



COMMONWEALTH OF THE BAHAMAS

Contribution To The Budget Debate – 2016/2017

By:

The Hon. Dr. Hubert A. Minnis

Member Of Parliament

For Killarney

At

House Of Assembly

Nassau, The Bahamas

Monday, June, 20th 2016

Mr. Speaker,

Let me thank you for giving me this opportunity to contribute to the 2016-2017 budget communication as presented by the outgoing Minister for Finance and Prime Minister The Rt. Honourable Perry Gladstone Christie. But before I do so please allow me to express my profound gratitude to the people of Killarney who have given me the honour to represent their views in this Honourable House of Assembly and also to the Free National Movement for the confidence placed in me to continue to lead our great FNM party.

I take this opportunity to also thank my loyal staff and my family, especially my wife whose support is beyond price in this difficult period. Above all, I thank Almighty God for giving me the fortitude to persist in my duty in the face of a firestorm of criticism from without and within. I do pray to be able to continue to serve our people as his all-righteous will be done in the life of our beloved homeland.

(MOTHER ROSALIE NORTH, SISTER, DORIS HALL).

THE REFERENDUM VOTE

Mr. Speaker,

It is with a great deal of humility but extreme pride that as leader of the FNM party we offer our congratulations and express our great satisfaction in the peaceful way in which the people of The Bahamas went to the polls on referendum day June 7, 2016.

Mr. Speaker,

The people spoke loudly and clearly to the nation and especially to us in parliament when they said “Do not touch our constitution.” Bahamians let me assure you that we in the FNM heard you loud and clear and we unreservedly accept and will faithfully abide by your considered decision.

Mr. Speaker,

We note with amazement that government members and others are trying to shift the blame for the failure of the YES vote away from themselves. Some have even said that if I had campaigned and spoken loudly and positively for the YES vote, the outcome would have been different. I never knew that I had such great influence; I

hope The Bahamas is listening. The people have sent a clear and unmistakable message that just as they have rejected the referendum proposal in 2016 they will also reject you and your failed policies in 2017.

Mr. Speaker,

The PLP government did not run a free, fair and transparent referendum campaign.

Mr. Speaker,

Free and fair elections are the foundation of any democracy ours being no exception. It was wrong Mr. Speaker, for this government to use the peoples' taxes to fund the YES campaign while denying funding to the NO campaign. To ensure that no future government of The Bahamas will be able to discriminate against its citizens in this manner an FNM government will enact legislation to remove this discriminatory practice for all future referenda.

It was right Mr. Speaker, for me to advise voters to become educated on the 4 bills and "TO VOTE THEIR CONSCIENCE" as widely

reported in the media. My advice to vote their conscience demonstrated my UTMOST RESPECT for the intelligence and ability of our people to best decide for themselves, what they wanted to do, after all do we not accept their decision during a general election? Again, as leader of the FNM party, we offer our congratulations and express our great satisfaction in the peaceful way in which the people went to the polls on referendum day and voted their conscience.

**(READ PARLIAMENTARY SPEECH – VOTE CONSCIENCE:
Wednesday, July 23, 2014.)**

Unfortunately, the process used in the referendum highlighted a number of irregularities which resulted in many persons being denied their fundamental right to cast their ballot. These irregularities, if not corrected for future elections could possibly cast a long dark shadow in the international community on our country's ability to hold free, fair and transparent elections.

These irregularities included among other things, a lack of clear instructions from the parliamentary officials regarding the presence, and or, dress of observers while within the polling venue. The

Parliamentary Commissioner agreed in advance to allow agents designated by the two major political parties to act as observers, however observers from the FNM were denied entry into the polling venues because they wore red shirts. Why Mr. Speaker should a red, green, yellow or any other colour shirt affect the voting process, and what is the legal basis for such a policy?

In many cases polls were opened and balloting proceeded in the absence of observers. Hard copies of the register of voters were not available on time, and in most cases not available at all, at some polling venues. It is unimaginable that in this modern society the administration would hold an election without hard copies of the register being available at the polling venue. This is simply unacceptable in this age of technology.

In some cases Voters were instructed to write “no” or “yes” in answer to the questions rather than to mark an “X” next to their choice.

Mr. Speaker,

In a fully wired country such as ours with all the modern technology available including the internet, telephones, faxes and Whats App we

find it unacceptable that this PLP government is so incompetent that it would take almost forty eight hours to count the votes and make the final results public. We suspect a sinister motive and we demand an urgent explanation from this PLP government. The government also owes the Bahamian people an explanation as to how the chairman of the PLP could issue a statement of the defeat of the YES vote before the Parliamentary Commissioner had received all of the results from the various stations and made them public, and even before the completion of the vote count.

