



**The Hon. Iram Lewis**  
**Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness,**  
**Management and Reconstruction**

**Contribution to 2020/21 Budget Debate**  
**House of Assembly**

**Monday, June 15, 2020**

## **Front Cover Pandemic**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I rise today humbled and encouraged.  
Encouraged because there is hope.

As one writer puts it, “Hope is being able to see that there is light, despite all of the darkness.”

The Bahamas has seen darkness the past nine months with Hurricane Dorian and the COVID-19 pandemic, but the Bahamians I know are resilient people who face difficult times with courage and a resolve to overcome.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I stand here today on the shoulders of the good people of Central Grand Bahama who gave this Water Cay Boy an opportunity to work for them, and for the people of The Bahamas.

My 2020/21 budget contribution as Minister of State for Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction is about Hope, Preparedness, Restoration and Rebuilding.

As an island nation we live in a hurricane zone. We have an awesome task of preparing

this country for the next disaster and rebuilding for the future.

I say next disaster not because I want one to affect The Bahamas, but because we must be realistic.

Due to climate change and our geography, each year we are at risk from storms that are gaining in destructive power.

As a country we must put in place policies and procedures to ensure our preparedness and resiliency.

We saw from Dorian the devastating power of the new superstorms.

Dorian is the strongest storm to hit The Bahamas. It was one of the strongest storms in recorded history.

It destroyed generations' worth of infrastructure and investment in Abaco, the Cays and Grand Bahama.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I turn my attention to my work as the Member of Parliament for Central Grand Bahama.

Dorian's path affected all constituencies in Grand Bahama at various levels, and Central Grand Bahama was no different.

We have continued the work of cleaning Central Grand Bahama.

The road was a bumpy one at the beginning, due to indiscriminate dumping putting further pressures on the clean up our our community.

For the most part, we have seen a decline in this practice. Our efforts will continue, and residents will remain vigilant to ensure our communities remain clean.

We are still moving ahead with key programs to enhance the lives of the residents of Central Grand Bahama.

Food security has been a focus.

The COVID-19 pandemic has magnified the need for food security for our residents. We have kicked our programs into high gear to assist residents with backyard farming.

During the time leading up to Father's Day we will be visiting our Central Grand Bahama residents and supplying them with raised garden beds inclusive of tomatoes, scallions, bell peppers and a few other vegetables.

We realize that some of our residents have begun successful backyard farms already, so these beds will be an addition to that. However, **Mr. Speaker**, there are residents

who have yet to begin and this small token is our way of saying, **“Let’s do this together.”**

On Mother’s Day our team visited a few homes and did a bit of lawn care to show some of our mothers how much we appreciate them.

The team also distributed care packages for mothers in Hannah Hill.

We were not able to reach as many as we wanted to, but for the Father’s Day backyard farming initiative we intend to visit every home in Central Grand Bahama over the coming months to ensure everyone has the assistance needed to get their farms going.



We agree that this is not a small task but if successfully adopted the results could have a major impact on our future.

To further support the farming initiative, we recently teamed up with Donald Archer of Harcourt Investments and Bahamia Services, to use a few acres of their facility to establish a community farm where we will have a plant nursery, food production area, a fresh salad and juice bar along with a farmers' market pavillion.

This facility will also be a place where we conduct training for those who need

assistance maintaining their backyard farms. This is initiative headed by Anthony Hudson.

I would like to thank the Minister of Agriculture and Marine Resources, The Member for Marco City, for his support of our program. We are looking forward to working with his Ministry as this program will be a part of the National Food Security initiative.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We have spent the past three months in varying degrees of lockdown and curfews. During this time families should have drawn closer; family activities should have

increased, and family time should now be more valuable than ever. These moments are priceless and ones you can never replace once the time has passed.

I know there are many fathers and mothers like me who miss loved ones, so I make this plea from my heart to all of the Central Grand Bahama residents: Do not let the **busyness** of the days take away the strength of your family bond. They are too precious.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I would like to extend sincere condolences to my predecessor Mr. Neko Grant and family on the recent passing of his son Neko Jr. He was a certified Architect like myself, and up to the time of his passing was contracted by the Disaster Reconstruction Authority as part of our Assessment team. As many of you know, I lost my son tragically just a few years ago. Saturday past was the fifth anniversary of his death. Like other families losing a child is never easy. On behalf of our team at the DRA we wish the

Grant family all the very best and our prayers are with you.

I would also like extend condolences to the family of Mr. Edward Poitier, my Godfather and someone who was instrumental in my upbringing.

**Mr. Speaker,**

So often I hear people make the statement “Grand Bahama can’t catch a break”.

I often feel those sentiments myself especially considering we are experiencing a global pandemic immediately after the devastation of Hurricane Dorian. But we continue.

On May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2018, we relaunched the YMTA in Hunters, Grand Bahama.

After some \$100,000 in renovations we not only refurbished the facility but established Grand Bahama's first Smart Park.

This centre has since played a vital role in Central Grand Bahama and is currently being used for disaster preparedness training.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I would like to also thank the Minister of Works, The Member for Carmichael, as I am pleased to announce that areas of Central Grand Bahama has been assessed, and the

scope of work is presently being detailed, and road repaving will soon commence.

