



Communication
By
The Honourable Iram D. Lewis, MP
Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture
Contribution
To The
Budget Debate
2021-2022

June 9, 2021
House of Assembly
Nassau, Bahamas

Mr. Speaker:

As I rise to make my contribution to the Budget Debate 2021-2022, as the Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, I would like to encourage all those young people who are embarking on examinations this week. We have all been through challenging times forcing our students and teachers to embark upon a journey that has been difficult to settle and learn, stay focused and study for this moment. I just want to say to the young people of our country that we

believe in you. Do not hesitate to ask for assistance if you need it – this does not make you weak or dumb, in fact, you are wise for recognizing you need it. Stay on course as the end is near. In just a few weeks, it will all be over.

Mr. Speaker, I would also like to send condolences to the family of Bradley Tate of Sweeting's Cay. Mr. Tate was not only a fisherman but also provided transportation for students to and from Sweeting's Cay.

On behalf of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, Mr. Speaker, I would also like to extend my sympathies to the family of sporting great Peter Gilcud who passed away last week. Not only was he a sporting great, but a cultural icon as a part of the Saxon's Junkanoo Group and he was an event promoter.

Mr. Gilcud will be sorely missed for his contribution to young athletes receiving scholarships with his assistance.

The great residents of Central Grand Bahama, who I so proudly represent, are hardworking, industrious, intelligent, talented, progressive, forward-thinking, and like-minded men, women, and children, who collectively seek a flourishing economy, financial increase, political stability and an open, free and independent place for our children and grandchildren to grow, develop, prosper and advance in whatever positive endeavor they so choose.

It is with pleasure that I turn my attention to my reason for being here – the great constituency of Central Grand Bahama.

Since being elected in May 2017, we (collectively) have forged ahead with developing certain areas. One thing I have always believed in is the ability to feed oneself in a healthy and wholesome manner. As such, we began promoting Backyard Farming prior to Hurricane Dorian at the home of Anthony Gerald Hudson.

We have developed three acres of land on the Mall Drive where an assortment of vegetables is grown. Long hours have gone into cultivating this property, so much so that volunteers can be found there on any given Saturday, particularly those students in need of the countless community service hours.

Since last summer, we have distributed over 250 backyard farming kits to residents.

(show photo of backyard farming kit

distribution)

(show photo of produce)

Our efforts have not all been in vain, as you can see, we are well on our way to producing top quality produce and when full grown, we have happily donated to Home Away from Home, a senior citizens home in the constituency, as well as the Grand Bahama Children's Home and the Rand Memorial Hospital. So, you see, we are not only catering to FNMs in Central, but all

residents from all over the island. We hope that sometime soon, this site will become the venue for regular Farmers Market events, complete with a pavilion for vendors to sell their produce, patrons to pick up what they'd like and have their smoothies and green salads made right in front of them, the sale of crafts, and other items.

Until then, we will host our Farmers Markets at another location developed by us in the Central Grand Bahama Constituency – The Grand Bahama Community Park, located on the

Princess/Royal Oasis property. I hope that people from all over Grand Bahama will take advantage of this opportunity this coming Saturday, June 12 from 9am to 2pm.

(Show photo of the Park)

To date, our park has become something that people are enjoying. Adding some dimension and creative work to this natural environment, local artist Brian Maycock, has used wood and stones

and carved words such as: Family, Trust, Honest, Welcome, Hope, Promise, Empowerment and attached them to the trees near the front of the park.

(show board with photos of the words)

With the renovation of the pond, which currently house a variety of fish and turtles with walking trails and birds watchman areas there are also areas where bridal parties have taken advantage of the beauty to capture their wedding

photos, music videos and other photo shoots. This is an area, I am proud to say, is being enjoyed by not only the residents of Central Grand Bahama, but those from East End to West End and visitors alike.

Other projects we have undertaken in Central include: the restoration of the YMTA along with the basketball court and soccer field. This particular area was the first to provide free WiFi to residents. (First Small Parks and a Community Garden).

Last summer, we had a major community clean-up effort to remove hurricane debris, and every polling division was included in this major project, which included government, Port Authority and private subdivisions.

(show photo of debris removal)

We also plan to install bathroom blocks and gazebos for Hanna Hill (Basketball Court), Hepburn Town, Lover's Beach and Pinders Point (Light-House Point).