These glaring irregularities are of great concern to us especially in light of the upcoming general elections and we put the government on notice that these irregularities must be fixed and for our own part we will demand that international organizations be invited to observe The Bahamas general elections in 2017 or before, to ensure the integrity of the voting process.

THE BUDGET

Mr. Speaker,

I now turn to the **FANTASY VOTE CATCHING PLP** budget which fails to tackle the growing national problems but instead is **RIFE** with past unfulfilled promises and **LACED** with new ones which they have no intent to carry out.

Four years ago the people of The Bahamas gave the PLP the mandate to provide peace, prosperity and good governance for the people of The Bahamas. The end of their mandate is fast approaching so it is appropriate that we review and analyze their stewardship.

A thorough examination of the Budget is crucial in that it gives us in the opposition, the Bahamian people, and the international financial community, the opportunity to examine in detail the financial state of our nation. It also provides us with the opportunity to critically scrutinize the performance of the Christie PLP administration in managing our economy, and how our taxes were spent. This is especially relevant, as fast approaching elections tend to **BREED DESPERATION** and **DESPERATE ACTS** by those in the PLP who

are determined at all costs to hold onto power to the detriment of we the people whom they serve.

Mr. Speaker,

The Budget is a health check of our economy. As indicated during the mid-year review the vital signs of the financial health of our Bahamas continues on life support and in the critical care unit. Yes, Pinewood, I accept my previous statement that the FNM had left the economy in a wheelchair, however it was breathing and moving about spontaneously, but now it's in a critical care unit and on life support.

If the Christie led PLP government continues on its present **TAX, BORROW, AND RECKLESS SPENDING COURSE,** the country's economic health will continue to deteriorate to a state from which we may never recover.

THE NATIONAL DEBT

Mr. Speaker,

These last six months from January to June have shown little to no improvement. Let us look at the facts. Our national debt which stood at approximately \$5 Billion in 2012 now stands at over 6.5 billion dollars in 2015, and the projected borrowing in this budget of 385 million, will bring the total amount to almost 7.3 billion dollars. This means that during this PLP term in office this **TAX, BORROW AND SPEND** PLP government in addition to the billions of taxes which it collected, has borrowed and spent more than two billion dollars.....

Where did all the money go?

Today under the PLP each child upon birth inherits a debt of \$20,857.00

Look around Mr. Speaker, just look around. Our public infrastructure is in a terrible state of disrepair. Just drive around and throughout the over the hill communities and you become acutely aware of the deplorable state of disrepair everywhere. Out-door toilets are still in common usage in many of our over the hill communities. Roadways

in New Providence and the Family Islands are riddled with deep potholes resulting in expensive maintenance costs for our already over-burdened and over taxed citizens. We in the Killarney Constituency await the long promised repair of the West Bay Street Corridor (Blake Road to Old Fort Bay).

I become **OUTRAGED, EMBARRASED,** and **ASAHMED** when I have to drive past, or visit government owned buildings such as the Post Office, the Clarence A. Bain building, the Rodney Bain building and the many other government buildings that are in such a dilapidated state of disrepair. Many of them should be condemned by Public Works.

I extend to the long suffering hardworking government civil servants who labour in such hazardous and unhealthy environments my commitment to deliver them from their misery on an FNM victory.

The pharmacies at the Princess Margaret Hospital and the Rand Memorial Hospital are short of critical medical supplies, but thank

God they have finally been able to open the hospital in Exuma, while we still await Abaco's opening, both constructed by the FNM.

Mr. Speaker,

With all the PLP talk of doubling the investment in education, this government has not built one single high school in its two terms in office; not one high school in nine years, Mr. Speaker, Not one. Where did the money go Mr. Speaker, where did the two billion dollars of borrowed money go?

Instead of reducing the national debt as promised, this PLP government went on a **BINGE OF TAX, BORROW, AND SPEND**, and our national debt continues to rise and is now in the danger zone where our debt to GDP ratio is at an all-time historic high, exceeding the 70% danger threshold climbing to 76%, causing alarming local and international concern. Many of our sister countries in the Caribbean have gone down this road and have all fallen into the hands of the IMF- with disastrous results. **(Devaluation!!! Devaluation!!! Devaluation!!!)**

This Christie administration has brought this country to the precipice of fiscal disaster but pray God, hopefully we in the FNM, once given the mandate of the people will have time to prevent it from falling over the fiscal cliff.

