



*Senator Dr. Michael Darville*

Contribution to the 2019 - 2020 Budget Communication

June 24<sup>th</sup>, 2019

Thank you, **Madam President**.

This afternoon I rise to give God thanks for this wonderful opportunity to serve; and for wisdom and guidance as I stand to my feet to make my contribution to this 2019-2020 budget debate.

**Madam President**, this administration has tried to paint its 2019-2020 Crayola budget as being people centric. But the truth of the matter is “this budget has nothing to do with

people,” but all to do with giving tax breaks to the rich and special interest groups on the backs of the poor and the middle class. The Free National Movement administration is playing with numbers in an attempt to fool some people into believing that they are doing a great job managing the economy. But the Bahamian people are stronger, wiser, and most of us can see straight

through the smokescreens of this hapless  
FNM administration.

**Madam President,** this morning I have a  
lot to say; but before I get into the meat of  
my contribution, with your leave, I would  
like to take a few minutes to thank  
Bahamians from all walks of life for their  
prayers and unwavering support, as we

move toward rebuilding and regaining the government in 2022.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Philip Brave Davis for this wonderful opportunity to serve. Our leader is not only a compassionate man who connects with the small man; but one who possesses the intellectual ability and

political will to handle the complex issues facing the nation.

In a recent meeting in Freeport, filled with PLP stalwart councillors, he outlined the scientific findings of recent polling which confirm that this FNM administration has swiftly lost popularity and that the PLP is well on its way to victory in 2022. Rebuilding from the ashes of our crushing

defeat at the polls in 2017 has not been easy.

But our defeat taught us that effective governance must always revolve around people and ensuring that opportunities are created that positively impact the largest numbers of our people possible.

**Madam President,** actions speak louder than words. After two (2) years of governance and three (3) budget cycles, the Free National Movement continues to talk

what they think is a good talk, but they fail to walk the right walk. They prove over and over again that they are not concerned with people; and that their policy decisions support and protect only the rich, powerful and special interest groups like the Bay Street Boys and rich foreigners in Lyford Cay. They are **con-tent** in continuing to campaign and play political games at the expense of the small man, who continues to



pick up the slack for the wealthy, who should be mandated by law to carry their fair share of the tax burden.

Compounding the matter, **Madam President**, the Minister of Finance seemed more concerned with numbers and balancing the budget to please external rating agencies, rather than addressing the pressing issues facing the poor and middle the class in this

country, which they promised to do on the campaign trail.

**Madam President,** as far as I am concerned, this is a slap in the face to the thousands of new and young voters who supported the FNM and their fake change agenda in the last general election.

**Madam President,** a few weeks ago, Bahamians everywhere listened and watched with complete despair as the Minister of

Finance read his flat, unimpressive 2019-2020 budget communication, which beside decreases in duty exemptions on school supplies and other items, spoke to no new policies to grow the economy, create jobs or bring meaningful relief or hope for struggling Bahamians.

**Madam President,** what is so disingenuous is this administration continues to blame the

former administration for every one of their failures; while trying to take credit for every single government project put in place by the Progressive Liberal Party, and even patting themselves on the back for a job well done. They simply have no shame!

**Madam President,** just open your eyes and look around the FNM's landscape. Most government ministers are out to lunch, **lost**

in their own bureaucracy, and accomplishing nothing tangible; while the Prime Minister tries to micromanage ministerial portfolios, he knows nothing about. Consequently, he is neglecting Grand Bahama and investments, which fall under the office of the Prime Minister.

**Madam President,** we have a cabinet where the blind is leading the blind and it seems

that everyone around the table has come to realize that the situation remains hopeless.

**Madam President,** no lie last forever; and in just two (2) years of governance, the Bahamian people have realized that this administration cannot be trusted, and their failed policies continue to demonstrate that they came to office without a plan.

**Madam President,** after the budget communication by the Member for East Grand Bahama, we on this side are left with more questions than answers; and like all right-thinking Bahamians, are still trying to determine why this administration is unable to meet its deficit projections, despite the sixty percent (60%) increase in VAT.

**Madam President,** I agree wholeheartedly with our Deputy Leader and shadow

Minister of Finance, the Member for Exuma and Ragged Island, Honourable I Chester Cooper's summation of this 2019-2020 crayon budget during his contribution in the other place. This budget is:

1. Colourful but the Minister of Finance failed to collect taxes,
2. Colourful yet the FNM's projected revenue collection in the remaining few months of the last fiscal year appear to



be unrealistic and questionable based on current trends.