I would also like to highlight a few of our recent initiatives:

- During the Christmas holiday we were pleased to join former Minister Maurice Moore and Lady Moore and a number of local residents for the lighting of the newly refurbished lighthouse in Pinders Point. The expressions of joy and excitement to see this landmark come to life once again was apparent on the faces of all those who attended, and the same sentiments were expressed by Minister

Moore. We look forward to the continued development of this landmark over the coming months as one of the sites identified in our Eco Adventure Parks Development program.

- Recently we were pleased to work along with an amazing group of local residents to assist in feeding just under 500 residents at the lighthouse in Pinders Point(Thanks to Jan Rolle, Sheila Grant, Deacon Donald Duncombe and other committee members). This for me was a highlight, as it proved the potential of how



this site can be used and its possible impact on the local community.

- On Valentine's Day weekend, we hosted the lighting of the Boiling Hole at Lovers Beach. We were able to feed many residents at this event and showed love in this community. A special thank you to Mr. Nehemiah Hield of Bahamen for the entertainment.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Moving forward we are working along with local industry partners to provide some assistance and guidance to those business persons and other residents who have been

displaced by Hurricane Dorian and affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

We want to ensure that as much support as possible is given to our corporate partners and entrepreneurs in Central Grand Bahama.

We know this is easier said than done, but we also know it is not impossible. Together we can achieve a better Central Grand Bahama and a better Bahamas.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I now turn to My Ministry.

When the Government last year established the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and

Reconstruction it was done to bring new focus to how we handle disasters.

The Ministry's purpose is not to replace or intrude on the operations of other relevant Government Ministries.

My Ministry is the lead in coordinating work in disaster zones through the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA); and it is the lead in ensuring appropriate measures are in place for hurricane and disaster preparedness through the work of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

Our work is through a focused and collaborative approach.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The 2020/21 budget makes provisions for funding the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction (DPMR), the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA) as indicated in the Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure presented to the House of Assembly.

Overall recurrent expenditure to the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness,

Management & Reconstruction (MDPMR) is \$11,236,100.

This amount is broken down as follows:

- Operational Expenses (for NEMA):  
\$500,000
- Debris Management (by the DRA):  
\$10,000,000
- Disaster Reconstruction Authority:  
\$200,000
- Remaining Items under Head 75  
allocated to the Ministry: \$536,100

## **Capital Expenditure**

The capital allocation for the Ministry totals \$6,500,000, which is further broken down as follows:

- National Disaster Recovery Project: \$2,000,000
- Hurricane Precautions: \$1,000,000
- Acquisition of Transportation Equipment (Land): \$500,000
- Minor Capital Projects: \$3,000,000.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The total budgetary allocation (recurrent and capital) for the Ministry and its agencies is \$17,736,100

**Mr. Speaker,**

Since the creation of my Ministry, we have worked aggressively on developing various policies to enhance the country's preparation for and response to disasters.

In mid-February, my Ministry in conjunction with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the University of the West Indies (UWI) convened a workshop comprised of more

than 50 people from various Government Ministries and Departments, the private sector, and The University of The Bahamas to discuss meaningful approaches to developing a Policy Framework on Resilient Recovery.

In summary, the Policy Framework focuses on effective recovery planning and operations to enhance resilient development. The framework will also reference the institutional arrangements that must be in place to achieve desired outcomes.

Last week we received the first draft of The Resilient Recovery Framework. This



document will be shared for discussion with a group of participants from the February workshop.

Five goals were identified as focal points for the framework.

- Safety and Security
- Access to Infrastructure and Services
- Community Engagement and Partnership
- Livelihoods and Economic Development; and
- Institutional and Capacity Development.

As my Ministry and relevant stakeholders advance the framework through various stages of development, I intend to provide the public with updates.

**Mr. Speaker,**

In addition to several trips of areas affected by Hurricane Dorian, I assembled a group of professionals, comprising, architects, engineers, and contractors to discuss the way forward on revising our building codes.

As an architect, and without any in-depth analysis but subject to cursory assessment during my initial tour of islands and cays

impacted by the storm, we concluded that a review of the building codes was necessary to ensure homes, businesses, roads, bridges, and other structures built, could withstand the force of superstorms.

The meeting with the team of professionals was fruitful in providing insights on measures to ensure building standards are not compromised.

It also brought to light that more inspectors are needed to ensure compliance in the industry.

In addition to the meeting, we led two separate delegations of professionals to areas

severely affected by the storm – Abaco and East Grand Bahama, including Sweetings Cay.

A report on the tour was produced by Craig Delancy, former Director of Building Control, Ministry of Public Works and Utilities.

The report concluded the current building codes, which are similar to the State of Florida, were regarded as adequate when closely examining some of the structures destroyed by the hurricane. In some instances the homes destroyed by Dorian were the

consequence of age, and non-compliance to the building code.

The application of hurricane clips and steel, for example, were not in compliance with prescribed procedures.

Failure to comply with building codes, and the application of illicit practices, in most instances, will be exposed by the impact of superstorms.

Technical experts were of the view that enforcement was lacking, and this may have resulted from the lack of adequate human resources.

Nevertheless, it is my view that some revisions of the building codes and increasing the number of building inspectors will be necessary to enhance penalties assigned to infractions.