Good things are happening in our country, Mr. Speaker, and in Grand Bahama Lighthouse Point has reopened, the government recently purchased the Grand Bahama International Airport (We The Bahamian people now own this major point of entry) and the refurbishment and proposed upgrades to the Rand Memorial Hospital.

And so, Mr. Speaker, I stand on their behalf to lend support to this proposed annual budget for the 2021-2022 fiscal period, as tabled by The Most Honourable Prime Minister, Dr. Hubert A. Minnis, MP, and Minister of Finance.

This is an important and pivotal budget as we make concerted efforts to place our beloved country, The Bahamas, in the best possible position as we undergo this global Covid-19 pandemic and its far-reaching impacts.

Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Youth, Sports

and Culture, my Ministry touches every Bahamian from our youth, all our athletes, artists and artisans. I must say, Mr. Speaker, that all areas have been impacted. Our youth groups, bands, organizations, sports clubs, training efforts, tournaments and meets, and especially our cultural activities have all had to make serious adjustments and alterations and in many cases cancellations. Most notably, despite best efforts, my ministry's own National High School Track & Field Championships and the Frank

‘Pancho’ Rahming Primary School Track & Field Championships had to be cancelled, so too were all CARIFTA Games Track & Field and Swimming; and we wait with bated breath in hopes that the 2020 Tokyo Olympic Games takes place in a few weeks from now.

Yes, Mr. Speaker, Covid-19 has caused us all to change the way we operate, the way we plan, the way we execute, the way we dream, the way we move forward, and I must credit the staff at

my Ministry who have been able to accomplish so much with so little.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to share some of the exciting and important initiatives planned by the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture for this upcoming fiscal period.

Following my appointment as Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture, I felt it important to meet with former Ministers who held the same portfolio on both sides of the political divide. The meeting was important because we discussed

sports programs and development, youth initiatives, the Orange Economy, the Cultural Policy, and other matters related to my Ministry.

I must say that meeting was extraordinarily successful.

(Show photo of luncheon)

Additionally, Mr. Speaker, senior Ministry staff met me in Grand Bahama, for the first time ever, and together with the Grand Bahama staff members, we toured the sporting facilities there.

We did intend to tour other areas, however, time was limited and further restricted due to the late arrival of the incoming flight.

(show photo of staff at Royal Oasis Gardens)

Turning my attention to the Department of Youth, there are seven initiatives we have either continued or started.

The Fresh Start Program is a 16-week youth employment program that engages youth

ages 18-25. This program provides both training and opportunities for those who may have been unsuccessful in securing employment since leaving high school and for those who may be considered at-risk and marginalized because of financial constraints, poor academic performance or an incomplete secondary education.

The Fresh Start Program prepares its participants to prepare for employment, identify potential employment opportunities, improve

personal qualities, qualifications, and job search skills, and make sound professional and personal decisions while gaining momentum and confidence for their journey ahead. Components of the Fresh Start Program include Job Readiness, Personal Development, Skill Set Training, and Internship.

Skill Set Training areas include Bar tending, Mixology, Butlery, Culinary/Baking,

Housekeeping, Clerical Work, Beauty Trades, Agriculture/Farming, Carpentry and Graphic Design.

This program will resume in Spring of 2022.

The Grand Bahama Fresh Start Program will include offerings such as Landscape Maintenance, Hair Braiding, Barbering and Pickling Preserves, and is expected to begin in the Fall of 2021.

The High School Leavers Job Readiness

Series was implemented to temporarily replace our Job Ready Program in New Providence. The HSL program is designed to curb youth unemployment by equipping young people between the ages of 16 and 18, with soft (interpersonal people) skills and job readiness training that would make them better candidates for long-term employment.

The pilot HSL commencement just weeks ago on April 21, 2021, and is already garnering

results. We have effectively completed one cohort and will be commencing the second cohort on June 21, 2021. The important thing about this program is that because it is in a virtual format, Bahamian youth on several Family Islands were able to be engage. They were exposed to soft and professional development skills with numerous young professionals from various career fields.

Interested persons can register on our Facebook page: Division of Youth 242 or call our offices for further information.

We intend to host another HSL program cycle this Fall 2021, and we also anticipate the resumption of the original in-person Job Ready Program in the Spring of 2022.

At this point Mr. Speaker, I must commend my staff in Grand Bahama who were able to successfully achieve this task while still working from home. The office there was destroyed

during Hurricane Dorian, and while we had a temporary space at the C.A. Smith Building, that has since been reclaimed and we are currently in the process of moving into another location.