3. Colourful but the government failed to show where the VAT revenue and the borrowed two (2) billion dollars went.
4. Colourful but this administration failed to meet their projected revenue.
5. Colourful but we are left with a two hundred and thirty (230) plus million-dollar deficit.

6. Colourful but this Free National Movement administration failed to grow the economy.

7. Colourful but the government failed to admit they chopped the capital works budget at the Ministry of Works by over eighty (80) million dollars, held back payments to contracted workers and neglected maintenance to government infrastructure, all in an attempt reduce

the current deficit and to make the figures look good.

**Madam President,** who do they think they are fooling? Where is the transparency and accountability the FNM keeps talking about? After peeling through all the layers of political rhetoric, one can fully understand why this Minnis administration chose to eliminate VAT on crayons, paper, pencils. It was simply because they wanted

to colour away their incompetence and consistent blunders for the last two (2) years.

**Madam President,** the members opposite dodged the last midterm budget debate in order to save face or simply to buy more time to play with the revenue projection numbers. But no lie last forever; and today the people of this country are demanding accountably and transparency from all ministers and their respective ministries.

## **Ministry of Health and NHI**

**Madam President,** as I begin my contribution on matters related to the Ministry of Health, the PHA and the department of Public Health, I must seize this opportunity to state how disappointed I was to hear the Prime Minister use of sick children in his attempt to discredit the PLP. I was disgusted after hearing the barrage of untrue statements about the Children's Ward

at the Princess Margaret Hospital and even more appalled at his **as-sertion** that the former administration would rather party than look after sick kids, in reference to allocating funds to repair that unit.

**Madam President,** while the Member for Englerston very promptly corrected this untruth, the Prime Minister must apologize to the Bahamian people in light of the letter from the Public Hospital Authority

confirming that that in 2016, under the PLP administration, a contract was awarded to Guarantee Construction company for the roof and window replacements at a cost of three hundred seventy nine thousand, four hundred and eighty seven dollars (\$379,487.00). The project commenced in October 2016, and was completed, on budget, in July 2017. The letter further stated that plans are in progress for renovations to the interior

section of the Children's Ward South and that work is expected to commence during the upcoming year.”

**Madam President**, the records clearly show that a contract was issued immediately following Hurricane Mathew in October 2016, and that work was completed two months after the PLP left office. Anyone in this place would know that it would have been a disaster to begin work on the interior



of the unit before the exterior work to the roof and windows was completed. But this stop, review, and cancel administration did absolutely nothing for two (2) years to begin the interior work to accommodate the sick children who would need access to this very essential unit.

In fact, **Madam President**, in the June 21st edition of the Nassau Guardian, it was stated

that the Unit is now being used for storage.

But rather than own up to their lack of incompetence, they do what they always do... Blame the PLP! My Lord, what a sad state of affairs!

**Madam President,** I am not surprised, however, because the Children's Ward was not the only project that this stop, review, and cancel government stalled. It also took two years for them to complete the Cory

Newbold Ward that we started before leaving office. It is also painful to see that despite detailed plans, inclusive of approved Architectural drawings for the Accident and Emergency Department, the Maternity Ward and many of our clinics in the family Islands; there is no sign of relief for patients who have no other choice but to access these essential services. Again, I could only assume, since there is no evidence to the

contrary, and no report from the Minister of Health that these essential works are still in progress or are they in stop, review, and cancel mode by this FNM administration.

**Madam President,** in contrast, when the PLP administration we came to office in 2012, we met the now much talked about Critical Care Block under construction. This work was started under the Ingraham led Administration, and in fact, if I am not

mistaken, the now Prime Minister was the Minister of Health.

**Madam President,** we did not stop review and cancel that essential project, but rather we continued it to completion. In fact, we had to borrow millions of dollars from First Caribbean International Bank to purchase the state-of-the-art equipment that the current Minister of Health loves to brag about, as no funding was left in place for

them. The record would reflect that we did not complain, as we are aware that governance is continuous and the healthcare of the people of the country is a priority.

**Madam President,** during the five years of the last PLP administration, which ended in May of 2017, the visible effects of a sustained national program of health reform, included significant upgrades in infrastructure, equipment and service

enhancement. Additionally, we demonstrated to the hardworking staff across the public health sector, that the PLP was keenly aware that they were the foundation for everything we did and would do all in our power to ensure that they had everything necessary to carry out their duties to the Bahamian people.

