



Communication by
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Contribution to the
Budget Debate for the 2020/2021 Fiscal Period

Theme:
An Unprecedented Budget For Unprecedented Times
“This is A Budget for the People”

At
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Nassau, New Providence,
The Bahamas

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Mr. Speaker

I wish to begin by giving thanks to the Almighty God for granting me another year to stand here to represent the constituents of Seabreeze, and to make my contribution to this 2020-2021 Budget Debate.

It has been a pleasure and certainly a privilege to serve the people of Seabreeze and I am immensely grateful to stand here on their behalf and to receive their continued support to speak as their voice in these hallowed chambers.

Mr. Speaker

I also wish to thank the good member for Killarney, the Most Honorable Prime Minister, Dr. Hubert Minnis for continuing to repose confidence in me to serve as a member of his Cabinet with responsibility for the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture. I remain persuaded that he and I and each member so elected have been handpicked to serve for a time such as this.

Foreword

Mr. Speaker: The evidence of this debate under a Minnis lead administration, amidst the clear and present danger of the COVID-19 pandemic, reflects this government's commitment to being open, transparent and accountable to The Bahamian people. (Mr. Speaker The 2020-2021 Draft Estimates Book is evidence of the Financial Report and Accountability of the Government in accordance with its obligations under the Constitution).

Members continued to work

Mr. Speaker, though we were all required to stay home to stay safe under the Executive Emergency Orders, the Executive

Arm of Government and all elected members together with the list of essential workers remained on the frontline for and on behalf of the people we represent. Mr. Speaker, we are here because we know that the people have elected us to serve and to do so in good times and in ‘not-so good times’. Mr. Speaker, it is an undisputed fact that as a government and as a people, we find ourselves in uncomfortable, unusual, extraordinary and unprecedented times. The Church continues to pray and worked as essential workers. And we are thankful for their service.

Notwithstanding these grave circumstances, we are here to debate the best way forward for our children, our youth, our economy and our future.

When I consider the sacrifices, risks and courage of members present, many of whom, their faces are hidden behind protective masks, I must commend the courageous efforts of this body, and say to them that history would be gracious in telling our story.

Budgeting is not only about numbers

Mr. Speaker: I would have indicated during the last Budget Debate, and do so here again repeat, that a national budgetary exercise cannot be and is not merely about the numbers, projections and analysis, but a complex tasks of prioritizing, analysing qualitative and quantitative data, and balancing these facts with the tangible needs of people. Mr. Speaker: Everything the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture does is to the direct benefit of the Bahamian people, and so I have dubbed it, “The People’s Ministry”. And Mr. Speaker, from the Minister of the People’s Ministry, I am here to declare that we

are debating an Unprecedented Budget for Unprecedented Times: This one is for the People.

Mr. Speaker: The late Pastor Theodore Parker, Theologian and Abolitionist is quoted as having said, “A Democracy is a government of all the people, by the people, for all the people.”

Hurricane Dorian – Cost of Damage

Mr. Speaker: Within one Budget Period, the people of The Bahamas were severely impacted by two catastrophic events: The first being Category 5 Hurricane Dorian that paid The Bahamas a deadly visit on the 2nd and 3rd of September, 2019; claiming the lives of more than 300 people including men, women and children listed among our official records of missing and dead: And has left thousands homeless, mentally and psychologically scarred, and an innumerable measure of physical damage beyond our most dreaded nightmare. A nightmare with respect to which we are all suffering the effects, Abaco and Grand Bahama feeling the brunt of this pain.

Mr. Speaker: The consequential damage to our economy is real. Dorian was not a pigment of our imagination and neither was it brought on by anyone. Dorian was a Natural Disaster and The Bahamas remains its victim. It left 100s of people displaced, and the Government of The Bahamas moved swiftly to evacuate hundreds from our family islands; established long term shelter-housing arrangements, secured mass food provision and clothing distribution – Through our collective efforts We Searched, We Rescued, We Sheltered, We are Healing and this budget exercise further facilitates our national efforts of Restoration. The Government assumed the costs to house and provide for more than 1,500 evacuees

here in the Capital. And Mr. Speaker please permit me once again to publically thank the Minister and his team at the Ministry and Department of Social Services led by Director Lillian Quant Forbes for their excellent work in this regard. Our nation will forever owe social workers a debt of gratitude for their invaluable service.

Mr. Speaker: speaking of real dollars and cents, according to the Ministry of Finance's assessment of the damages due to Hurricane Dorian, our economy was hit by a financial loss of approximately of \$3.4 billion – One hurricane Mr. Speaker, in less than one year; and Mr. Speaker, amidst that there was no cut of the civil service and immeasurable help financially and otherwise that was rendered to affected citizenry, not forgetting the exorbitant costs to restore basic infrastructure to the affected islands. Mr. Speaker, for a small island nation to still stand after such an ordeal, speaks volumes to our resilience. And it speaks to the unprecedented leadership we have in these unprecedented times. And yes, Mr. Speaker, this is an unprecedented budget, but it is A Budget for the people.