This ongoing discussion between the Ministry, Government agencies, and relevant stakeholders is expected to yield positive results for the way forward. I am sure that the Minister of Works and Utilities will elaborate more on code revision during his much anticipated presentation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

On the subject of building in flood-prone areas, I am not aware of restrictions to homeowners who built in such zones.

However, this is an area that must be addressed to reduce the number of structures destroyed and to give early notice to homeowners residing in the pathway of flooding that occurs from tidal surges.

It is worth noting that subject to a conversation with Troy McIntosh, City Manager for the Grand Bahama Port Authority, we were made privy to several flood maps for Grand Bahama Island that

captured the results of flooding based on tidal surges up to 20 feet.

This map provided useful information in advance of Hurricane Dorian making landfall in Grand Bahama, as information on the tidal surge of the storm was added to a statistical model projecting the areas in Freeport that were expected to be impacted from floodwaters.

Based on data received from the Meteorological Department on Hurricane Dorian's projected path and expected tidal surge of 20 feet, Mr. McIntosh and his team of engineers were able to project, with a level



of preciseness, the areas expected to be flooded and the potential height of the water.

The information from the model was shared with the residents and owners of businesses in Freeport.

Further, recommendation was made for people to seek higher ground. As we are all aware in most storms, some residents will respond positively to the recommendation and others will take a position that residing in their homes is their preference.

As one who participated in the rescue operations of Hurricane Dorian, I can tell you that failure to adhere to the advice of

technical experts and evacuation recommendations could result in negative outcomes.

## Slide 2 Dorian Severe Damage

I present the 20 foot flood map depicting various projected levels of tidal surge to the City of Freeport.

Mr. Speaker,

I would also like to draw reference to the Fishing Hole Road. Its been a very contentious issue in our community. Which we have now addressed. (comments)

## Slide 3 Fishing Hole Road

**Mr. Speaker,**

Up-to-date flood mapping of the entire Bahamas on a micro-level – that is, mapping of each island – is necessary for planning and evacuation in the event of any oncoming storm.

I am aware that advancing such an initiative will require input from various Government Ministries, Departments, quasi-governmental agencies, and collaboration with private sector entities, such as the Grand Bahama Port Authority, to affectively address the issue.

I am also aware of the value added in drawing on best practices of international partners, in particular the State of Florida, where regulations exist on building in coastal and flood-prone areas and there is extensive use of flood hazard maps.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I also wish to note that I am baffled that a significant number of people do not know how to swim considering The Bahamas is an archipelago.

Being able to swim could save lives during storms when there is flooding.

Going forward in our policy discussions we as a country should consider the introduction of swimming programs in all schools.

I reiterate, **Mr. Speaker**, having the ability to swim is a matter of life or death especially in a superstorm. (personal reflection)

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction has responsibility for two departments Nema and the Disaster Reconstruction Authority. Both

units are very important in our work as a Ministry.

NEMA leads our preparations for hurricane season. We have had the great fortune of continuous support of donors to help us with preparedness, early relief and early recovery.

I would like to share what funds were received on the Bahamas Disaster Account often referred to as the Donation Account. This account is managed by NEMA with assistance from the Ministry of Finance. The account was established to receive and

manage financial donations from the private sector and government.

During the period September 2019 – May 2020, the account recorded revenues of approximately \$16 million dollars. \$9.6 million was received in cash donations; \$3.6 million came from Government, and approx., \$2.8 million dollars in the form of in-kind contributions. (food and other donated contributions)

**Mr. Speaker,**

\$13.8 million dollars has been spent to date with a balance of \$2.5 million on account.

**Expenditures include:**

\$1.5 million dollars on medical evacuation helicopters

\$16,000 dollars on ferry evacuations

**Expenses related to Kendal G. L Isaacs  
Gymnasium (shelter)**

\$250,000 dollars tent rentals

\$17,000 dollars for generation rental

\$46,000 dollars for washroom facilities

**Other expenses include:**

\$2.5 million on Recreational Vehicles (RV's) and associated costs



\$4.6 million dollars on dome structures

\$275,000 dollars on Transportation and  
Freight

\$139,000 debris clean up

\$113,000 other goods and services

**Mr. Speaker,**

Hurricane preparedness continues to be a  
focus for the Ministry.

I am pleased to announce that 95 shelters,  
for all islands, have been identified and are in  
a state of readiness.

In addition, NEMA is currently  
communicating with other civic and religious

organizations, specifically on the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama. Many have indicated their facilities are available for use as hurricane shelters in the event of a storm. However, some remedial work is required.

There is high expectation that the recently identified facilities will be added to the existing shelter list within the next 30 days.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The COVID-19 pandemic has shifted how we think about shelter accommodation.

Due to the recommended metric with respect to physical distancing the traditional

means of accommodating evacuees will no longer be practiced.

My Ministry and NEMA have agreed to undertake a classroom-style approach to separate people in shelters.

This type of arrangement will be captured in future designs of multipurpose facilities.

Notwithstanding the construction of current shelters, every effort will be made to ensure the classroom-style design is used.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Consistent with other Government agencies, and again, due to COVID-19,

NEMA's action plan for the 2020 hurricane season required revision.

I note that the action plan included, among other things, a week of activities centred on preparing for the hurricane season, school visits, and hurricane drills.

It is likely that we will continue with the implementation of some activities that are within the framework of COVID-19 standards.

