



Contribution

of

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Member of Parliament (Bamboo Town)
Minister of Transport and Local Government

to the

Budget Debate – Fiscal Year 2019/2020

**“Implementing Government’s Policy Agenda and
Securing Core Fiscal Objectives”**

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House of Assembly
Commonwealth of The Bahamas

Mr. Speaker

I rise today in this Place on the grace and unmerited favour of Yahweh, Elohim, The Lord of Life. For in Him we live, move and have our being.

Mr. Speaker

King Solomon was the wisest man who has ever lived and no one after him has possessed such wisdom. This most wise gentleman wrote the book of Ecclesiastes where he spoke about all that he had experienced in this life; and how he went to parties (wine and women), and had a good time, how he amassed great wealth but couldn't take it with him. How he ended up with three hundred (300) wives and seven hundred (700) concubines (sweethearts) and could not find any fulfilment in all of that.

Mr. Speaker

Our Chaplain last week spoke about this.

Mr. Speaker

At the end of the book of Ecclesiastes, at the end of Solomon's life, he summed his life up this way; that the total responsible of man is this: In Chapter 12, verse 13 and 14, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*

Mr. Speaker

Because there is going to be a day where our thoughts and intentions, the inclination of our hearts and our actions are going to be judged, it is wise for all of us to continuously undertake self-audits to ensure our thoughts and intentions are good.

Mr. Speaker

In regards to our thoughts and intentions, I heard in this Place the conversation about the poor and a number of persons have gotten up and spoken about our love or lack thereof. Love or Lack thereof is based on my interpretation during this debate. But I want the Bahamian people to hear me and be on guard when individuals speak about their love and concern for the poor in future.

Mr. Speaker

I am not imputing impure motives to anyone because Rule 33, section 17, says that we are not supposed to do that in Place. But, I have come here today with what I believe it is a teachable moment from History. His-story.

Mr. Speaker

Judas Iscariot was a man of influence. He was the banker, the accountant, he was the treasurer for the disciples of Jesus; and I do believe that all of us in here are keepers of the public purse. In John Chapter 12, vs 1- 7it reads:

*“Six days before the Passover, Jesus came to Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honour. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with Jesus. Then Mary took about a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume. **But** one of his disciples, Judas Iscariot,*

who was later to betray him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor? It was worth a year's wages.' Judas did not say this because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief; as keeper of the money bag, he used to help himself to what was put into it." "For The love of money is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10)", "for money answers everything (Ecclesiastes 10:19)" and "By their fruits you certainly will know them (Matthew 7:15-20)".

So for all of us, let our thoughts and intentions be pure in regard to the poor and not political posturing in this place. Selah

Mr. Speaker

I have heard it also said during this debate that this budget has no vision, lacks vision. In differing, I say that it is vision and shared values that bind this Free National Movement government together. We know and understand that "Where this is no vision the people perish (Proverbs 29:18)." We know that vision is the end destination, where we intend to go.

Mr. Speaker

The Good Book says that we are to *"Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he who reads it will run with it and if we act on it, it will surely come to pass. It shall not disappoint (Habakkuk 2:2)."*

Mr. Speaker

The last time I checked, we wrote the vision down. I looked at our Manifesto, The Speech from the Throne, this Budget...all written. Vision, our end destination for all to see...

Mr. Speaker

Money answers everything. This budget is for us, the government's irrefutable proof of us putting money to our continued vision to rescue the Bahamian economy and, yes, poor people.

- We have a vision of food security. We have put measures in place in the budget relative to BAMSI, farmers, and fishers. Our vision being fulfilled.
- We have a vision of energy security. We have made allocations for renewable/ solar energy and new generating equipment for BPL. We intend, **Mr Speaker**, to solarise the Family Islands and our public schools. Our vision being fulfilled.
- Our vision of social transformation, a renaissance in the over-the-hill communities, our heritage communities, is being further pursued in this budget. Tax incentive for residents and businesses are still in place. Cleanup campaigns are still underway. Southern Recreation Grounds is still under construction. Our vision being fulfilled.
- Our vision of a highly educated and vocationally trained society is being further pursued. Free tuition for students at UB in the Fall/September and continued free tuition at BTVI is in this budget. Our vision being fulfilled!
- Our vision to assist the poor and economical vulnerable is being further pursued. Zero rate of VAT on breadbasket items, on electricity under \$300 and Water and Sewerage bills under \$50 dollars. As well as reduction on custom duties on certain items in this budget. Our vision being fulfilled!
- Our vision of more transparency, more accountability in how we deal with the finances of our country is being pursued through the Fiscal Responsibility Act passed in this Parliament, which requires us to have a quarterly report relative to how the nation is doing, not just a mid-year budget review. The Act mandated that last year's budget deficit could only be 1.8% of GDP, which we did. This year, budget deficit had to be 1% of GDP, which we did. And next year's overall budget deficit will be no more than 0.5% of GDP and eventually, to a balanced budget. In order to achieve this feat, we have to bring our spending in line and simultaneously grow the economy; which incidentally

grew last year by 1.6% and I do believe will grow by an even larger number this year.

Mr. Speaker, that is our vision being fulfilled.

- We have a vision **Mr. Speaker** yet to be achieved where our capital spending in the budget is larger than the \$372M interest that we pay on our national debt. And **Mr. Speaker**, I believe if our history is any indication of our capacity to achieve, the Bahamian people can look forward to seeing that feat achieved in a future budget. In this budget we have allocated some \$207M to capital works. We have accomplished goals toward our vision...some in part, some in full. Stay tuned **Mr Speaker!** The best is yet to come and the half has never yet been told.

Constituency Matters

Mr. Speaker

I am reminded of another scripture. No apologies, **Mr Speaker**. I can only be who I am. I grew up having to memorise the Book and it is just like fire shut up in my bones. Jeremiah, in chapter 29 verse 11 wrote, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to do you good and not evil, plans to give you a future and a hope.” It is God speaking to Israel and I have used it as my statement of purpose for the constituency of Bamboo Town.