The Be Inspired Program is a governmentfunded, grant-based program designed to empower young Bahamian citizens between the ages of 18 and 30 years, seeking to establish or expand their small businesses. While

all our programs are important, this one in particular is of significant importance.

It is so important because my government will provide aspiring entrepreneurs who possess viable, small business ideas, with the tools and other resources necessary to successfully launch and manage their small business. Successful participants are awarded grants up to \$5,000.00 which enables them to procure goods and materials for their business ventures.

The Youth Leaders Certification Program

(YLCP) is a highly subscribed training program that equips our local Youth Leaders and Youth Workers in effective techniques and methods of youth work and development. It aims to standardize the training of Youth Leaders and equalize the services delivered to our young people on a national level.

The YLCP typically runs for 16-weeks and is facilitated on Tuesday evenings from 6:00 p.m.

to 9:00 p.m. The Spring 2021 cohort commenced virtually on March 2, 2021 and is scheduled to complete their training on July 13, 2021. Again, this virtual offering allowed the ministry to provide this program to Youth Leaders across the length and breadth of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

The next program offering is scheduled for October 5, 2021.

Youth Leaders Advanced Training Course

The Division of Youth is in the business of ensuring that our youth leaders remain on the cutting edge, fully equipped to manage the highs and lows, successes and failures, triumphs and defeat our young people experience daily. To ensure that this is achieved, the Division of Youth recently launched a second phase to the Youth Leaders Certification Program. The first of a series of advanced training commenced in May of this year. Youth Leaders from New

Providence, Grand Bahama, and Eleuthera tackled critical issues such as youth suicide, physical and substance abuse, conflict resolution, domestic violence, suicide, trauma, incest, molestation and rape, and positive youth development and engagement in a Covid-19 environment.

Similar workshops will be facilitated by the Division of Youth two times per year via zoom and will be offered to Youth Leaders who have previously completed the Youth Leaders

Certification Program and need refresher or updated material.

The aim of these refresher courses is to equip our youth leaders with the requisite tools to identify tell tale signs of these issues and to outline the protocols/procedures they should follow to adequately address such occurrences.

These training sessions will be facilitated on Wednesday evenings from 6 to 8 pm.

Grants and Contributions

The Division of Youth relies heavily on our nation's youth leaders and youth organizations to provide programs, initiatives, guidance, and constructive engagement of our young people that they become well rounded, socially apt, contributing members of our communities.

Our grants and contributions program further strengthens our youth organizations ability to carry out their mandates through the provision of funding. These contributions help to procure

supplies, material, other resources, and equipment to facilitate youth programs adequately and effectively.

National Youth Month

October is designated National Youth Month when we celebrate, acknowledge, and highlight the positive contributions that youth, youth leaders and youth organizations make to national development. To make this a success, the Ministry provides each island with funding to

assist with the organization of its own preapproved activities during the month.

We anticipate that, much like last year, all our National Youth Month activities and initiatives may have to be delivered virtually. These activities include the always popular Youth In Parliament, a Virtual Youth March and Rally, and the National Youth Awards, which this year will culminate our Bahamas Youth Summit.

The Bahamas Youth Summit will focus on the engagement of stakeholders and partner for

the purposes of reorienting them with the draft National Youth Policy and speak to the proposed implementation and accompanying legislation.

The Bahamas Youth Summit is scheduled to be held at the end of October 2021.

Department of Sports

Mr. Speaker, the feeling of nationalism is indispensable to the idea of nation building.

Sports is perhaps one of the strongest common threads that binds people together and helps in developing a feeling of patriotism and unity that

can counter promoters of division and strife. It helps in elevating qualities of dedication, determination, teamwork, and a passion for fitness in the psyche of a nation.

Any major international sporting event like the Olympics or a World Cup promotes universal brotherhood and gives one a sense of belonging to a larger global community.

Sportspersons have always served as successful goodwill ambassadors, just look at Shaunea Miller-Ibo, Steven Gardiner, The

Golden Girls, The Golden Knights, Buddy Hield, Jonquel Jones, and now we can add Jazz Chisholm...just to name a few.

Our international athletes, through their tremendously outstanding performances continue to elevate the reputation and image of The Bahamas on a global scale beyond what our marketing dollars could afford to do.

