

Statement by
Rt. Hon. Hubert A. Ingraham
Member of Parliament for North Abaco

On Thursday past I submitted my letter of resignation as a Member of the Honourable House of Assembly to the Speaker of the House of Assembly to take effect on the 31 August of this year. This will bring to a close 35 years of public life during which I strove to be an agent for change for better for all our citizens.

It has been a long journey; one filled not only with the highs of victory and accomplishment but also with the lows of defeat, dismissal from Cabinet in 1984, and recent defeat at the polls for the party I led. In office, I always did my best. And I worked tirelessly.

I was truly a political nobody when, at the age of 25, I was selected by the then Leader of the governing party to manage the re-election campaign of my predecessor as the Member of Parliament for Coopers Town.

Then at 28, I was elected National Chairman of the governing party. The next year, in 1977 at 29, I was elected the Member of Parliament for the constituency I now represent.

Of the 15 individuals elected to the House of Assembly for the first time that year, only I and the Member for Centreville remain in this place.

We do not have a long list of resignations – only six since 1976. Two of these were former Heads of Government, Sir Roland Symonette and the Rt. Hon. Sir Lynden Pindling; two went on to become

Governors-General – Sir Clifford Darling and Sir Orville Turnquest. The others left for other reasons.

In 2002, after serving two consecutive terms as head of government, I voluntarily demitted office, having, thus far, been the only prime minister since independence to do so.

When in 2005 and 2007 respectively, my party and the Bahamian people invited me to serve again in high office I honoured these requests.

Having failed in leading my party to secure a renewal of a mandate to serve as the Government of The Bahamas in the recent general election, I elected to observe a long-held custom of various parliamentary democracies.

While many will comment now and into the future on the reasons for my party's loss, I accept full and unreserved responsibility for our defeat.

Accordingly, I decided to resign both as Leader of my party, and my seat in this Chamber. Again, history will record that I am the first defeated prime minister in an independent Bahamas to do so.

By leaving at this time, I wanted to afford my party the opportunity to move forward with new leadership and a fresh start. I remain confident in the future success of the Free National Movement.

I congratulate the governing party on its recent election victory. Our system works best and is most vibrant when the minority accepts the electoral victory of the majority, and agrees to cooperate with, though not always agree with, the majority, in the service of the common good.

Inherent in this acceptance of the right and responsibility of the majority to govern, is a necessary reciprocity. This reciprocal responsibility required of the majority, is that the minority will be treated fairly, and that their rights will be respected and not infringed upon.

I also remain confident that the ideals and customs of this House and of our democracy will flourish, nurtured by the good men and women who serve here, a free press, a strong civil society, and an eternally vigilant people, in whose House of Assembly it has been my privilege to serve.

I came to the House of Assembly a driven and highly motivated young man. I had no expectation of reaching the heights to which I ascended, and really only desired to be the best representative possible for North Abaco.

Having been born in Pine Ridge, Grand Bahama and raised in the humblest of circumstances in Coopers Town, Abaco my earliest experience of life was without the most basic of amenities.

I was, after all, a product of a Family Island community which got its water from open wells, pumps and rainwater tanks, lighted the night with kerosene lamps, had no paved roads and no telephones, and where education was limited to what was available at an All Age School that did not go beyond Grade 9.

Notwithstanding its economic poverty, the community of North Abaco was rich beyond measure in so many ways. It became my inspiration, instilling in me lessons of industry, self-reliance, fortitude, community, an honest day's work and a life-long commitment to helping others.

I am grateful to and for all those in that community who saw in me a potential to effect change in our society, who guided me to become politically involved and who brought me to the attention of the powers-that-be affording me the opportunity for involvement at the national level.

I vividly recall my first speech in the House. It was about governmental neglect of the Family Islands. I will publish it someday along with a number of other speeches. I trust that these speeches will offer a record of my aspirations and accomplishments on behalf of the Bahamian people.