**Madam President,** as a former cabinet minister in the last PLP administration, I am proud to report to this honorable house and the Bahamian people that the PLP delivered a sustainable platform for the transformation of our Public Healthcare system, as I will show in the short time allocated to me as the spokesperson for health in our party.

**Madam President,** the Ministry of Health and the Public Hospital's Authority and the



Department of Public Health had on its agenda during our administration, five (5) areas of priority focus, aimed at preparing the wider public healthcare system for the effective implementation of universal health coverage over the short, medium and long term. We understood that the strengthening our Public health system involved a significant, purposeful effort to ensure that all Bahamians could have access to

preventative, curative, rehabilitative and palliative health services without financial hardship or the denial of quality healthcare services they need. Rather than complaining, or constantly criticize the former administration for the challenges we meet in place, we simply rolled up our sleeves and got to work.

**Madam President,** when the PLP came to office in 2012, Ophthalmology services

were experiencing staff shortages, equipment related challenges, prolonged clinical and surgical appointments (up to one year for some procedures), and a limited scope of service, all of which contributed to unmet patient needs. To address these and other service inefficiencies, our administration expanded and strengthened Ophthalmology services by engaging a total of twelve (12) professionals (two of whom

were retinal specialists) and support staff. The addition of the two retinal specialists, significantly enhanced the availability of personnel to deliver care, particularly as we expanded access to more clients via scheduled visits by the Ophthalmology team to other public health facilities. This initiative represented a major but essential undertaking of our public healthcare system along with the relocation of the (off campus)

Eye Clinic, to a new rented and upgraded facility (formerly known as Eye Word) at #26 Soldier Road.

**Madam President,** professional development was high on our agenda and millions of dollars were spent annually for staff training and development to ensure that members of the healthcare team, were equipped to meet the demand of their

dynamic environment and evolving global trends.

Indeed, **Madam President**, in recognition of the hard work and dedication of our Nurses, under our watch they received the largest promotion exercise ever in the PHA and the Department of Public Health history.

The Public Hospitals Authority would have executed three industrial agreements and prior to leaving office, we executed a

recognition agreement without requiring a staff Poll and started negotiations with the senior physician's union for an industrial agreement for Consultants.

**Madam President,** physician training and development continued during our administration. Indeed, we made significant strides from our linkages with the University of the West Indies. Our residency

programmes for the training of specialists in Family Medicine is a prime example. I believe we now have in excess of thirty-one (30) Family Medicine trained physicians working in the public sector, some of whom are deployed to the Family Islands. Madam President, when we left office, it was estimated that a minimum of one hundred twenty (120) additional Family Medicine physicians were required to provide



adequate primary care for our populations in New Providence, Grand Bahama and the Family Islands. It is my hope that this essential program is not a part of this administration's stop, reviewed and cancel agenda.

**Madam President**, prior to leaving office in 2017, the former cabinet of the Bahamas approved the implementation of an

**Integrated Health Information Management System (iHIMS)** for the public healthcare system, which was designed to achieve the important goal of the **“One Patient; One Record”** approach to patient care. This meant that there would be one Inpatient, Outpatient, and Accident and Emergency (A & E) Electronic Medical Record (EMR) across the entire public healthcare sector, which includes all the

Department of Public Health's Clinics in New Providence and all the Family Islands.

With this approach, no matter where the patient accesses the service within the public sector, the patient's information, laboratory results, other diagnostics and radiology images, would be available in real time to Healthcare providers.

The project was launched on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2017 as a two-phased initiative. The first phase (Patient Registration) was scheduled to go-live by the end of 2017. We heard no mention of this initiative in the Minister's contribution, so I must conclude that this perhaps was another FNM stop, review, cancel initiative.

**Madam President**, before the prim minister open his mouth, he needs to arm himself

with the facts. Under our watch the PLP completed the Child & Adolescent Robert Smith Unit a ninety-two (92) bed, thirty-four thousand (34,000) square feet facility that sits on more than an acre of property and was officially commissioned on the 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The building also houses the Special Education Department.

In addition, **Madam President**, the Progressive Liberal Party made available the

funding to completely transform the nation's sole Geriatric Hospital. The upgrade was critical to improving workflow, inpatient accommodations and the other support services required for fostering a therapeutic environment. This hospital is now considered a model for the region.