Mr. Speaker

When I ran in 2012 and 2017, I said to the people of Bamboo Town that I know the plans I have for you, plans to do you good and not evil, plans for a future and a hope. And I said to Bamboo it is about you. **Mr. Speaker**, I have not lost sight of that and I have asked the people of Bamboo Town to never lose sight of it either. Indeed, that is why I have come into this place.

Mr. Speaker

In my constituency, we have done a lot of work and I take this opportunity to say a Happy Belated Father's Day to all the fathers in Bamboo Town and the entire Bahamas. I hope you enjoyed your crab and rice. I certainly enjoyed mine.

Moving along, **Mr. Speaker**

Let me offer my condolences to the families of Alrae Rahming and Blair John, while I offer condolences to families of my constituents:

- 31-year-old Able Seaman Kennedy Carroll Storr Jr. of Taylor Drive, Bamboo Town;
- 96-year-old Glyde Dean Gardner of Seven Hills;
- 84-year-old Vera Smith of Joan's Heights;
- 29-year-old Ashanti C. Hall of Bamboo Town; and
- 80-year old James Smith of Kennedy Subdivision.

Surely, there are others in my constituency, **Mr. Speaker**.

For all of their families, I pray that God the Father of Compassion, the God of All Comfort, in His infinite mercy and love, provides peace in their circumstances. May the souls of the faithful departed rest in peace and rise in glory.

Mr. Speaker

I offer congratulations to my constituent, the National Teacher of the Year winner, Mrs. Waynette Bethel-Hanna as well as her parents, who are also my constituents, Mr. Wayne Bethel who works at the Port Department and runs a very successful construction company, Nassau Construction and her mother, Mrs. Glendina Bethel, Accountant, Ministry of Social Services. I congratulate them all.

Mr. Speaker

In Bamboo Town, I have sponsored a number of programmes;

- Summer school, summer science and Entrepreneurship programmes through Mr. Malcolm Foulkes.
- **Mr. Speaker,** We have partnered with The Ministry of National Security and our National Neighbourhood Watch Programme in Bamboo Town to ensure the safety and security of the residents of Bamboo Town.
- **Mr Speaker,** for the record, my constituency office is opened from 9am to 5pm, Monday through Friday, and every Thursday starting at 3pm.

Mr. Speaker,

Bamboo Town is a progressive group of communities. When I sought re-election to that area, flooding was a significant challenge for residents, due in part, to unscrupulous individuals who allegedly stole the metal grills off of the top of drainage wells resulting in a lot of the wells filling up with silt. With the cooperation of the Minister of Public Works, we are securing improvements of the drainage systems in various areas of the constituency. Drainage wells on Sapodilla Boulevard, around the Kennedy Park, and at the entrance to Gamble Heights are functioning well and their maintenance/cleaning has been ongoing. The drains at the rear of Super Value require either the road to be lifted or repositioning of the wells to get the effective hydraulic head.

Mr. Speaker

Our speed control programme has added to the safety of the streets of Bamboo Town. The road bumps have slowed the pace of vehicular traffic through the residential area, which is

used as short cuts by impatient motorists who give no thought to folks who may be crossing or playing near the streets.

Mr Speaker

I also thank my colleague Minister of The Environment for his attention to Bamboo Town. The increased and on-time collection of household garbage has provided tremendous relief for residents. Our clean-up campaigns have been successful and our efforts will be sustained in the next fiscal year.

We are happy with our Derelict Vehicle Removal Programme, and look forward to the new initiative in this budget, of \$50 for owners to remove some derelict vehicles in the over-the-hill communities.

Mr. Speaker

We continue to have great challenges in the area of Dorsettville near Resurrection Catholic Church and the community next to Zion Baptist Church on Zion Blvd. Both were cleaned the other day and two days later, bulk waste was deposited there again.

I find it hard to believe that people who live in that area are the perpetrators. I therefore urge residents to be watchful and report any and all incidences of dumping; and I urge those that are responsible to take to properly disposing of their waste.

Mr. Speaker

If I were a betting man, I would likely win a wager that the culprits were paid to take those items to the New Providence Landfill but did not do so.

Mr. Speaker

We will implement counter-measures to catch these culprits and seek their prosecution in our new Environmental Courts. So perpetrators, be forewarned.

Mr. Speaker

This Government believes in the empowerment of people – not simply locating jobs. That is why I fully support our implementation of one of our most impactful initiatives, the Small Business Development Centre (SBDC).

We are breaking the cycle of dependency on Government, facilitating growth and expansion, as the Minister of Finance communicated to this House.

I urge my constituents, business persons, who are not members, to join the Bamboo Town Business Bureau (BBB) to take advantage of the offerings of the SBDC that the fund provides in grants, equity and loans. We have also held business seminars for edification of members of the Triple B (BBB) which was conducted by Mr. Malcolm Foulkes and associates.

Mr. Speaker,

I am pleased to congratulate all of Bamboo Town Students who have graduated from high school. In life, academic success is not achieved by all, but it is important that all find value and work. So, for those who need additional training/classes to graduate, we will implement an afterschool programme. This programme will seek to shore up academics and to promote trade works to bolster the workforce. We intend to build what is known as a **FAB lab**, in conjunction with MIT (Massachusetts Institute of Technology), in the building next to my constituency office. Working people will need higher levels of education to tackle the technological demands of all occupations as we enter the 4th industrial age and this FAB lab will assist in that development. You can Google FAB Foundation for those interested in more information.

Mr. Speaker

This summer, Bamboo Town will again host its annual basketball tournament among polling divisions and a science camp to encourage students' interest in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects.