The story of my disenchantment with the political party of my youth is a matter of public record. I was summarily dismissed from Cabinet and denied a nomination for re-election. I further endured expulsion from the party of my youth when most of those who now represent that party had not yet attracted attention on the national stage.

I am forever indebted to the good people of North Abaco for keeping faith with me and for supporting me as I matured in my political life.

I am humbled but at the same time proud to have remained their parliamentary choice through eight consecutive elections: twice as a PLP, once as an independent and five times as an FNM. This is a singular distinction for me. I can never adequately express my thanks to the people of North Abaco for their confidence, loyalty and support.

It is impossible for me to reflect on my life of service without speaking of my grandmother, Mama Lizzie. Her dream and faith in The Bahamas, her belief in my ability to achieve, and her dedication to raising me to be honest, hardworking and loyal are central to all that I have ever been.

I was only able to add chapters to my Bahamian story because of the early chapters of that story which Mama helped me to write. My story is inextricably tied to hers, and to that of the Bahamian people.

Expelled from the party of my youth -- but if anything more fiercely committed to deeply-held principles of democracy, honesty, accountability, justice and fair play -- I was fortunate to find kindred spirits and a new political home in the Free National Movement.

In May, 1990, I was elected Leader of that Party. Two years later we successfully won the Government of The Bahamas ushering in sweeping changes which would deepen our democracy and modernize and transform our country.

History will record that the electoral victory of the Free National Movement in 1992 was a reaffirmation of the promises of nationhood, inclusive of greater freedom and economic opportunity.

In the years after August, 1992, every Bahamian boy and girl, Bahamians of every race and class, from every walk of life, of every political affiliation, and in every island of our archipelago, bar none, believed that they could enjoy the full, unfettered benefits of citizenship.

The Government led by the Free National Movement changed The Bahamas forever.

Our policies and programmes introduced the era of Government in the Sunshine; government committed to accountability, transparency and good governance in all its dealings.

We liberated the airwaves making it possible for Bahamians to enjoy the fullest expression of freedom of speech in a democracy deepened by open, free, private broadcasting for the first time. In freeing the airwaves we created a new and vibrant business sector that

produced new business and job opportunities for hundreds of persons now engaged in private radio and television broadcasting.

We facilitated the introduction of modern communications including cable television and the internet, advancing the benefits of the information age to our country. Today, our Information Communications & Technology (ICT) sector, including radio, television, telecommunications and the internet, is fully privatized and regulated by an independent body – the Utilities Regulatory and Competition Authority (URCA), created by my Government.

We computerized the public sector. We reached new milestones in the reduction of bureaucracy and improvement in the delivery of services to the general public including application for and issuance of business licences, drivers' and vehicular licences and machine-readable passports.

We sought to and largely achieved our goal to limit the ability of politicians to exercise discretion in granting permits and licenses connected to private business by establishing clear rules and criteria. As a result, nowadays, individuals seeking permits and licenses from the Government simply demonstrate that they meet the required criteria and they are granted business licences – for shops and restaurants, radio and television – *inter alia* without recourse to political influence.

We modernized the Customs Department bringing it to international best practices standards, rationalizing our tariff system lowering average customs duty rates from 45 percent to 25 percent, reducing the number of duty rates from 120 to 20, and substantially expanding duty free import of bread basket and essential foods, medicines and goods required for the care of infants and the elderly.

We introduced 24/7 comprehensive e-government in The Bahamas permitting on-line payment of government fees and taxes.

We reduced the size of the House of Assembly by 11 seats, the minimum allowable under the Constitution. We caused the proceedings of the House to be carried live via Cable television and radio, and we conducted well-organized, hassle-free elections on each occasion it fell to us to organize general elections.

We established a resident Court of Appeal and extended the Supreme Court to Grand Bahama and caused the construction of the Garnet Levarity Judicial Centre in Grand Bahama.

We initiated some of the most progressive legislative reforms in the history of The Bahamas, inclusive of reforms to business, finance, electoral, judicial and social legislation.