ANEMIC GROWTH RATE

Mr. Speaker,

Our growth rate remains anemically low at a projected 0.5% for 2016-2017 and is the lowest of all the countries in this region. We are unable to decrease our unemployment rate unless we grow our economy, and a pitiful growth rate of 0.5% just will not cut it. The IMF has suggested that in order to cut our high unemployment rate in half, and accommodate the young people coming out of school, we must grow our economy by at least 7.5%. With a growth rate of zero point five per cent, 0.5% Mr. Speaker, our country is fast slipping behind our other sister countries in our region. When the PLP government is kicked out of office in 2017 or before, they will leave a country that will require massive fixing, and God willing, fix it we shall.

Mr. Speaker,

The PLP government has so recklessly mismanaged our economy that we are now at the brink of financial disaster as our credit-worthiness remains one downgrade away from junk bond status. It will require careful, steady and expert hands to arrest this fall and put us back on a path to peace and prosperity.

Mr. Speaker,

We will not grow our economy if we continue to make it difficult for Bahamians and others to start and operate profitable businesses. Contrary to the PLP government's claim about spreading the red carpet to attract investments, it is not easy to do business in our country. Try to open up a bank account and experience the difficulty. Increased bureaucracy and government red tape are making it more expensive and more difficult for the small entrepreneur to get into and or to survive in business.

We must cut the red tape if we are to be competitive with other jurisdictions.

Mr. Speaker,

When given the mandate to govern, we in the FNM will grow our economy and reduce our National Debt. We will grow Bahamian Ownership of the Economy and provide Economic opportunity, empowerment and growth for all citizens. We will ensure fairness in government, cut red tape and provide concrete support for Bahamian enterprises. **(STUDENT, UNKNOWN TO MANY DENIED SCHOLARSHIP FOR MEDICAL SCHOOL THOUGH SHE WAS AN 'A' STUDENT.)**

CORRUPTION

Mr. Speaker,

If we are to grow our economy we must stamp out the corruption and cronyism which is endemic in this Christie PLP administration. Week after week we become aware of millions of dollars going missing from government agencies and in most instances the culprits go scott free. **The habit of public money disappearing into private pockets must stop.** It is the duty and responsibility of politicians of our generations to root out and stamp out the high level of corruption in our society and under an FNM administration procedures and policies

will be put in place to prevent the uncontrolled stealing of public funds and those caught stealing will be brought to justice.

Mr. Speaker,

The myriad of scandals that have plagued this Christie-led PLP administration has without a doubt contributed to this PLP Administration being described by many, as the worst government in the history of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. Scandal after PLP scandal is all we hear about nowadays. Who can forget the BAMSI fire insurance scandal and who can justify that for 35 students at BAMSI they built a cafeteria seven times the size of The College of The Bahamas' cafeteria? You hear of negotiations with the Chinese for 10,000 acres of property in Andros and you, a born Bahamian, can't even get one acre for the use of you and your family. There is constant talk in the community about the Alfred Gray magistrate scandal; The Rubis oil spill scandal; the Urban Renewal Small homes repair scandal and the missing money at the Post Office, The College of The Bahamas, the Customs Department, the Road Traffic Department and the list goes on and on.

MORTGAGE RELIEF

Mr. Speaker,

For five consecutive years this PLP government of hope and change has provided false hope to home owners with their defaulted mortgages. The PLP promised mortgage relief, but in spite of their promises, home foreclosures and bank repossessions continue to escalate.

Bahamians have taken due note that for the fifth year in a row, the PLP promises to bring mortgage relief, but it is too little too late because the Bahamian people have lost faith in your many failed promises. **(THE PEOPLE WANT TO ANXIOUSLY FORECLOSE UPON YOU AS GOVERNMENT). The people of The Bahamas want me to let you know Prime Minister, that they are anxiously awaiting the opportunity to foreclose on the PLP Government and evict all of you from this honourable House.**

The FNM will unveil its own simple, workable but common sense mortgage relief Programme which will keep many home owners in

their homes despite the long dark delay and the many not now able to be saved and for whom relief has forever been lost.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Mr. Speaker,

When the PLP assumed the mantle of government in 2012 our unemployment rate stood at 14%. Four years later that number has increased to 14.8%. Where are the May Employment Statistics that are now overdue? Are you ashamed, or are you trying to delay in an attempt to include the Job Program Employees? The Department of Labour in its latest survey indicates that there are over 31,000 persons unemployed and looking for work while thousands more have become tired, discouraged, and in such despair that they have lost hope and have stopped looking. The cruel fact is that unemployment among our young people is at the highest level ever. Labour relations between the government and the labour unions are so strained that a noted labour leader remarked the other day that relations “were never this bad” and a union chief has commented that “We may campaign against the PLP.”