Mr Speaker

Our Backyard Farming Initiative will bear fruit this budget season as we begin our constituency farm and greenhouse at Carlton Francis Primary School and at our Constituency Office.

For Bamboo Town constituents who may feel perplexed, hold firm, for you are next. Be assured, Bamboo, it is still about you.

The Ministry of Transport and Local Government (Head 40)

Mr. Speaker

Following the Minister of Finance's Budget Communication, my Ministry and its Agency Heads digested the template to establish the following guides:

- Maintain fiscal discipline;
- Maximise revenue and limit borrowing;
- Modernise and improve revenue collection;
- Eliminate low priority spending;
- Greater responsiveness to the public; and
- Adhere to a strict process for procurement of goods and services.

For my Ministry's part, we are excited and are busy strategising ways and implementing policies that embracing new ideals, understanding that we are committed to the general

principles of accountability, responsibility, stability, transparency, inter-generational fairness and inclusive growth.

For its administration, my Ministry has been allocated just over \$9.6 M (\$9,627,059), which is relatively the same level of funding when compared to the closing FY2018/19 (\$9,622,942).

We are guided by the principle that we must do more with less and look forward to making the new system of accountancy work with public managers having greater visibility and control over budgeting and spending, lending to more effective human resource planning. My Ministry has shifted its gears to focus on long-term policy planning and effective governance.

Notwithstanding our immediate cost-saving measures, my Ministry will actively pursue initiatives and proposals that will enhance value for money, realising more savings, and improving service efficiency.

Road Traffic Department (Head 54)

Mr. Speaker

Pointedly, I turn to the Road Traffic Department, which has been allocated just over \$4.6M (\$4,648,445), representing around \$0.6M down from that which was allotted in FY2018/19 (\$5,295,180).

Under this Administration, we are undertaking to ensure the mechanism is in place to facilitate The Bahamas' thrust toward robust economic growth and record employment levels. A key component for this is coordinating steps in proper transportation planning, identifying the right policy mix, and developing our infrastructure with consideration for the environment, public health, and climate change. Fundamentally, **Mr. Speaker**, it is about improving the quality of life of our citizens.

The Road Traffic Department projected revenue collection for 2018/2019, was just under 36 million dollars (\$35,856,626.00). That figure was exceeded, as the Department brought in nearly 40 million (\$39,521,957.65) as of March of this year ... and counting as the fiscal year has yet to end.

Mr. Speaker

Peace comes with order. Thanks to the Ministry of Finance, the Road Traffic Department will soon be rendered cashless so that the Department, which is among the largest generators of revenue, will have the capacity to take on present and increased work in terms of volumes and variations.

Once this process has been completed, we should find that along with the Transport Management System (TMS), the Department will be hard to outpace in respect of revenue collection. This, of course, will lend to more efficiency and overall transparency.

Mr Speaker

We will be pursuing additional revenue initiatives for the Road Traffic Department this fiscal year with the introduction of specialty/organisational plates, personalised vanity licence plates, novelty tourism plates and general issue plates. We will achieve this by upgrading and enhancing the licence plate production facility at the prison by a capital injection of close to \$0.9M.

Mr. Speaker

Our land transport system is highly dependent on private transportation. In some households, there is a vehicle to every adult resident. While our arterial system of streets has progressed to accommodate increasing volumes of traffic, we all know the need for sound interventions for safe, reliable public transportation. The present high level of cars on New

Providence roads is a concern given the effect on air quality, delays in journey times due to congestion (particularly at peak hours); and the loss of natural areas to make way for the extension and building of new roads.

Mr. Speaker

Over the years, the Transportation Policy and Planning Unit (TPPU) has worked on several important traffic management and road safety initiatives including the Unification of the Public Bus System for New Providence, the development of a Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan and a Review of the Road Traffic Act.

Unfortunately, when the New Providence Road Improvement programme ended, the Transportation Policy and Planning Unit (TPPU) lost some of its resources and funding. Today, the TPPU is refocused once again on implementing important road safety initiatives.

One of these initiatives is the Junior Road Safety Officer Programme, which is deployed in all Government Primary Schools in New Providence and several Family Islands. It was pushed by my immediate predecessor and is envisioned that this programme will be in primary schools on all the Family Islands by the year end.

Mr. Speaker

I am sure that we would all agree that our children should learn about road safety at an early age so that it will become a part of a way of life for them. I am happy to report that this programme is doing just that. The children are learning about road safety through messages posted on their road safety notice boards, poems, rap music, plays and road safety assemblies.

To ensure that programmes like this are sustained, financial provisions have been made in this budget. I also thank my colleagues Ministers of Education and Health for allowing their ministries to assist in making this road safety programme a success.

Another road safety initiative that requires mentioning is the work toward updating of the Road Traffic Act. We have decided to bring incremental change to this law as opposed to the all-inclusive change package.

Mr. Speaker

My Ministry is reviewing the current Act as well as a Bill that has existed in my Ministry for several years. This review is meant to reduce the Bill from its present form, which is cumbersome and requires more clarity in some areas so that it is properly understood by those who will have charge of its administration.

This incremental approach to change is rationalised with the foreknowledge of how all-inclusive change exposed Government in the case of the Planning and Subdivisions Act. Incremental change allows us to build capacity to enforce new provisions.

I am pleased to announce that, with the new Road Traffic (Amendment) (No.2) 2018 having been passed, the same should come into force shortly with the Appointed Day Notice, which will be signed before the end of June. This amendment will prevent road users from using electronic communication devices while driving, driving with open alcoholic beverages and producing their drivers licence when requested to do so.

Mr. Speaker

Through you, I wish to advise that this is just the beginning. We intend to introduce stiffer penalties for reckless driving, careless driving, and causing death by reckless driving.

