



2021 MID-TERM BUDGET & BILLS CONTRIBUTION

By

Senator the Hon. Carl Bethel, QC

In the Senate on March 18, 2021

Madam President,

I rise to Move for the Second Reading and Committal of the Public Procurement Bill.

This Bill is a part of a Compendium of four (4) Bills which will radically transform not only the processes of public procurement, but also the role of the Ministry of Finance, itself. These Bills will provide a new economic architecture, consistent with international best practices, which will assure greater transparency, efficiency and fairness in public procurement, debt and financial management. Additionally, the Statistics Bill will, we trust, lead to the development of a truly science-based system of data collection and statistical analysis, which will produce more reliable GDP, health, sciences and socio-economic information, both to better inform the general public, but also to inform the decision-making process of the Central Government and, in particular, the Ministry of Finance.

The three (3) other Bills before the Senate today are:

The Public Debt Management Bill;

The Public Finance Management Bill; and

The Statistics Bill.

Madam President, the Public Procurement Bill seeks to modernize and to make public procurement more transparent, non-discriminatory, fair and efficient. A central Public Procurement Department is to be created in the Ministry of Finance, headed by a Chief Procurement Officer appointed by the Governor General on the advice of the Public Service Commission. This Chief Procurement Officer must report directly to the Financial Secretary.

The Act will apply to all Procuring Entities, namely each Ministry or Department and any Public Body (defined as a statutory body or a government business enterprise that is in receipt of government funds for procurement purposes) as well as local government entities.

The Public Procurement Department must, among other things, implement policies and standards for public procuring, conduct centralized public procuring (for goods, services, tools and equipment generally used in every government ministry and department, such as paper, ink, toner, janitorial supplies, and so forth, by way of bulk purchases, develop and implement an electronic procurement system to allow for electronic advertising (RFPs), accepting bids electronically, setting up an electronic registry of all bids, which will allow for the electronic publication of all information which is required by the Act to be publicly disclosed – such as (Section 5(2)(d)) publishing a notice of the award of any procurement contract for goods or services in excess of \$25,000.00.

A Public Procurement Board will also be established which will review all proposals or recommendations of a Tender Committee for any procurement valued in excess of \$250,000.00 and under \$1, 200,000.00; and to make recommendations to the Minister of Finance for the award of such a procurement contract.

Each Procuring Entity must establish a Procuring Unit internally. The Procurement Units have the duty to prepare public invitations to bid and where the amount of the contract is less than is less than \$50,000.00 may award the contract. Where the bid exceeds \$50,000.00, submit the same to the relevant Tender Committee. Each Procuring Unit must establish a Tender Committee comprised of the head or deputy head of the Procuring Unit [Permanent Secretary, Undersecretary of a Ministry or Director or Deputy Director of a Department] along with the principal accounting officer (usually the FO assigned to the Ministry or Department, the head of the Procurement Unit and two other technical officers to provide legal or commercial advice.

The Tenders Committee may award contracts between \$50,000.00 and \$250,000.00, subject to the approval of the Minister of Finance. Where a contract exceeds the ceiling, the Tenders Committee may recommend to the Tenders Board a particular award. However, the Tenders Board may accept or reject that recommendation. The Board can award contracts between \$250,000 and \$1,200,000. Above that sum, the Board must make a recommendation to Cabinet for approval.

The Bill in Section 27 sets out the different types of bidding, among them being: Competitive bidding, International bidding, selective bidding, restricted bidding or limited bidding. Competitive bidding is the standard, default, procedure. However, the other specified mechanisms can be utilized where the circumstances warrant the same. Section 27(2) provides that competitive bidding must be used, except where one of the other permitted bidding methods is utilized.

Contracts for public works in excess of \$6 million, and contracts for the purchase of goods or non-consultancy services in excess of 155 thousand special drawing rights must all be conducted by way of **International bidding**, meaning US Dollars.

**Selective bidding** is for high valued or complex procurement where it is desirable or prudent to only accept bids from pre-qualified bidders.

**Restricted bidding** may be used where particular goods and services are only available from a small number of suppliers.

**Limited bidding** may be used where no “suitable” bids have been received by the competitive or selective bidding processes; where for technical or artistic reasons or where there are some kinds of exclusive rights (such as a trade patent or copyright) the contract can only be performed by a particular provider with no alternative or substitute source; for example a subscription to Microsoft Windows.