COVID-19 – Cost of Damage

Mr. Speaker: And if Hurricane Dorian, was not enough, amidst our healing and national recovery efforts, only 5 months later, the world was stricken with the effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic: First showing its ugly head in Wuhan, China, then sweeping the globe, and arriving at our shores here in The islands of The Bahamas on 15th March, 2020, prompting an immediate shut-down of the state by way of an Emergency Proclamation issued on the 17th March, 2020, by His Excellency the Governor General. Followed by the tabling of a Resolution in both Houses of Parliament on the 18th and 19th

of March, respectively. Mr. Speaker, please allow me to extend my heartfelt condolences once again to the families and victims of Hurricane Dorian and of COVID-19. Mr. Speaker, we expect hurricanes, but none could have predicted Dorian. We are aware of viruses and their potential to spread, but the world remain in shock having experienced the wrath of COVID. It is a ‘novel’ or new stream of the coroner viruses and therefore, makes economies and circumstances most volatile. We are not comfortable, Mr. Speaker but We are where we are, and it is what it is.

Mr. Speaker: To the shock and disbelief of many, the novel coronavirus made Dorian seem miniscule when we compare its globally catastrophic effects, the extent of its reach and the accelerated pace at which it travelled, virtually striking every nation of the globe. It brought the world economy to a virtual halt, and sparking a global public health crisis having infected 6,091,000,000.00 people to date and claiming the lives of 400,000 human beings (Wikipedia Covid-19 Pandemic 2020). Unprecedented Times – Unprecedented Measures – Unprecedented Budget – Unprecedented Challenges

Mr. Speaker: As we yet debate, our nation remains in survival mode under the Emergency Powers Order and members of parliament are all here assuming the risks for those we vowed to serve. Mr. Speaker, the reality is, the Dorian and COVID-phenomena coupled with Hurricane Irma and ‘the state of Acoma’ we found ourselves in upon assuming office in 2017 resulted in what is a National Economic Challenge. On a broader scale the World describes this state as a Worldwide Economic Crisis. Mr. Speaker, our islands are not immune to the effects of this crisis, and thus we must find the best way to survive and rebound. Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of Finance and his team led

by the good Financial Secretary have done just that – found a way for us to rebound by means of this unprecedented budget for unprecedented times. Mr. Speaker: Our economy suffered a gigantic loss resulting from COVID. Our Tourism sector was hardest hit. Our number 1 industry was shut down, and the country was made to survive on ‘drips’ for approximately 6 consecutive weeks as we worked together to stay home to stay safe. Mr. Speaker, now is the time we must encourage the Minister of Tourism that he and his team and the members of the tourism sector can and must rebound, and rebound we will with the help of the good Lord. As a member of the Government, I am thankful to the good Lord for sparing the lives of thousands of Bahamians during the spread of COVID, with 11 deaths and 103 infections to date, the majority of whom were women. We all know it could have been much worse. I take this time to extend my condolences to the families and victims of the COVID-19 Virus. In particular, my colleague, Minister Johnson who lost his dear sister.

Mr. Speaker: In similar fashion as we did with Dorian, this government in response to the challenges faced by COVID-19, executed an Unemployment Benefit Plan and Stimulus Package to the tune of \$10 million for the direct benefit of the people. Many of whom are of our youth demographic, and our tourism and creative arts sectors such as straw vendors. Mr. Speaker, as a result of COVID, it is being forecasted that the Bahamian economy will suffer a 16 percent, or nearly \$2bn, contraction in GDP during 2020.

Mr. Speaker, I dear to repeat the fact that it could have been worse. And so I too would like to join the many organizations who partnered with my Ministry in creating Thank you videos to the front line COVID-19 Fighters including the medical community, members of the armed forces and all essential

workers who helped us maintain some sense of normalcy during a most difficult period.

Mr. Speaker: As the Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, I wish we had more funds for sports development and youth programs and cultural upliftment; and I wish COVID and DORIAN did not happen because one life lost was one life to many. But it did. We are where we are and unfortunately yet fortunately it is, what it is. I find it fitting to repeat here the prayer of Reinhold Niebuhr who wrote, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

Mr. Speaker: Prior to this administration coming to office 3 short years ago, the Bahamian people suffered from what I term, 5 years of neglect, incompetence, a culture of unaccountability and an unacceptable level of indiscipline. But Mr. Speaker, it is what it is, and we are where we are. It is now the people’s time, and we have moved on from that depressing story; but we will not forget that we found the cupboard empty, the cookie jar missing and the people in a state of a coma.

Mr. Speaker: While we have introduced a phased reopening for the benefit of the economy, we cannot ignore the fact that the COVID-19 Monster remains at large; and therefore we must proceed with caution.

Today, we are in the middle of a Budget Debate, still not knowing whether there will be a resurgence or even another outbreak of COVID. Time waits on no man or woman for that matter; and today, we are once again at the beginning of a long hurricane season; that is according to meteorologist expected to be overactive. What is even more concerning is that our

country is positioned in a 'hurricane belt' and therefore our chances of experiencing a storm is significantly high.

However, Mr. Speaker: I join the chorus of those who sing with confidence, "I don't believe He brought us this far to leave us." Mr. Speaker, today we present to the Bahamian people an unprecedented budget for unprecedented times, and extraordinary measures but all to the benefit of an extraordinary people. This one is for the people.

