst time to meet – 10am on a Tuesday morning – the exact time the Cabinet meets. His timing was proof positive that he was not serious about meeting, he was simply into goofing off and could not be taken seriously. In the end he walked away from the briefing on Baha Mar. He is not being ready for the high office of Prime Minister as he has to consult with his colleagues as to whether he can meet with the PM on very important issue which will affect thousands of Bahamians. He is incapable of making sensible judgment calls; leaders are routinely required to think and make judgment calls on their feet at a moment's notice.

## **CRIME**

For those of you who were not following the news, last Wednesday, 8<sup>th</sup> July, Minister of National Security the Hon. Dr. Bernard Nottage announced that the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has approved a \$20 million loan to help The Bahamas Government in organizing various social re-engineering programmes and strategies of rehabilitation to help fight crime in the country.

According to the Minister, the anti-crime initiative will have four components:

The first component seeks to improve behaviours for non-violent conflict resolution in New Providence by applying differentiated evidence-based interventions.

The second component aims to help at-risk youths find jobs through training and employability programmes.

The third component seeks to strengthen the administration of justice through an integrated electronic system for case management and the introduction of innovative dispute resolution mechanisms among other programs.

The fourth component seeks to better help reintegrate offenders into society through activities such as the design and implementation of a comprehensive rehabilitation model and a curriculum built on evidence-based practices.

This in addition to \$20 million the government has allocated to fighting at-risk behavior, lack of academic performance in the public school system. The program involves a tracking system, job training and job placement in an attempt to address the unacceptably high rate of youth unemployment, improve scholastic outcomes, and fight some of the root causes of crime.

So in the upcoming fiscal year, the government has allocated an additional \$40 million to addressing youth unemployment, truancy and crime.

Three of our brothers were killed over the Independence weekend bringing the total of murders to 80 for the year. I have expressed this before and I do so again. I am very concerned about the unacceptably high levels of crime which is and should be of great interest to all Bahamians and residents of our beloved Bahamian and especially the proliferation of illegal guns on our streets.

My research has disclosed that more than 500 million military style hand - held weapons exist now - enough to arm every 12th human on earth - and millions more are produced each year, reports a new World watch study released recently. Violence fed by the uncontrolled spread of these weapons is further destabilizing societies already ravaged by war, poverty, and environmental degradation.

For our part, I applaud and fully support the saturation patrols by our police force; the newly formed marine division of the Customs Department to more effectively fight fraud; Operation Sandy Bottom; the new school tracking system for truant and wayward students; the small arms treaty we signed onto at the United Nations; the continued work of OTBAT; and the amended letters of agreement signed between the governments of The Bahamas and the United States in the fight against transnational criminality including drugs, weapons and human trafficking in addition to drug treatment.

In light of the startling availability of hand-held weapons I am obliged to ask the following question: "are we swinging against the tide on the very vexing and disturbing

problem of the Proliferation of Guns?" Personally, I was not aware of the magnitude and would venture a guess that neither does the general public. Clearly there is a compelling need to educate the public. A bold and demonstrable message must be sent to those who trade and use illegal guns.

I sought the approval of the National General Council of our Party on the following anti-crime proposals last month's meeting and with your kind leave I wish to repeat the same in this place:

- A minimum of 10-15 years in jail with the loss of 50 to 75% of all personal assets on conviction of the possession of an illegal firearm.
- 25 years to life in jail for conviction of possession of a high powered machine gun and the loss of 90% of all personal assets.

In addition to the role of the government within the realm of public policy and the legislation of new laws, every citizen must do more to expose the criminals that lurk in the shadows and are shielded by some of us. They are our families, friends, associates and neighbours and we must take a zero tolerance approach to criminality if we are to conquer this scourge.

Yamacraw, consider the following:

A willful criminal act comes from a Criminal Mind, built by the same social process as the Respectful or the Ethical Mind, yet the results are often different. In his book *The Naïve Agenda*, local thespian Patrick Rahming sums up the path of destruction taken by criminals and its harrowing impact on Bahamian society, and I quote:

***"...the children of the so called 'Peaceful Revolution have taken up arms, and are spreading terror evenly across the sociopolitical spectrum, with daily reports of machine gun attacks, rapes and other violent episodes, leaving the Bahamian society confused, frustrated and frightened."***

At some point our brothers, sisters, friends and neighbours took a wrong turn in their life's journey only to come into conflict with the law and this is why a program such as Urban Renewal is so important. I believe that social re-engineering in addition to a national culture of intolerance would go a long way in breaking the back of crime.

### **National Development Plan**

Many of us in this room have been critical of the way the country is being developed and were calling for a National Development Plan with specific economic, educational and sociological markers to measure our rate and quality of development. The government is now developing a plan and I implore you leaders to become a part of the consultative process and let your voices be heard loud and clear.

### **Immigration Policy**

I wish that people who comment on national issues such as our immigration policy do not cause injury to our international reputation by making careless and unfounded characterizations. For example, there is no evidence that the country's immigration policies are "xenophobic" or insular in any way. To the contrary, large numbers of expatriot workers exist in and build our national economy. I however concede that there is a capacity challenge where applications for work and spousal permits take too long to be processed. I do applaud the government for its aggressive enforcement efforts and for solving the vexing problem of statelessness through relevant legislation.

### **BTC downsizing**

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is duplicitous for a leader to agree to a shareholder agreement which empowers Cable & Wireless to downsize employees and outsource services as it sees fit without government approval, only to call a downsizing exercise "inhumane." This is double talk. As a board member, I can say that the government, BTC

management and the union continue to work together for the best possible outcome for the workers there.

BTC hosted a press conference today at 4pm to update the media on the status of the latest announced redundancies.

Ladies and gentlemen, I have saved the best for last as I salute your three time honourable member the Minister of Social Services and Community Development Melanie Griffin. She has been an attentive and responsive representative as well as an advocate for the poor, the disabled and children. Her work to reform the social assistance, safety net program with conditional cash transfer system have injected dignity in the way the government deals with its most vulnerable population. She has advanced legislation to protect children and the disabled in addition to signing onto a United Nations Charter on people living with disability. Her work is laudable.

When she sent dethroned and sent the FNM Queen Janet Bostwick into retirement, she never looked back. She has delivered a cut behind to Dion Foulkes in 2012 will do it again - be it Dion Foulkes, Heather Hunt or whoever the FNM sends into Yamacraw.

I ask you to continue to show your support for Mrs. Griffin as she carries the banner for the PLP in 2017.

Thank you again for your kind invitation and good evening to all.