Mr. Speaker

There are too many cases of “killing in the course of dangerous driving”. In most cases, the offenders have been fined ten thousand dollars (\$10,000). We must look in the mirror and asked ourselves if the punishment fits the offence. We intend to work closely with the Royal

Bahamas Police Force to vigorously enforce all traffic laws. I wish to assure the general public that **“if you don’t obey the laws, you will surely pay”**.

Mr. Speaker

I am very pleased to announce that the Ministry of Transport and Local Government has agreed in principle with the United Public Transportation Company Limited to a unified public transportation pilot project for Route 17.

Mr. Speaker

The public transit service will operate along the fixed route according to a pre-determined schedule. The service will be provided by modern, clean buses; and users will board buses at designated bus stops or at other locations as directed by the Ministry along the route. The service will operate seven days a week from 6:00am to 8:00pm with buses operating every 15 minutes. Five buses are projected to operate this service based on either a 60-minute or 75-minute round-trip time.

A fare will be charged for all trips taken on the transit service. The fare structure is applicable to each one-way trip and applies to all customers. All fares are by exact change cash on a **“pay as you enter”** basis. Fares must be deposited by the customer into a fare-box on the buses. Bus drivers may not handle or deposit fares on behalf of customers except when the customer is unable to do so due to a disability.

My Ministry will reserve the right to alter the fare levels, fare structure, to introduce zones and to offer fare reductions or to introduce alternate fare payment methods (tickets or passes) as it deems appropriate. This Bus Unification pilot will be official launched next week.

Mr. Speaker

The transportation management system (TMS) is functioning well, within designed parameters given by the former administration, as it has afforded the Road Traffic Department the ability to be more transparent and effective in meeting its mandate. However, there are a few drawbacks that persist. Challenges are experienced when we are at our highest volume of customer service, with system responsiveness lagging and a timely response to troubleshooting queries. However, Data Torque has come in and is working, as a part of its contracted service, to mitigate the issues that the Department would have during operational hours.

In addition, **Mr Speaker**

Every island is not yet connected to the system and this is unacceptable. By law, each licensed driver, customer, no matter where he or she resides in The Bahamas, no matter where the licence is issued, is entitled to the same level of service.

As a result, **Mr. Speaker**

In the near future, we will provide TMS and relevant training on the islands of Grand Bahama, Abaco, Exuma, and Eleuthera. There are provisions being made in order to facilitate Andros, Bimini, Cat Island, and Long Island.

The southern islands are still manual, but it is the objective of the Department to put an end to all manual/paper licences by the end of this September.

Mr. Speaker

The Road Traffic Department has drastically improved from the services that it offered some two to three years ago; however, another May with long lines and frustrated customers at the Business and Franchise Section has taught us valuable lessons.

Mr. Speaker

Going forward, therefore, the Department will stagger the public service vehicle licencing month and invite franchise members to register in alphabetical order, with sections of that alphabetical order being assigned to particular months of the year.

This will lend order to the Section as they would be more prepared to assist customers due to the reduced volume of work required. Bahamians will remember that we used to experience the same long-line effect until Government decided that we would register vehicles via the owners' birthdate.

Mr. Speaker

There is a final set of issues within the Road Traffic Department that I must touch on briefly. They centre on the Taxicab Union particularly.

The Taxicab Union has brought it to the attention of my Ministry that their members' licence plates are the same colour as private charter bus plates and self-drive cars. It has been said that the private charter buses are providing the service that law allows exclusively for taxicabs.

Mr. Speaker

My Ministry has taken the decision to cause yellow to be the distinguishing colour for taxicab plates, as is generally accepted universally/internationally and we will change the colour of the SD plates.

There is also the challenge of livery cars overtly competing with taxicabs. There is the complaint that livery cars are on a line spotting fares when the law provides that their services ought to be prearranged. My Ministry is dialoguing with all parties to reach an amicable conclusion to this matter.

Mr. Speaker

In May 2017, the Governor General in her Speech from the Throne foreshadowed the government's intention to review and give consideration to the ownership of taxi licence plates by persons who have been leasing those plates for many years. This government is absolutely committed to bringing order to what has been allowed to mushroom into chaos.

Mr Speaker

The Prime Minister, in his wisdom, has established a Cabinet sub-committee consisting of six Ministers (Carl Bethel [Attorney General], Renward Wells [Transport and Local Government], Frankie Campbell [Social Services and Urban Development], Dionisio D'Aguilar [Tourism and Aviation], Brensil Rolle [Public Service and National Insurance], and Dion Foulkes [Labour]), tasked to make recommendations regarding issues pertaining to recalling of all plates, inactive plates, renewal of franchises, and plates "in the estate of", among others.

Mr. Speaker

It is good to know that on this issue, there is agreement on both sides of this House.

Post Office Department (Head 51)**Mr. Speaker**

I now turn to the Post Office Department.

Mr. Speaker

Isaiah 52 and 53 famously describe a mysterious figure that scholars dubbed the "Suffering Servant" – one that we now know as Yeshua, Our Lord. As it turns out, the General Post Office had its suffering servants as well.

Oh, Mr. Speaker

For years, the management and staff of the General Post Office were subjected to horrendous working conditions that threatened to crush their morale. The travelling journey to restore the peace of postal workers was long and fraught with controversy; but, this Administration resolved to get it done in the shortest possible time.

The conditions that postal workers endured were nearly unforgiveable. This Administration is strictly guided by the tenet that all workers have the right to work in conditions that are safe, healthy, and ensure human dignity.

Mr. Speaker

We begged their pardon and got to work. And at the beginning of May, this year, in regards to the general post office on East Hill Street, the rally to the suffering servants in Isaiah 52:11 went out “Depart, depart, go out from there (to the new Town Centre Mall)!”; and on Thursday, 23rd of last month, I was privileged to witness our Prime Minister declaring the relocated General Post Office open for business at the Town Centre Mall after just eight (8) months of the decision to relocate there.