**Madam President,** the redevelopment of the Rand Memorial Hospital on Grand Bahama was long overdue; and was a

necessity, prior to construction of a new one hundred and fifty (150) bed hospital via a private public partnership. It was in this context, that an aggressive plan was developed to significantly improve the physical infrastructure and services at the facility, to ensure improved working conditions for staff and service for the residents of Grand Bahama, from Sweetings

Cay to West End. This project is still ongoing.

**Madam President,** effective January 2015 at the Eight Mile Rock Clinic, we extended clinic hours until 9pm on weekdays, and for the first time on Grand Bahama, a full time Family Resident Specialist was deployed to Eight Mile Rock Clinic. No longer did they



have to travel to the Rand Memorial for routine care after normal clinic hours.

**Madam President**, there's more! In April 2013, contracts were awarded for much needed remedial construction work to the clinics in High Rock, Hawksbill, McLean's Town and Sweeting Cay. The renovations were part of our government's continuing effort to expand and upgrade facilities and

optimal care to residents no matter where they reside. In addition, in October 2013, much needed renovations and repairs were carried out to the doctors' and nurses' residences.

**Madam President,** in West End, we constructed a new clinic and doubled the space to meet the increased needs of the people in that area. The clinic was equipped with state-of-the-art equipment and

furniture, which as a component of its services, offers enhanced dental care and trauma services, portable digital x-ray machines and will afford offsite access to x-ray readings. An ambulance was also decentralized to this clinic to ensure improved emergency response time. You see

**Madam President;** the Progressive Liberal Party believes that all Bahamians should be afforded the opportunity to have adequate

health services in their communities and the multimillion-dollar Old Bahama Bay resort.

**Madam President,** with respect to Freeport, an aggressive plan was developed by the PLP to transform the delivery of Healthcare for our people. In this regard we engaged the services of the Beck group to advance a redevelopment plan so as to expand the infrastructure and services to meet the needs of residents of Grand Bahama. The first

phase of that plan called for the construction of a modern and much needed Primary Healthcare Clinic for the Freeport Area on the western side of Sunrise Highway in Grand Bahama. This new Freeport Community Clinic (FCC) was to house ambulatory care, specialty services, pre-surgical counseling, all public health functions, mental health, pharmacy,

radiology and imaging, and limited laboratory services.

This new facility would further reduce visits to A & E at the Rand Memorial Hospital and serve as a central hub for outpatient specialty services and a state-of-the-art rehabilitation service for the island of Grand Bahama. Again, the fate of this critical facility was caught up in the FNM's stop and cancel programme.

In addition, **Madam President**, a number of critical structural works were well on their way at the existing hospital in Freeport, when we left office in May 2017. These included:

- a) The construction of Private Ward Services.

- b) The construction of inpatient units to accommodate the growing need for beds in the Rand Memorial Hospital.
- c) The construction of a new kitchen and cafeteria for the Rand Memorial Hospital, which should have been completed before the end of 2017. This would have made room for upgrading and expanding much needed clinical space within the hospital.



d) The construction of a new Doctors' On-Call Suite for the Rand Memorial Hospital, which was expected to be completed in July 2017. It is seen that some work is ongoing but the project does not appear to be adequately funded.

**Madam President,** in late 2017, the Public Hospitals Authority had assumed an expanded role in supporting the Department of Public Health's (DPH) health facility

strengthening projects as part of the consultant recommendation prior to the launch of national Health Insurance. Specific priority was given to the completion, retro-fitting and commissioning of the mini hospitals in Abaco and Exuma; leading the way was the renovation of the four (4) poly clinics in New Providence and thirteen (13) community clinics on the islands of Eleuthera, Andros, Inagua, Long

Island, Acklins, Crooked Island and Mayaguana. repairs to clinics in New Providence were completed. In some instances, renovations to some of the identified clinics in the family Island was started and in others, approved Architectural Drawings and permits were left in place for the incoming government.

**Madam President,** we in the PLP firmly believe that the health of a nation is the

wealth of the nation and as outlined earlier and despite the politic rhetoric from the free national Movement we invested heavily into healthcare which was necessary prior to the launch of National Health Insurance; the vehicle for the launch of universal primary health care.