Regrettably, Mr. Speaker, just like last year, the coronavirus Covid-19 continued to disrupt the certainty of competitions for our many

athletes, though, that never deterred their determination, training and preparations.

Carifta

Once again, the Carifta Games, arguably the world's best showcase for junior track and field athletic talent, originally scheduled for Bermuda was cancelled, as were the Carifta Swimming Championships, scheduled to be held in Barbados.

Olympics

Our top world athletes are poised to compete on the biggest global stage for sports... the Olympic Games, and again there are waves of uncertainty, is it on or is it off. One thing we do know for sure, whether the Olympics is on or off, our athletes will be ready as demonstrated by the series of record breaking and qualifying performances being reported, ready to run, jump, throw and swim.

Mr. Speaker, I pray that the environment in Tokyo is safe enough for our athletes, who have dreamt of this honor to represent their country and are diligently preparing. They are anxious and eager to have their opportunity to shine.

Bahamian World-Class Athletes

Mr. Speaker, despite the limited opportunities for sporting competitions to make its usual impact, we have had the privilege of witnessing several commendable and

outstanding sports performances. Please allow me a moment to reflect on some of them:

Basketball

Buddy Hield, a Grand Bahamian native, continued his stellar performances on the hardwood floor. Buddy, who plays the forward position for the Sacramento Kings, achieved a historic feat back in February 2021 where in just his 350th National Basketball Association

(NBA) game played against the Charlotte Hornets he hit his 1,000th 3-point shot. That remarkable feat surpassed Golden State Warrior guard Steph Curry's record, who achieved the same but in 369 games. Hield become the fastest player in NBA history to reach this milestone.

Another Grand Bahamian, Jonquel Jones, #47 of the Connecticut Sun in the WNBA, is also making waves with her double doubles.

Yolette McPhee-McCuin, daughter of

legendary basketball coach and former ministry employee, Gladstone ‘Moon’ McPhee, has well established herself as one of the best basketball coaches in the United States and is the current head coach of the Ole Miss Rebels women's basketball team. Following a breakout season, including five Southeastern Conference (SEC) wins and three top-25 wins, Ole Miss University has inked coach Yolette McPhee-McCuin to a new four-year contract. McPhee-McCuin is now under contract through 2025.

Deandre Ayton of The Phoenix Suns is also having a Break-out year.... And Yes I am a Laker Fan but, they were knocked out in the first round of the playoffs by a team lead by a Bahamian. A trade-off that I can accept.

Football

Mr. Speaker, 6'5", 226 lb Grand Bahamian native, Michael Strachan achieved his dream of playing football in the National Football League

(NFL) when he got drafted by the Indianapolis Colts during the 2021 draft held on May 1st, 2021.

Selected in the seventh round, Strachan became the latest Bahamian athlete to join an impressive pool of NFL athletes, with Bahamian heritage, past and present, to be drafted into the NFL. Ed Smith (Denver Broncos), Allan Ingraham (Washington Redskins) and Myron Rolle (Tennessee Titans) Deward Darling (Baltimore Ravens) just to name a few.

Coaching

University of Kentucky's Bahamian track and field, Rolando Greene was named Women's Team Coach of the Year for the Southeast Region in the USA for the indoor track and field season.

Anton Richardson. A former MLB Player and now coaching The San Francisco Giants.

Baseball

Local baseball development leagues continue to provide a strong foundational base of training

for our youth. International baseball leagues have taken note and increasing numbers of our young athletes are being recruited into the professional leagues creating economic opportunities like no other for them.

Currently, there are more than 20 Bahamian youngsters playing professional baseball in the minor leagues and scores more who are benefitting through athletic scholarships at various colleges throughout the United States.

Bahamian baseball players, perhaps more than any other sport right now, are making waves throughout the Major Leagues and Minor Leagues. Undoubtedly, Jazz Chisholm is our poster athlete, but he is being closely followed by a pool of exceptional talent patiently waiting their call. So impactful has Jazz been for the Florida Marlins, Mr. Speaker, that the organization has agreed to host a Bahamian Heritage Celebration on Saturday, 12 June 2021, during which Jazz will be honored. I'm pleased to say that as

Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture I will be present.

Mr. Speaker, professional and amateur sporting events provide much needed economic benefits, to both athlete and country. Equally important, they also provide community pride and national unity.

The onset of Covid-19 dealt a piercing blow to the sports world. We are pleased however that the once bustling stadiums, tracks and parks are slowly, and carefully seeing activity again.