As the Prime Minister indicated at the opening ceremony, “The postal service is an essential part of the infrastructure for democracy” and must be preserved and enhanced.

Mr. Speaker

As I did at that time, I again publicly thank my Permanent Secretary, Ms. Cora Bain-Colebrooke, and the Ministry’s leadership team. I thank the Postmaster General, Ms. Jennifer Johnson, her leadership team, and our postal workers for them being peaceful and patient citizens. Their patience is indicative of their democratic values and their willingness to defend them through service.

Mr. Speaker

This is an appropriate time, also, to thank the project manager Mr. McGwire, who drove hard general contractor targets. I am also extremely grateful to my colleague professionals from the Ministry of Public Works, who went beyond the call of duty to get the General Post Office up and opened. These professionals include Acting Chief Architect Mr. Timothy Johnson, Senior Mechanical Engineer Gerard Symonette, Electrical Engineer Jipcho Johnson, and Allan Pickstock; Mr. Craig Delancey and the Building Control Division. Special thanks are also extended to Mr. Harold Williams of the Ministry of Finance, and Mr. Alex Carey and Mr. Franklin Clarke, Ministry of the Public Service, without whom, this relocation would not have been possible. I thank them one and all.

Mr. Speaker

This is a welcomed development for the Post Office Department and for local and foreign patrons of the Bahamas' postal service. Postal officers are now back to working full eight (8) hour workdays. Customers of the General Postal Office have received and are currently receiving the keys to their new postal boxes.

Mr. Speaker

The relocation of the General Post Office presents an exciting opportunity for the postal service to realise full automation of counter and most interior services, address the upgrade of mail security features, explore new innovative ideas that will enhance its postal service product, positioning the service to distinguish itself among regional counterparts.

Contrary to the belief of some, conventional postal services are not dying or fading. The fact is that the global communications market is embracing technology to expand its ability to

move goods and services across borders to the satisfaction of its customers. Our make up as a diversely populated archipelago, by law, requires postal services for every community.

Beyond that, the Post Office is now in position to embrace new innovative expansions to its services and various forms of automation that may be adapted to service new partnerships. Partnership arrangements will involve the facilitation of some of Government's social obligations and the provision for customers to be able to access on-site track and tracing. We are pursuing partnerships with FedEx and DigiPrint to host services there.

The Department will also renew communications with local manufacturers, with the intent of producing souvenir items, featuring our beautiful stamp images. This new product line is expected to further expand our revenue intake.

Mr. Speaker

In the near-term, the Post Office will re-establish a physical presence in the downtown area, to allow easy access to postal products and services, to customers in the general downtown area, and especially to our tourist market. We are currently looking for suitable accommodations to host operations.

Mr. Speaker

The Post Office Department has been allocated in this year's budget \$6.7M (\$6,721,698), which represents a decrease from the closing year's allocation of \$7.1M (\$7,120,120). It should be noted that, with its accommodation challenges, up to March of this year, the Department had spent only \$4,614,868 of the 7.1M that was allocated.

Mr. Speaker

It should be noted that Post Office revenue declined due to loss of market share, which hinged on reduced hours of operation. Now that we have the place and the space, the General

Post Office must shift gears from not just pride of place but also pride of service. There is much to be done, much to rebuild in terms of operations. In fact, there is a critical need for additional trained/skilled workers as indicated by the Prime Minister. I am advised that the postal service workers have recommitted to greater efforts to serve with excellence. Now is the time to pour it on.

Mailboat Services

Mr. Speaker

When considering the Post Office, there is no escaping the discussion of mailboat services. Again this year, we propose to spend just over \$8.7M (\$8,754,000) subsidising mailboat services to the Family Islands. This figure is taken into my Ministry's administration budget.

Mr. Speaker

Eric Wiberg, a renowned Swedish American nautical author and historian that grew up in The Bahamas, presents a very good narrative in ***"Mailboats in The Bahamas: Two Hundred Years of Maritime History"***. For me, it was essential reading and I recommend it to those interested in mailboat operations. Wiberg traces the genesis of a "humble fleet of cast-off merchant boats" to the present-day reality of mailboats continuing to serve over fifty (50) Family Island communities. We see the dynamics of owners and mariners through time, hurricanes, and, yes, even politics.

Mr. Speaker

Mailboats are essential to our sprawling archipelago, transporting everything from propane to barrels of gasoline to livestock to foodstuff to frozen fish products to crabs to crops to coffins. In many instances, goods that are transported by mailboat cannot be transported on an

airplane. Since its inception, the mailboat system has been subsidised in some way by the Government of The Bahamas, because without the subsidies, many of the routes, which are commercially “unviable”, would cease to exist.

Mailboat owners have long advocated for increases in rates and, on the 13th of last month, the Nassau Guardian published an article entitled “*Family Islands: mail boat and postal reform*” by Roderick A. Simms II¹. There are pertinent recommendations made by Mr. Simms that should not be ignored and will not be ignored in respect of mailboat and postal services in our archipelago.

Mr. Speaker

It is clear to see that mailboats have an untold effect on our economy as a whole. New and existing entrepreneurs have embraced technology, receiving orders for goods by WhatsApp or Facebook and shipping them on mailboats, needing only to write the recipient’s name and destination in permanent marker on the box or package. Online banking has assisted their businesses, allowing them to track payment deposits ahead of dispatching packages.

My time as Minister responsible for regattas gave me good insight as to the importance of the mailboats to our premier cultural event. They literally carry the entire regatta package to the Family Islands. They carry the sloops, the cars, the supplies for regatta site, the stalls, the music, and the people – the full package.

Mr. Speaker

In an effort to standardise collection of freight tariffs and to properly intake VAT from the mailboat service, my Ministry will establishment a central freight collection/ distribution

¹<https://thenassauguardian.com/2019/05/13/family-islands-mail-boat-and-postal-reform/>

centre on Potter's Cay that would restrict traffic within a designated zone, minimising risk to the public, to mailboat owners and operators, and to the government.