There is also the expectation when considering the recent opening of domestic travel that NEMA will commence additional training in the Family Islands to ensure staff

and volunteers are proficient in executing shelter management assignments. COVID-19 new health and safety protocols will be incorporated in all training going forward.

It is also worth noting that in planning for the hurricane season, NEMA on several occasions held virtual meetings with Family Island administrators, and its regional partner, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency (CEDEMA).

All meetings have been productive; Administrators have revised documents on protocols to be executed in the event of a hurricane; execution of protocols begin

when a hurricane advisory or warning is given.

In addition to the provision of adequate shelters, ancillary activities must also be addressed for the effective operation of each facility.

People have been trained to manage each facility. And in consideration of COVID-19, all facilities will be in possession of the appropriate number of personal protective equipment (PPE) kits.

The provision of food and other supplies have been addressed. Nema is also taking regular inventory checks of other items in

storage facilities located on the islands of Grand Bahama, Abaco and New Providence, Vendors have assured NEMA's staff that enough food will be in their storage to address NEMA's needs and those of the general public.

**Mr. Speaker,**

After Dorian we received help from countries around the world in various forms. I want to thank **all nations** who came to our aid during our time of need.

I would like to specifically thank our brothers and sisters in the Caribbean through their assistance via CARICOM. Security

personnel and various forms of other aid and technical advice were given.

They were there for us and we will be there to assist them in their times of need in the ways we can during natural disasters.

#### Slide 4 US

I also express gratitude to the U.S. Embassy and the U.S. Northern Command Centre for their assistance in our hurricane preparedness efforts.

These agencies are well represented in weekly planning meetings by Ms. Stephanie Bowers, Charge de Affairs, Commander



Kevin Self, and other team members, whose input in the planning process is appreciated.

The in-kind contributions are generous. Goods slated for delivery under this robust partnership are a small marine rescue vessel; building materials for hurricane shelters; communication equipment; virtual staff training in shelter management; and other essential items deemed necessary for shelter operations.

I am most grateful to Ms. Bowers and Commander Self, as through our deliberations they have shown keen interest in helping revitalize economic activities in

the country. All items for repairs and operation of facilities will be procured from local vendors.

Discussions with the U.S. Embassy and NorthComm are helping further bolster our response capacity. In short order the U.S. Embassy/NorthComm will gift to The Bahamas 12 rescue boats. These boats will be used in the event of flooding.

An exhibit of the boats are presented here.

Additionally, the Government of the United Kingdom provided naval assistance during Dorian through its deployed regional assets.

We continue to work closely with the U.K. and British High Commissioner Sarah Dickson. The U.K. has been a true partner to us.

## **#Slide 5 Naval Ships and Rescue Choppers**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I commend the staff from NEMA for working to secure these items as we ready ourselves for this hurricane season.

Even if significant disruption occurs in The Bahamas from a catastrophic natural disaster, an alternative would be available for the adequate functioning of its operations.

In short order my Ministry is expected to commence dialogue with stakeholders from the City of Tampa, Florida with respect to having access to a warehouse in the vicinity of a port.

The proposed facility is expected to serve as a drop-off location for donated items for disaster relief.

I note that the western side of Florida was chosen because a hurricane travelling through The Bahamas would most likely impact the eastern region of South Florida.

**Mr. Speaker,**

When I was asked to join the Cabinet as the new Minister of State for the Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction I was excited to have a real opportunity to bring all of my technical abilities to bear on the work to be done in this Ministry, particularly through the new Disaster Reconstruction Authority.

As a graduate of Tuskegee University where my studies were focused on Architecture, I was inspired to take the work of rebuilding our Northern Bahamas on my

shoulders with a team of dedicated and qualified Bahamians.

As I travelled to Abaco and the Cays and throughout my home of Grand Bahama, I knew our work would be the most important work not just for this Ministry but for our country.

I walked and talked with many residents devastated by Hurricane Dorian. We lost lives; we lost our homes; we lost our businesses. Many were in despair, and some even lost hope.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The appointment of the Disaster Reconstruction Authority Board took place in December 2019.

As a result of the catastrophic impact of Dorian, the Board led by its Chairman John-Michael Clarke, invested much time toward the work of rebuilding.

Mr. Clarke, I want to thank you in particular for your leadership, and to the other Directors for your hard work.

The Authority made the decision to focus on what it felt were the immediate needs in the disaster zones.

Some of those decisions were informed by town hall meetings held in Abaco and Grand Bahama.

It was important to speak to the residents, hear their concerns and guide our decisions by the people who lived this terrible experience.

We began our work on the following priority initiatives:

- Continue the clean-up of communities
- Development of the small home repair program
- Management and expansion of debris sites



- Construction of resilient temporary housing
- Co-ordination of school repairs and new construction
- Design and construction of a community center/hurricane shelter
- Design and construction of mixed-use residential communities
- Installation of solar streetlights
- A risk assessment for the redevelopment of the Rand Memorial Hospital
- And, development of a fundraising strategy.

What I have outlined are the current projects the DRA is busy doing on behalf of the residents of Abaco and Grand Bahama.

Some of our work is being done in a strong collaboration with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working in the disaster zones. I will speak more about NGOs later in my presentation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

As you are aware, Hurricane Dorian's destruction resulted in the loss of many homes in Abaco and Grand Bahama. We have not experienced that level of devastation from any hurricane in recent history.

