

Hon. Kenred Dorsett M.P.
Minister Of The Environment And Housing
Mid Year Budget Review
March 2016

Thank you Mr. Speaker

Mr. Speaker,

I rise to make my contribution to the ongoing debate of the Mid Year Budget Review. I do so on behalf of the wonderful people of the Southern Shores constituency. They are the people who gave me the opportunity to serve this country in this place and continue to support me as I do so to the best of my ability. As always I thank them for

the privilege to be here and for their continued support. I am their voice in this place and I am humbled and honoured to represent them.

Mr. Speaker

I am a proud member of the Progressive Liberal Party (PLP), that is the Party I believe in and that is the Party which I also represent. It is my Party. This PLP administration led by the Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie, the member for Centreville has done much in the short time since we have been in office. Being ever mindful of the state in which we met the affairs of this nation no one on this side or the other side can refute the fact that this

administration has made great strides. Although the side opposite tries to paint a picture of doom and gloom even they cannot do so with straight faces because they know that although this government is not perfect and has no magic wand to wave to do everything in one day, we have made tremendous progress in many regards. Mr. Speaker, while the side opposite would like for the Bahamian people to believe that this PLP administration has done nothing at all for this country. They know full well that it is pure rhetoric meant to aid them in gaining political mileage. As a matter of fact, I ask the public to review the voting record of the side opposite on matters brought to this place. I am certain you will find

that the opposition has supported most of the bills and resolutions we have advanced in this place.

MR. SPEAKER

The Bahamian people must not be fooled by those who would have them believe that nothing is happening and that we are all crooks and robbers on this side. The Bahamian people must understand that this Government is on the job on their behalf every day, in some instances, all day. Those on the side opposite will say whatever they think will get them from that side to this side. That is all that they have done in the past four years, TALK and sadly, their TALK has now descended to

new lows, where character assassinations, rumour, innuendo and baseless rhetoric has substituted constructive criticism, debate and presentations of alternate policies . While they would like the Bahamian people to believe the this government is no good, I put it to the the people through you Mr. Speaker that they (the FNM) are the ones that are inadequate. They have brought next to nothing to the table as Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition. The member for Marco City has done more to advance alternatives and policy suggestions in his short time on the side opposite, than the collective efforts of the entire opposition over the past four years. They are inadequate and day-by-day they show the Bahamian people that they can't even be an

effective opposition. So you really think the Bahamian people are prepared to have them lead! I don't think so, Mr. Speaker.

MR. SPEAKER

For the past four years they have pointed fingers at the Government with nothing but hearsay as proof, they have voted against the national budget for reasons that still baffle many to this day, they have grandstanded or attempted to grandstand and have rejected ideas, initiatives and programmes advanced by this Government without offering any alternative plans. Even when they reject the ideas in their presentations, they still vote to support the

bills. So don't mind what they say, mind how they vote. In my view, this PLP Government is a better Government than the FNM ever was and was a better opposition than this FNM is now. This is evident by the irresponsible behaviour displayed by the Leader of the Opposition himself who led protesters over the Sir Sydney Poitier Bridge to Paradise Island and then stood by while private property was destroyed. This after the Prime Minister himself released a statement informing that beach access had been agreed and extended with Access Industries, the owners of the property. The inadequacy of the FNM and their leader is further evident in the speech given in this place by the Member for Killarney on Monday, only to have

the proverbial egg on his face the very next day. The Bahamian people should know by now that the FNM is no viable alternative to this Progressive Liberal Party Government which has brought this nation back from the brink of disaster and is steadily advancing it in the right direction.

MR. SPEAKER

This Christie led administration has been able in the last three plus years to reduce the deficit from over half a billion dollars to a projected \$141 million dollars. I want to repeat that. This PLP government, who they claim has done nothing for this country or its people has been able to reduce the deficit from

over half a billion dollars to a projected \$141 million dollars. Mr. Speaker - This is a great accomplishment. What it means is that the government has a far less budget shortfall now than it did under the FNM administration. This is progress. This is progress from a progressive government. This Christie led administration established the National Training Agency, a project stopped by the former administration. Since this institution opened its doors, thousands of young Bahamians have become certified in various vocations FREE OF CHARGE. This institution is not just operational in New Providence but Family Island residents also have access to this resource. This is progress. Progress of a progressive

government empowering its citizens through training. Uplifting its people and enabling young people to make a positive and constructive contribution to the Bahamian workforce.

MR. SPEAKER

For decades many experts Bahamian and foreign have advised that the custom duty regime alone would not sustain The Bahamas economy forever. They advised that we look into other forms of taxation. After many years of discussion, after many months of consultation, after weighing the pros and cons of different regimes, this PLP administration introduced Value Added Tax at a

rate of 7.5% which was launched successfully. The Bahamian people should take note that while the opposition inside and outside of this place has said that they would remove VAT from certain items, NONE on that side have said that they will REPEAL Value Added Tax. As a matter of fact, they wanted to implement it before 2012. Committed to implement if they became the Government in 2012 and therefore, there should be no argument between opposition and government on this matter. Mr. Speaker -This is progress and while no government wants to create or impose additional taxes on its people, we have to acknowledge and agree that tax reform was necessary.