The Procuring Entity must be informed exactly who is the beneficial owner of any bidding entity, to ensure that there are not multiple bids from the same beneficial owner using different entities, which might undermine the bidding process.

There has been some concern expressed that this Bill removes the power of Cabinet, being the supreme voice of the People, the electorate, expressed in the actions of the Executive, has been stripped of its inherent right to oversee major procurement projects on a policy basis. While that power has been constricted by the Act, it has not been eliminated, where the circumstances so warrant.

Section 57 of the Act allows for the commencement of an investigation where there is a “failed procurement”. Such failure under sub-section (2) of the Bill might arise where there were administrative or procedural errors, delays, extraneous events or circumstances, or where there may have been collusion between bidders. When such or any of these circumstances arise the procuring unit may implement an alternative method of procurement under Subsection (3)(a).

The Bill also provides for the appointment of a Procurement Review Tribunal essentially to serve as an appeal mechanism for disappointed bidders. If the Tribunal upholds the award to the successful bidder, the complainant may only appeal to the Court of Appeal on a point of Law. This means that the hearing in the Court of Appeal is only concerned with whether the Appeals Tribunal made a legal or procedural error; and does not directly relate to the underlying complaint.

The Public Finance Management Bill will, essentially, replace the Financial Administration and Audit Act. In keeping with the new normal, it will provide for enhanced transparency, accounting, job performance indicators with the specific listing of specific duties (which would formerly be only implied duties) and reporting. The Office of Treasurer is replaced by a new statutory creation, called the Accountant-General.

The requirements for enhanced financial reporting after the end of each budget year have been specifically set out in Section 72. Section 74 requires the publication of annual audited financial statements and accounts on the official government website.

Section 75 gives enhanced oversight functions to the Public Accounts Committee of Parliament.

The Public Debt Management Bill creates a new regime which will govern the management of the Public Debt of the Government.

The Statistics Bill will transform the Department of Statistics into The Bahamas National Statistical Institute; which Institute will be governed by a Board. There will be a National Statistical Committee comprised of stakeholders, such as the Managing Director of the Institute, the Governor of the Central Bank of The Bahamas, representatives from the Public Service, the Medical community, Tourism, Education, the University of The Bahamas, Social Services and civil society. The Committee implement a National Statistical Strategy in collaboration with the Institute. The Bill will essentially remove the

employees of the Statistical Institute from the Public Service; and create a new institutional culture in the gathering of statistical information, analysis and presentation.

Madam President, these reform Bills will have a dramatic impact upon financial and fiscal management by the Ministry of Finance, increasing reporting and public disclosure requirements, particularly, increased oversight, thereby limiting the power of the Executive to distort procurement policies and disciplines, and in due course will make a lasting contribution to improved out turns throughout every Ministry and government agency or public bodies.

## BUDGETARY OVERVIEW

Madam President, Hurricane Dorian, followed closely by the Covid Pandemic have both wreaked hitherto un-imaginable damage and havoc upon the lives of every Bahamian, and has decimated our nation's economy. This is not peculiar or limited to The Bahamas. This is the situation across the entire Globe. Worldwide havoc, damage and economic crises have been spawned by this Pandemic. The world economy is on life-support. Travel and tourism have ground to a virtual stop worldwide.

Our government has had to make harsh decisions and to take drastic measures throughout this crisis. Minister Kwasi Thompson has already detailed the hundreds of millions of dollars spent simply to support the unemployed, provide food to the hungry, help to sustain challenged businesses and private schools, and to keep the public service fully employed during the crisis and lockdowns without the loss of a single public service job through it all. There have been no layoffs of government workers, and no slashing of benefits, pensions or entitlements, even while people were home, and basically not working at all for nearly an entire year!

It has not escaped the notice of the Central Bank of The Bahamas and economic pundits and commentators that in the absence of meaningful economic activity during the Pandemic lockdowns, most particularly in the absence of any foreign exchange revenue from Tourism, the Government deliberately borrowed heavily in US Dollars. The answer to such implicit criticisms is quite simple. Any government worth its salt develops a strategy to ride out every storm that confronts it! We had to decide whether to borrow in US Dollars in order to support the value of the Bahamian Dollar, in the total absence of any foreign exchange receipts, or to simply allow the value of the Bahamian Dollar to fall.