Mr. Speaker,

It pains me to know that every night over 43,000 Bahamians go to bed hungry because they are too poor to buy the nutritional food that they need to eat. I know what it is to be poor for I have lived it from birth, during my childhood and student days. I am a product of the poor and the face and poster boy of all those living below the poverty line and Mr. Speaker, with every fiber in my body and with help from The Almighty I am totally committed to doing all that I can, whenever I can, with the help of whoever I can, to remove this scourge of abject poverty from the face of our Bahama land.

Mr. Speaker,

I do not know if those on the PLP front bench are aware of or appreciate the amount of pain and suffering that abounds in our society but every day more and more of our people are suffering because this PLP government has done nothing to improve their quality of life.

CRIME AND VIOLENCE

Mr. Speaker,

The Christie led PLP government has failed and failed miserably in its most important responsibility to the Bahamian people and that is to keep us safe. Violent crimes and the fear of crime stalks our land and the record breaking murder count of 146 persons last year almost qualifies The Bahamas as an armed war zone and already we have recorded 56 murders and are on the way to meeting or surpassing last year's record. Our economy will not grow until we solve the issue of crime, and as you know Mr. Speaker, crime is a multi-faceted issue which requires multi-faceted approaches. The family, the church, civil society, and the government must all join forces to combat this societal menace.

Just last week a grandfather was murdered at an ATM banking machine. We must hang these criminals. An FNM government led by Minnis will do all to ensure that these murderous scumbags are hang until they are Dead, Dead, Dead. An FNM government had done it before, and we will do it again.

FNM CRIME REDUCTION PLAN

Mr. Speaker, we need peace on our streets. We will create a safe Bahamas by collaborating with our social partners the church, educators, social workers, and the citizen at large to implement new crime prevention programmes. A major problem in our society is that our children are growing up without knowing the difference between right and wrong. They live in a culture that glorifies violence, disrespects authority and are concerned only about their rights but not about their responsibilities.

Our aim Mr. Speaker, is not just to control behavior but to change it by directing their energies into positive channels by:

- Instituting conflict resolution Programmes in community centres.
- Fostering various kinds of cadet programmes and troupes such as dance, music and other wholesome activities that promote personal, family, group and national pride and build skills and leadership in our people. We will give them opportunities to display their talents and to gain other forms of national recognition.

- We will develop a modern, efficient crime fighting machine properly manned, trained and equipped to prevent crime where possible, detect crime when it occurs and bring those responsible to account before the courts of law.
- We will hang those murderous scumbags.
- We will review the present policy of the **PLP CRIME, CATCH, RETAIN AND RELEASE AND INSTEAD,**
- We will work with community based partners to identify potential problems and existing feuds and intervene before they occur and turn deadly.
- We will introduce neighborhood safety programmes designed to change the culture of violence that is endemic in our poverty stricken neighborhoods.
- We will eliminate habitats where criminals and criminal activities flourish.
- We will deploy intelligence officers throughout the inner city to prevent and proactively diffuse criminal activities while at the same time gathering invaluable information to help us work to develop and implement a zero tolerance crime strategy.

- We will Use state of the art technology in our fight against crime including the new gunshot detection devices, the innovative social media exploitation technologies, drones and other crime fighting devices in the detection and surveillance of hotspot targeted high crime areas.
- We will build a modern prison where the emphasis will be on rehabilitation and skills training rather than just a place for the warehousing of criminals.

Mr. Speaker,

I wish to commend our brave men and women of the Royal Bahamas Police and Defense Forces who everyday put themselves in harm's way to keep us and our communities safe and assure them that the FNM once given the opportunity will support and provide them with the resources necessary to help us rid this menace from our society.

EDUCATION

Mr. Speaker,

We need a more educated society with the skills necessary to live in and contribute to today's technological world. Our public school

system continues to graduate far too many students with a D grade average and no visible plan to change this disheartening statistic.

We have to stop social promotion.

If a child cannot read or write sending him or her forward to a higher class only breeds anger and frustration.

We have to stop this notion that every child should go into a purely academic stream.

No child should leave grade 2 without knowing how to read and write and basic arithmetic. **(ONCE LITERACY IS LOST, NUMERACY FOLLOWS).**

The public education system must provide programmes to ensure that every child emerges from 12th grade with a marketable skill.

The FNM will initiate properly staffed, active community centres, where enterprise, music, art, seamanship and various marketable skills are provided free of cost to our young and not so young citizens.