Economic Outlook – Before Covid & Dorian

Mr. Speaker: Prior to Dorian and COVID we had no downgrades, our debt to GDP had increased to 59.2%, and we anticipated a growth of 1.2% for the year 2019-2020. Standards and Poor maintained this nation's creditworthiness at BB+/B. These are the records, and these are important facts. Mr. Speaker: Had we maintained the downward trajectory that plagued the former administration, someone said on East Street, 'dog would have eaten our lunch'. But it is because of this financial stability founded under the leadership of the Prime Minister, established by the Minister of Finance and his team prior to Dorian and COVID, our face is still good, and we can live to see another day, and plan for others. Mr. Speaker, for this, we give God thanks.

Mr. Speaker: Not only are these successes demonstrative of this Government's plan, but a plan that was working and a government that continued to act responsibly, and live up to our word to restore our economy and our people. The reputational damage we suffered in my view ought to be laid and remain solely at the feet of the former PLP Administration whose failed governance model was evidenced by a yearly downward trajectory of downgrade after downgrade. Mr.

Speaker, the Bahamian people came off that train on the 10th May, 2017, because we all saw plainly that that ship was destroying our past and threatening our very future. Mr. Speaker, I said it before on behalf of the people of Seabreeze, and I will say it again, to make it abundantly clear, that “we are not going back; we have made a commitment to move our communities, our country and our people forward, upward, onward, together.” And this Budget is for the people.

The New Environment Post CoVid

Mr. Speaker: If we look around this chamber, the furniture has changed, the distance between us has been adjusted; and save for members of the media, we have no visitors in the gallery. Mr. Speaker of the 290 years of our parliamentary government existence, this is an unusual environment. And this means it cannot be business as usual; and anyone who is advocating for the same benefits under hardship conditions is simply seeking to cause political mischief or being ‘unreasonable’.

Mr. Speaker: As the Minister of Culture, permit me to reinforce the tone of this Budget Debate 2020-2021, as first announced by the good member for East Grand Bahama, Minister of Finance and Deputy Prime Minister, who said and I quote, “This is an Unprecedented Budget for Unprecedented times.” And to this allow me to further posit, that this is still the People’s Time, This remains the People’s Budget, and this 2020-2021 Budget is for The People”.

Mr. Speaker: The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture understands that the role and mandate of the Ministry is to lead in shaping the nation’s youth ideology, sporting methodology and cultural philosophy. Significantly, we

recognize that we must do this with a great degree of adaptability in these ever changing times. Mr. Speaker, ‘adaptation’ or the ability to change in response to one’s environment is one of the greatest characteristics of a human being.

Mr. Speaker: How we come out of these experiences or whether we allow them to propel us forward or hold us back I believe, will be determined by the extent of our ability to ‘adapt’. One Charles Darwin is quoted as having said, “The most powerful natural species are those that adapt to environmental change without losing their fundamental identity which gives them their competitive advantage.” Mr. Speaker, this Budget for the People is designed to ensure that we adapt to the new conditions in which we must operate, while maintaining a stable national outlook and preserving our competitive advantage in the banking and tourism sectors, two main pillars of our sovereignty and national identity.

Mr. Speaker: The Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture is budgeted at \$18,938,186. This figure represents a reduction of some \$5,143,194 (a 21%) budget cut in line with the agreed fiscal austerity measures. This simply means Mr. Speaker, given the changing circumstances and limited financial resources, a portion of the Ministry’s funds had to be reallocated. This cut ensures that in the given circumstances, there are adequate provisions to help with public health expenses, social safety net programs, job creation and sustenance, food security initiatives and tourism rejuvenation. Mr. Speaker, what we cannot forget, is that we are all in this together, and all food comes from one pot, and every man, woman, boy and girl, rich and poor have to eat.

Mr. Speaker: Lots of work goes into budget preparation, management and application. Hence, I would like to briefly pause to acknowledge the hardworking Management and Staff of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture who works diligently to facilitate programs, services and initiatives that support the youth, sports and cultural sector; I also say thank you to our partners for appreciating the fact that these challenging economic times brought on by challenging events require all hands on deck in the management of our fiscal affairs.

Mr. Speaker: Where possible, most budgeted items with the exception of Personal Emoluments suffered a reduction to bring our Ministry in compliance with the required overall 20% cut. Mr. Speaker, what this means, was that our aim was to ensure all persons who had jobs and benefits prior to COVID-19, maintained that status, they kept their jobs and benefits. Mr. Speaker, maintaining the livelihood of Bahamians was and remains the priority of this Government. With personal emoluments not being included in the budget cut, some items in accordance with actual expenditure carried a greater deduction than others. But Mr. Speaker, it is to be noted that no critical area went empty. The Ministry has dedicated itself to ‘adapting’ while maintaining the quality of services, programs and facilitation our Ministry offers. And we are thankful to the Ministry of Finance for their cooperation in this regard.