The consequences of a devaluation of the Bahamian Dollar would have multiplied the adverse impact of the Pandemic a thousand-fold immediately. The prices of everything from the Oil to power BPL, and the cost of electricity, would have doubled, tripled or even quadrupled, depending on the extent of any fall in value. A Gallon of gas could conceivably have gone up to at least \$20:00. The costs of the most basic food items would also have skyrocketed. Panic buying and profiteering would have been prevalent. A true economic calamity would have been inflicted upon this nation, in addition to the most calamitous health and safety crisis of any of our lifetimes. After the initial surges in prices and

panic buying, the true effect of monetary devaluation (coupled with the absence of any foreign exchange income) would have become immediately manifest. In the absence of any USD Dollars, The Bahamas would, quite simply, have been unable to afford to import food.

I have listened to members opposite who have raised a litany of complaints and criticisms against the Government, without acknowledging the obvious; without acknowledging the deleterious effects and devastation of the Covid 19 Pandemic, not only on The Bahamas, but throughout the world. This posture is in my view opportunistic, unrealistic and a disservice to the Bahamian People. Here are the inescapable FACTS.

The Monthly Economic and Financial Developments (MEFD) Report of the Central Bank of The Bahamas for January 2021, released on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021, clearly shows the stark realities which confront The Bahamas, and the economic harshness of the Covid Pandemic, through which we are now passing.

The Report finds that throughout 2020 “the COVID Year” total foreign arrivals to The Bahamas decreased by 75.2%, with air arrivals sharply declining by 74.3% and sea arrivals sharply decreasing by 75.4%.

This means that not less than 75% of foreign currency earnings to the Bahamian economy, and to the pockets of scores of thousands of ordinary Bahamians working in the Straw Market, the hotel sector, offering jet ski rides, sailing cruises, restaurant and food services. This loss of foreign exchange cuts to the heart of the economic viability and sustainability of the Bahamian economy. Foreign exchange is needed to purchase the essential goods and services which we do not and cannot produce in The Bahamas. Had the Government not borrowed heavily in USD, our external foreign reserves would have collapsed, and the Bahamian Dollar would have been devalued, leading to all the adverse consequences of which I spoke earlier.

The Central Bank Report further, and significantly, records the devastating and debilitating sharp reductions in domestic revenue collection throughout the Covid Year 2020. There was a 39.2% fall-off in tax revenue from goods and services for a loss of \$284 Million Dollars; Specifically, VAT receipts fell by 44.4% for a loss of \$229 Million Dollars, and Excise taxes fell by \$43.6 Million. Proceeds from international trade fell by \$128.7 Million Dollars; with revenue from Real Property Taxes also falling by \$9 Million Dollars.

Madam President, this is truly an instance where the Government was forced by the dire effects of the Covid 19 Pandemic to “make bricks without Straw”, just like the Ancient Israelites!

Governments have to make difficult choices in difficult times. Our decision to increase borrowings in USD was the RIGHT decision at the right time and for the right reasons.

The Members opposite call for more spending on social relief, without acknowledging the \$210 Million Dollars plus which has already been plowed by the government into direct payments of unemployment benefits (which had long expired as a matter of law) to thousands of displaced workers throughout our country (\$76 Million) AND additionally, since December 2020, the payments to over 37,000 displaced workers of a FURTHER \$30 Million; private sector payroll support (\$44.4 Million to help to preserve private sector jobs), and the payment of rental assistance, \$33 Million Dollars in direct food assistance and other support initiatives of the Ministry of Social Services to more than 72,000 Households.

The calamities of mass starvation, economic chaos and the devaluation of our currency have all been, thus far, avoided because of the very wise decision of the Government to borrow heavily in US Dollars. It is true to say that the burden of rolling over **pre-existing** US Dollar debts, and the cost of any new borrowings, may create some short-term challenges in terms of the loan servicing requirements as a percentage of government spending. These difficulties pale in significance when compared to the calamity that a wholesale devaluation of the Bahamian Dollar would have caused to the economy, and to hundreds of thousands of long-suffering Bahamians.

Members opposite have pointed in one or two incidents where needy persons may have fallen through the cracks; and have not been able to access the same benefits which have been given to scores of thousands of Bahamians in similar circumstances. It must be acknowledged that it is not a perfect world. Even with the best of intentions a Government which is spending hundreds of millions of Dollars indirect unemployment and food support for scores of thousands of needy Bahamians is bound to miss some persons, whether through inadvertence, or perhaps because of insufficient information. Surely, though, it must be reasonable presumed that if the government is doing all in its power to help the many, it has not deliberately decided to exclude any!