Mr. Speaker, for over 30 years, there was a derelict vehicle site in my constituency, it was unhealthy and unsightly and I made a commitment to my people to have it removed. If you were to pass that site today you would see that it is clean as a whistle. This is progress and in the upcoming budget we hope to be in a position to speak to the allocation of funds to transform that tract into a green space and recreational facility for the people of Southern Shores and the neighboring committee of South Beach.

Mr. Speaker, we have invested \$200 million to ensure that the Royal Bahamas Defence Force has the vessels needed to patrol the waters of The

Bahamas, to ward off poachers, deal with illegal immigrants and protect this nations borders. This is progress. Progress from a progressive government who believes in securing our borders and keeping our nation safe.

Mr. Speaker,we are in the process of the introduction of National Health Insurance, a programme that has been gravely needed in this country for decades. Mr. Speaker, access to universal health care must become a reality for our people. We all know of someone who has been in a position where they needed medical care but could not afford it. We all know that people have died because they could not afford medical intervention.

National Health Insurance will save lives. This is definitely progress. Progress from a progressive and focused government.

MR. SPEAKER

While this Government has made progress in many areas. We remain focused and concerned about the scourge of crime especially here in the capitol. We understand and acknowledge that there is much work left to do in relation to crime, education, the environment and other issues but we have made PROGRESS and this process of progress is a journey and not a single act. All of this nation's problems will not be solved overnight or even in this first term. However, Ministry by

Ministry, issue by issue, one would be able to examine the work of this government at the end of this term and see that significant progress has been made in delivering on the commitments in our Charter for Governance.

In my view, we have been good stewards on behalf of the Bahamian people, considering the challenges we faced. Particularly the financial challenges. The progress we have made should not be ignored, indeed it should be touted and it must be made known. Once it is made known it must be repeated. Time and time again! The Bahamian people should be admonished not to trade in a well oiled working machine for the proverbial "lemon",

which will look flashy, but will sputter and die after you drive it off the car lot.

MR. SPEAKER

I now turn to the Ministry of the Environment and Housing. The 2015/16 fiscal period was a time of prudence in spending for all departments and units in the Ministry of the Environment & Housing, as we did our part in contributing to what the Rt. Hon. Member for Centreville termed, “an overarching strategy and action plan to bring better economic and social outcomes for all Bahamians.” Under Head 72 (which includes the Department of Forestry, the Botanical Gardens, the BEST Commission and BNGIS), the Ministry was allocated

\$ 3,075,378 for recurrent expenditure, and as of 31 December 2015 had not spent half of that sum, and the Department of Housing which was allocated \$ 1,531,589.00 for recurrent and capital expenditure, had spent \$ 1,291,506.00 up to 31 December 2015. The Department of Environmental Health Services, Head 65, was allocated \$ 28,641,339.00 for recurrent spending and up to 31 December 2015 had spent \$ 17,377,801.24.

Mr. Speaker,

While fiscal discipline and restraint are critical values, we must still continue to act in a manner

that will better the lives of all Bahamians; and we must continue, in this Ministry to manage and protect the environment while permitting economic development in order realize the government's revenue earning potential and fulfilling the aspirations of our people..

ENVIRONMENT OVERSIGHT AND PROTECTION

Mr. Speaker,

In the first half of the 2015/16 fiscal period, the Ministry of the Environment & Housing continued to provide for the protection of the environment upon which national development is based. My Ministry completed and submitted to the United Nations

Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) the Second National Communication Report as well as the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions of the Bahamas, which speak to what we as a country will do to advance a path toward a low-carbon, climate-resilient future. We also established the National Implementing Entity for the Green Climate Fund..

On the environment agenda, the first half of this fiscal period was dominated by the twenty-first session of the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC and the eleventh session of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol held in November to December 2015, in Paris, France. The meeting

marked a decisive stage in negotiations on the future international agreement on a post-2020 regime. Some 195 States that are Parties to the Convention were represented at the COP which is the implementing body of the Convention. COP 21 , for the first time in over 20 years of UN negotiations, aimed to bind all the nations of the world, including the biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, to a universal agreement on climate to come into effect in 2020,

Mr. Speaker,

The Bahamas had a very active delegation participating in COP 21, also known as the 2015

Paris Climate Conference. The Paris Agreement aims to hold the increase in global average temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, and also pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. The shift of ambition towards 1.5 degrees marks the recognition that holding temperature rise to such levels is the only way to ensure the survival of our nation and people.

Critically, the special needs of Small Island developing States (SIDS) is preserved in the agreement. References to Loss and Damage represent a work in progress and we have made great steps considering that the issue is a volatile one. The strong compliance language we sought

has not been delivered but the future process does not abandon it; and with respect to Transparency, the provisions are very fair and will help The Bahamas in the process of implementation.

All in all, the Paris Agreement is a major achievement, and brings us one step closer to achieving the future we want and the survival of our planet. The Bahamas looks forward to ratifying the agreement in a few months.