Mr. Speaker, it is unfair that due to lack of finances, students in our Family Islands do not have the same access to education at The College of The Bahamas as students from New Providence and Grand Bahama, **so we will provide full scholarships and housing to all Family Island students, once qualified, to attend The College of The Bahamas. We will also provide a stipend for all these Family Island students.**

NATIONAL HEALTH INSURANCE

Mr. Speaker,

We wish to place on record The Free National Movement's total commitment to providing every Bahamian with easy, affordable and timely access to quality health care. Essential to the realization of this goal however is the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the expansion of preventive health care. We believe however that in order to provide the greatest good to the greatest number of our people that care must be taken as to how the programme is implemented.

On the march to comprehensive health insurance, the Free National Movement constructed mini hospitals in the islands of Abaco and Exuma.

WE have upgraded the Rand Memorial Hospital in Grand Bahama and the Princess Margaret Hospital in New Providence.

WE have introduced tele medicine facilities and our prescription drug Programme is providing free medicine to thousands of Bahamians who are suffering from lifestyle diseases.

WE were prepared to construct a new maternal and child health block, decentralize ambulance services, and introduce tele-medicine to our ambulances, thus allowing our emergency care to commence immediately with the assistance of the emergency room doctors.

WE believe that the next logical phase Mr. Speaker, is to introduce insurance for catastrophic illness rather than the primary care which the PLP government is presently promoting. As a physician who has spent many years in the health care industry, no one has satisfactorily explained to me or to the Bahamian people how the primary care that is being promoted now is substantially different from what is available today.

Mr. Speaker,

Both you and I know that it is the cancer patient, the patient with chronic heart disease, with brain illness, and other chronic illnesses, who requires financial assistance most, rather than persons with a chest cold or a broken finger. We encouraged the government to engage in a real partnership with all the significant stake holders, the medical community and the insurance industry to develop a quality, cost effective comprehensive health care insurance programme. I am glad that the Prime Minister has decided to follow our recommendations.

Mr. Speaker,

This **TAX, BORROW** and **RECKLESS** spend PLP government has brought this country to the brink of disaster and is trifling with our future in a most serious way. When we in the FNM announced that we would eliminate VAT from many of the consumer and breadbasket items, the Prime Minister laughed at the idea and lectured us that the foreign consultants said it was a bad idea, however, I am pleased that the Prime Minister has accepted our bad idea and has decided to remove VAT from some components of education.

BUT PRIME MINISTER YOU HAVE NOT GONE FAR ENOUGH.

VAT has become a financial burden on the elderly and the suffering poor. These are the people who you see spinning in gaming houses as their only way out from under.

VAT is a deep concern to a struggling middle class, who see no end to the burden of rising prices.

So Mr. Speaker, a priority duty of a Minnis led Administration is to arrest the reckless spending, reduce our borrowing, and remove the burdensome **VAT tax from the more than twenty breadbasket items, from education, from light and water bills, from medicine, health care and insurance, and from prescription drugs.**

IT IS A HEARTLESS Christie led PLP government that has forced the poor, the indigent, and the elderly, whose only income is their monthly old age government pension, to pay VAT on food, medicine, light and water and health care.

The FNM will deliver relief.

The poor and middle class have a savior. The young people and the elderly will have a savior.

Hurricane Joaquin devastated the southern Family Islands last year and they are still suffering from its affects. We are pleased that the government has taken our advice and extended the exigency order, but Mr. Speaker, that is not enough. If the government can waste over twenty million dollars for Junkanoo Carnival then the government must be able to declare these Family Islands as disaster areas, and provide them with a Tax Holiday for 1 – 2 years.

TAX FREE ZONES FOR OVER-THE-HILL AND DEPRESSED AREAS.

Mr. Speaker,

We support the extension of The CITY OF NASSAU REVITALIZATION Act for an additional year as these fiscal incentives will encourage the revitalization of the City of Nassau however just as the PLP provides economic incentives to Bay Street, an FNM administration will focus on the positive transformation of

impoverished over-the-hill and depressed areas by creating tax-free zones in the poor neighbourhoods. Our vision is to revitalize these over the hill areas by providing Bahamians who live and invest in these areas, exemptions from the payment of customs duties on imported materials, exemptions from real property tax, business licence and any other taxes. In addition, customs duties will be reduced on vehicles proven and certified for the business. In this way we will uplift and transform these Over-the-hill and depressed areas just as the Family Islands Development Act is transforming the economy of many of our Family Islands. If Bay Street can be given incentives, then why not the inner city and depressed areas?

Prime Minister you said you will “wipe every tear from every eye.” Just drive through these depressed areas represented by your government. (Bain Town, Centerville and Englerston). They are still crying, but an FNM Government will assist and surely wipe their tears away. Relief is soon to come.