Mr. Speaker: From the onset of COVID-19 my Ministry has been in adaptation mode. We launched our Online Activity Platform on the 23rd March, 2020, (one week after the shut-down). This platform provided weekly motivational online Stay at Home, Stay Active and Stay Engaged challenges with Youth, Sports and Cultural components. These videos and

messages inspired hundreds of other postings of challenges and online engagement by other civic organizations, families and friends. We also used the available electronic medium to stay connected with our Ministry partners, while monitoring a daily COVID-19 Hotline to the benefit of the general public. Today, in accordance with public service policy the Ministry's staff has returned to work albeit on a rotation basis with our office opening only for those urgent matters between the hours of 9am and 1pm Monday to Friday having commenced on 13th May, 2020.

Mr. Speaker: To highlight the major areas of the budget, the following reflects an estimated breakdown of the Draft Budget allocation per Departments/Sections/Offices within the Ministry. One important fact that is to be noted, is that though the Ministry has suffered necessary deductions, the differences are not below actual expenditure. In other words expenses are in accordance with or below the approved budget estimates for last budget cycle. This means for example, athlete subvention was approved at \$1,346,150 last budget period. The actual expenditure under that item for the budget period was \$1,007,588 as per the date of the 2020-2021 budget publication. A difference of \$338,562 was not spent based on the date of this record. This position would inform any reasonable adjustment or rationale for new budgetary spending. I hasten to add for the benefit of our athletes of whom we continue to be immensely proud, that in accordance with the existing sports policy no active athlete approved for subvention would be affected by the item adjustments. However, where an athlete is not performing in accordance with standard policy, the usual adjustments will be applied as recommended by the Department of Sports and our standard consultation with the respective federation sporting bodies.

That being said Mr. Speaker: What I call Poster ‘B’ is a snapshot of key areas estimated under the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture’s Budget Head 47 and are displayed in the chart below and are as follows:

*Ministry General Programs (includes Summer Programs)	\$2,300,000.00	12.14%
Personal Emoluments (minus Summer employment staff)	\$5, 331,280.00	28.15%
Youth -	\$1, 518,280.00	8.01%
Sports-	\$2,839,920.00	14.99%
Culture-	\$1,826,832.00	9.65%
*Operational Expenses	\$5,121,874.00	27.05%
Total	\$18,938,186.00	

- *Items marked with an ‘*’ represent expenditure for combined Ministry programs/initiatives or acquired services*

Mr. Speaker: This budget while taking into account the unprecedented times in which we all find ourselves has chartered a course that will allow us to work together to overcome the challenges of Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19. Towards this end, this FNM Government is leaving no one behind. We have made the provisions for our youth programs to continue albeit under new conditions, and for our athletes to continue receiving assistance for their training and development. We have secured the subsidy for the benefit of our cultural community in anticipation of among other events the end of year our beloved Junkanoo celebrations. We have maintained provisions for our partners to receive their annual financing albeit at a 20% deduction as mandated: And we have done this while leaving room to facilitate initiatives designed to invest in, and strengthen the youth industry, our sports sector and the orange economy.

Mr. Speaker: In an unprecedented time, we find ourselves in an unusual environment, applying extraordinary measures, but all for the benefit and betterment of the Bahamian people. Mr. Speaker, when all is said and done, Bahamians will see beyond the noise and rhetoric and know as I know, as you know, as every member in this honorable house knows and agree that “With this government ‘it is not’ and ‘cannot’ be business as usual: These are extraordinary times that require extra-ordinary measures: And while the budget is unprecedented, it is a Budget for the people.”

Mr. Speaker: Budgeting is how the numbers work to benefit people.

DIVISION OF YOUTH

Mr. Speaker: Former U.S. President Barak Obama said it well when he substantially summed up the role of government, “As a nation, we don’t promise equal outcomes, but that everybody should have an equal opportunity to succeed.” Mr. Speaker, that is fundamentally the philosophy that undergirds the work of the Division of Youth: No Youth should be left behind and it is our job to keep them connected with the knowledge, the tools, the people and resources that will ensure their best future.

Mr. Speaker: In the face of COVID-19 the team of professionals at the Division of Youth led by Mrs. Sandena Neely demonstrated not only an ability, but a willingness to adapt in a crisis situation. Notwithstanding the Emergency shut down, the team quickly developed creative ways to keep the youth currently enrolled in the many programs inspired, engaged

and patient. Some programs continued by virtual classroom allowing the youth to stay connected and maintain a sense of togetherness notwithstanding the distance between them.