We established in law that all children have two parents, abolished the laws regarding primogenitor and dower rights and provided for the children of intestate parents to inherit equally regardless of their sex and for surviving spouses to inherit the matrimonial home.

We enhanced and increased social welfare programmes for the neediest in our society including widows and orphans and increased both contributory and non-contributory old age pensions. We increased NIB benefits payments for maternity, sickness, industrial injury and funeral benefits. And, we put in place regulations requiring automatic periodic adjustments to NIB benefits payments.

We established The Bahamas Investment Authority (BIA), a one-stop shop for investing in The Bahamas, and introduced and published a transparent National Investment Policy that has endured for two

decades, facilitating historic levels of investment inflows to The Bahamas.

BIA, together with the Bahamas Financial Services Promotion Board, organized and coordinated fruitful joint public-private investment promotion tours which I led to Japan, Hong Kong and China in Asia; to the important western European economies including the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Italy and Switzerland; to Brazil, Argentina, and Chile in Latin America; and to Canada and the United States of America.

We privatized areas of the economy better operated by the private sector most notably in hotel ownership and operations, and in telecommunications.

We reinvigorated and re-invented our tourism sector, introducing themed resorts beginning with the development of Atlantis on Paradise Island, which transformed our most important economic sector and created new levels of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, income and wealth for Bahamians. And, many additional small and boutique hotels, bone-fishing lodges and guest houses were significantly incentivized on our watch.

We made the redevelopment of Baha Mar Resort in Cable Beach possible and won agreement for the award of \$400 million in contracts to Bahamian contractors on the project.

We modernized the financial services sector, strengthening its regulation and oversight and hence safeguarding it against increasing threats from international regulatory bodies.

We created the Securities Commission and The Bahamas Securities Exchange (BISX) and unleashed the potential of a greater

Shareholding Society. And, today thousands of Bahamians are owners of shares in profitable businesses -- previously the sanctum of the Government and a small select group -- most notably including the Bank of The Bahamas, Cable Bahamas, and the new Port at Arawak Cay.

We accelerated diversification in the economy, making the dream of container transshipment a reality and further facilitated the development of the ship and high-end yacht care and repair industry in Freeport.

We extended the Business Licence and Real Property Tax concessions under the terms of the Hawksbill Creek Agreement.

We deepened Bahamian ownership in the economy, facilitating the acquisition of fee simple title to Crown Land and government-owned land for thousands of Bahamians.

We regularized the unauthorized occupation of Crown and government land by thousands of Bahamians in New Providence and on virtually every Family Island.

And, we demolished a number of shanty-towns, developed without authorization, on Crown and Government owned land around New Providence and replaced them with affordable built houses for Bahamians. Thousands more Bahamians became home-owners for the first time facilitated by the economic expansion which our policies made possible.

We introduced elected Local Government in the Family Islands, deepening and expanding our democracy and fulfilling a long-deferred dream for many.

We established urban redevelopment of inner-city communities replacing dilapidated structures, creating "Rebirth Communities" and

instituting Community Policing in Over-the-Hill and other disadvantaged communities around New Providence.

We extensively upgraded our public education infrastructure including the repair, upgrade and expansion of existing schools, the construction of 13 new primary and high schools. And, we constructed the first new public libraries put into use into 26 years at Carmichael Road, East St South and Elizabeth Estates.

We introduced pre-school places for four-year-olds, and constructed the first Early Childhood Education Centre at East Street south, the latter funded partially from money coming from the reduction in the salaries of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and Members of Parliament put in place by the FNM Government.

We amended the Education Act raising the school leaving age from 14 to 16 and we computerized the government-operated school system.

We devolved the College of The Bahamas into an autonomous institution, made it free for qualifying Bahamian students, and caused an unprecedented increase in funding for tertiary education.

We created Bahamas campuses of the University of the West Indies in medicine and law naming the latter in honour of the late Hon. Eugene Dupuch.