These Tax Free Zones would contain multi-purpose community centers with amenities to provide for

- A. After School Program
- B. Daycare Center
- C. Nursery
- D. Care for the elderly
- E. Counseling (Family, religious, conflict resolution and parenting)
- F. Sporting (Basketball, volleyball and others)

All to be within a safe and clean environment.

Mr. Speaker,

Let's get this right. **“I have nothing against Bay Street, I only think it's time for the wealth and benefits to spread to the inner city and beyond.”**

LOCAL GOVERNMENT FOR NEW PROVIDENCE

Mr. Speaker,

20 years ago in 1996 The Bahamas established a modern system of Local Government everywhere except in New Providence where local community affairs are handled directly by the central government. Local Government in The Bahamas has been moderately successful on the Family Islands and now is the time to introduce Local Government Councils to New Providence

Why not Mr. Speaker? If Family islands can take care of their community affairs why can't New Providence resident do the same?

A Minnis led FNM government will strengthen Local government in the Family Islands by allowing them to retain a portion of the revenue generated in their area to remain in their area for local development. They will be given greater responsibility for their future development and direction.

Our country has one of the most centralized governments in the world, with a shocking proportion of decisions that affect our daily life being made by politicians and unaccountable bureaucrats in Nassau. At best, it can lead to outdated thinking and shut out innovation and at its worst, it breeds corruption. Under my FNM administration we will bring local Government at long last to the residents of New Providence giving them a say in their daily affairs affecting them where they live and expanding our democracy by bringing government closer to the people.

We must strengthen the existing local government in the Family Islands before bringing it to New Providence, but bring it, we will.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me extend congratulations to all local government Chief Councilors; Council members and Town Committee Chairpersons and members in all of our Family Island districts and townships on the 20th Anniversary of elected local government in our islands.

YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

Mr. Speaker, one in every three young persons in our Bahamas is unemployed.

This startling statistic could only **BREED FRUSTRATION, CRIME, AND A VIOLENT SOCIETY.** To rescue our country we must rescue our youth and that is why we will engage students, young people, the unemployed and the under employed in national development initiatives. The energy and enthusiasm of Bahamian Youth will help to bring about the changes needed to advance our country to the next level. And we will work to help our young people ignite their future and achieve their full potential. We will introduce the most comprehensive social intervention initiatives ever seen in the modern Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker,

We are dedicated to creating the opportunity society where every Bahamian will have easy access to skills training, jobs and economic opportunities to enable them to participate fully in the country's life and become economically productive.

Our young people are failing to participate fully in our economy through no fault on their own and so the FNM will implement a Bahamas Youth Development Corps Programme for young people between the ages of 18 and 30 so that they may earn money towards higher education and entrepreneurship.

We will facilitate youth employment through the reintroduction of a Skills Training Programme and we will institutionalize the Self Starter Programme to encourage and support budding entrepreneurship and new business.

GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND

Mr. Speaker,

The economy of Grand Bahama REMAINS at its lowest ebb and its future is uncertain. Several tax concessions under The Hawksbill Creek Agreement

came to an end this year and despite the assurances given by all parties in the Memorandum of Understanding we remain skeptical -- until the amending agreement is signed into law we urge the government to ensure that the amending agreement contains terms and conditions that are especially favourable and beneficial to the economy of Grand Bahama and the Bahamian people.

Any new agreement must result in new major investments, expansion of existing businesses, greater and more direct government involvement, more efficient, competitive and relevant reorganization of regulatory licensing, and governmental functions in keeping with international best practices.

Mr. Speaker,

Grand Bahama offers still the best opportunity for us to expand the country's economic model from tourism and financial services to include light industries. The knowledge industry comprising of scientific and technological advances offers limitless economic opportunities for sustainable development and we encourage the government to seize the opportunity that these new industries offer for the development of Freeport and Grand Bahama.

As we have done in the past, an FNM government will vigorously promote and extend the economy of Freeport and Grand Bahama by developing a knowledge-based sector in Freeport so as to create meaningful jobs and job opportunities for Bahamians throughout Grand Bahama.

PLP PROMISES UNFULFILLED

Mr. Speaker,

- The PLP promised to reduce the national debt but instead they have increased it.
- The PLP promised to reduce the unemployment rate but instead a greater number of people are unemployed today than ever before.
- The PLP promised to bring mortgage relief to struggling home owners but more Bahamians are losing their houses today than they did four years ago. We note your new PLP promise in your budget statement to bring mortgage relief but we and the Bahamian people have lost faith in your promises. Your PLP Plan is just too little and too late especially for the thousands of Bahamians who have already lost their homes and those who are about to lose the home where they live.