**Madam President,** one would only have to look at developed countries' budgetary allocation for healthcare to determine that

health ministries are well funded; and as such, maintenance of medical infrastructure is a priority and the training of doctors, nurses and para allied healthcare workers at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels is of paramount importance. Which was later confirmed in our setting by a study done by KPMG and Oxford Economics with prove a positive that universal healthcare would

have a positive impact to our GDP over time if implemented in a phase approach.

But for some strange reason, **Madam President**, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Finance and other cabinet colleagues continue to put the Minister of Health in a terrible position, allocating little or no supplementary funding for his ministry and new evidence based medical programs. With

only an eight (8) million dollar increase in his healthcare budget and all the challenges in the public healthcare system, it seems to me FNM want the Hon Dr. Duane Sands, the PHA and the Ministry of Health to fail.

**Madam President,** to compound the situation, for the first time in a modern Bahamas we see budget cuts in certain areas of healthcare with nothing for the NHIA, despite the fifty-six thousand (56,000)

people now enrolled in the NHI universal primary healthcare program.

**Madam President,** we on this side are calling on the government to reconsider its current position and allocate supplementary funding to the Ministry of Health so that the minister can implement some innovative programs, protocols and training in order to redirect the some of the unnecessary primary



healthcare traffic from the accident and emergency departments and free up beds at the PHM and the Rand Memorial Hospital from patients who suffer from chronic non communicable diseases and boarders.

**Madam President,** it is common knowledge for years that both the accident and emergency departments at the PMH and the Rand Memorial Hospital are bursting from the seams with non-emergencies and this

medical traffic must be redirected back to the polyclinics in New Providence, Grand Bahamas, Abaco and Exuma. A few weeks ago a relative had to go to the emergency room and waited the entire day to access this essential service which was very frustrating for the patient and her relatives. As part of our transformative plan for improving services at the accident and emergency and reduce the waiting time under our watch we

extended the hours at all the polyclinics to handle these non-emergencies. Prior to the launch of the NHI selective catastrophic care programs in Nassau, Grand Bahama, Eleuthera, Abaco and Exuma, it was our intent to train family and primary healthcare physicians in many of the common emergencies seen in the urgent care facilities around the world, place cross trained EMS personal at all the polyclinics with

ambulance services, and equip doctors, nurses and allied health professionals to provide urgent care in our communities, thus reducing the long waits at the hospitals.

**But Madam President,** because these programs were started under the Progressive Liberal Party, they fell victim to the FNM's stop review and cancel agenda and the department of public health. The apparent cut in the NHI budget would certainly affect

the programs that are currently in place and the ministry of finance is asking the NHIA to do more with less. This begs the question of the government's commitment to NHI or are they trying to scuttle it because it is a PLP project.

Madam President in view of this decision by the government to put this life changing program on hold the Minister of Health is on record as saying that the plan for NHI is

now pushed back to 2021. This proves once again that this administration continues to squander away the good will of the Bahamian people with these kinds of poor decisions.

But through you, **Madam President**, I want the people of this country to know that we in the PLP is ready to govern from day one. In Our Charter of governance 2030 the PLP has laid our compressive plan for

healthcare and pick up where we left off and simply implement these sound evidence-based programs that would revolutionize healthcare throughout the country, create equity in the system, reduce the waiting times at our clinics and hospitals and save lives.

## **Grand Bahama**

**Madam President,** in the remaining time I have left, I now turn my attention to the

Island of Grand Bahama, the home of the Minister of Finance, and two (2) cabinet ministers, the island that has five (5) Members of Parliament; yet its people continue to struggle.

**Madam President,** on the campaign trail, the Free National Movement had all the solutions for the resurgence of Grand



Bahama; but to date they have failed to deliver.

**Madam President**, after two years of talk, and the implementation of a 60% increase in VAT, on the backs of the poor and middle class we have witnessed:

1. the mass migration of workers from Grand Bahama.
2. the rise in youth unemployment and the misery index.

3. the decline in the tourism sector and the “purchase” of the Grand Lucayan resort, which doesn’t seem to be real.
4. the rise and fall of GIBC digital.
5. lack of investments

**Madam President,** despite the FNM having won all seats in Grand Bahama, all I heard thus far in this budget was a few lines from the Minister of Tourism about the Carnival Cruise Port and the letter of intent from

Royal Caribbean for the purchase of the Grand Lucayan resort.