Climate Change

As an outcome of the UNFCCC COP 21 the Ministry is planning a workshop with the aim to sensitize

stakeholders in both public and private sectors on the Paris Agreement and also promote stakeholder buy-in. The workshop is scheduled to take place during the beginning of April, prior to the signing of the Agreement. Further, the workshop seeks to promote an inclusive process which will also encourage input from all stakeholders on the various components of the Agreement.

My Ministry is also in the process of completing the Green Climate Fund (GCF) readiness proposal which will support the Ministry of the Environment and Housing through the provision of \$300,000. These funds will be used to strengthen institutional capacity within the Ministry and position staff to access additional resources to adapt to Climate

Change. In addition, the Readiness Programme will establish National Implementing Entities with the capacity to receive funds and oversee projects advancing climate change efforts in The Bahamas. The programme will facilitate the training of MOTEH staff and other agencies within the public sector as well as provide technology transfer.

Mr. Speaker,

The impact of climate change is of great importance for The Bahamas as it leads the world in the percentage of people living in coastal zones.

Mr. Speaker we have continued the process of

reserving Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and have not only met our target of 10% reservation of the marine and coastal areas as protected zones but we have exceeded the target. My Ministry and all stakeholders are now working on the research which will help us to increase our MPAs to 20% by the year 2020. Simultaneously, we are working on the blueprint for management plans for these marine parks, which not only have the potential to create hundreds of jobs in the green and blue economies but also have the potential of further diversifying our tourism offerings by expanding eco-touristic and marine experiences throughout our islands. We look forward to engaging Bahamian entrepreneurs who are interested in investing in

this sector.

Mr. Speaker,

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

In the past fiscal year, the Ministry attended various international meetings, workshops and on matters relating to the environment, science and technology. Attendance at these meetings allowed for further national development and capacity building, and ensured Bahamian representation and participation in critical meetings, where decisions were made that affect the region. We are increasing our presence on committees and bodies that make decisions on environment managements for the region and the world. At these international

meetings, The Bahamas plays its part in efforts to address climate change and respond to its threats.

In 2014, The Bahamas signed the Small Island Developing States (SIDS) Dock Agreement in Samoa. The primary objective of SIDS Dock underscores the need for new opportunities for the development of the vast sustainable energy resources available in the Caribbean. I served as Chair of the first SIDS Dock meeting in Paris within the margins of the UNFCCC COP 21. Additionally, it should be noted that The Bahamas now serves as Vice-President and a board member of SIDS Dock through 2017.

The Ministry continues to upgrade its technical

environment competence through workshops sponsored by global initiatives.

Mr. Speaker, a few years ago my Ministry held the first National Environmental Conclave. The object of that meeting was to engage environmentalists, conservationists, stakeholders and interested parties to assist with the drafting of a bi-partisan environmental road map for The Bahamas. Unfortunately, all of the minutes and written recorded data from that meeting was lost. So this year, my team is completing the transcription of the limited audio recordings from the meeting and will place the draft environmental road map in the public domain for broad public consultation and

input. The environment is too important to our way of life and economy, to not have an environmental road map for the Bahamas. We will speak in greater detail to this during the upcoming budget debate. That road map will also include the development of a national waste management plan as we address the needs of all our islands.

NON GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATIONS

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry's relations with our NGO partners continued to be productive. The Bahamas National Trust (BNT) And the Nature Conservancy continued to provide support and assistance to the Ministry of the Environment, supporting initiatives coordinated

by the Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission and other environmental initiatives coordinated by the Ministry.

Mr. Speaker,

THE BAHAMAS NATIONAL TRUST

The Bahamas National Trust (BNT), as the manager of the National Park system for the country, maintains a close working relationship with my Ministry and the Department of Marine Resources as well as the Ministries of Education and Tourism.

Many projects and challenges that involve or face the BNT are cross-cutting and collaboration and communication with partners can reduce challenges and make projects more successful.

The BNT continues to assist with the identification of the near shore and marine areas for the next 10% of the 2020 Challenge for The Bahamas to protect 20% of its near shore and marine environment. A gap analysis of the protected area system will be implemented to insure connectivity for the protected area system. This work is being funded through a Grant from Oceans 5 and the BNT is working with TNC and BREEF to implement this project. The project also provides funding for the development and completion of Management Plans for national parks on two islands.

In helping to plan and implement Sustainable Financial Initiatives for the BNT, I have requested that the BNT conduct Financial Gap Analysis to

assess the full cost of running the national park system. This analysis will help determine the additional support that is needed to be invested by the government to support a well - managed National Park System. The Financial Gap Analysis is being supported by the Ocean's 5 Grant and ultimately should lead to a recommendation for new green jobs.

Mr. Speaker,

The BNT assists in strengthening the community and interagency collaboration necessary for the effective management of the parks. Its Education Department continues to promote our national parks as outdoor classrooms. In 2015 over 12,000

people participated in national park field trips and education programmes. Over 8,000 of these were students from 71 different schools in The Bahamas. These educational field trips introduce people to our unique Bahamian ecosystems: mangrove wetlands, pine forests, coral reefs, coppice forest and the sandy and rocky seashore.