- The PLP promised to honour the vote on the gambling referendum but they spat in the faces of the Bahamian people when they rejected their vote in favour of the YES.
- The PLP promised to preserve and protect our culture but instead you spent as much as Twenty million dollars ON CARNIVAL in your attempt to water down and disrespect our traditional Bahamian culture.
- The PLP promised to save and expand the middle class but more and more of our middle class has fallen at or below the poverty line and now must seek handouts from the government's social programmes.
- The PLP promised to create over five thousand jobs at the opening of Baha Mar but every day as you Mr. Prime Minister Drive to work the unopened white elephant stands as a memorial to your failed legacy.
- The PLP said that your government "Believes in Bahamians" however the foreign investor is granted crown lands at concessional prices while Bahamian applications are left unattended on the shelf.
- The PLP promised an Oil Drilling Referendum. Are they now afraid?
- These are but a few of the solemn broken PLP promises made to the Bahamian people that have caused such a trust deficit in this Christie led PLP administration but there is soon coming a day when you in

the PLP will be held accountable by the Bahamian people for your many broken promises and voted out of office as you rightly and justly deserve!

Mr. Speaker,

After what is turning out to be another disastrous term in office, the Bahamian people are ready to again reject another scandal-ridden PLP administration.

PLP RECORD OF FAILURE

Mr. Speaker,

The hard fact is that the last four years of the Christie led administration is characterized by rising national debt, no accountability, low growth rate, increasing high unemployment, and an unacceptable high rate of criminal activities. To arrest this unhealthy state of affairs our priority when assuming office will be to launch our **FNM RECOVERY AND GROWTH AGENDA** that will create an opportunity and shareholding society by focusing on restoring and growing a strong economy, creating meaningful jobs,

supporting entrepreneurs, incentivizing small businesses and wealth creation for Bahamians.

Mr. Speaker,

Let me remind the Christie administration of their legacy in the last four years:-

- GDP growth remains anemically low.
- Unemployment remains stubbornly high.
- The murder rate has never been higher.
- The National Debt continues to rise.
- The debt to GDP ratio is worsening.
- The Middle class has been decimated
- The Poverty level is at an all-time high.
- The Bahamas continues to fall in the ease of doing business rankings.
- We are one downgrade away from JUNK status.
- There has been no Freedom of Information ACT so Transparency remains a dream.

As the next government, my FNM Administration will:

- Deepen and strengthen our democracy by improving our System of Governance by employing a full time Press Secretary with responsibility for Cabinet and other updates to the media; a Prime Minister who acts as CEO; instituting a 2-term limit for prime minister; a recall system for non-performing MP's; primaries for constituency candidate elections; anti-corruption bill to govern an independent anti-corruption unit; an independent director of Public Prosecutions with no oversight by the Attorney General (amendments to existing law); financial independence of House Speaker; more effective public disclosure with the necessary amendment thus allowing the Commissioner to refer cases directly to the independent Public Prosecutor; strengthening and proper staffing of Auditor General including the authority to refer cases directly to an Independent Director of Public Prosecution, an ombudsman; contractors bill with a lien clause, and a contractor general act.
- Work towards the modernization of over the hill communities, while ensuring as far as possible the traditional character of these areas

- Remove VAT tax from breadbasket items, education, utilities, medicine and health care and prescription drugs.
- Create multi-purpose community centers.
- Provide quality day care and programmes for the elderly and disabled through private enterprise encouraged by grants, rebates, quality assurance, monitoring, rating, etc.
- Include proper sporting facilities—all within a safe environment
- Provide quality day care to allow more mothers to be gainfully employed or engage in enterprise. By quality day care, we mean a place where children will not only play, but learn basic literacy, numeracy, hygiene and social skills
- Upgrade or create cultural centres—National Museum & Library, Performing Arts Centre in collaboration with experts in these areas and philanthropic individuals and organizations.

In the opportunity and shareholding economy my FNM Administration will:-

- Promote economic growth through innovation by utilizing the COB campus as an incubator for scientific research, development and technological advances.
- Provide small business incubators, incentivize
- Devote serious investment to building creative industries, which, according to the IDB's Orange Economy, is capable of embracing more people in entrepreneurship, using the talents that so many Bahamians possess in Junkanoo arts, design, visual arts, straw work, dance, music, writing, publishing, theatre and so on. Equally important, the creative industries can be more protective of natural resources. Properly exploited, creativity can add millions of dollars and much needed diversification to the Bahamian economy.
- National Solar Energy Program, allowing net metering.
**OUR GOAL: EACH HOME TO BECOME SELF
CONTAINED POWER STATION.**
- Using modern technology, cause there to be a real-time connection between government agencies for a more efficient information and service processing.