To my view that is just “playing politics”. If they really wished to help single mothers who might have missed out, how about getting their names and addresses and a note of their issues, and sending it directly to the Minister of Social Services? Or giving such information to any Minister in this place?

Then, if there is no response one could properly complain. Not one of them has indicated that they made any the slightest effort to actually help the persons about whom they complain. This is unfortunate, and certainly is not to be expected of someone who is meeting cases of misfortune while campaigning for their votes. Give us the names and the issues and we will cause the particular matters to be addressed.

Madam President, the Central Bank Report clearly outlines the start and unrelenting challenges faced by this Government over the past year. But we have put our shoulders to the wheel; we have soldiered on and we are prevailing.

## ECONOMIC RECOVERY PLAN

### 1. Opening the Economy

The Government has a focused plan to reopen the economy in a safe manner. Hotels are coming back on-stream. Most recently, the Cove at Atlantis has moved towards re-opening. Vaccinations have commenced, and soon will be extended to broader sections of the economy.

The Government is exploring with the Cruise Lines the possibilities of Home Porting in The Bahamas. This will enable the re-development of the Cruising industry throughout our major urban centres in Nassau and Freeport as well as throughout of Family Islands.

### 2. Grand Lucaya

The Opposition, desiring to again repeat their wholesale abandonment of the People of Freeport under the former Christie Administration in 2005, are now raising objections to the Government's purchase of the Our Lucaya Hotel.

Their wholesale disregard and disdain for the People of Grand Bahama will undoubtedly, again, be demonstrated when they start to oppose the Government's purchase of the derelict and storm-battered international airport in Freeport.

Contrary to their professed love for the people of Grand Bahama they appear to be unwilling to put money where their mouth is. Freeport already has a bad taste left by the infamous PLP Bend or Break Speech, which crippled the enormous potential of Freeport; when the late Sir Lynden used a verbal and public onslaught, as well as unilateral legislation, to compel submission, when good faith negotiations could have attained the same laudable goals.

The sencon betrayal of Freeport by PLPs was the refusal of the Christie PLP Administration to buy and save the Princess Hotel properties, which were essentially abandoned by the developer after the devastation of Hurricanes Jean and Francis in 2005. Thereby, the PLP condemned the very heart of the great city of Freeport to wrack, ruin and desolation. The world famous International Bazaar followed shortly afterwards, and is now a total wasteland.

Wit such a history of destructive contempt and neglect, is it any surprise that the PLP now strives to add to their dismal record in Freeport by rejecting the purchase of the Our Lucaya Hotel properties? This is a sad indictment; indicating the narrow shallowness of their thinking, and lack of empathy, sympathy or respect for the thousands of workers in Grand Bahama who lost their livelihood with the loss of the Princess Hotels, the International Bazaar, and whose livelihood in the Our Lucaya Hotels is being threatened by the PLP.

The economic recovery plan of the FNM is directly tied to the resurrection of a booming and blooming tourism industry in the City of Freeport and indeed in the Island of Grand Bahama.



### 3. Bahamian Business development

The economic recovery plan of the FNM is also directly tied to the further support and development of Bahamian entrepreneurship and business development, particularly SMEs. The long established FNM Grant programmes to small and medium sized businesses will undoubtedly continue and, over time, will increase.

### 4. Tax Reform

The PLP have produced what can only be called a “quick-fix, pie in the sky” Plan, they say will bring about economic transformation. Chief in this plan is a promise to reduce VAT to 10%. It seems that the PLP expects to “make bricks without straw AND without clay”. At least they are promising that in the hope of swinging the voters. But un-achievable promises cannot comfort anyone. The fact is that they will not be able to do that while the economy is still in recovery mode and, consequently, tax revenue itself will still be in recovery mode for the foreseeable future.

The FNM, as mentioned by the Minister of State for Finance, is pursuing aggressive digitization policies to enhance the ease of doing business, and the convenience of the general public. The MOS has also indicated that we have commissioned scientific and technical research into tax reform measures. The FNM will not make wild and unattainable promises, that would be unfair to the People. We will continue in a focused and deliberate manner to make improvements every day in the ease of doing business, and in strengthening Bahamian ownership and participation in our domestic and export-based economy.