The BNT's commitment to strengthening environmental stewardship for The Bahamas continues with the continued support of 60 Discovery Clubs across 9 islands in The Bahamas. This programme emphasizes fun learning in the outdoors and participants learn camping skills, bird and plant identification and experience Bahamian ecosystems in an up close and personal way. The

BNT Navigators Level (ages 14 – 21) has clubs on Andros, Abaco, Grand Bahama and Nassau. These young people are completing the marine level and obtaining skills such as scuba certification and Certification in Reef Check so that they can assist in marine ecosystem monitoring in national parks. The BNT is working closely with me on the development of a National Environmental Youth Corps. This initiative will employ Bahamian Youth and prepare them for “Green Jobs” in the Parks and Beaches Authority, The Forestry Unit and within the National Park and protected area system.

Continued development of infrastructure for National Parks is a priority. Conceptual Plans for Park Development have been developed for The

Retreat, Rand Nature Centre, Lucayan National Park, and the Abaco National Park. These parks have the greatest opportunity for visitation and income generation to help support their operations.

Mr. Speaker,

PARTNERSHIPS AND ASSISTANCE

Working with the IDB, National Audubon, and the Ministry of Tourism the BNT is the major implementing partner of the Bird Tour Guiding Project which graduated 70 trained Birding Guides in December 2015. The Project which focuses on Andros and Inagua continues with Advanced Tour Guide Training being implemented in the first 2 quarter of 2016. The BNT, Ministry of Tourism and

National Audubon are working to begin special trips from Audubon Chapters, Tour Developers and Nature Tourism Writers to insure that the guides will begin to receive nature tourism business for their islands.

Concern for the sustainability of our marine resources continues to be a priority for the government, BNT, its members and partners. We have to create an environment for our marine scientists to be able to return to the Bahamas to carryout research that will help us to preserve our biodiversity, protect us against climate change, address ocean acidification and the impacts of climate change on the agricultural sector.

Mr. Speaker, I know that BNT values its strong relationship with the Ministry of the Environment and I look forward to continuing to work together on projects which further sustainable development and the protection of Bahamian biodiversity.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

Mr. Speaker,

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has provided technical support, including GIS mapping, to the government as it seeks to complete the consultation process or the declaration of the Marine Protected Areas.

Through an introduction made by The Nature Conservancy, I was able to negotiate a \$500,000

grant from The Waitt Foundation to support the operations of The Bahamas Protected Area Fund.

In addition, following the government's expansion of the Bahamas Protected Area Network in August 2015 The Nature Conservancy, working with my Ministry, has secured more than 1.5 million dollars to support the following:

- o Completion of at least three management plans to guide the effective management of these areas.
- o Development of a framework for co-management of protected areas by local communities and community groups in an effort to support effective management of

protected areas

- o Update of the financial gap analysis which will determine that amount of funding needed on an annual basis to properly management the protected area network
- o Assist the Government and the Bahamas National Trust with the development of by-laws for all parks being managed
- Assist in the design of a sustainable finance mechanism that will support the further capitalization of the Bahamas Protected Area Fund

THE BAHAMAS PROTECTED AREA FUND

BOARD

The Bahamas Protected Area Fund Board was established in 2015. Its Executive Committee is charged with the management of the Board's efforts between meetings. The Board has established its account into which it can receive grant funding. It is actively recruiting an Executive Director.

The Board was successful in its application for a grant from the Waite Foundation to facilitate its work and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been drafted and approved by Cabinet and is

awaiting signature by the Ministry of The Environment & Housing. The Board has considered the UNEPs Environment and Social Safeguards Policy as its operationalization is an activity which will be led by the Executive Director who is under recruitment.

Mr. Speaker,

The Board is keenly aware of the need to grow the Fund and I am pleased that the Board has as its members a wide cross section of private and public sector individuals to draw upon

It is my expectation that we would have engaged an Executive Director before the end of this fiscal year.

THE PUBLIC BEACHES AND PUBLIC PARKS AUTHORITY

The newly created Bahamas Public Parks and Public Beaches Authority was established with effect from 1st July and is operating from Aspley House, Frederick Street. The Executive Chairman is Sen. Hon. Greg Burrows, Mr. Pericles Maillis serves as Deputy Chairman and veteran civil servant, Mr. Bruce Walker is the Managing Director. Its mandate includes maintaining and improving parks and grounds on New Providence and in the Family Islands.

The BNT also serves as member on the new Parks and Beaches Authority, providing support as the

authority looks at improving the management of these public recreational areas.

Parks and grounds on several Family Islands damaged by Hurricane Joaquin will be repaired over the next few months. We have also been given approval to advance much needed repairs to parks throughout the island of New Providence, which will be funded through savings identified by the Ministry of Works. The Authority has also hit the ground running in New Providence holding clean up exercises in several areas. They have also advised of a zero tolerance policy to unauthorized roadside signs which has been met with great appreciation from many Bahamians. We are now in discussions with persons erecting bus shelters, benches and

other outdoor advertising tools on green verges and public land. These activities will be properly managed and regulated moving forward and my Ministry also takes the view that if structured properly it can provide the Government with an additional source of revenue while ensuring that whatever is done is tasteful and enhances the aesthetic of the islands.