Mr. Speaker: The Division manages multiple programs year around for the benefit of our nation's youth demographic age 15 – 24 and extends to the age of 30 in some instances. It also provides support for the 300 youth registered organizations throughout the length and breadth of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. (The Division of Youth poster: 'C' shows a fraction of the work of the Division within a typical 12 month period)

Direct programs of the Division include, the National Youth Certification Course for aspiring and functioning youth organization leaders; Fresh Start Program for At-Risk Youth (who demonstrate a willingness to embrace the opportunity of a 'Another Chance'; Job Ready Program for Marginalized Youth (who require additional help to prepare themselves to succeed in the job market); Youth Ambassadors Developmental Program for early bloomers, National Youth Summer Employment Job Experience Program designed to benefit young people enrolled in high school and pursuing tertiary education, for which 1,500 youth were hired and placed last year (the largest contingent ever): Then the National Youth Summer Camp - Team Building Program for adolescents; Be Inspired Mentor to Mentee Program launched in 2018; The Self-Starter Program for budding young entrepreneurs, and the recently established Train the Trainer Program which provides incite of new programs and initiatives, best practices and globally trending techniques to ensure Youth leaders remain relevant and on the cutting edge of youth development. The highlight of the year is always the invigorating 'Youth Month Activities' featuring the Annual

Youth March (which in an extraordinary fashion brought together approximately 5,000 youth for two consecutive years, 2018 and 2019 respectively): The Band Encounter and the coveted National Youth Awards in regard to which we celebrated 157 nominees and 14 winners last October: And not forgetting the intelligent and youth inspired debate during the esteemed Youth Parliament, and the Band Encounter. Mr. Speaker: We can only pray that come October, the world has sufficiently returned to some level of normalcy to celebrate in the best way we can, the outstanding accomplishments of our young people and youth leaders.

Mr. Speaker: Growing out of a COVID-19 environment the Youth Division quickly adapted by embracing the use of technology. Hence, coming in the Fall of 2020, a number of youth programs will be available via online instruction. Some programs such as the Fresh Start Program, Job Ready and the National Youth Leaders Certification Program in New Providence and the Fresh Start Program will be launched. Each year these programs collectively touch the lives of approximately 500 Persons who upon successful completion are equipped with national certification, strategic job experience, technical and vocational skills as well as the tools, and the knowledge to prepare them to contribute to society as productive law abiding citizens.

***Mr. Speaker: This year's budget has maintained 100% of our youth programs. The young people remain the priority and focus of the Youth Division and of this Government.**

***Mr. Speaker: Notwithstanding the adjustment of an estimated 20% deduction to their items, we have maintained 100% support of every fixed Youth Organization Grant. Our partners remain a priority of this Government. Mr. Speaker we are not**

focused on having much and doing little, but doing much with what we have. The goal of the Division for this coming year is two-fold: (1) To successfully launch as many of its Programs Online; and (2) To enlist and train physically or via its online platform, a sizeable percentage of youth from the major family islands of The Bahamas while ensuring access to those who are differently abled.

Mr. Speaker: I thank the youth and our youth partners and partnering organizations for their continued cooperation and partnership. This is an extraordinary budget to account for extraordinary times, and this budget is for the people.

DEPARTMENT OF SPORTS

Mr. Speaker: Jim Rohn says, “Discipline is the foundation upon which all success is built, and lack of discipline inevitably leads to failure.” Mr. Speaker, it is my considered view that Sports is that vehicle that drives discipline; and if we nurture it, sports is able to drive our people and economy to a more prosperous future.

Mr. Speaker: For the last two years I have had the opportunity to observe and review the record. Persons whose life reflected a background in sports were able as teenagers to stay away from trouble, and as adults to apply good work ethics and team building skills. Mr. Speaker, sports is a Crime Fighting Tool waiting to be used. A sports minded person is a disciplined individual and a disciplined individual makes good for a productive and law abiding citizen. Mr. Speaker, my point here is there are many ways and multiple things for our children to learn in addition to academics, and one of those avenues for learning alternative skills is acquiring a ‘sports discipline’. It is for us to consider what we allocate to sports

programming in comparison to strictly academic programs. To my mind investing strategically in sports development through sports education and not merely sports activity is a thought worthy of conscious consideration.

Mr. Speaker: We are losing too many of our children to gangs and a life of violence. Sports is a focused skill that has the ability to produce strategic results. According to a study published by Guardian Direct, organized sports can help your children build social, physical and mental skills on and off the field. Additionally, sports keeps children and youth in particular, positively engaged in 'clean fun'. It also keeps them healthy and active. Some attributes acquired through a sports program are trust, endurance, determination, sportsmanship, dependability, responsibility, self-discipline and social skills development.

Mr. Speaker: The Division of Sports has the responsibility to influence and facilitate the development of sports throughout the country, whether it be professional sport, recreational, educational or organized sports. Team sports and individual sports all work together to build a well-rounded citizen and citizenry. But Mr. Speaker, I will be the first to admit that the sector requires more investment and room to grow. There has long been advocacy for a Sports Academy to give aspiring national, regional and international world class athletes the opportunity to build their skills and techniques in a strategic environment that simultaneously accommodates their academic learning. Bahamians possess raw talent in the area of sports and if nurtured we can produce more Bahamians who add value to our Tourism product and international reputation.

