



# **Contribution**

**by**

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE**

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**Transport and Local Government**

**2021-2022 Budget Communication**

**The Senate**

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## **Madam President, Senate Colleagues:**

Thomas Paine, an 18th century American writer, penned these words during the American Revolution:

“These are the times that try men’s souls. The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of their country; but he that stands by it now, deserves the love and thanks of man and woman.”

It is my humble opinion that our Prime Minister, Dr. Hubert Alexander Minnis and his Government did not shrink, but stood firm and met the dual challenge of Hurricane Dorian and Covid 19.

Yes, our Prime Minister was tested, his Government was tested and indeed, the Bahamian people were tested, and we passed with flying colours.

Madam President, I wish to recite a passage from the Bible: Proverbs Chapter 15 Verse 22;

“Without counsel plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed.”

During this unprecedented crisis, Our Prime Minister and his cabinet sought and followed advice. We took and still are taking advice from the medical professionals, from trade unions, from the business community and from religious leaders.

I wish to publicly thank all of them for their service to our beloved Bahamaland. As Thomas Pain wrote, they did not shrink from the service to their country

and they “deserve the love and thanks of man and woman”.

We are all in this together. A full recovery depends on all of us doing our part to ensure a healthy nation and a strong economy. That’s why I got vaccinated. I got my two jabs. My wife and my five children are all vaccinated. I encourage all Bahamians to get vaccinated for your own protection and that of your love ones.

Madam President

The FNM Government has done a lot over the last four years. This bold, visionary and well planned budget is a continuation of our last four years in Government.

**Madam President,** the Government's plans to develop the *Government Employment Incentive Programme* that would give employers VAT tax breaks while simultaneously creating 2,500 new employment opportunities will bring hope and new economic opportunities to many Bahamian families.

Yes, Madam President, and while the economy has begun to significantly improve and many persons have returned to work, there are some Bahamians that are still challenged by the pandemic. I want to assure you Madam President and all Bahamians under the sound of my voice that this Government continues to hear the cries of our people and that is why we intend to bring social and economic relief to all Bahamians through this budget. That is why throughout this COVID-19 pandemic we worked aggressively to:

- Stimulate the economy and promote economic growth as well as encourage foreign direct investment and local investment in order to create jobs.
- Prior to the global pandemic, some 15,000 jobs were created in the last two years alone while unemployment dropped to a ten year low.
- The 52 week job program, which has helped train and employ 1,000 participants, has been renewed.
- Labour on the blocks, a program implemented by our Ministry, has delivered over 1,500 new jobs.
- We incentivized and worked with the private sector and business community to encourage them to retain their existing employee numbers and where possible create new jobs opportunities.

- The new expansion at Baha Mar has created 500 construction jobs and 700 permanent jobs.
- Nassau Cruise Ports has created 500 construction jobs and hundreds of permanent jobs upon completion.
- The newly expanded and renovated Sandals Hotel has employed hundreds of Bahamians in its construction stage and will employ 1,000 Bahamians on a permanent basis.
- Aqualiner Condo Project 9 Adjacent to One (Cable Beach) will provide 300 construction jobs.
- The Point Hotel, which will be opening in two weeks, will engage 400 permanent employees and will be 98% Bahamian.

- Goldwynn Development (Opposite OPM) has employed 175 Bahamians.
- The Sterling Global Group development (PI) has and will employ 500 Bahamians.
- Some 8,000 jobs were created recently or will come on stream shortly.
- This Minnis led Government made a conscientious decision not to fire any public servants from the Public Service during the pandemic nor reduced the pay of any public servant.
- Madam President that is why we provided unemployment payments to eligible persons who found themselves unemployed during the pandemic. \$284 million (Over a quarter of a billion dollars) to more than 86, 000 Bahamians.

- Additionally, we provided \$36 million dollars to the Food Assistance Programme and assisted in putting hot meals on the tables 72,000 Bahamians. Yes, Madam President, 18,000 Bahamian families have and are still benefitting from the Government food program.



On the 2 June, 2021, during the Budget Debate in the lower house, Chester Cooper, the Deputy Leader of the PLP said: “ a new administration will have to look under **every rock** and make some **hard decisions.**”

If the PLP wins the next election, which we know will not happen, are they planning on increasing taxes and eliminating benefits Bahamians now enjoy.

What does Chester Cooper mean by **every rock**?

Are they planning to increase Vat again?

Are they planning to increase the gas tax?

Are they planning to increase NIB contributions?

Are they planning on reducing social services benefits?

What does he mean by every rock?

Make sure he and the PLP do not have the opportunity to look under every rock....vote FNM.

**Madam President,**

The Ministry of Labour of which I have responsibility for continues to live up to its vision to ensure access for all Bahamians to safe and fair employment

opportunities and responsive social security and consumer protection programmes.

The Ministry is led by our Permanent Secretary (Acting) Ms. Gina Thompson, who heads a dedicated staff of employees that comprise:

- The Department of Labour
- The National Tripartite Council
- The Bahamas Bureau of Standards and Quality
- The Consumer Protection Commission
- The Prices Commission
- The Consumer Affairs Division, and
- The National Training Agency

I wish to take a few minutes to highlight some of the accomplishments of these entities.