Department of Sports Programs:

Grants to Federations and athletes

The National Governing Bodies (NGOs) for sports play an important role in facilitating the development of their respective sports. It therefore is important that where possible, the government, through my Ministry provide as much assistance, both technical and financial, as we can. In this regard, we have continued to provide financial assistance to the organizations that are registered and administratively

compliant to assist with their various programs.

Most recently, Mr. Speaker, my Ministry provided financial assistance to the Bahamas Association of Athletic Associations to participate in what they consider the last chance for Team Bahamas to qualify relay teams for the Olympic Games.

My Ministry also aided the Bahamas Lawn Tennis Association to assist their men and women's teams who will be competing in the

upcoming prestigious Fed Cup and Davis Cup tournaments.

Athlete Subvention

The Athlete Subvention Program has been a tremendous source of assistance to scores of athletes in their respective disciplines. Despite budget limitations, this program offered financial assistance directly and indirectly to 75 of our country's top athletes in 11 sporting disciplines.

Sports Month

The month of November, as has become customary, we will celebrate Sports Heritage Month. We intend to again celebrate our sports legends and athletes in person, if possible, and through use of television and virtual platforms. We anticipate continuing to feature online and televised fitness segments, open dialogue sessions with all sporting organizations and the sporting community, and the television broadcast of our top 20 athletes from all sports by popular

vote. We hope to again host our featured and highly anticipated events, the National Sports Awards Ceremony, and the Induction of our National Sports Legends into the Hall of Fame.

Grand Bahama Sports Complex

Mr. Speaker, there is so much going on in the sporting world, but I must point out an upgrade we at the Ministry did recently with extraordinarily little money. Following my

appointment as Minister, I toured several facilities here in Nassau, among them being the Thomas A. Robinson Stadium. In storage, there were extra stadium chairs just sitting there in case. Today, I am pleased to announce that the residents of Grand Bahama have benefitted from those chairs, and they now have a new home at the Grand Bahama Sports Complex.

(Show picture of chairs at Grand Bahama Sports Complex)

My Ministry also installed adjustable starting block and a touch pad timing system to the swimming pool at the YMCA in Grand Bahama.

A first in their World Class upgrade.

South Beach Pools

This once beautiful facility in the most southern part of New Providence succumbed to the ravages of a series of hurricanes which all but

destroyed the facility. Roofs stripped of their shingles, sand and boulders tossed into the pools, and the eventual corrosion of pipes by the salt air made the facility unsafe and unusable.

(Show photo of South Beach Pools)

I am pleased to report today however that my Ministry's reinvestment into the facility has restored what had become an eyesore into a beautiful swimming recreation facility where young and older folks can enjoy time in the water and perhaps more importantly... learn to swim.

The South Beach Pools facility features three pools, a competition pool, kiddies shallow pool and a fountain pool. The facility will soon be open for use by the public.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry continues to work and invest in the development of sports throughout the country. Our mission is to create the access and opportunity for our athletes and administrators to flourish in both athletic competition and in the business of sport.

National Sports Authority

Mr. Speaker, our National Sports Authority continues to advance its mandate despite extremely challenging circumstances. As you could well imagine, the NSA facilities have been out of use for several months due to the pandemic, and before that, the KGLI Gymnasium was in disrepair after serving as an emergency shelter for Hurricane Dorian evacuees. Additionally, Mr. Speaker, our Thomas A. Robinson Stadium is in urgent need

of repair and attention. Last budget period, the Ministry of Public Works made much progress with selecting a company to oversee refurbishment works and we look forward to this project's conclusion.

Mr. Speaker, my Ministry also recently made significant upgrades to the facilities at the National Boxing Centre, and the Kendal G. L. Isaacs Gymnasium.

Management is eager to further effect and complete much need repairs to the KGLI Gym,

which is usually a major revenue source for the NSA. Furthermore, the Gym must be in optimum form to attract more NCAA and other professional sporting events. The fact is all our sporting facilities need consistent maintenance and upkeep for the benefit of our athletes and to attract international events, which is one of the overarching goals of the NSA.

Andre Rodgers Baseball Stadium

Mr. Speaker, you would note as you traverse the Sports Centre corridor, that much progress has been made to the multi-million-dollar Andre Rodgers Baseball Stadium, which is currently under construction. Again, we are grateful for the efforts of the Ministry of Public Works who has carriage of this capital works project, and to the technical and construction teams who are just as eager as we are for completion, and the inaugural first pitch at the first game day.