**Madam President,** The Prime Minister in his contribution, did not even mention anything for Grand Bahama. Therefore, people of Grand Bahama are hoping that the Minister of State of Grand Bahama would break the silence when he speaks and outline what is expected for Grand Bahama in this budget and the future.

**Madam President**, except for the one point two (1.2) million dollar increase in **Head 74, Line 2251199** under ‘other services’ in the Ministry for Grand Bahama Budget, this crayon budget shows little or nothing for our beautiful island, whose residents continue to put their fair share of taxes in the consolidated fund? After all the big talk about the importance of Grand Bahama,

there is no real money in this budget to prime the economy.

**Madam President,** where is the money for investments? capital works? the development of the much talked about Tech Hub and training specifically for Grand Bahama? Surely the government doesn't expect the one point two (1.2) million dollars allocated is simply no going to cut it.

**Madam President** let's take a closer look at the FNM's signature tech company GIBC Digital. For the last two (2) years the Free National Movement has spoken often about its tech hub for Freeport, Grand Bahama, and how they will eventually attract high tech companies from around the world to set up shop in Freeport and other commercial enterprise zones throughout the country. We were told that companies will be given

concessions and special immigration approvals in these enterprise zones and they will bring their business from abroad and not be able to compete with Bahamian tech companies for local business. But is this truly the case with GIBC digital?

**Madam President,** last week an article appeared in one of the daily's in which it was mentioned that GIBC digital, the original tech hub investor in Grand Bahama,

queried the government's commitment to its plans for that island. In that article the principle of the company said his company gave the government a road map to make its technology hub a reality. He said words are easy, but the work required to create a tech hub requires investment in time and money by the government not just talk. He further stated that there is no real money allocated in the 2019-2020 budget to make it happen.



**Madam President,** after being asked about GIBC digitals plans going forward, Mr Woods answered, One of two things will happen for GIBC digital, either work will start to come because the government is committed to the digital transformation or the company is going to find work outside the Bahamas.

**Madam President,** it was my understanding that under the Commercial Enterprise Act,

foreign companies are not supposed to compete locally. However, GIBC Digital was and is still looking for local business.

Was this company misled by technical officers at the Office of the Prime Minister, Grand Bahama concerning what a foreign company in these commercial enterprise zones can do? Please correct me if I am wrong because from what I understand, under the current legislation his company

has only one option, if he wishes to benefit from government concessions and special immigration visas; and that is to bring his business from abroad and not to compete with Bahamians in the tech industries period.

**Madam President,** Mr Wood statements are very confusing and proves that the government has no enforcement protocols in place to protect Bahamian workers and

companies from tech companies operating in these commercial enterprise zones.

**Madam President,** before the Minister of State for Grand Bahama stands to his feet; and like his other colleagues, tries to take credit for PLP capital works projects, I wish to outline to the country some of the good work began and/or completed by the PLP during our last term in office.

1. The Smith's Point Sea Wall

2. The Fishing Hole Road Causeway
3. The Freeport Fire Station
4. The West End Clinic
5. The junior high school in Holme's  
Rock
6. The government complex in Eight Mile  
Rock
7. The renovation of all clinics on Grand  
Bahama

8. The renovation of the Farmers Market,  
downtown Freeport

9. The opening of Jack Hayward Junior  
High on the site of the former Grand  
Bahama Catholic High

10. The relocation of Lewis Yard Primary  
to the campus of the former St. Vincent  
de Paul Primary

**Madam President,** this Free National  
Movement government must be reminded

that other than continuing with the funding for completion, these are and will always be PLP projects. The truth of the matter is the Free National Movement cannot point to a single capital works project that they have started on the island of Grand Bahama.

**Madam President,** what about the Grand Bahama Investment Incentive Act that in the speech from the throne the Free National Movement vowed to repeal it immediately

on coming to office? But it was funny to see the prime minister extend the act just prior to the minister of finance made the 2019-2020 budget communication. But once again I beg to ask where is the accountability and transparency concerning the ongoing negotiations with Hutchison Whampoa and the GBPA in this regard?

**Madam President,** we were told that negotiations would continue with the heads



of agreement we left behind with the GBPA; with the intent of the government to finalise this important agreement within one year in office, and move to collect outstanding funds owed to the government by the Grand Bahama Port Authority; some of which could be used to develop the government's underfunded tech hub initiative. To date, nothing has been brought into the public domain in this regard. So once again I am

asking the Minister of State for Grand Bahama, where is the accountability and transparency the FNM keeps talking about?