***Mr. Speaker: We continue to build the same kinds of schools in hopes of obtaining different results. I trust that sooner rather than later we will realize the benefit in diversified learning even as we require the building of a diversified economy and skill base. Mr. Speaker, the Bahamas Vocational Training Institute as it was in its inception have trained and equipped hundreds of students who simply learned differently. This technical and vocational training and certification environment allowed us to produce some of the best electricians, plumbers, beauticians, nail techs and now some of the best business savvy people in The Bahamas and around the world. Mr. Speaker, that different kind of school established under a Free National Movement Administration was working and different kinds of schools can work and need to work for more reasons than one. Mr. Speaker, in the absence of such environments with a growing population in a small space, I believe it will become harder and harder to build national teams such as our well known Golden Girls (who celebrate their 20th Year Anniversary this year) and more challenging to build another Golden Knight team as we are losing our boys to quickly to drugs, gangs and violence. Moreover, we must find a way to bring together the wealth and pool of talent we have right here, creating an environment for the structured transfer of sports knowledge; The coaches have been working and the coaches are eagerly waiting. I believe given the proper priority, it will happen. Mr. Speaker, not every professional needs to sit behind a desk with a business suit and tie. The National Sports Academy will harness the development of multiple sporting disciplines. The Academy would not merely be ‘facilitating’ but ‘regenerating’.**

Mr. Speaker: The Department of Sports is deficient in its pool of human resources. Nonetheless, the sports team led by Director Timothy Munnings continues to carry the weight of

sports, and they do a phenomenal job. While overseeing the Boxing Commission, Ant-Doping Commission, monitoring the productivity of the National Sports Authority, and work collaboratively to ensure compliance of all Sporting Federations and sporting organizations throughout the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. The Sports Department with the full technical support of all partnering federations directly coordinates the National High School Track and Field Championship, the Primary Track and Field Championship, Bahamas CARIFTA Team Travel, World meets, and where necessary assist with international events held locally. The Department provides technical support for private events and guidance on all matters of sports throughout the country. Poster 'C' shows a fraction of the work of the Department of Sports within a short 12 month period)

Mr. Speaker: Sports consumes approximately 15% of the Ministry's budget (as shown in the Pie Chart); this is the greatest share of the three departments within the Ministry. The Department ensures not only that we execute our mandate to facilitate the development of sports, but directly coordinate annual Reward Programs designed to give national recognition to the hard work and outstanding accomplishments of our athletes, former athletes, professional organizations during the National Sports Awards and Sports Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, respectively. Mr. Speaker, organizing and hosting a national event as many would appreciate is no walk in the park and so to the Organizing Committees of these events, and for our continued partnership with the Bahamas Olympic Committee – we say thank you.

***Mr. Speaker: The Department of Sports in the last fiscal period provided direct and indirect financial assistance to 93**

elite athletes in 11 sporting disciplines at an approximate cost of \$1 million. And we will not waiver in that commitment. Mr. Speaker, I hasten to add however, that a Committee led by Kim Rolle has been established to recommend policies for enhanced accountability of the subvention system.

***Once again, as we all must share in the burden of the loss suffered due to COVID-19, and as mandated, organization fixed grants were reduced by 20%. We will continue to provide assistance to our athletes through their federations to successfully compete in regional and international meets. Hence, Mr. Speaker, though we find ourselves in austere times, with an unprecedented budget and having to take extraordinary measures, this budget continues to provide for our athletes and sporting organizations. This is a budget for the people.**

Mr. Speaker: We mentioned earlier how proud we were of Steven Gardner, Shaunae Miller-Uibo and the World Championship team who so ably represented The Bahamas, Steven attaining the gold in the men's 400 meters and Shaunae attaining the silver in the women's 200 meter race. *All medal athletes, in addition to Ms. Tynia Gaitor who qualified for the championships were rewarded the customary prize monies for their performances in the amounts of \$40,000, \$30,000 and \$5,000 respectively in accordance with the established sports policy.

Mr. Speaker: We are immensely proud of Bahamian born and bred Chavanno 'Buddy' Hield who in grand style won the NBA 3 point competition thereafter no doubt contributing to him landing a contract worth over \$86 million dollars over a four year period. Mr. Speaker, Buddy continues to make us proud and certainly he makes me proud to serve as the Minister of

Sports during a time when he and as many of our athletes are breaking glass ceilings.

***Mr. Speaker: Noteworthy of mention, every year, Buddy hosts the 27 Elite Basketball Clinic at the Kendal G. L. Isaacs Gymnasium and Day Sessions at neighbourhood parks. His sports acumen and community mindedness speaks to the example of a Sports Superstar that our youngsters and athletes can emulate. We must invest more in sports to identify and groom more “Buddys” who are value adders to the public purse.**

Mr. Speaker: Currently, there are at least 20 Bahamian youngsters playing professional baseball in the minor leagues and another group who are benefitting through athletic scholarships at various colleges throughout the United States.

Mr. Speaker: Worthy of mention, is Mr. Nathan Bain, a Grand Bahamian and senior at Stephen F. Austin University, East Texas, who led his team in defeating the No. 1 ranked Duke University, 85-83 points in an NCAA basketball showdown. This achievement sparked the tension of the world and sports news via ESPN, CNN, and BCC so much so that his story of world class sports success from a native of a small island state attracted donations in excess of \$100,000 to provide relief for his family who suffered devastation from Hurricane Dorian. Mr. Speaker – Sports adds to pot in a tangible way.

Mr. Speaker, Buddy, Nathan, Shaunae, Steven are all testaments to the fact that the money will come if we invest in the people, and this budget and this government has been and will continue to do just that. Mr. Speaker, the records are clear

– this is an unprecedented budget for unprecedented times and it is a Budget for The People.