We created the Antiquities Monuments and Museums Corporation. We created the National Art Gallery while at the same time saving and restoring an important piece of our built heritage – Villa Doyle.

We restored Collins House for use as our National Library; it presently houses the Antiquities Monuments and Museums Corporation.

We acquired premises for the future development of a National Performing Arts Theatre. We created the Junkanoo Expo.

We enhanced the work environment and terms of employment of teachers and created teaching career paths and introduced foreign language instruction beginning at primary school level.

We created the Public Hospitals Authority removing the management and administration of the three principal public hospitals outside of the public service bureaucracy. Additionally, we dramatically expanded the network of modern Community Health Clinics around the country – Coopers Town and Fox Town, Abaco; Spanish Wells; Harbour Island; Grand Bahama; Bimini; San Salvador and New Providence.

We undertook the phased transformation of the Princess Margaret Hospital into a new 21st century general hospital; the substantial redevelopment of the Rand Memorial Hospital is underway. New community hospitals are under construction in Central Abaco and in Exuma.

We instituted free prenatal care for pregnant women in all public hospitals and clinics and improved the delivery of public health services. We introduced free anti-viral treatment for HIV-positive pregnant women and subsequently extended it to all HIV-infected individuals.

We expanded and upgraded public infrastructure throughout The Bahamas including the provision of basic public utilities such as water, electricity, and land and cellular telephone to Family Island communities, some for the first time.

Today, most Family Islands have access to cable television and residents on even the most remote islands in the southern extremities of

our archipelago have access to 6 off-air television channels including ZNS. Additionally, these remote communities are gaining access to the internet via DSL services offered by the privatized Bahamas Telecommunications Company (BTC).

We significantly upgraded public service offices and accommodations including a new Customs Department Headquarters, new Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health Complexes in New Providence, a new Northern Bahamas Police Headquarters in Grand Bahama and a new international Port Facility in Marsh Harbour.

More recently, new Government Administrative Complexes were constructed in Freeport and in Central Abaco.

And, construction of the new terminal and tower at the Marsh Harbour International Airport is nearing completion.

We undertook reform of the public service, inclusive of road traffic reforms and the extension of Treasury functions to two of our major Family Islands. And, we removed colonial vestiges of gender discrimination in the public service as regards terms and benefits of employment.

We set out in a phased manner to improve remuneration for public officers, remedy salary anomalies and provide incentives to keep scarce professionally qualified officers in the public sector.

We modernized legislation governing the Royal Bahamas Police Force and undertook the sustained upgrade of police training programmes and conditions of service. We expended record sums to ensure provision of adequate vehicles and equipment and access to state-of-the-art crime fighting technologies for the Force.

We constructed a Defence Force Base at Inagua. Another Base, constructed with the assistance of European Union funding is nearing completion in Ragged Island. Additional outposts for the Defence Force were established at Grand Bahama and Abaco.

We ensured the adequate provisioning of the Royal Bahamas Defence Force, inclusive of acquiring two surveillance aircraft. And, we left in place a comprehensive, carefully thought out plan for a phased programme of expansion of the Force's fleet of vessels to assist in combating drug, gun and human trafficking; illegal migration and poaching; while bolstering the Force's capacity to respond to natural disasters.

We brought never-before-experienced transparency to our immigration processes, regularizing the immigration status of the foreign-born children and spouses of Bahamian citizens and removing the fear and uncertainty that distressed and tore apart so many families for so many years.

We regularized the status of thousands of other long-term residents of The Bahamas – teachers, doctors, nurses, prison officers, other public servants and significant investors in our economy– who had contributed and continue to contribute in meaningful ways to our development as a people and a nation through careers that spanned as many as 40 years.

We created the Immigration Detention Centre providing for the detention of non-criminal immigration detainees separate from criminally accused or convicted persons and we introduced regular and more efficient air repatriation of illegal immigrants in place of previous arduous sea repatriation exercises.