We are also taking steps to bring order to what oftentimes becomes mass confusion at Potters Cay. Additionally, 24-hour manned security and CCTV surveillance will be implemented. We have taken note that some mailboat owners and operators have mistakenly used Potters Cay as a storage facility for derelict vessels and defunct parts. The Port Controller has been asked to ensure that all legal steps are taken to bring order to that area of Potters Cay.

Port Department (Head 53)

Mr. Speaker

Despite our small population of fewer than 400,000, The Bahamas is a big ocean nation. In terms of the number of islands, islets, reefs, coral reefs and cays, The Bahamas is one of the larger archipelagos in the world. In this regard, our Blue Economy Initiative is priority for growth. So, in the Customs Tariffs Regulation, we have increased the fees in terms of the size of boats that cruise our waters and **Mr. Speaker**, we are looking for a significant revenue windfall from this initiative.

Mr. Speaker

This Government is committed to promoting and developing our marine transportation industry, and there are many developments currently underway in this sector.

The Port Department has been provided \$8.6M (\$8,616,536) for its administration and operations. This figure represents a minor decrease of \$0.1M when compared to FY2018/19 (\$8,523,120).

Over the closing fiscal year, the Port Department has:

- Repaired the roof to Port Administration Building;
- Installed CCTV within the Port Departments Building to safeguard the cashier's cage;
- Contracted with Bahamas Marine Engineering for Fender Maintenance and related upkeep at Prince George Dock;
- Conducted enforcement operations on San Salvador, North and Central Andros, Bimini and Cat Cay;
- Installed a transformer at Potter's Cay as part of the strategic upgrade project;
- Conducted security perimeter fencing repairs at Prince George Wharf to ensure that that port retains its ISPS standard;
- Designated Dock Masters at Prince George and Potter's Cay Docks for the effective management of facilities and operations;
- Reconstituted Dock Safety Marshals to administer safety protocols while cruise and cargo vessels are berthing and departing Prince George Dock;
- Renewed the focus of the Port Maintenance Team to effect preventative upkeep and undertake immediate repairs at Prince George Dock;
- Separated Inspection and Boat Registration processes for transparency and greater accountability;
- Sold the Tugs Snapper and Amberjack via a bidding process;
- Drafted a Wreck and Salvage Removal Policy to address sunken and abandoned vessels throughout The Bahamas generally, with particular emphasis in and around New Providence, particularly at Potter's Cay Dock and Arawak Cay;
- Held a Town Hall meeting with owners and operators of commercial recreational watersport vessels at the National Training Agency;
- Developed and executed in-house training programmes for Port officers; and
- Installed solar lighting/fixtures at Prince George Dock.

Mr. Speaker

The following initiatives are among many more that are ongoing or being finalised within the Port Department:

- Legislative reviews of the Boat Registration Act for vessels between 100 and 500 gross tonnage;
- Memorandum of Understanding between the Bahamas Maritime Authority and Port Department to articulate their interrelated policies and activities;
- Maintenance and installation of Harbour Transit Light;
- Automation of the Port Department procedures and processes;
- Construction of a Solar Lighting Battery House at Prince George Dock;
- Deployment of agency representatives from the Department of Public Works and Port Department to finalise estimates of repairs required for the basin/dock in Matthew Town, Inagua to mitigate the social, safety and security concerns;
- Development of cost estimates for harbour and channel dredging required to make the North Abaco Container Port accessible and functional;
- Installation of CCTV System at Prince George Dock, which is now 80% complete;
- Title Document Initiative for vessel registration requirement to prevent the registration of stolen vessels etc;
- Vessel Decal Initiative to assist with ease of identifying vessels that are duly registered;
- Immediate general repairs at the Dock Master's Office at Potter's Cay (upgrade of water supply, roof repair and interior repairs); and
- Initiative to upgrade beach enforcement activities including use of two (2) new Jet Skis, CCTV and Drone Coverage, Regatta Buoys, Watch Towers, Signage, VHF Radios. There is an ongoing discussion about outsourcing the Beach Enforcement function, but that has not yet been finalised. With these efforts, we seek to ensure the safe of Bahamians and visitors alike.

- We will also reconstruct the Jet Ski ramp at Goodman's Bay for the convenience of franchise owners who operate there.

Mr. Speaker

In FY2019/20, the Port Department will work to ensure that my Ministry approves proposals for and commences work on:

- National Pilotage Evaluation/Qualifying Policy for the Bahamas;
- Automatic identification system (AIS) requirements for vessels transiting the Bahamas; vessels are not required to do so now.
- A Mooring Authority for The Bahamas, in conjunction with the Docks Committee;
- Reorganisation of Potter's Cay Dock to address berthing concerns previously articulated;
- Hydrographic mapping of passageways, which requires regional assistance;
- Request for Proposal process for the immediate removal of derelict and abandoned vessels around New Providence;
- Automation of Port Administration and Operations (MARIS proposal by PDMS Limited, Registry and Regulatory Solutions) for acquisition via negotiated purchase.

There is a tremendous amount of work to be done in the Port Department, but with God's help, all things are possible.

Air Accident Section

Mr. Speaker

The safety and security of our constituents is paramount to this Government. Additionally, The Bahamas has long been marketed as a high-end tourist destination. For the sake of our residents and guests, safety and security policies are fundamental priorities. I can

point to various major events/accidents that involve plane crashes, catastrophes at sea, and on our highways.

The Government of The Bahamas has determined that Bahamas Air Accident Investigation Department (BAAID) should operate from a position of independence as a Corporate Sole. As a result, the BAAID currently operates from accommodations within my Ministry, administratively separating itself from the Department of Civil Aviation, which is required to comport with international standards.

