



New Year's National Address

The Most Hon. Dr. Hubert Minnis

Prime Minister and Minister of

Finance

12 January 2021

Good evening, and a belated
Happy New Year.

This past Monday, we celebrated
the attainment of Majority Rule, which
was achieved after generations of
struggle.

Majority Rule is one of our greatest
achievements as a people.

It ushered in greater equality, and
the flourishing of our democracy, upon

which, we continue to build as a free and sovereign people.

Dear Fellow-Bahamians:

This year's New Year's Address, is unlike any a Bahamian prime minister has had to give.

Tonight, I want to let you know, about the very difficult state of affairs, in which we continue to find ourselves, because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

But, I also wish to report, that there is good news.

I am pleased to announce this evening, that I have appointed the COVID-19 Vaccine National Consultative Committee.

The primary purpose of the Committee, is to advise the Ministry of Health, in support of the National COVID-19 Vaccination Plan.

This Committee, is chaired by Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis, OD, CMG, and is made up of public health experts, and representatives of various sectors, including, religious and community leaders.

Government officials, will report at the appropriate time, on the roll out of a vaccine in The Bahamas.

My Fellow Bahamians:

2020, was one of the most difficult years in living memory.

The global pandemic, has killed nearly two million people, and made millions of others seriously ill, some with severe, and long-term consequences.

COVID, devastated economies.

It kept us away from our loved ones.

Almost overnight, a new reality descended on the world, and on the Bahamas.

The pandemic, has left many in states of grief, financial hardship, and poor mental health.

We continue to mourn those we have lost, and we continue to pray for those affected by the virus.

COVID-19, has interrupted our Bahamian way of life, with thousands of Bahamians still out of work.

Tourism came to a near halt during the first wave, leading to hotel closures, and the complete shutdown of our cruise industry.

This extraordinary global crisis, has required us as a people, to summon our greatest resolve.

I am very proud of the many, many Bahamians, who worked together in a spirit of love and unity, and who have followed the public health guidelines, for nearly a year.

The emotional toll of this pandemic, has been overwhelming and painful.

A grandmother, who has not hugged her grandchildren for nearly a year, put it best when she said: “It is time for COVID to be over.”

Thankfully, because there are now successful vaccines for COVID-19, our country, and our economy, are set to reopen more fully in the months ahead.

I say to that grandmother, and to all Bahamians:

The end is in sight!

Restrictions will end!

We will get back to our way of life!

Jobs and the economy, are coming back!

Last month, some hotel workers returned to their jobs.

But we still have a few more months to go, especially as the pandemic continues to rage, in countries all around us.

Fellow Bahamians and Residents:

Our main priority during this pandemic, was to save, and to protect lives, which is still my greatest priority.

The pandemic, caused many in our country, to be confronted with difficult decisions.

How do I feed my family?

How will I pay my rent, or my mortgage?

Do I have enough money, to afford my medication?

Will I be able to put gas in my car?

How do I keep my business afloat?

Many have had to spend their savings.

Many hard-working Bahamians, needed the assistance of their government.

Just as my Government was determined to save lives, we are just as determined, to help those of us in need.

To support our fellow countrymen, your government spent over \$177

million through the end of October 2020, on our comprehensive COVID-19 response.

The closure of much of our economy, caused an immediate financial shock, to many families.

To help to support businesses and workers, we offered \$44.4 million dollars, in tax credit/tax deferrals, which funded the payrolls for nearly 7,000 private-sector employees.

Small businesses, are part of the heart and soul of the Bahamian economy.

To protect nearly 4,500 jobs in the small business sector, \$47.3 million, was made available for small business grants, and continuity loans, through the Access Accelerator, Small Business Development Center.

The Government provided, \$45.5 million in unemployment support,

administered by the National Insurance Board.

This included, the extension of NIB's existing benefit programs, as well as, support for Bahamians in the hospitality sector, and self-employed individuals.

This has been, the largest distribution, of unemployment benefits in Bahamian history.

The Government brought together, the major food aid organizations, and funded, the largest food distribution effort in Bahamian history.

\$17.2 million in food support, has been spent between March and October 2020, providing food, for approximately 100,000 people to date.

While we note, the decline in new COVID-19 positive cases, since its peak in the summer months, we are

also painfully aware, that it will take time, to rebuild our economy, and to restore livelihoods.

To ensure that Bahamian families, continue to be supported as the economy reopens, and Bahamians return to work, my Government, has pledged to continue the unemployment assistance support, to the end of January 2021, and food assistance, to the end of March 2021.

Further, to help boost our public health care facilities, in order to protect, and to save lives, the Government provided \$20 million dollars in contingency funding.

These funds, covered the cost for medical equipment and supplies, ensuring suitable quarantine facilities if needed, and other measures, to ensure the country was equipped, to combat the spread of the virus.

We significantly boosted contact tracing, and lab capacity, to process COVID tests.

Here on New Providence, \$9 million dollars, has been spent on major improvements to the Princess Margaret Hospital, and areas of Sandilands Rehabilitation Centre.