We reduced the work-week from 48 to 40 hours, introduced minimum wage in the public and private sectors, improved protections

and safety standards in the workplace, increased maternity benefits and introduced familial leave in law for the first time.

We created the Industrial Tribunal to facilitate the settlement of trade disputes.

We created the Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission (BEST) to coordinate Government's environmental policies and instituted environmental impact assessments for development projects.

We more than doubled the size of the National Park System, created and then expanded a network of marine protected areas, legislated protection of marine mammals, sharks and marine turtles, modernized legislation and regulation of the built environment making environmental impact assessments mandatory under defined circumstances, and increased the Government's subvention to the Bahamas National Trust ten-fold.

We created a permanent National Disaster Relief Unit in the Cabinet Office to coordinate the Government's response to national emergencies both natural and man-made which evolved into the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). And we established the National Disaster Relief Fund which receives financial contributions from the public, international relief agencies, foreign governments and The Bahamas Government.

We elevated The Bahamas' reputation in the global community.

Whether in attending meetings with the President of the United States at the White House, the Chinese President and Premier in Beijing, or participating in the Summits of the Americas and Caricom gatherings of Heads of Government and State, as well as numerous Commonwealth

Heads of Government meetings – we sought to advance the good name and national interests of The Bahamas.

I was honoured to bring the views of The Bahamas to the United Nations General Assembly on four occasions including addressing Special Sessions of the UNGA to mark the 50th anniversary of that premier global institution, and Special Sessions called to address: Millennium Development Goals and the health crises presented by the HIV-AIDS pandemic and by the epidemic of Chronic Non-Communicative Diseases.

We promoted and encouraged improved observance of individuals' human and personal rights and freedoms among the general population, ratifying the major International Human Rights Conventions and requiring that more than lip service is paid to the observance of human rights by law enforcement agents of the Government.

We expanded the role of The Bahamas in the international fight against the traffic in illicit narcotic and psychotropic drugs bilaterally, regionally and internationally.

We raised the international profile of The Bahamas on the environmental front increasing participation in the international meetings of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and those connected to the targets and goals set out at the Rio Summits on the Environment and in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

We had the good fortune to Chair the Conference of Heads of Government of the Caribbean Community on three occasions and to have served as President of the Annual Meetings of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund last year.

We established diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China resulting in the gift of the National Stadium, access to concessional loans for the construction of the Airport Gateway project now underway in New Providence and of the North Abaco Port and Angelfish Creek Bridge in Abaco; and, in the private sector, facilitated Chinese funding for the Baha Mar development in Cable Beach.

We substantially changed the fiscal trajectory of the country in 1992 when I first had the honour of leading an FNM Administration in Government. The previous five years had seen a doubling of the national debt. Cumulative GFS deficits for that period amounted to nearly 16 per cent of the country's GDP.

We were pleased in our first term therefore, to be able to reduce the cumulative deficit to less than 8 per cent of GDP, giving a clear and immediate signal to financial markets and the world that the fiscal slide had been arrested.

We succeeded, in our second term, in eliminating the recurrent deficit for two years, 1999/00 and 2000/01. There is no recorded history of a similar fiscal performance in an independent Bahamas.

We achieved the highest real GDP growth rate ever, 7.7% in 1998. And, we achieved the lowest unemployment rate ever, 6.9% in 2001.

The next term brought a new administration and a new fiscal reality, although the economic situation remained much the same.

We were offered another opportunity in 2007 to return the country to the path of fiscal discipline which we gladly accepted and moved straightaway to make up for lost time. We immediately heralded this return with the recording of a recurrent surplus of \$24 million in the first year. In August of the following year the global economy was wrecked

by an economic and financial disaster unlike anything seen since the Great Depression more than eighty years ago. This brought a temporary suspension of ordinary fiscal strategy here in The Bahamas as it did everywhere. As the economy continues the revival already underway it is essential that fiscal discipline returns with an urgency to make up for lost ground.