5. The Minister of Agriculture has worked assiduously to re-vitalize agriculture and fisheries. Your Government has consolidated and enshrined in Law Bahamian ownership and exclusivity in use of Bahamian Marine Resources. With the Biological Resources Act which we passed recently, we have enshrined Bahamian ownership and exclusivity in the development and exploitation of biological and genetic resources and associated local knowledge. These initiatives will implant Bahamian Ownership and control over the most vital elements of our Natural Resources, all done thanks to your FNM Government.

The FNM government has real plans, concrete plans, achievable plans to revive the domestic Bahamian economy, foster sustained and broad-based economic growth in every Island and Cay, and improve the quality of life of every Bahamian.

### LEGISLATIVE HIGHLIGHTS

Over the course of the past year the government has passed many Acts of Parliament, among them:

- 1) A compendium of Acts namely—
  - (i) **The Companies (Amendment) (No.2) Act 2020** (No. 34 of 2020);
  - (ii) **The International Business Companies (Amendment) Act, 2020** (No. 35 of 2020); and

(iii) **The Property (Execution of Deeds and Documents) Acts, 2020** (*No. 37 of 2020*),

were passed to provide inter alia for flexibility for deeds and similar instruments to be executed by a company without the requirement of a seal.

2) A new **Banks and Trust Companies Regulation Act, 2020** (*No. 22 of 2020*), was passed to repeal and replace the then existing Banks and Trust Companies Regulation Act (*Ch. 316*), to consolidate and modernizes the law regulating banks and trust companies within the Bahamas, and to providing for a special resolution framework for banks.

3) A new **Central Bank of The Bahamas Act 2020** (*No. 24 of 2020*), was passed to repeal and replace the then existing Central Bank of The Bahamas Act (*Ch. 351*) and consolidates and modernizes the law governing the Central Bank of The Bahamas, and provides for the continuance of the central bank, its functions, powers and duties.

4) The **Road Traffic (Amendment) Act, 2020** (*No. 25 of 2020*), establishes the offences of vehicular manslaughter for killing a road user, in the course of reckless or dangerous driving, or while driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol, or while driving in contravention of any of the stated offences under the Road Traffic Act including driving with a child who is unbelted. The Act increases the penalties and fines for killing while driving in the prohibited manner.

5) A new **Financial and Corporate Service Providers Act, 2020** (*No. 27 of 2020*), has been passed to modernize the law regulating non-banking financial and corporate services in The Bahamas.

6) The **Digital Assets and Registered Exchanges Act, 2020** (*No. 28 of 2020*), makes provision to regulate the issuance, sale in, and trade of, digital assets in or from within The Bahamas.

7) The **Bail (Amendment) Act, 2020** (*No. 29 of 2020*), makes provision for inter alia the Bail Management System.

8) The **Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Act, 2020** (*No. 39 of 2020*) sought to provide for a continuous electoral register and to make several other amendments to provide for a smoother and more efficient process for the conduct of elections.

A number of Bills have been laid in the House of Assembly this year most notably

1) The **Public Finance Management Bill, 2021** which is seeks to strengthen accountability and transparency in the management of public finances. This Bill incorporates best practices in the management of public resources.(Not yet passed)

2) The **Public Debt Management Bill, 2021** seeks to put in place a new regime to manage the public debt, including the establishment of a Debt Management Office and a Debt Management Committee. (Not yet passed)

3) The **Airport Authority (Amendment) Bill, 2021** provides for the acquisition of the Grand Bahama International Airport. (Not yet passed)

4) The **Biological Resources and Traditional Knowledge Act, 2021** was passed this year. This Act establish the legal framework to provide for the protection and sustainable use of biological resources and traditional knowledge within The Bahamas.

#### REGISTRAR GENERAL

With respect to the Certificates that have been applied for online and received:

Birth Certificates      114

Marriage Certificates    13

Death Certificates      9

The execution of the contract for the development of the new Corporate Registry is imminent. This system will have two platforms; one that will be developed specifically for use by individuals and another that will be developed specifically for use by Financial and Corporate Service Providers. The system is being developed by the same Company which manages the same system for a leading regional service provider. Some of the features of the new system are as follows:

1. The new system will allow for the bulk payments to be made for up to 250 companies at one time;
2. A Registered Agent will be able to obtain a list of companies under its remit in an easily accessible format that is also exportable;
3. A Registered Agent will be able to obtain customizable and standard reports on any company;
4. A notifications feature will provide automatic notifications for payments prior to the imposition of penalty fees; and
5. The platform for use by FCSPs will assist them in the day to day management of their companies, while also allowing management to audit the work done by their subordinates.