By my direction, the Authority is also completing conceptual drawings for the development of a Constitutional Garden & Heroes Garden on an area of public land, immediately north of the Botanical Gardens. The vision is to develop the public green spaces from Saunders Beach in the west to Mount

Fitzwilliam in the east, to create historical monuments and facilities similar to those which can be found in the "National Mall" in Washington D.C. This will enable us to celebrate and showcase our nation's history and create additional diversity to our tourism product and offerings. With the long term vision of erecting statues of Bahamian heroes on landscaped areas of our roundabouts throughout New Providence, we not only have the opportunity to preserve and celebrate our history, our heroes and heroines, but we also have the opportunity to enhance national pride while expanding the tourist attractions over the hill and into the southern corridors, which we hope will lead to greater economic benefits for taxi-drivers and

tour operators. We are also developing conceptual drawings for the redevelopment of Lake Killarney and Lake Cunningham. Similarly, these projects have the potential of creating new green jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities. I will expand on these initiatives in the upcoming budget presentation.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT OF FORESTRY

The Forestry Unit embarked on several projects in the first half of this budget cycle. It completed the draft of the National Forest Estate maps for the pine islands (Abaco, Andros, Grand Bahama and New Providence) and we will now advance the

process, which ultimately will lead to parliamentary approval and gazettelement. The Forestry Unit received grant funding from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) in the amount of \$10,000 to initiate the preparation of base maps depicting areas of Crown Land on Abaco, Andros, Grand Bahama, and New Providence, to support the declaration as National Forest Estate. The TNC digitized more than two hundred maps, including the comprehensive Bahamas Land Resource Study maps, which provide pertinent baseline data on vegetation, soil, water, and land capability of The Bahamas.

In July of 2015 the Forestry Unit participated in

Data Management Training under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN). The Bahamas received \$10, 000 to host a Data Management Training exercise which greatly assisted the Forestry Unit in effective management of the National Forest Estate by building capacity in data collection, defining boundaries, and sample plot establishment. Other governmental agencies who participated included the Department of Lands & Surveys, The Bahamas National GIS Centre, The Bahamas National Trust, Department of Environmental Health Services, and the Water Sewerage Corporation.

The Pine Forest Management Handbook

The Forestry Handbook 2014, entitled *Pine Forest Management in The Bahamas* has been given final approval by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. The handbook is one of the key deliverables from the recently completed FAO training programme. The handbook serves as a guide to basic forest management concepts, and forest related activities. It is anticipated that this resource book will be used to facilitate the scientific based management of the impending National Forest Estate.

I would be remiss not to let colleagues know that the Forestry Unit will be commemorating Forestry Week from the 18th - 24th of March, 2016. My staff has planned tree planting ceremonies, talk show

appearances, a selfie competition for students and school visits. You will hear more about this, next week.

PETROLEUM EXPLORATION

Mr. Speaker,

In the area of Oil exploration, I wish to advise that the new Petroleum Legislation will come into effect on 31st March 2016 and its expanded emphasis on environment protection will serve this country well during the drilling process. All future and pending applications for oil exploration licences will be considered in full under the new petroleum exploration regime.

Renewable Energy

Electricity generation in Bahamas is based almost entirely on plants powered by petroleum products. While the reduction in the cost of fossil fuels reduces the economic feasibility of Renewable Energy technologies for smaller scaled projects, The Ministry of the Environment and Housing believes that cost should not only be the reason for the drive behind the use of RE in the Bahamas, as another major factor which must be taken into account is the reality of climate change, which is the result of the use of fossil fuels. Thus the Ministry's drive is to incorporate Renewable Energy (RE) as well as Energy Efficiency (EE) programs into our energy mix which would lead to a significant drop in the import of fossil fuels,

increased savings, energy security for The Bahamas, and most importantly, a decrease in carbon emissions.

Mr. Speaker

The Ministry has also actively provided support for the Carbon War Room in preparation for the advancement of Renewable Energy projects in New Providence and various Family Islands. The Unit is also working along with Bahamas Power and Light with regards to the deployment of renewable energy to maintain collaboration efforts with the utility provider. It is intended for us to update the country on the Residential Energy Self Generating programme before the end of this fiscal year.

The Bahamas, through the Ministry of the Environment and Housing (MOTEH), was appointed as a Co-Chair to the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) Council in January, 2016. To this end, as Co-Chair, I am traveling to the IRENA council meeting in May to provide a platform for the country's voice to be heard with respect to challenges and needs in preparation for the country's transition to renewable energy.

Mr. Speaker

YOUTH ENVIRONMENT CORP PROGRAMME

The Ministry of the Environment and Housing is currently working along with various NGO's in

efforts to populate blue and green jobs in the economy. The programme seeks to empower young Bahamians; providing those individuals with the skills needed to become successful in life and blue and green economies. The programme also aims to target individuals with an interest in the aforementioned fields; serving as a fast track tool for employment as well as a feeder programme for young high school graduates.

DATA FOR DECISION MAKING

THE BAHAMAS NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEM

As the focal point for all matters related to the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management (UN-GGIM) Initiatives, the BNGIS Centre continues in its execution of the Caribbean Geodetic Project which is an initiative resulting out of the hard work of the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management that was established by the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations.