(Show photo of baseball stadium)

Mr. Speaker, earlier I highlighted how our young boys and men have been advancing on the international stage in baseball, and it is hoped that this new stadium will be a place for them to further enhance and showcase their many talents. We also look forward to being able to host Major and Minor League Baseball events right here in our own back yard, for the benefit of our local baseball and sports fans.

Division of Cultural Affairs

Mr. Speaker, I now shift attention to the portfolio of The Division of Cultural Affairs.

In the wake of this Covid-19 pandemic, Mr. Speaker, and recognizing the significant impact volatility on our economy and specifically our Tourism sector, there is an urgent need for our country to explore other industries. According to sources, this Minister notes that the Creative

Cultural Industry or CCI sector or Orange Economy, has contributed to three percent of the

global economy. USA, Australia, UK, China, Malaysia and India are getting maximum benefits from these industries, as CCI in the US contributed 4.2%, Australia 3%, UK 5.2%, China 6.37%, Malaysia 1.27% and India 0.95% to their GDPs respectively. According to the World Economic Forum, in North America CCI is a \$620 billion dollar industry, generating 4.7 million jobs, with estimates for Latin America and the Caribbean at \$124 billion, providing 1.9

million jobs. It is my sincere hope that one day
The Bahamas can yield similar success.

Mr. Speaker, the scope of initiatives and
activities covered by the Division of Cultural
Affairs includes matters related to:

- Performing Arts: Music, Dance and Theatre
- Fine Arts – Sculptures, Paintings, etc.
- Literature/Publications – Books, Magazines
etc.
- Film Production
- Audio/Visual Production

- Digital Arts – Photography/Gaming and App development
- Craft – Straw work, Jewelry making etc.
- Architecture
- History and Heritage Research
- Culinary Arts
- Fashion
- Exhibitions
- Music Production/Audio Engineering
- Cultural Exchange programs

- Festivals and National Cultural Celebrations

Mr. Speaker, I wish to expound on 5 important areas of concern:

The E. Clement Bethel National Arts Festival

Mr. Speaker, the E. Clement Bethel National Arts Festival is in its 62nd year of existence. It is a one-of-a-kind cultural festival that caters to almost every single age and to every single island and cay in The Bahamas. The National Arts Festival seeks to give artists of all genres a

platform to express and showcase their talents.

The festival is open to all from ages 4 years and up. Schools and communities are invited to participate from February through May.

Mr. Speaker, the 2020 Festival was hard hit by the onset of Covid-19 and subsequent lockdowns and restrictions, leaving portions incomplete. Notwithstanding, the Ministry team and the industry professional adjudicators were able to travel and complete adjudications in

North & South Andros, Mangrove Cay, Andros and Eleuthera.

However, I am happy to report that for the first time ever the 2021 E. Clement Bethel Festival is completely virtual and is currently underway with 371 individual participants and 832 choirs, junkanoo groups and ensembles.

Participating islands include Abaco, Acklins, Andros, Bimini, Berry Islands, Eleuthera, Exuma, Grand Bahama, Inagua, Long Island and New Providence.

I invite and encourage all of you to visit our Division of Cultural Affairs Facebook page to view some of this year's fantastic talent on display.

National Junkanoo Program

Mr. Speaker, we all know that Junkanoo is considered the highest expression of Bahamian cultural identity. You would be pleased to note that the National Junkanoo Festival has expanded

over the years with more Family Island areas hosting events and expressing interest in doing so.

My ministry manages and coordinates the Junior and Senior Junkanoo parades in New Providence and provides financial and technical assistance to the various junkanoo parades across The Bahamas. We are forever grateful for our 30 plus year firm partnership with Sol Petroleum, formerly Esso, whose corporate sponsorship of Junior Junkanoo is legendary. On behalf of a

grateful nation and thankful young people, I say thank you.

We all know that circumstances did not permit our usual grand celebrations last year but are most hopeful that conditions will allow the free expression of this our most important cultural event come Boxing Day 2021 and New Year's Day 2022. We await guidance from health officials on this matter.

Intangible Cultural Heritage Assets

Mr. Speaker, you may not be aware, that Junkanoo, although considered Bahamian is not owned by The Bahamas. Our nation is currently at risk of losing the option to own Junkanoo and call it Bahamian. In October 2020, the Ministry and UNESCO submitted a nomination paper on behalf of The Bahamas to outright own the rights to Junkanoo, and have it deemed international as an Intangible Cultural Heritage Asset.