Notwithstanding the terrible global economic conditions during my Government's last term in office, we undertook some of the big things required to make our capital island not only more livable but also more functional. New Providence is being transformed into a modern city with the potential to be the most efficient small city in our region. Nassau Harbour was dredged and now accommodates the largest ocean-going cruise ships.

We created the Airport Authority to commence the redevelopment of the Nassau International Airport, now renamed the Lynden Pindling International Airport.

The Phase I construction of a new US Departure Terminal at the LPIA is completed and operational. The Phase II redevelopment of the International Departures Terminal is on schedule for completion in October and I fully expect that the third and final phase of the redevelopment of the domestic terminal will be completed and opened in late 2013.

We restored jet aircraft to the Bahamasair fleet.

We created a new Port of Nassau at Arawak Cay. And, a new 100,000 square foot Customs Warehouse has been constructed at Gladstone Road. This has permitted all cargo shipping to be removed from downtown Nassau.

Downtown Bay Street is being revitalized following the replacement of leaky water mains and the upgrade of other underground utility services in the City of Nassau.

We built a new Nassau Straw Market and left in train the refurbishment and upgrade of the Houses of Parliament and the Judicial Complexes; the reconstruction of the Pompey Museum; the creation of Pompey Square at the western entrance to downtown Nassau, the replacement of sidewalks in the downtown area, and the pedestrianization of Charlotte Street where asphalt is to be replaced with stone pavers.

We undertook the New Providence Infrastructure Upgrade Programme, bringing the island's road network and water and sewerage services up to 21st century standards. It is nearing completion.

We left under construction an elegant four-lane Airport Gateway Project which is well on its way.

We ensured that public beaches and parks in New Providence – including Saunders Beach and Montagu Beach -- were dramatically expanded and improved, and more access to the sea provided for all Bahamians.

We facilitated the construction of the new Harry Moore Library and Communications Centre at the College of The Bahamas which is now open and which will assist that institution in its progress to university status.

We caused new electricity generating plants to be put in and brought on line in Abaco, Bimini, and North Eleuthera. New Public Administration buildings have been constructed and opened in Abaco

and Grand Bahama, and the construction of two new community hospitals are under construction in Exuma and Abaco.

We put in place a landmark Unemployment Benefit Programme and a National Prescription Drug Plan.

Thirty-five years after having been first elected to represent the Coopers Town Constituency - a scattered constituency of small fishing and agricultural villages in which residents got water from open wells, pumps and rainwater tanks, lighted the night with kerosene lamps, had neither paved roads or telephones, and where education ended at the Grade 9, Coopers Town and North Abaco – have been transformed.

Today, residents of the North Abaco constituency have access to centrally provided electricity, water and telephone services. Indeed, they enjoy access to cable television and internet services. Modern community health clinics sit in the middle of Coopers Town, Fox Town and Grand Cay; the children of Dundas and Murphy Town have access to a new primary school, and the children of the northern most parts of the constituency, access to a Central high school.

I was especially pleased to have been able to cause potable water to become available in the communities of Grand Cay, Mount Hope and Green Turtle Cay for the first time.

Residents move within and between settlements of the Constituency and beyond along paved roads.

In Coopers Town the main roads are lined with sidewalks and sea defences, sidewalks and landscape have been installed along our sea front, green spaces and play areas created in our settlements and a first class public beach front park created at Treasure Cay.

Soon, we expect, the constituency will have a new sea port necessitated by the vibrant development which has taken place resulting in a tripling of the population. In 1977, 1,400 individuals were listed on the Coopers Town Constituency Election Register. This year the number is four times higher at more than 4,600.

So much of what my three administrations achieved during 15 years at the helm of the Bahamian Government was only made possible by the diligent and dedicated service of the professional Bahamian Public Service.

I express thanks and gratitude to the many loyal public officers who daily, with little recognition or appreciation, serve the government of the day, implementing policies and ensuring that the goals and objectives of policy makers are achieved so as to accomplish improved levels of service for the general public. I am in their debt.