The Caribbean Geodetic Project, financed by the Mexican Government, resulted in technical training for BNGIS Centre's staff in the USA and Mexico. The training sessions are focused on various aspects of geospatial spatial technologies including Geodetics, Spatial Data Infrastructure and GIS Standards. The importance of this work is that, in general, a global geodetic reference frame underpins Global Navigation Satellite Systems technology and provides the framework for all geospatial

activity, as a key enabler of spatial data interoperability, disaster mitigation and sustainable development. There is also a growing demand for an accurate and stable global geodetic reference frame which is used in many Earth science and societal applications, including sea-level and climate change monitoring, natural hazard and disaster management and a whole series of industrial applications (including mining, agriculture, transport, navigation, construction) where precise

positioning introduces efficiencies.

BNGIS TECHNICAL SUPPORT TO AGENCY SPECIFIC INITIATIVES/PROJECTS

Last year with the passage of Hurricane Joaquin, The BNGIS Centre operating on NEMA's Emergency Support Function 5 "Planning and Information" and played a pivotal role in applying geospatial Technologies to disaster risk management. With assistance from the U.S. Embassy and its strategic partners, The BNGIS Centre was granted restricted Access to Pre and Post Imagery of hurricane impacted Islands including Crooked Island, Acklins, Long Cay, Long Island, Cat Island, Exuma, Rum

Cay and San Salvador. To date the Centre has completed surge modeling, extensive hazard and topographic mapping for all of the impacted islands. This work will inform the recovery, reconstruction and mitigation phases of Disaster Risk Management.

As a member of the Technical Advisory Committee the BNGIS continues to provide technical support to various ongoing projects executed by the Ministry of The Environment and the Office of the Prime Minister. BNGIS also continues to support National Security on matters related to the application of geospatial technologies for Law Enforcement.

KEEPING THE ENVIRONMENT CLEAN

THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mr. Speaker,

Keeping the Bahamas clean is a costly business.

The DEHS continues to vigorously pursue the elimination of Shanty Towns and successfully eradicated in excess of 75 structures in Gamble Heights. at a cost of \$302,397.50.

RESIDENTIAL GARBAGE COLLECTION

MR. SPEAKER

This administration thought it wise to privatize the collection of residential waste after meeting the fleet of publicly owned garbage trucks in disrepair when we assumed office. Not only did we think this would be more efficient but it would provide entrepreneurial opportunities for Bahamians. This programme by and large is working, in many areas that garbage is collected on time and efficiently. However we have received complaints from some persons who for some reason are being overlooked by the collections companies. This does not negate the fact that this programme has provided employment to Bahamian young men predominately and given others a chance to be self

employed in this industry.

MR. SPEAKER

The method for collection is by constituency, this was the easiest way to divide the contacts among the various companies. There were already maps available and boundaries were already set. The companies and the areas that they are responsible for are as follows:

| | |
|-------------------|--|
| Bahamas Waste | Elizabeth, St. Anne's, Marathon and Centreville |
| United Sanitation | Fox Hill, Sea Breeze, |

| | |
|--|---|
| IMPAC | Englerston and Nassau Village Yamacraw, Montagu, Bain & Grants Town |
| Trash It Direct Trucking | Southern Shores, South Beach Fort Charlotte, Golden Gates and Carmichael |
| Bommer Trucking Premier Choice | Killarney Bamboo Town |
| Garbage Man RMG Superior | Mount Moriah Pinewood Golden Isles |

| | |
|-------------|-----------------------------|
| Mr. Pick Up | Tall Pines and Garden Hills |
|-------------|-----------------------------|

I advise the public that should they experience problems with garbage collection to contact the Department of Environmental Health Services to report it at 322-8037.

Mr. Speaker, I also want to publicly thank the Sanitation Services company in Freeport, Grand Bahama for their frank discussions and cooperation with my Ministry. From our discussions with them, it is clear that to effectively address the garbage collection concerns of our densely populated areas in New Providence, we have to advance collection twice per week as is done in Freeport. This

obviously would have budget implications and as we continue to evaluate the recommendation, we should be able to speak further to the matter in the upcoming budget debate.

MR. SPEAKER

The DEHS also has a **Bulk Waste Collection Programme**. This is the collection of waste that cannot be collected by the residential trucks such as old mattresses, furniture and appliances. Bahamians should also note that, green waste, trees, trimming etc., are not residential waste and should not be collected by the trucks contracted to collect residential waste. Trucks are dispatched

throughout New Providence, collecting bulk waste every Monday, Wednesday and Friday. Mr. Speaker, it is sometimes disheartening to see the amount of garbage being disposed on roadsides, in abandoned buildings and vacant lots by citizens. This is unhealthy, unsightly, and it provides havens for rodents and other pests. Further, it is illegal and it must stop. We must understand that this country belongs to us all. While the government does its part to collect waste and clean up communities, the people of this country must also do their part by ensuring that they dispose of their garbage in the proper places. Residential garbage should be placed in a bin at the roadside for collection and other wastes should be taken to the

New Providence Landfill. Mr. Speaker, in the upcoming budget, I hope to advance a Citizens in Action programme, which will formalize our partnership with the citizens to identify areas that need to be cleaned and also provide opportunities for communities to get involved in solving some of the problems.