## Slide 6 Small Home Repair

The DRA launched the Small Home Repair Program on February 10<sup>th</sup> of this year, to provide assistance to homeowners.

Offices have been set up on Grand Bahama in the Harold DeGregory Building; in Abaco in the Government Complex; and, in Nassau at NEMA's Office.

To date just under 5,000 homeowners have set up profiles on our web portal. Three thousand are receiving assistance.

One of the great things about this program is the fact that Bahamian vendors and contractors are benefiting financially while

homeowners are getting much-needed assistance.

Vendors providing building supplies; contractors doing repairs; assessments being carried out. Just under five million dollars has been spent to date on this program. This money has been spent in The Bahamas, with Bahamians, working for Bahamians.

There are still hundreds of homeowners who need to upload information to the site; bring in quotes for repairs; or have their homes assessed.

Unfortunately, there have been a number of applicants who do not qualify for various

reasons. Despite this, I want to encourage the residents of Abaco and Grand Bahama to register for the assistance being offered. For small home repair assistance please call 602-5363 or register online at [drabahamas.org](http://drabahamas.org).

**Mr. Speaker,**

One of the most vexing problems homeowners have expressed to our team is the issue of insurance.

In some cases, I have been advised that insurance proceeds have been paid directly to a homeowners' mortgage institution. The impact of this is that in some cases the

homeowner is left with little or no money to repair their homes.

Under the present policy, those homeowners who have insurance do not qualify for our program.

Insurance has been an issue for many people – those who have it and those who do not.

This is an issue that continues to be discussed from a policy perspective. We seek policies that help more people access the small home repair program.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I would also like to note we have a wonderful group of young energetic people providing good customer service to homeowners. They have demonstrated patience and care for those they assist. I would like to thank them for their work.

**Mr. Speaker,**

As I indicated earlier, the DRA started the small home repair program on February 10<sup>th</sup>. Due to the pandemic, we were able to work at full pace for only six weeks before our entire team had to work from home on March 23<sup>rd</sup>.

COVID-19 slowed us down for the past 13 weeks, but we are now preparing to take our program on the road thanks to the donation of two RVs from the United Nations Development Programme and the local Rotary Clubs.

In our efforts to move this program as fast as we can, our team will now be available next week to register people who cannot get to the offices in Abaco and Grand Bahama.

To people still not registered, we are coming to your door in your neighborhoods.

**The work by Bahamians for Bahamians continues.**



**Mr. Speaker,**

While the DRA has a well-organized home repair program underway, we also have a working relationship with a number of NGOs.

In Little Abaco, we are working with Church by the Sea out of Fort Lauderdale. The Church has bought the materials to fix the roofs for 256 homes, and the DRA pays the labour every week. This labour is provided by Bahamian tradesmen in North Abaco.

In Cooper's Town, another NGO, GEM, has purchased some supplies for another 250

roofs. The DRA will be contracting and paying a team of Bahamian labourers so we can move that program along. That work begins this week.

Throughout Abaco and Grand Bahama, we have had other NGOs working on gutting, demucking, roof repairs, and mold remediation.

We continue to thank them for their efforts. They have been working along with us, so this vital work for Bahamians continues.

## **Slide 7 Temp Housing RV's/domes**

**Mr. Speaker,**

Housing is a significant challenge. There is no way around it. I do not have to repeat in this place that there are thousands of homes that need repairs, and many were destroyed.

Thirty-two domes were erected in Spring City – initially for the residents of Spring City.

Some residents did not come when contacted, however I am advised that 29 families are now residing in the Spring City domes, and three are being repaired for families returning to Abaco.

The DRA has taken over the installation of another 171 domes to be erected on the property of homeowners throughout Abaco and East Grand Bahama.

We met with Social Services and Local Government to verify the people who meet the criteria for these homes.

The DRA team will be in communities this week in Abaco and Grand Bahama preparing the infrastructural work necessary to erect the domes and other container housing units.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The following criteria are in place for temporary housing:

- Consideration has been given to those families whose homes have been totally destroyed.
- Consideration has been given to senior citizens and persons with disabilities.
- Consideration has been given to families with minor children.

We feel this is a fair process to first assist the most vulnerable in our community.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I feel the need to explain fully the Domes Project, as there has been much misinformation on this.

In the immediate aftermath of the storm it was realized that temporary housing would be necessary for the islands of Abaco and Grand Bahama.

For Abaco, given the devastation of the areas of Marsh Harbour it was thought that a Family Relief Centre could house thousands of people impacted by the storm.

At that time, the NEMA Disaster Relief and Reconstruction Committee was charged

with investigating options for this Family Relief Centre.

During this time NEMA was bombarded with proposed housing solutions. Most proposed by foreign partners who required the Government of The Bahamas to pay a rate per person, per day, for temporary housing.

This meant that the Government would have had to commit to paying between fifty million and seventy million dollars for temporary housing facilities for nine months. The Disaster Relief and Reconstruction Committee was challenged to find a more reasonable solution.

It was then thought that a tent city, similar to the ones built in Haiti, could be used as immediate temporary housing.

There was a donor who pledged to provide up to one thousand free tents. Two things happened: The first was the donor was unable to make good on the pledge, and two, concerns arose regarding the resiliency of the tents given that hurricane season was not over. This was still in September.