- Amend the Hotel Encouragement Act by reducing the number of rooms needed to access the concessions thus encouraging Bread and Breakfast facilities and increasing room inventory.
- Land Reform
- Streamline government agencies and eliminate costly regulations which hamper growth, and breeds government inefficiency, waste, corruption and cronyism.
- Create a business friendly and enabling environment conducive for the establishment and operation of successful businesses.
- Make available land and government crowned lands to Bahamians at concessional rates for the construction of owner occupied homes and the expansion of the domestic investment in our economy.
 - Encourage foreign direct investment in clear, transparent, and favourable conditions for Bahamians.
 - Incentivize Bahaman businesses to return to the Family Islands by making crown and government lands to Bahamians at concessional rates to create employment as part of our Return to the Islands initiative; and

- Create a more accountable government by enacting a Fiscal Responsibility Act, and bring into force a new Freedom of Information Act so that Bahamians will have easy access to the workings and the decisions of the government.
- My FNM government will enact The Whistle Blower Protection Act.
- We will enact The Campaign Contribution Regulation Act. (Campaign finance reform).
- We will strengthen the Prevention of Corruption and Bribery Act and we will stamp out corruption.

NEW AND BETTER BAHAMAS. I commit to labour unceasingly to ensure that under an FNM government we will focus and devote all the diverse and brilliant talents of our party and of Bahamians young and old to:

- Growing the economy
- Creating meaningful jobs and a more prosperous Bahamas
- Reducing the public debt
- Reducing poverty
- Growing a solid middle class

- Creating a safer Bahamas
- Creating a more educated Bahamas and
- Creating a more accountable Bahamas

The PLP are now getting **VEX VEX VEX** because they realize the Bahamian people have decided to **REJECT THEM. TO VOTE THEM OUT. AND GET RID OF THEM FOR GOOD.** That is why they are trying to sully the good name of and bully Bahamians and decent FNMs. They have tried their best to detract us and stop our momentum but they will fail! It won't work! And, "It Ain't Long Now!!"

Mr. Speaker,

MY PLEDGE AND ASSURANCE AS FNM LEADER

I wish to assure you, this honorable house and The Bahamian public at large that our reason for being a political party in our Bahamas is to provide a scandal-free, accountable government throughout our term in office.

We ask you to place your trust in us and we will honour that trust, and honour you our Bahamian people.

We will do the much important work to be done and address many of the problems caused or ignored by the PLP during their time in government.

We will fight to strengthen our economy.

We will relentlessly attack the long simmering problem of crime and its root causes.

We will rebuild our country's ageing infrastructure and put in place social programmes to aid Bahamians young and old especially during difficult times.

We promise and commit to always work on your behalf, and for the benefit of our children and the next generation.

Mr. Speaker,

AS I CLOSE I ONCE AGAIN REPEAT

The last four years have been nothing but a long dark night of misery for the Bahamian people but as the Bible declares “**Weeping endured for a night but joy comes in the morning.**”

Mr. Speaker,

Morning is dawning. The rising sun will break through the storm clouds and oh what a sunrise that will be. This sunrise will usher in a **NEW AND BETTER BAHAMAS.**

Under an FNM government we will focus on:

Growing the economy

Creating meaningful jobs and a more
prosperous Bahamas

Reducing the public debt

Reducing poverty

Growing a solid middle class

Creating a safer Bahamas

Creating a more educated Bahamas

Creating a more accountable Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker,

We are now preparing for a convention. I will enter as FNM Leader, and I will emerge as FNM Leader.

The Delegates will **ROC with DOC.**

The young people will **ROC with DOC.**

The Family Islands and the entire Bahamas will **ROC with DOC.**

My Deputy will **ROCK with DOC.**

I can see Mr. Speaker, You are prepared to **ROC with DOC.**

The five thousand plus babies that I have delivered and now are off voting age will “Rock Wit Doc”

I say to them my babies, my children, “I’ve delivered you safely into this world, it’s time for you to deliver me and your country.”

Mr. Speaker,

This great country of ours will again thrive. We will thrive because we do what we say, we keep our promises, and we pick People over Politics.

We recognize, this is **THE PEOPLE's TIME**.

It is truly time for The Bahamas to **ROC with DOC and the FNM**.

I invite all Bahamians to roll up your sleeves and come with me as we build a society of full employment, secure jobs, safe streets, good schools, adequate accessible and affordable health care, a social security net for the lease able to care for themselves and a Bahamas marked by love of God and compassion for our fellow Bahamians.

Mr. Speaker,

“It ain't long now.

Thank you and God bless The Bahamas.

.....END.....