MR. SPEAKER

In the DEHS **Derelict Vehicles Programme**, approximately one thousand six hundred (1600) vehicles were removed during the first half of the fiscal year. This again is an area in which residents must do their part. Just as with garbage,

derelict vehicles are also unhealthy, unsightly and havens for rodents and other pests. I ask citizens to please dispose of these cars in the proper manner at the Derelict vehicle site at the New Providence Landfill. I also want to publicly thank people like Anthony Rolle, who goes by the Facebook name of Conchalay and Rosemarie Hanna. Often times, I get my intelligence and information from them and people like them who provide me with photos of areas where illegal dumping has taken place or where derelict vehicles can be found. I have encouraged them to provide me with pictures and directions and that information has helped me in carrying out my duties. This sort of public private information

sharing is a part of what I hope to accomplish on a bigger scale with the Citizens in Action Programme

Landfills, Transfer Stations and Dumpsites

The DEHS continues to have oversight dumpsites, transfer stations and landfills in the Family Islands at a cost of \$1,079,691.00 per month. There have been a number of challenges related to the managing the volume of incoming waste. Some improvements have been made with regard to frequency of maintenance.

The DEHS has exhausted its allocation for this expenditure and \$5,398,461.00 is required to continue these operations through June 2016.

MR. SPEAKER

With regard to the New Providence Landfill. As is known by the general public the management of the New Providence Landfill was turned over to Renew Bahamas by the Government. This move was to ensure better efficiency, innovation and remediation of the Landfill. To date, Renew Bahamas has been able to establish a Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) which was commissioned around the time of the last annual budget debate. They have advised that over 90 Bahamians have been employed and this arrangement has also saved the Bahamian people millions of dollars in costs associated with managing the landfill, which

were previously borne by the government.

MR. SPEAKER

Though there is still the concern of fires at the Landfill and the smoke which emanates from it, the public must be reminded that the Landfill has been at its current locations for many decades. During that time fires which erupted were more intense, more frequent and would last for weeks on end at times. That is not an excuse, because I had hoped that we would be at a juncture where we are experiencing no fires! However, Renew Bahamas has been able to extinguish fires which have occurred in less time and the frequency of dump

fires has decreased. We have made progress and continue to do so striving for a completely remediated Landfill with no chance of fires.

Relocation of Derelict Vehicle Site

MR. SPEAKER

As I mentioned earlier in my presentation, the Derelict Vehicle Site which was located on Marshall Road was successfully relocated to the New Providence Landfill on Tonique Williams Darling. Limited preparatory work was conducted at the new location. Further infrastructural work needs to be conducted at the new location and that would be addressed in the upcoming budget.

Mr. Speaker,

There was a shortfall in the allocation in the 2015/2016 Budget. The item 0521100 (Development Contracts) is used to facilitate payments to contractors responsible for Family Island landfills, Dumpsites and Transfer Stations, residential garbage collection and the derelict vehicle removal program. Garbage collection is a repeated and necessary activity. Of the approved estimate of \$9,056,663, \$8,995,800 has been spent. The approved estimate for the Bulk Waste Program was \$140, 000 out of which \$139,271 has been spent.

Mr. Speaker,

The DEHS needs a total of \$6,783,876 to allow it to meet its obligations for garbage collection up to June 30th 2016.

Legislation –

The DEHS began collaboration on legislation (e.g. for funeral homes, disposal of medical waste etc) which will address sundry environmental matters which I shall discuss in the end of fiscal year budget exercise as some of these initiatives will be nearer to fruition.

Mr. Speaker,

Capacity Building

DEHS has an active international and local training program that are both practical and theoretical. During the period under review, persons have received training relative to Oil Spill Response and Remediation, Hazardous Materials First Response, National Marine Casualty Investigation, legal Searches, Renewal Energy, Occupational Health and Safety, IUCN Data Management, Sustainable Solid Waste Management.

Mr. Speaker

My team has also been working on advancing new legislation for the creation of a Ministry responsible

for the Environment and a Department of Environmental Planning and Protection. That work is advancing very well and we will expand on those matters in the upcoming budget debate.

Mr. Speaker we also are advancing the completion of the Freeport Bye-laws which will address environmental challenges, monitoring and rules for Freeport.

Mr. Speaker,

The SAICM Project (Strategic Approach to Integrated Chemicals Management conducted in conjunction with the Pan American World Health Organization has been completed. The overall goal

of the project was to improve chemical safety in the Bahamas. The project objectives of preparation of a National Plan on Chemical Safety, assessment of infrastructure and capacity, a Situation Analysis and a Chemical Event Response Plan have been met.

KEEPING THE BAHAMIAN DREAM ALIVE

Mr. Speaker,

I now turn to the Department of Housing which for the first six months of fiscal year 2016 has been busy carrying out its mandate to deliver affordable homes to Bahamians. Of the one million dollars (\$1,000,000) approved for infrastructure in the

2015/2016 Budget the Department has received an appropriation of \$694,543 to date.

NEW HOUSING

The Department has completed significant work over the first half of 2016.