In order to formalise this arrangement and to integrate all major accident investigations services, my Ministry is collaborating with the Office of the Attorney General to establish a Corporate Sole Authority to investigate all accidents and incidents.

The Authority should be staffed by scientifically-qualified safety investigators tasked with clarifying the course of events that lead to the accidents or incidents,

In cases where foreign aircraft/vessels are involved, it is proposed that, under the Accident Investigations Act, the aircraft/ vessels would not be permitted to leave the jurisdiction prior to the conclusion of the investigation.

This integrated authority approach is exemplified by the United States of America's National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), Sweden's Accident Investigation Authority (SHK), and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB). So **Mr. Speaker**, I look forward to the BTSA, the Bahamas Transportation Safety Authority.

The Bahamas Maritime Authority

Mr. Speaker

I now move to one of the jewels in The Bahamas' crown. The Bahamas Maritime Authority (BMA) continues to effectively manage a register that is among the largest in the

world's shipping League of Nations. The BMA is responsible for collecting all registration and related fees and for meeting its expenses in accordance with a budget agreed with the Minister. The BMA currently has offices in Nassau, New York, London, Hong Kong, Greece, and, most recently, in Tokyo. We along with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are now exploring the idea of causing all of our BMA offices abroad to function as Consulate where we do not currently have one.

Mr. Speaker

The Bahamas has retained its position as the number one flag for passenger/cruise ships with over 142 ship flying The Bahamas' flag ranging from the world's largest cruise ships to the small expedition ships operating in the Polar Regions.

Notwithstanding the successes in the industry, I continually get the question as to why we are "slipping" in status in terms of tonnage. Let me be clear. Although the growth of the Register is gratifying, the BMA's policy is not one of growth at all costs. The Authority's policy comports with that of the Government of The Bahamas.

Our standards will not be compromised in order to attract additional tonnage. Ships that do not meet international standards will not be accepted onto the register. Ours is a commitment to quality, compliance and continuous improvement of all Bahamian-registered ships, their owners and crews. We are proud of our ships and of our reputation as a *Quality Register* throughout the international shipping industry.

Mr. Speaker

In November, the Deputy Prime Minister, K. Peter Turnquest and I, formally opened the BMA's office in Tokyo, Japan. The office represents the sixth exclusive BMA office and, with Japan being the world's second largest shipping market in terms of vessel tonnage, the BMA

seeks to provide direct services to the Japanese maritime sector and increase its market share of ships flying The Bahamas' flag.

An international measure of a flag state's performance is the outcome of the inspection of its flagged ships by other port state control countries. I am pleased to advise that The Bahamas flag is ranked as a non-targeted (that is, low risk/high performing) flag within the European (Paris MOU) and Asia-Pacific (Tokyo MOU) regions. This, coupled with the United States Coast Guard's QUALSHIP 21 status, clearly demonstrates The Bahamas' commitment to be a quality flag state.

Through you, **Mr. Speaker**

I extend thanks to the owners, managers and shipboard crews of our flagships for ensuring that our registered ships comply with the international convention requirements and avoid delays following Port state inspections.

In fact, in 2018, The Bahamas recorded its lowest ever number of annual detentions following port state control (PSC) inspections with only 24 ships being detained.

Mr. Speaker

The BMA is holding its own as a State Owned Enterprise. We are very proud of the efforts of the Chairman, Denise Lewis-Johnson and Deputy Chairman, Mr. Peter Goulandris and the Board, as well as the Executive Management Team and Staff of the BMA in all of the offices worldwide. Our annual IMO Member State assessment contribution of over US\$1.3M placed The Bahamas as the seventh largest financial contributor of the IMO's total assessment for its 174 member States and three (3) Associate Members. It is well worth it.

Mr. Speaker

I am also pleased to announce that BMA's Managing Director and CEO, Captain Dwain Hutchinson, has been appointed an Executive Governor of the World Maritime University. I look forward to that appointment bring further gains BMA.

Mr. Speaker

The BMA is managing the process of reviewing the Bahamas Merchant Shipping Act, updating national legislation to comply with international Conventions to which we are party. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been invited to lobby other IMO member states to again support The Bahamas candidature for Category C of the IMO Council.

As the BMA moves to celebrate its twenty-sixth anniversary this fiscal period, activities will be mounted to raise national maritime awareness and to encourage young people to choose maritime rewarding careers.

Department of Meteorology (Head 55)

Mr. Speaker

While all of the agencies within my remit play critical roles in the implementation of our policy initiatives and programmes, weather and climate impact virtually every aspect of our lives, thus the need for a Department of Meteorology.

The Department's important work is funded by an allocation of just over \$2.5M (\$2,530,804), about \$400K less than the closing FY2018/19 (\$2,958,620).

Mr. Speaker

At present, there are no ministerial directives or legal instruments in place to guide or to dictate the operation of the Department of Meteorology. The draft of a proposed Bahamas

Department of Meteorology Bill is under review at the Office of the Attorney General in conjunction with the Law Reform and Review Commission.

Mr. Speaker

The draft Bill will establish the Bahamas Department of Meteorology as the single authority for meteorological services in The Bahamas as well as outline the functions of the Department overall.

Mr. Speaker

The intent is to formalise the framework for the delivery of public and commercial meteorological goods and services to grow the economy of The Bahamas. The Bill will create a new revenue stream vis-à-vis its measurement and observational products generated from a vast climatological database. Further, the progression of the Bill to law will fulfil the international obligations of The Bahamas as party to Conventions under the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

Mr. Speaker

The infrastructural upgrades for the Department will continue this FY the \$20M (\$19,136,110.00) Doppler Weather Radar and Airport Weather Observing System (AWOS) Project with Vaisala Ojy, which commenced in October 2016 to achieve ICAO compliance at key airports, continues. A contract amendment in the amount of \$1,567,309.00 is required to complete both the Doppler and AWOS installations, with project completion by the end of December 2019.