The Elizabeth Estates Clinic, and the South Beach Health Centre, were upgraded, to strengthen capacity, for

the delivery of urgent care services, at the community level.

The Government, also boosted the South Beach Health Centre, to care for COVID-19 patients.

Capacity was added to PMH, including a modular unit and treatment, and isolation unit, provided by Samaritan's Purse.

On Grand Bahama, \$21 million dollars, has been allocated for the phased redevelopment of Rand Memorial Hospital.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

To help in the education of our children, and young people during the pandemic, in 2020 alone, the Government, in partnership with the private sector, purchased thousands of tablets and laptops, for distribution across the country.

In June 2020, the Ministry of Education, purchased 5,880 tablets, as well as, Wi-Fi devices for students on the Lunch Program.

The Ministry of Education, is in the process of purchasing an additional 5,000 tablets, for students in junior high schools.

All students and teachers on the following Family Islands communities, were provided with devices for the new

school year: Mayaguana, Inagua,
Acklins, Crooked Island, San Salvador,
Rum Cay, Cat Island, and on Andros,
for the communities of Congo Town,
and Mangrove Cay

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In terms of the COVID-19 virus, our
situation remains generally good at
this time.

We have had lower cases numbers
for many weeks.

However, we must all remember the pandemic is not over.

We must continue to wear our mask, social distance and regularly sanitize.

Internationally, more infectious variants of the virus have evolved, and been detected. It is possible, that cases will rise again before vaccines arrive.

If this happens, as a Government and people, we will have to return, to some of the measures that worked, to beat back previous waves.

Through our experience during the pandemic year, we now know the formula that works.

Tough times do not scare us. Difficult circumstances do not break our resolve.

Coming out of the awful pandemic year, we are working hard every day, to ensure you have a brighter future.

We are working, to help businesses to stay open, and to reopen.

We are working, to provide new capital, to help entrepreneurs take risks, and expand our economy.

In the weeks ahead, I will have even more to say about our economy.

I note for now, that international investment projects for 2020, totaled more than \$1 billion dollars.

At the upcoming Bahamas Business Outlook, I will also offer an update, on the post-Hurricane Dorian recovery in Abaco, as well other national developments.

The massive redevelopment of Downtown Nassau continues, with approximately \$1 billion dollars' worth

of projects, that will help to revitalize our city center, and tourism services, and product.

The new U.S. Embassy, at a cost of approximately \$318 million, is taking shape.

The Bahamas Mortgage Corporation, has moved in to a beautifully restored building, at East Hill Street.

The demolition of the old Main Post Office, is nearing completion. A new Supreme Court complex, will eventually be built on that site.

The buildings on the site of the old Queen Victoria Hotel, will be demolished shortly.

In that space, will be the new Central Bank building.

At Prince George's Wharf, there will be a \$250 million port redevelopment, that will become the

world-renowned, and new Nassau Cruise Port.

A new Cabinet Office, will be built at the site of the existing one.

Government House, is going through significant renovations, and over time, its building and gardens, will be refurbished and beautified.

Phase One of the new Southern Recreation Grounds, is open.

The \$200 million-plus, The Pointe project, is nearing completion in Downtown Nassau.

The revitalization of Downtown, represents jobs and economic recovery.

They also symbolize, a new day for the City of Nassau, for New Providence, and for the Bahamas, after the horrible pandemic of 2020.

With God's grace and guidance, 2021, is going to be a much better year for our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The policies, my Government put forward during the pandemic, slowed the spread of the virus.

Most Bahamians, did a wonderful job following the guidelines. Consequently, we were able to have, a generally open, and safe Christmas.

Over the many months of the pandemic, we used various restrictions, to save lives, and to limit the spread of the virus.

We made the difficult decision, to implement curfews and restrictions, to reduce infections, and to keep Bahamians safe.

As a medical doctor, I learned, it is necessary to take sometimes bitter

medicine early, so the illness can be stopped, before it is too late.

While we were working hard with the health professionals, to keep Bahamians safe, some were taking public positions, to advance their political agendas, and they criticized us at every turn.

Where we are today, with more openness, and lower virus numbers, proves that the tough choices we

made throughout this crisis, were the right ones, to protect Bahamians.

During the pandemic year, we learned together, how to beat back this virus, when surges emerge.

Let me again thank our frontline workers.

This includes our healthcare professionals, and other workers in food stores, pharmacies, police and defence force, and other services

professionals, who saved lives, and kept our country running.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

In all things, and at all times, let us give thanks to Almighty God, the source of life, our comforter in times of need.

May I end this evening, with this prayer that was recently sent to me?

I believe, it is a wonderful prayer for a New Year.

“Look back and trust God.

Look forward and trust God.

Look around and serve God.

Look within and find God.”

May God bless you and your families, and may the God of New Beginnings, bless us, with a New Year filled with abundant new life.

Thank you for listening. Good evening.

May God bless our
Commonwealth!