NEW PROVIDENCE

In Strachan Hills Subdivision, almost 22 units have been completed despite challenges with cavities on several lots that were only discovered after construction started. The Department of Housing also began the exercise of constructing 4 system houses that have turned out extremely well and it

looks forward to using this technology in the future.

In Fire Trail Subdivision, construction has begun and preparation to clear land for the construction of additional units has commenced.

In Sunset Subdivision Extension plans are underway for the construction of 10 units. The property is presently Crown land and the resolution to vest the property in me as Minister of Housing is on the agenda. Once we complete that vesting, we will be able to proceed with that construction and the development of the acreage owned by the Government off the Milo Butler Highway, which also in on the agenda for Parliament's approval to have

the same vested in me.

In Dignity Gardens Crescent where the Department expects to construct 9 units, all the infrastructure is in place and the Ministry of Public Works & Urban Development has approved the plans for this development to proceed.

In Romer & Reeves Streets, the Department is working on the process of acquisition to commence that would allow it to construct 10 units on these lots.

Plans are well advanced for the Carmichael Village

Subdivision, and infrastructure work is currently being advanced. This will be a green subdivision and the first one in which all of the homes constructed are systems houses. The beauty of this subdivision is that the contractor receives no monies until the units are completed and occupied so the risk to the government is minimized. Ardastra Gardens is also being developed and infrastructure work should begin in short order.

The Department of Housing and the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation is advancing construction of homes in the John Claridge subdivision in eastern New Providence and additional private public sector projects will be advanced to help stimulate the

housing construction sector.

THE FAMILY ISLANDS

The Department of Housing has also been proceeding with housing developments on the Family Islands. On Grand Bahamas in Bahamian West II the Department of Housing is proceeding with the construction of over 30 units. On San Salvador, it has identified 15 lots in its existing subdivision that will provide some relief to the demand for housing on this island. Housing construction was suspended as we had our contractors help with the hurricane restoration exercise in the wake of Joaquin. However, I am advised that construction has now resumed. In

Abaco in Spring City, further development is taking place in our existing subdivision to alleviate some of the housing demands that exists.

Mr. Speaker

As the national debt is further reduced, it enhances the opportunity for the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation to issue additional bonds to assist the Government's Housing programme. That is why, in the Department of Housing and the Mortgage Corporation we are so excited about the Prime Minister's announcement. We look forward to receiving the final approvals from the Ministry of Finance for the issuance of bonds to enable us to expand housing construction and the creation of

hundreds of jobs before the end of this fiscal year.

RENTAL UNITS

Mr. Speaker -The demand for repairs to existing houses in the government housing programme keeps the Department of Housing busy, along with repairs and maintenance of its rental units.

The Department of Housing has 148 rental Units in 19 buildings that they are responsible for the upkeep and Maintenance. These buildings average in excess of 30 yrs in age, and many have not had any major renovation during its useful life. The Department of Housing over the past six months

undertook the following:

- Major Renovation of the Big yard Complex off East Street (15 Units) at a cost of \$275,000. A comprehensive assessment of the Windsor Lane (Big Yard) rental unit complex has been conducted and it is hoped that this exercise will provide the blue print for the handling of the other properties that we intend to attack in a similar manner.
- Other Minor Repairs to Various Other Rental Building also took place
- The Department has Planned and Received approval to carry out major works in several of the smaller unit at a cost of \$300,000. The

work is scheduled to begin by the end of March.

The Department of Housing given its commitment to provide affordable homes is actively investigating and researching several new home designs and construction techniques to minimize Home Cost to Bahamians. Additionally, realizing that Traditional Home ownership will remain unattainable for some, the Department is committed to providing alternative home solutions. In this regard several sights are being investigated for new the construction of rental complexes.

Mr. Speaker on the issue of Natural Resources and

Aragonite, the Commonwealth Secretariat is expected to return to the Bahamas next month to enable us to complete the fiscal regime review. It is intended that I will be able to fully brief the public during the upcoming budget.

Mr. Speaker,

This was an overview of the budgetary performance of the Ministry of The Environment & Housing for the first half of the 2015/16 fiscal period. I will have a more comprehensive contribution at the annual budget debate.

MR. SPEAKER

I support the Mid Year Budget Statement made by the Rt. Hon. Perry Christie and I support the work being done by this Government. This PLP administration is doing much good in this country for the Bahamian people. This is the reason that while the opposition may moan and groan they can offer no alternatives because they understand that our leader and this team would not do anything without ensuring that it is the best decision under the circumstances. They know full well that the Bahamas moves in the right direction when the PLP is at the helm. The opposition in and outside of this place know the the Christie led Progressive Liberal Party administration is the best and only choice to ensure that this country continues to

progress in the right direction.

MR. SPEAKER

As I close, I admonish my colleagues on this side, that we must ensure that the people of the country know what we have done, are doing and intend to do for them and our country. We must create the ways and means to remove the filters and speak directly to the people. They must know that opportunities are available, that there is hope and the gloom and doom campaign of the FNM is nothing but a ploy to gain votes. The people of this nation must know of our stewardship and the progress must continue as we march on.

THANK YOU MR. SPEAKER