Mr. Speaker

The other capital works project that is continuing in the Met Department, is the installation of Automate Weather Observing Systems (AWOS). Automated Weather Observing

Systems (AWOS) are essential for aircraft instrument approach and landing operations. They are critical to secure and maintain as ICAO certified facilities. AWOS remotely measures and monitors surface wind, visibility, runway visual range, height of cloud base, air and dew-point temperatures and atmospheric pressure to assist the approach, landing and take-off of aircraft.

By December of this year, we look forward to their installation in:

- Governor's Harbour, Eleuthera;
- Cockburn Town, San Salvador;
- George Town, Exuma;
- Matthew Town, Inagua; and
- Fresh Creek, Andros.

Mr. Speaker

It is to note that due to the construction of new airports, this strategically placed combination of the latest, most modern AWOS and Doppler Weather Radars should produce more timely warnings and more accurate weather forecasts, resulting in a greatly improved Early Warning Weather System for the entire Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker

The Met Department has an Upper Air Station located at the LPIA. There, balloon technology is employed to measure altitude, pressure, temperature, relative humidity, and wind speed and direction. These balloons can ascend to over 20 miles above the earth. Ultimately, meteorologists and weather forecasters use the resulting profile to determine the stability of the atmosphere. Therefrom, they are able to determine the likelihood of developing severe weather and the genesis and movement of tropical cyclones. With this information, pilots can determine the height at which airframe icing can occur on the wings of an airplane.

Mr. Speaker

My Ministry is painfully aware that the building from which this work that is essential to life safety is carried out exists under tenuous conditions. It is an imperative, therefore, that the structural damage to the walls and roof be remediated in the upcoming fiscal year and we will do so.

Mr. Speaker

I know that you are sorely missed as your first degree is in meteorology. The scientific requirements of the field are exacting. Even entry-level roles for the Department of Meteorology require the best and the brightest in STEM subjects (particularly, Mathematics and Physics).

Since it is difficult to find meteorological professionals in The Bahamas, the Department will build its capacity through continual training and re-training, while we identify suitable candidates, Bahamians first, to fill the vacancies.

Department of Local Government (Head 18)**Mr. Speaker**

I now move to the Department of Local Government.

Recognising the mammoth responsibility given to the Department of Local Government, every effort has been made to ensure that it manages the “people’s money” with fiscal prudence and transparent accountability while looking after the well-being and economic growth and development of the Family Islands.

For the fiscal year 2018-2019, the Department of Local Government was allocated a budget of just under twenty-seven million dollars (\$26,427,767.00) for its operations.

Around \$13.3M (\$13,319,147.00) of that was allocated to Family Island District Councils operations. The allocation for Exuma will be the same as previous years.

This year, an appropriation of just over \$26.2M (\$26,221,439) is proposed with funding to District Councils on par with the closing year's (\$13,149,097).

Mr Speaker

Attrition to retirement has challenged the Department and is, therefore, high on its agenda for remediation. As a stopgap measure, some administrators have oversight of two Districts. In a few months, my Ministry will ensure that every Local Government District is staffed with a Family Island Administrator as the Prime Minister has mandated.

Mr. Speaker

It should be noted that, in the first instance, suitable candidates will be sought from within the Public Service and a few will come from outside the Public Service. It is my view that this is a wonderful opportunity for serving officers.

Mr Speaker

In March of 2019, Family Island Administrators came together for an Administrator's Workshop under the theme, "Family Island Administrators: Agents of Change, Productivity and Accountability. During this time, they focused on the responsibilities of the Family Island Administrators, best practices and the way forward. This workshop was well received by the Administrators and deemed a great success.

Mr Speaker

The Department will continue its efforts to confirm long serving officers throughout the Family Islands who have been "temporary" workers for many years. Over the last fiscal year, the

Department of Local Government was successful in causing the confirmation of ninety-three (93) officers in that predicament. In this fiscal year, we are looking to confirm another tranche of temporary workers.

Mr. Speaker

Last month, the Parliamentary Registration Department assisted the Department of Local Government in its efforts to fill some eight (8) vacancies on Local Councils. Nominations were held on 9th May 2019. Six (6) vacancies were filled at that time by virtue of the fact that nominations were singular in various areas including South Andros, Central & South Abaco, Inagua, and Long Island. Two areas required full scale elections – Central Abaco and North Abaco. Those elections took place on the 23rd May 2019 and winners have been officially declared.

One vacancy in Long Island had no nomination, leading to a ministerial appointment.

Mr. Speaker

There are a number of Local Government facilities throughout the Family Islands that have been allowed to fall into a state of disrepair. Administrator's residences on North Andros, Bimini, Harbour Island and Inagua require extensive repairs and renovations and in two cases, rebuilding.

Mayaguana, Marsh Harbour, Abaco, and Exuma have facilities that require less extensive maintenance. The Department will work diligently to ensure that these facilities are brought up to standard for occupation in this coming fiscal year.

Finally, **Mr. Speaker**

In keeping with its commitment to properly manage the people's money, the Department has been successful in re-establishing the Internal Monitoring Unit. This unit will be headed by

an Assistant Auditor in the person of Mrs. Debra Miller. It is anticipated that Mrs. Miller will be able to focus on providing the necessary financial guidance and assistance to all Family Island Administrators.

Mr. Speaker

I once again take this opportunity to thank the Prime Minister for allowing me to serve; and thank my Permanent Secretary, Cora Bain Colebrooke, and the Ministry's executive team, Directors Trevor Basden (Met Department), Brenda Colebrook (Local Government), Controller Bradley Sands (Road Traffic), Commander Raymond King (Port Department), Post Master Jennifer Johnson and the Entire Staff of The Ministry of Transport & Local Government for their work of excellence.

Mr. Speaker

Bamboo Town reiterates its full support for the Budget. Until the road we trod leads unto our God, we will continue to march on.