It is anticipated that this new system will greatly enhance the efficiency of the Companies section and allow more services to be done online.

## JUDICIARY

Supreme Court

CSJP Projects:

### 1. Digitization

The successful firm ZCOM commenced their scanning of the court files. The Honourable Chief Justice provided a priority of the files to be scanned commencing with the commercial, international and public law files. The firm has been actively engaged in the process of scanning and the Civil Registry is prepping the files which are then taken over to Charlotte House where ZCOM is located. It is expected that by July the digitized files will be uploaded into the ICMS which would allow for reviewing of the files by the Court, the attorneys and the public.

### 2. Integrated Case Management System

The successful firm, the Anchor Group has commenced their preliminary works into creating the ICMS for the Judiciary. There have been meetings with the Magistrates Court, Supreme Court and the Court of Appeal. Extensive meetings continue to be held with the Judiciary's ICT Unit including the Subject Matter Expert and the Anchor IT team to ensure that the Judiciary has the necessary infrastructure to ensure the successful implementation of the system. The CSJP has also funded the upgrading of the Court's LAN/WAN which is also necessary to support the ICMS.

The Anchor team are presently interviewing Magistrates, Registrars and Judges to chart the work flows and see the types of forms, orders and other documents used in each of the court divisions. This will assist them in creating the work flows necessary to customize and tailor the ICMS for the Judiciary and ultimately pave the way for e-filing. A survey was developed for the staff and judicial officers in the Magistrates, Supreme Court and Court of Appeal which will assist in identifying any gaps or areas where upskilling or additional training will be required to assist them in the move to the ICMS.

### 3. Bahamas Judicial Education Institute

The Judiciary procured two spaces at Charlotte House and with funding from the IDB loan through the Citizens Security for Justice Programme will outfit one of them to provide for training of the staff and judicial officers of the Judiciary. The space comes at an opportune time because the court is currently involved in a court reform and modernization initiative with the two major (ICMS and Digitization) projects in the works.

### 4. Digitization Unit - the Judiciary (space shared with ZCOM)

The second space procured at Charlotte House will permit the Judiciary to establish its own digitization unit to scan those files that are not covered by the CSJP loan and also to continue with the digitization of files until the court becomes completely paperless. The furniture and equipment for this space is being funded through the CSJP.

## Court of Appeal

The effects of the global Covid-19 pandemic are still being experienced throughout The Bahamas and the world over. For the Court of Appeal, the changes brought on by the pandemic have inured to the court's benefit. That is, court users continue to enjoy litigating matters from the comfort of their offices; homes; correctional facilities; cars and even different islands and countries! Further, judges who comprise of some of the most vulnerable in society are in this vein protected by remote working as they do not have to physically engage with counsel, the general public and staff. Indeed, the work of the court has been largely unencumbered and notably more efficient. To this end, the Court of Appeal has sat continuously from May 2, 2020, save for the customary short summer and winter breaks.

In conjunction with the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal has embarked upon several modernization projects. The first of which is the complete digitization of the judiciary which would specifically transform the Court of Appeal into a paperless court. The project should be fully realized by October 2021 and it will allow for digital filings and more seamless access to court documents especially notes and transcripts from the lower courts; the same is vital for the timely dispensation of appellate court matters. Undeniably the digitization project would transform the court into a 21<sup>st</sup> century virtual court; a court without borders or physical constraints.

Additionally, the Court Integrated with DigiPay project went live on Monday, March 15, 2021. Court users will now have the option of using cash, credit cards or debit cards for the payment of court fees. The payment portal will be available on the court's website and features will include: SMS text messaging of invoices and receipts; a catch all e-mail for invoices and receipting and downloadable printing of receipts.

The *Court of Appeal Act, Chapter 52, Statute Laws of The Bahamas* is also in the process of being amended to allow for the appointment of an Assistant Registrar. That individual will assist judges and the Registrar in the execution of the work of the court. The position will simultaneously provide a career path for judicial aspirants who may have entered the judiciary as legal research clerks. The court is ever mindful of the need to attract and retain talented attorneys-at-law.

Lastly, the Court of Appeal recently revised the format of its monthly Cause List to include the name of the panel of judges sitting to hear each case. It is anticipated that this historic move would allow counsel to better prepare for hearings before the court. In the future, it is also envisaged that this change would assist counsel identifying the particular courtroom in which their matter would be heard.