Mr. Speaker: (Poster ‘D’ exhibits the progress we have made with the Re-opening of the South Beach Pools. This is another project of the Ministry for which we are proud. We have suffered minor setbacks and further challenges were presented as a result of COVID-19, but the final touches are being done with the safety of visitors as a priority. The facility has been dysfunctional for some time, but we are committed to see its full reopening for the residents of South Beach and the wider Bahamian populous. It is expected that the facility will be fully operational in the Fall of 2020.

Mr. Speaker: Facilities of the National Sports Authority are in the process of being renovated, the Kendal G. L. Isaacs Gymnasium in particular having suffered considerable damage due to its use as a long term shelter for the evacuees of Hurricane Dorian. I wish to take this time to commend the Authority and its General Manager Mr. Quinton Brennen for the exceptional hospitality they provide to those in need. Additionally, in relation to the Baseball Stadium presently under construction, I am advised that work is steadily progressing and its proposed completion date is December 2020. The cost of the project to date is \$27,486,658. (Poster ‘E’ – exhibits the progress of construction to date at the Andre Rogers Stadium). Mr. Speaker, I thank this government for its substantial investment in sports and in this facility that will help to save our youth. An unprecedented 27,486,658 invested in sports.

DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Speaker: Culture's power to transform societies is evident now more than ever. On the 22nd April, 2020, UNESCO hosted a virtual consultative meeting with 126 countries to examine the impact of COVID-19 on the Creative Arts Industry.

Culture Ministers from around the world gathered in the virtual room to discuss the impact of COVID-19 on the cultural sector. The virtual dialogue aimed to secure information intended to help UNESCO support and track COVID's impact on its Member States.

Mr. Speaker: In response to this call to action, the Division of Cultural Affairs have embarked on a fact finding mission across the archipelago of The Bahamas to create an expanded digital National Creative Artist Registry. The Creative Cultural Industry, better known as CCI, which members include artists, artisans, musicians, entertainers and all genre of performing arts, depend on physical activity and social connections for the most part. Unfortunately, COVID-19 presented a challenge for the industry as concerts and performances had to be cancelled and people everywhere were required to keep their distance to reduce the spread of the disease.

Mr. Speaker: The Orange economy is inextricably linked to the Tourism Industry, as one of the hardest hit industries, during and post COVID the CCI remains at a stand-still and will require consideration of intentional stimulus injection to restore activity in that market. People want to be entertained and entertainers must be motivated to energize crowds, and we know the good book says, "money answereth all things." (Ecclesiastes 10:19)

***Mr. Speaker: We must find a way to improve the collection of research data to inform quantitative and**

qualitative analysis for the CCI. There are hundreds of artists, performers, musicians and artisans who through their talent and creativity lift tremendous financial burden from the government through their self-employment and ability to employ and contract others. They play a pivotal role in hiring and training others to develop a creative skill that maintains and promotes our native identity and island cultural philosophy. Mr. Speaker, like our athletes, many of our musical artists like Julian Thompson, well known as Julien Believe, other live bands such as Essence, and artists such as Jodi Minnis, take The Bahamian culture around the world at no cost to the government. Free advertisement Mr. Speaker: And these cultural artists return home with earned foreign revenue that adds to our U.S. reserve. Mr. Speaker, as sports requires an Academy, these artist require a state of the art Local Performing Arts Theatre for plays, Broadway shows and musical productions, and a Recording Studio to encourage ingenuity and the development of today's musical icons. A Performing Arts School will strategically focus on strengthening cultural education, and national identity. Such a school will allow us to identify those talented children like David Cox Jr., and in a structured way educate and nurture those will exceptional creative art talents. Mr. Speaker, this is how we expand industry and economy – through sound and strategic investment in our people. Mr. Speaker, diversity creates avenues for growth and as a nation we must add to our educational component and outlook.

***Mr. Speaker: I am a firm believer that the only way to achieve a more resilient Bahamas is through investing in our people, our first and most valuable resource. And this investment will lead to a greater state of self-sufficiency, diverse economy, and sovereign security hidden in the rich heritage of our culture and other natural resources. This classic yet novel**

approach may very well be the fuel we need to restore our competitive edge in a saturated world tourism market, and it may also be capable of powering the revenue generating engines of our national economy. Mr. Speaker, indeed a National Arts Council could very well be the vehicle to bring structure, economic accountability, consistency and stability to the creative arts sector and the country at large.

Mr. Speaker: While preserving, promoting and facilitating the development of our cultural philosophy, the Division of Culture led by Executive Director Rowena Poitere Sutherland ensures the consistency of programs through the National Art Gallery, the National Junkanoo Parades, the Junior Junkanoo Program during which 19 schools participated this year, the E. Clement Bethel National Arts Program, the National Christmas Tree Lighting event. The Division consistently facilitates opportunities for artists to have platforms and stages to showcase their talents and develop their techniques and skills. Mr. Speaker, in the area of Drama, I am most proud of the work of Terez Davis Nixon better known as ‘Ms. Daisy’ and the funny and culturally entertaining yet educational videos of Bahamian life, colloquialism and dialect showcased by Timico Sawyer known as ‘Sawyer Boy’ and Latoya Dean of Grand Bahama in her famous ‘Laughs by Latoya’ video clips. We are also proud of the work of Comedian Will Stubbs.