Mr. Speaker, the paper was accepted in Paris, France, and we are now in the phase and process of preparing a case to show that Junkanoo is indeed Bahamian.

Other Initiatives

Mr. Speaker, I would add that the Division of Cultural Affairs also a slew of new and enhanced program initiatives on the horizon, which include:

- **Implementation of a National Cultural**

Artisan Digital Registry

- Implementation of a National Cultural Policy
- Implementation of a National Arts Council

Bill

- Recommendation for the implementation of a
Junkanoo Curriculum

- Proposal for a new National Performing Arts

Centre

National Art Gallery of The Bahamas

Mr. Speaker, the NAGB, like all other areas under my portfolio, had to rely on their creativity to overcome some of the pandemic-related challenges. They have proven to be among the most creative in the ways they manage to keep moving forward.

Mr. Speaker, the NAGB continues to make Bahamian art more accessible to the masses at the physical gallery, which is currently open to the public, with access for Bahamians and residents

being free of charge. Locals and tourists are encouraged to stroll through gardens that are dotted with various art pieces or wander indoors and take an introspective look at Bahamian art and imagination on display. While we fully encourage in-person visitation with the adherence to the relevant safety protocols, the NAGB has also been a trailblazer in their provision of electronic content for art lovers and enquiring minds, both adults and children, by way of online virtual tours and activities. I

encourage all to visit us online at nagb.org.bs. Certain pages cater to teachers and families and community outreach programs are also available online.

Of special note, Mr. Speaker, is the Covid-19 Resources section and the important social action partnership of the NAGB, with its non-profit partners, Friends of the NAGB and Friends of the Arts in The Bahamas, who have collected and continue to receive donations to assist artists in

the community with loss of work and/or commercial exhibitions due to negative impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Additionally, the NAGB proposes to continue its reach into underserved communities on New Providence and in the Family Islands through our mural program and travelling art exhibitions. Other programs that will resume include the Art, Culture and Exchange (ACE) Series, which brings accomplished art

professionals from abroad to give lectures, meet with artists, and speak to UB students, and other local art exchanges and instruction with teachers and school-aged children.

Bahamas Games

Mr. Speaker, I am extremely excited to announce that my Ministry has begun planning for the 6th edition of The Bahamas Games, a national Olympic-style multi-sport program, designed to promote national unity among the

people of The Bahamas. The first Bahamas Games were held in 1989, and the last one in 2001, some 20 years ago. The attempts to host such events every 2, then every 3 years, was interrupted by the economic and physical impacts of destructive hurricanes and other severe international shocks.

Mr. Speaker, all previous versions of the Games were successful in their intent, as reflected in their revelation of world class athletic talent in The Bahamas and especially in our

Family Islands. Best indicators of this are the subsequent preponderance of Family Island athletes on this country's numerous Men's and Women's World and Olympic Championships and Gold Medal Teams. The upcoming 6th edition of The Bahamas Games will be timed to coincide with the grand celebration of our nation's Golden Jubilee or 50th Anniversary of National Independence in July 2023.

The Bahamas Games Secretariat will plan and execute the Games with the assistance of

volunteer committees and the various sports federations and associations. We look forward to this special opportunity to showcase and highlight our local sports power.

Mr. Speaker, I wish to state here today that we will not be able to properly host a befitting Golden Jubilee Bahamas Games without the solid support of every Bahamian, every budding and professional athlete, and corporate Bahamas. So, I encourage all parties to step up to the plate

to ensure that we give our young people and our country our best.

CLOSING

Mr. Speaker, this 2021-2022 budget provides a total of \$19,030,586 million to achieve the government's mandate and implement all these important programs, projects, and activities on behalf of the Youth, Sports and Cultural communities. It is interesting to note that of that

amount a whopping 25.2% goes to salaries, leaving \$14,190,640 for administrative functioning and program and project advancement.

Mr. Speaker, good things are happening in our nation. We thank the government and people of The Bahamas and thank God for his blessings over our Commonwealth.

Once again, Mr. Speaker, I express my appreciation for being given this high honor and awesome responsibility to lead the charge on

behalf of the good people of the Commonwealth
of The Bahamas, to whom I pledge to do my part
in advancing our country and its people,

“Forward Upward Onward Together.”