The Relief and Reconstruction Committee was then asked to find a solution that was more resilient than the best tent.



The dome by Intershelter was the solution. The dome is really a permanent structure that we have adopted for temporary use, and at the time it was the only structure that met our resilient requirements.

While this was going on, plans for the development of a Family Relief Centre with the necessary infrastructure had to be created. A site had to be identified, engineering had to be done, infrastructure and dome materials had to be procured.

The design of the Centre was completed and approved near the third week in September and arrangements were made to

begin to procure materials for it. By this time, we had evacuated a large percentage of the population of Marsh Harbour.

Materials for the Family Relief Centre were ordered and began to arrive the third week in October.

The proposed site of 13.5 acres to house over 1,000 people was totally cleared.

After clearing the site, and following the advice of Water Mission, and IsrAid, it was discovered that the proposed site, although out of the freshwater well fields, was not considered to be outside the safety zone for preservation of fresh water.

As a matter of best practice, it was recommended that the site be shifted 800 meters south of where the 13.5 acres had been cleared.

**Mr. Speaker,**

We are building a more responsible and resilient Bahamas. In the past some may have kept the original site, as it was outside of the well fields, but thinking about the future it was decided to move the site. The site was shifted by 800 meters and a new clearing started.

In November just prior to the scheduled arrival of the first dome shipment, Captain

Stephen Russell led a small team on a site visit to Abaco to review the site clearings and the well fields and to confirm the impacts.

While there, it was observed that many residents had tents on their properties while attempting to repair their homes

It was obvious that homeowners with property, preferred to have the dome placed on their property rather than have them go to a mass site.

These suggestions were noted and discussed, and the strategy for providing the domes changed from having a mass dome site, to one where domes would be provided

for people and erected on their personal property.

In addition, for residents in Spring City where the properties are small it was decided that a small cluster of domes would be constructed in a vacant area to accommodate them.

At the time, the number of totally destroyed homes in Spring City was determined to be 47. It was decided 40 domes would be constructed in Spring City. This land had to be cleared and prepared to receive the domes. This was November, **Mr. Speaker.** During our town meetings in

Abaco residents in Spring City indicated that they felt to erect 47 domes in the area chosen was too dense, so the number was reduced to 32.

The shift in strategy required that residential assessments had to be completed throughout Abaco to determine who met the criteria to have the domes put on their property.

The Ministry of Works and Department of Social Services had commenced this exercise but given the enormity of the damage the full assessment exercise was not complete until March of 2020.

I ask the Bahamian people to bear in mind that these home assessments were taking place along with the most significant disaster clean-up in Bahamian history.

Preparations to the Spring City site were completed in January 2020, and the infrastructure and domes were installed and completed early March 2020.

With assessments in hand, ready to determine vulnerability criteria for who would receive a dome on their property, COVID-19 restrictions hampered our efforts – not because work was not allowed on the island of Abaco, but because the crews doing

the work were New Providence based and travel was restricted.

To date the Government has received all of the infrastructure materials for the original Family Relief Centre, including mass plumbing materials, solar lights, shelter tents, generators and kitchen equipment.

In addition, the materials for the domes have been received and are in containers at the original site, just north of Spring City.

These materials include the lumber for the dome bases, and materials for plumbing and electrical installations.



The Government budgeted 6.4 million dollars for this project. Land preparations and the procurement of materials have cost us 4.7 million dollars to date.

We have been assured that the materials are in The Bahamas. We are verifying that assurance so we can properly account to the Bahamian people.

Let me reiterate, **Mr. Speaker**, that having a dome is not a mid-term temporary or permanent housing solution.

Domes are meant for people with destroyed homes, staying on their property

while they are actively repairing their homes. This has been lost in the dome's discussion.

In addition, dome specifications were upgraded to include electrical power, hot water and shower facilities.

We are currently investigating a solar solution for domes that must be placed in remote areas.

This is a substantial upgrade from the communal electricity and plumbing facilities originally envisioned at the Family Relief Centre.

With the relaxing of restrictions, residents in Abaco will see the pace of dome

installation quicken. The DRA and Social Services will be contacting recipients this week to arrange site visits so dome installations can commence.

While this has by no means been easy, I can report that all of the domes have been assigned.

### **Slide #8 MSC Foundation**

**Mr. Speaker,**

For Sweetings Cay, 20 (20 by 20 in size) container homes are scheduled to arrive on Grand Bahama on June 26<sup>th</sup> courtesy of the MSC Foundation.

We are finalizing where these structures will be erected on Sweetings Cay. We are likely to erect all on the Government subdivision on Sweetings Cay.

The DRA's technical team will be on the ground this week to look at preparation.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Let me say here that when we needed to get Government services up and running in Abaco, RVs were purchased and sent to the island.

The majority of these are located at the Government Complex in Marsh Harbour.

The RVs were purchased for emergency purposes and are not meant as a mid-term temporary or permanent solution, as these vehicles are not wind rated for any level of hurricane.

NEMA will write officially to all Government agencies regarding a move-out date of all occupants currently residing in the RVs.

We have the responsibility to consider the well-being of the residents, especially those who work diligently to maintain access to Government Services in the Public Service.

The DRA is aggressively working to provide alternatives for those currently living in RVs.