***Mr. Speaker: The Division of Culture has unfortunately experienced some challenges this year. Firstly, the National Dance School is in the process of being relocated and revived; and we require a National Dance Director to assist in this initiative. The school of 30 years has an enrolment of 600 students. Secondly, the E. Clement Bethel Program was stopped abruptly due to COVID as well as the Junior Junkanoo program. Currently, the Division is actively considering**

alternative online platforms that would also allow for expanded participation audience, and instruction with respect to these programs.

Mr. Speaker, the feeling world over is that ‘COVID has snatched it away’: From the way we interact, to the way we dance, the way we play, the way we learn, the way we worship and the way work, and the list can go on and on. But Mr. Speaker, we will defeat COVID for we have a heritage and a legacy that precedes.

***Mr. Speaker, regarding the Annual Junkanoo Parades, the Ministry has met initially with sector stakeholders. As soon as the Emergency Powers are lifted, we intend to host a follow-up meeting to determine the best course of action for this year’s parades.**

***Mr. Speaker: With all good intention to host the parades, the appropriate allocation is available in this year’s budget to provide our annual subvention and augment parade expenses. Mr. Speaker, we will be guided by the health officials and monitor world health guidelines to uphold this government’s priority, which is to keep the Bahamian people safe. Mr. Speaker, we maintain our grant assistance to 100% of our partners and will continue to do all we can to keep the cultural community strong and resilient.**

***Mr. Speaker: The Division of Culture accepts that these are unprecedented times that requires an unprecedented budget, but we remind COVID and every natural disaster that like the ants, the people of these Bahama islands have been here a**

long time: We are hardworking, have the ability to adapt and our forefathers have handed down to us a legacy of strength and resilience to overcome.

Pen ultimately, Mr. Speaker, many parents are calling about the Ministry's Summer Employment and Summer Camp Programs. Mr. Speaker I am sure all appreciate that we are in an usual environment and therefore it cannot be business as usual. That being said, we understand that the youth have been virtually locked down for approximately 4 months, and at some point too much energy in a balloon will cause it to burst. *I am pleased to report that under the guidance of the Ministry of Health we are planning to host our 4-week Summer Programmes commencing 27th July to 21st August. We also continue to monitor guidance by the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention for best practices of reopening youth, sports and cultural sectors and activities. In this COVID-19 Environment, our programs will be guided by and subject to the advice of the Ministry of Health.

MOYSC COVID-19 GUIDELINES

***Mr. Speaker: In collaboration with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture has prepared a list of COVID-19 Guidelines for the benefit of Youth Organizations, Sports Federations and Organizations and Cultural Artists and related entities that may choose to conduct independent programs. Mr. Speaker, for the record we emphasize that until we are clear of this State of Emergency particular contact sports and related facilities should not be conducted or opened in the absence of health guidance. The official Guidance Document will be available on Monday 15th June, 2020 and can be viewed via the Ministry of Youth Sports and**

Culture port on the Government's Website or the Ministry's Facebook page.

SEABREEZE

Finally, Mr. Speaker,

***I want to commend the residents of Seabreeze for cooperating with the National COVID-19 Coordinating Office whose efforts have successfully mitigated against the spread of the COVID-19 Disease in our communities. I would also like to thank the Seabreeze Team that laboured tirelessly to ensure the Safe Door-Delivery of over 300 Grocery Care Bags and Grocery Vouchers to residents in need throughout the communities of Seabreeze. I am thankful to have had the opportunity to deliver some of these items personally to my constituents.**

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to Seabreeze, my team and I have been consistent in the community, engaged in ongoing community building programs and initiatives, including our annual summer camps, back to school and Christmas giveaways to name a few. Just before COVID our first Annual Prayer Breakfast was held.

Capital developments including park upgrades, cleaning of verges, removal of derelict vehicles, in addition to water and sewerage upgrades, speed bump installation and much more, continued virtually from Day 1 of my tenure.

The Seabreeze Team appreciates and understands that this member means business. We are consistent and my team is committed. Our Goal from day one was to Build a better Seabreeze, and we will continue to do this through Stable, Steady and Sound Leadership.

I thank my family for their continued support of this sacrifice to country and commend this government for keeping our nation, our economy, and our people – stable, steady and focused on building a New and Better Bahamas.

While we can accept that much has changed from the last Budget to now, and that COVID has deprived us of many things, one Tramaine Hawkins sang: “I never lost my hope, I never lost my joy, I never lost my faith, and I never lost my praise. Shirley Caesar gave a strong response that can resonate with those of the Christian faith in any crisis: “This Joy that I have, the world didn’t give it to me, and the world can’t take it away.”

Mr. Speaker: This indeed is an unprecedented budget for unprecedented times – but this 2020-2021 Draft Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure, I submit, ‘Is A Budget for the People’ and Seabreeze Supports.