I acknowledge and express thanks and appreciation for the role which the leadership and membership of the Bahamas Public Service Union and the Bahamas Teachers Union played over these many years.

And I acknowledge with thanks and appreciation the role played by the private sector which contributed to our spectacular success in growing our economy and creating new and additional jobs particularly during our first two terms in office. Their support was similarly helpful in containing job losses and in supporting our jobs creation and skills training initiatives during trying economic times during our last term in office.

The work of the House of Assembly is never done. So, as I prepare to retire from the House I express my hopes for continued progress on several fronts, notably:

1. Achieving full equality of the sexes in law and custom;
2. Realizing more focused education and training programmes and outcomes required to better equip Bahamians with the skills needed to realize their potential in a 21st century global economy;
3. A reduction in the level of violent crime and the enhancement of a more peaceful and nonviolent society;
4. A reduction in the rate of growth of Government debt and a return to sustained economic growth;
5. A more fully developed network of youth and human development programmes inclusive of effective social intervention measures, and a focused attention to public health;
6. A more efficient and productive judicial, legal and public sector;
7. Sustained and continuous police training at all levels including enhanced investigative skills;
8. Ongoing measures to protect and preserve the nation's environmental and cultural heritage;
9. The establishment of an Independent Electoral Boundaries Commission and related efforts to even further deepen our democracy;
10. The coming into effect of the Freedom of Information Act and related efforts to make government even more transparent and accountable.

These are attainable goals on which I believe we enjoy considerable national consensus. This notwithstanding, success on these fronts will only be possible if we are able to continue to rely on the selfless service of men and women of character in the House of Assembly.

And so, as I depart, I encourage Bahamians from every walk of life to come forward to participate more fully in the political life of our country. In truth, some thick skin will be helpful as this is not a

profession for the thin-skinned or easily offended. What I have always found, however, is that service to and for the Bahamian people is reward in and of itself.

I love the House. I am proud of an excellent record of attendance and of participation in its proceedings.

I was, during my 35 years in this Honourable House, in a hurry to modernize and transform our Bahamas. I did all that I could do every day to achieve better for all Bahamians.

I am pleased to have done as much as I have as soon as I did, to implement the pledges I made and to keep our commitments to the people of The Bahamas.

Today, The Bahamas is a different and a better place than it was when I first entered those Chambers. I am gratified to have assisted in guiding the remarkable transformation of our country.

I leave Parliament with the conviction that I have given my best; indeed I have given my all in the service of the Bahamian people. I have ducked no decision that I believed to be in the interest and to the benefit of the Bahamian people. I have always accepted the convention of our parliamentary system that, whatever might have been done in the name of the government, the buck stopped with the Prime Minister.

To the extent that some found my passion -- and admittedly sometimes my impatience -- difficult to comprehend, I express regret. In my drive to make ours a more perfect common good, I may have failed at times whether in word or deed. I express regret for those failures as well as any work left undone on behalf of the country I love with every fiber of my being and every ounce of my energy.

I am proud of my service to the Bahamian people.

I will forever be grateful for the opportunity given me by my party, by my parliamentary colleagues and by the people of The Bahamas. I especially thank the people of North Abaco.

Upon my return to leadership five years ago, I promised to stay in office as long as I could or as long as the Bahamian people would have me.

The Bahamian people in their majority have now determined that it is time for me to go. I accept their decision. And I thank them for the confidence they previously reposed in me for 15 years as Prime Minister of The Bahamas.

I could end my remarks no other way than in thanking those dearest to me who have sustained me in my public life.

I thank my wife Delores, my children and my entire family for their unwavering support during my political career. Without their love and support my national service would not have been possible.

In the immortal words of gratitude by Shakespeare I say to my family and to all the Bahamian people, "I can no other answer make but thanks, and thanks..."

25 July, 2012