**Madam President,** last week I read an announcement by the Chairman of the Lucayan Renewal Holdings LTD, Michael Scott, in one of the dailies, which said that in five months the sale of the Grand Lucayan is expected to be completed. If so, that would be some good news for all of us

in Grand Bahama, after waiting for two years.

**Madam President,** there have also been rumours going around that one of the hotels on the Lucayan strip have some problems with the foundation and may have to be demolish. If this is true, we believe there could be a reduction in the sale price. My questions, if this is the case, who did the appraisal for government and were the

structural engineers at the Ministry of Works consulted prior to the purchase? What would be the potential loss incurred to the taxpayer after learning that the hotel was already purchased at sixty-five (65) million, above the appraised property value, if there are indeed structural problems?

**Madam President,** the people of Grand Bahama are praying that the negotiations for the purchase of the hotel property goes well,

that the owners can get on with the renovations, and Bahamians can find work. For two (2) years our tourism product has suffered. As a result, many of our seasoned hotel workers have relocated to the capital, Bimini and Exuma. Many however, are longing for the day when the economy turns around, so that they can find sustainable jobs in the tourism industry at home.

**Madam President,** the Carnival Cruise port deal, another project conceived by the PLP, would be good for Grand Bahama. The Free National Movement must never forget that it was us in the Progressive Liberal Party who negotiated the bad deal the Free National Movement left behind with the Hutchison Group of companies; giving them exclusivity to any port operation, not just in

Freeport but the entire island of Grand Bahama.

**Madam President,** these difficult negotiations made way for the Carnival Heads of agreement for East Grand Bahama; and led to where this FNM administration, the GBPA and Carnival are today. We on this side are waiting to review the new heads of agreement with carnival and we pray that this FNM administration would not drop the

ball once again and sell our birth right for a bowl of porridge. **Madam President**, all we are asking for is that the small man is protected during the negotiating and allowed the residence of Grand Bahama to get a piece of the pie of the economic pie.

**Madam President**, the business community on Grand Bahama is experiencing great challenges, as daily we witness the retraction in retail sales since the increase in



Value added tax. We are all hoping that the government makes good on the promises to Grand Bahama, especially after increasing and speed up its investment plans to jump start the tourism sector and small business access funding.

**Madam President,** I stress again that I have searched the budget for real funding for Grand Bahama and could not find it in the

Ministry for Grand Bahama, the Ministry of Finance, or the Ministry of Works. As a matter of fact, I see nothing in the budget to finance urban renewal programs or any of its centres. So, I await eagerly for the Minister of State for Grand Bahama to direct me and the residents of Grand Bahama to where the money is for our island.

## **Conclusion**

**Madam President,** after looking closely at this 2019-2020 crayon budget; and comparing it to the promises made to the Bahamian people, I have come to the conclusion that this administration **‘can fool some FNM’s all the time and some PLP’s some of the time, but they cannot fool all of the people all the time.’**

**Healthcare is underfunded, the ministry for Grand Bahama is underfunded, the**

**department of housing is underfunded, the ministry of social services and urban renewal is underfunded. But every ministry travel and food budget has increased along with gasoline allowance.**

My mama used to say talk is cheap and money buy land. The people of Grand Bahama are tired of the talk; and after two years looking for action. With your leave,

Madam President, I admonish this administration to stop dragging its feet and:

1. get the tech hub going
2. finish the capital works projects we left behind by the PLP
3. assist the private sector with job creation and bring Grand Bahamians back home
4. put some money in the Social Service department to help the poor unemployed

and the homeless on Grand Bahama while working on your formula to create some sustainable jobs

5. continue with our medical tourism plan for Grand Bahama

6. focus on the new clinic for Grand Bahama and a program that will attract medical tourists and healthcare jobs

**Madam President,** since this administration seems devoid of ideas, I would like to offer

some suggestions for improving the economy:

1. use the airport at Gold Rock Creek in East Grand Bahama to create an aircraft maintenance and training facility.
2. extend the arms of BAMSI to Grand Bahama to help to re-establish the once lucrative agrobusiness that once existed on Grand Bahama.

3. focus on the air sea cargo hub with a break bulk facility.

Do something tangible for the people of Grand Bahama and the Bahamas, whose time you said it is!