A plot of land has been identified, a more resilient structure has been identified, and it is anticipated that the Public Servants currently housed at the Government Complex can be given a more safe and comfortable solution in short order.

The challenge with the temporary housing has been that even our temporary solutions must be resilient, storm-resistant solutions.

**Mr. Speaker,**

While we continue to address temporary housing, the DRA is also at the same time looking at permanent housing solutions. Pre-qualification notices have gone out for the design-build of mixed-use residential developments for the disaster zones.

Two, 60-acre plots have been identified in Marsh Harbour and Wilson City.

In East Grand Bahama, properties designated for subdivision development in Sweetings Cay and McLeans Town will be identified. The submission date for the pre-qualification notices is June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

The DRA is also finalizing a land-lease agreement with a donor for the construction of 46 homes in the Central Pines subdivision.

Those homes will be given to 46 families in Abaco. We expect construction to begin in August 2020. **The work by Bahamians, for Bahamians continues.**

### **Slide #9 Debris Management**

**Mr. Speaker,**

In every disaster debris cleanup is a big-ticket item. When Dorian ravaged through our northern islands it created approximately 3 million cubic yards of debris.



The bulk of this clean-up has been done by Bahamian contractors. To date, the clean-up of communities and the management of our debris sites has cost the Government of The Bahamas some \$27 million dollars.

**Local Bahamian contractors have benefitted from this process and they have exceeded the expectations of many who said Bahamians did not have the knowledge, skill or resources to perform the work.**

These contractors demonstrated what Bahamians can do. They have handled the clean-up well.

Also assisting our Bahamian contractors are a number of NGOs who have worked in the Cays, Abaco's mainland, the City of Freeport and East and West Grand Bahama.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The clean-up of our communities is not finished. The DRA is currently evaluating request for proposals to provide operations and maintenance services for 17 debris management sites.

I want to list those sites for the benefit of the Bahamian people and the residents of Abaco and Grand Bahama.

During the opening of the request for proposals for these sites we received over 60 submissions from interested companies. The 17 sites include:

- Treasure Cay Debris Management Site
- Treasure Cay Open Air
- Spring City Debris Management Site
- Snake Cay Debris Management Site
- Green Turtle Cay Waste and Debris

Transfer

- Guana Cay Waste & Dump Site
- Man-o-war Cay Debris Management

Site

- Elbow Cay: North End; Elbow Cay Club; White Sound
- Grand Cay Waste and Debris Transfer
- Moore's Island Waste and Debris Transfer
- Wood Cay Waste and Debris Transfer
- In Grand Bahama

McLeans Town Debris Transfer

Pelican Point Debris Transfer

High Rock Debris Transfer

Sweetings Cay Waste and Debris Transfer

**Mr. Speaker,**

This is an opportunity for local Bahamians to benefit from these contracts.

During Dorian's path of destruction cars and boats were flung all over Abaco and Grand Bahama.

The DRA has identified 8 to 10 acres of land on Thackery Street in the Freeport Commercial Industrial area for a salvage yard.

I would like to thank the Grand Bahama Port Authority for providing the property for this purpose.

We are also confirming a location in Abaco for a salvage yard. Over the next week a request for proposal will be announced. The DRA will also announce a request for proposal for marine clean-up for Abaco and Grand Bahama.

This is another opportunity for local Bahamians to benefit from these opportunities. **The work by Bahamians for Bahamians continues.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

The work of the DRA and the reconstruction and rebuilding of our islands is significant.

The DRA is actively working with Government Ministries to ensure schools, hospitals, clinics and shelters are repaired.

The DRA is working with the Ministries of Education and Public Works to ensure work at the Central Abaco Primary School and the Patrick J. Bethell High School are completed.

It is anticipated that the Central Abaco Primary School will be completed before the start of the fall school semester.

Work has begun on the school in Green Turtle Cay, and it is anticipated it will be able to resume in September.

A comprehensive school for East Grand Bahama is actively being developed.

The DRA will continue to collaborate with the Ministries of Education and Public Works to ensure education facilities within the disaster zones of Abaco and Grand Bahama, including housing for teachers, are provided as a matter of priority.

**Mr. Speaker,**

The Ministry of Health and the Public Hospitals Authority have done an assessment of hospital and clinic facilities on the islands of Grand Bahama and Abaco.



Of the assessments completed, the most critical is the assessment of the Rand Memorial Hospital in Freeport.

This facility was significantly damaged. Temporary field hospital facilities were provided by the NGO Samaritan's Purse.

However, these accommodations are not designed for long-term use, and had to be abandoned due to recent severe weather.

The Ministry of Health and the Public Hospitals Authority are committed to the re-development of the Rand Memorial Hospital and the construction of a new, modern, resilient facility.

The DRA is working with the Ministry and the Authority to develop the framework and project plan, so that a proper hospital is constructed.

The goal is to have a new facility constructed within the next 30 months. The DRA will work with the Ministry of Health and the Public Hospitals Authority to determine how best to meet this timeline.

The DRA will sign an agreement this week for a risk assessment that will inform any future decisions as it relates to the development of a new facility.

In the interim, temporary works are being executed at the present hospital to provide more robust facilities than the tents of the field hospital. A Covid-19 Unit is presently nearing completion. A special thank you to Mrs. Norma Headley and The Board of The Cancer Association of Grand Bahama for allowing The PHA to transform that facility in a first class health facility. This facility along with the IAT Building at the Rand offers more resilience to inclement weather conditions.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Throughout the disaster zones, Government infrastructure, public buildings, police stations, administrative offices, seawalls, docks and roads were compromised and destroyed.

We will approach this work at a structured pace.

The DRA will work with the Ministry of Public Works to confirm the priority and timeline of the damaged physical infrastructure.

Upgrades that must be incorporated into the reconstruction of this infrastructure to

make it more resilient are also being considered. **The work for Bahamians by Bahamians continues.**

**Mr. Speaker,**

When we needed support after Hurricane Dorian devastated the Northern Bahamas, the world arrived to help.

Many NGOs came and assisted with early relief. Many stayed through the recovery, and many are helping us rebuild.

The success of our work with NGOs is a direct result of the partnerships we have established with them.

The NGOs who are working with us do so with our knowledge and collaboration and represent part of the team helping to rebuild The Bahamas.

On behalf of the Government and people of The Bahamas, particularly the people of Abaco and the Cays and Grand Bahama, I would like to thank all NGOs for their work in The Bahamas.

The 115 registered NGOs are now posted on the DRA Facebook page. And of course, we also thank the many Bahamians who have joined us on this journey and are helping family members, neighbors and friends.

**I would also like to thank Bahamians living abroad who remembered home when we needed them most.**

I'd say one additional thing regarding NGOs. We are seeking ways to continue to refine our partnership with them.

While we welcome the assistance of the international community, NGOs must have proper authorization to operate in the disaster zones.

We continue to work on enhancing our monitoring system with NGOs. We also want to make sure data compiled and reports produced by NGOs are circulated to the

Ministry of Disaster Preparedness, Management and Reconstruction in order to ensure we get all feedback needed to inform our policy decisions.

In short order, this Ministry along with relevant stakeholders will discuss appropriate measures to ensure the proper coordination of NGOs.

### Slide #10 Pledge Conference

**Mr. Speaker,**

There has been much debate about the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Government Pledge Conference held earlier this year.



- 49 pledges were made during the pledge conference
- \$1.771 billion dollars is the total value of the 49 pledges
- \$1.675 billion dollars was pledged for equity and technical assistance from a single donor
- \$42.8 million dollars in grants
- \$53.2 million dollars for technical assistance and gifts in kind
- \$109,000k in cash and sponsorship

**Mr. Speaker,**

Outside of the pledges, the DRA received a donation from Cable Bahamas for

\$250,000, which has been used toward the small home repair program.

We continue to communicate with donors, so the status and value of pledges continue to be updated and correlated with the DRA's priority projects.

As some pledges for technical assistance or gifts in-kind represent discounts off future purchased services from a vendor, we may not be able to access the full value of the pledge, as they may not be services we intend to purchase or be relevant to priority projects at this time.

In addition, some donations are no longer available due to the changing economic climate or requirements associated with accessing the support.

Some of the pledges have come with specific restrictions and may not line up immediately with priority reconstruction projects.

**Mr. Speaker,**

New donors continue to present themselves to the DRA for support and we are incredibly grateful for the ongoing partnership with individuals, foundations, NGOs and corporate partners.

Since the conference, we have received 10 new pledges of significant value and there are many projects, large and small, for which we continue to seek assistance.

It is an active process and the nature of the pledges is complex, but we have an agile team who are communicating with donors about the ways they hope to support our reconstruction work and how we can partner together to fund our most urgent needs.

Pledges are exactly what is inferred. It is a pledge and until we receive a firm commitment, **“it is a pledge”**.

Many donors have very specific ways in which a pledge must be used, and we are working with them to match pledges with priority projects for the DRA.

**Mr. Speaker,**

As I conclude, I note that as difficult as these times are there are still things, we can be proud of.

**Mr. Speaker,**

I would like to congratulate the Member of Parliament for Bain and Grants Town, who recently graduated from the University of The Bahamas with a bachelor's degree and all our young people who have completed

university degrees, high school graduations; the circumstances have certainly been challenging but we have made it.

**Mr. Speaker,**

Before I end I would like to wish again a very happy birthday to Ms. Mable Russell, who recently celebrated her 103rd birthday; is a resident from Water Cay, the birthplace of my parents, I express my sincere gratitude to Ms. Russell, as she was instrumental in the spiritual and social growth of many Grand Bahamians, including me.

The hours I spent with Ms. Russell on her birthday were well spent, considering her

powerful prayer for the Governor General, who participated in the small event by telephone, His Excellency, Maurice Moore, and loved ones.

Equally important was her reflection of the past. **Mr. Speaker**, Ms. Russell's journey through life is a testament that even in the wake of difficult times there is a brighter future for this Bahamas.

I now present this body with a photo of Ms. Russell, a centenarian. With partial lyrics from a well-known song, I emphatically state, "Here's to a lady, so worthy of Praise".

## **Slide #11 Build Back Better**

**Mr. Speaker,**

I conclude by assuring the residents of Grand Bahama and Abaco that we will spare no effort in restoring these islands so battered by Dorian.

The task is great, but our Government is committed.

The rebuilding of our Northern Islands is not a sprint it is a journey.

Our recovery will not happen overnight.

**WORK FOR BAHAMIANS BY  
BAHAMIANS WILL CONTINUE!**