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| <b><u>DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR</u></b> |
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**Madam President**

I wish to reaffirm this Government and my Ministry's commitment to ensuring the full protection of all workers in The Bahamas. As I stated during my recent Labour Day Address, this Government is committed to protecting all workers in the country – those unionized as well as those who may not be affiliated with organized trade unions. We are committed to ensuring that no worker is left behind. As the Minister of Labour I wish to take this opportunity to thank the

Trade Unions for their leadership, support and understanding during this difficult period, as we continue to fight the Coronavirus pandemic. My Ministry and this Government will continue to work with all trade unions and employers to ensure that all workers in The Bahamas receive adequate compensation and benefits in accordance with national and international labour laws.

**Madam President,**

Securing jobs for Bahamians continues to be a major focus of the Department of Labour's Public Employment Services unit which serves as an online skills bank which allows unemployed Bahamians who are looking for work to apply for jobs. The site is also used by local companies to recruit new hires.

Within the last year, this service has been utilized by a growing number of Bahamian job seekers. Between the period July 1, 2020 to June 3, 2021 approximately 20,048 candidates have utilized this service in New Providence.

**Madam President,**

I happy to report that the Department of Labour is modernizing its accounting systems. In fact, on June 1, 2021, the Department launched its first Digi Pay Cashless System which now processes Notification of Vacancy Applications along with Union Registration Fees and Union Costing Matters. The Department of Labour accepts company cheques or credit/debit cards online through the Digi Pay platform and Cash at third party vendor, Cash and Go, Suncard and

OMNI Finance Group. This system looks promising for the Department.

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| <b><u>NATIONAL TRIPARTITE COUNCIL</u></b> |
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**Madam President,**

Over the past two years the National Tripartite Council has been extremely successful in achieving a number of goals outlined in the 2018 – 2021 Strategic Plan. In addition to fostering an excellent working relationship with the Bahamian Social Partners and International Labour Organization Decent Work Team and Country Office for the Caribbean the NTC's accomplishments include;

- Submitted recommendations to enact productivity legislation and establish a National Productivity Council. I wish to advise that this this recommendation is presently being considered by the Government.
- Recommended the adoption of the National Child Labour Policy.
- Completed widespread research and local and international consultation on the transformation of The Bahamas Industrial Tribunal. It is anticipated that once the final recommendations are submitted it will be sent to the Attorney General for review and reformatting before it is considered by the Government.

- Completed and submitted recommendations to the Government for the adoption of the Bahamas Second Generation Decent Work Country Programme.
- Submitted recommendation to the Government for the ratification of ILO Convention 190 and ILO Recommendation 205 regarding Violence and Harassment in the workplace;
- Submitted recommendation to the Government for the ratification of ILO Convention 159 regarding Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Disabled Persons.

On May 21, 2021 during the National Tripartite Council's 2021 Annual General Assembly, I reaffirmed the support of the Government regarding

the adoption of the National Child Labour Policy and the extraordinary efforts being carried out by the NTC in this area. Additionally, I commended the NTC Executives for the outstanding work that have been undertaken, in conjunction with the ILO Caribbean Office, on the historical Bahamas Second Generation Decent Work Country Programme. This comprehensive document sets out the common commitment of the Government of The Bahamas, workers' and employers' organizations and the International Labour Organization to promote Decent Work in The Bahamas.

**NATIONAL TRAINING AGENCY**

**Madam President,**

The National Training Agency continues to lead in the development of the overall workforce of The Bahamas with a keen focus on its core demographic; young persons, between the ages of 16 and 30. The NTA has been intentional with the advancement of its full mandates and expanding its reach and training to all Islands of the Bahamas.

Over the Last year the following results were achieved:

### **Family Island Expansion and Results**

The Agency continues to leverage its Learning Management system (Brightspace) to expand its services to every Island in The Bahamas. 190 new trainees from 12 islands of The Bahamas obtained certifications in soft skills, Office procedures, Microsoft Office suites, web designs, graphic designs

and Information technology. 99% of Office procedure trainees also obtained city and guilds certifications inclusive of special pass.

Qualifications are being offered to Family Island trainees that enables them to take advantage of employment and entrepreneurial opportunities on their various islands.

**Madam President,**

Family Islands students are for the first time enrolled in the Institute of Leadership and Management (ILM) at the Agency. Four of these students have completed their assessments and are awaiting certification, while an additional six are currently enrolled in the programme. Islands participating include Exuma, Crooked Island and Cat Island.

The Agency is currently conducting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cohort of the National Dive and Fishing Certifications in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources. 48 persons are currently enrolled and participating from four islands of The Bahamas- Grand Bahama, Exuma, Cat Island and San Salvador. They have successfully completed the Mandatory Workforce Preparation course (Soft Skills) and are in the technical stage of the course where they are undergoing two levels of PADI Dive certifications. Additional cohorts are scheduled for later in the year for other Family Islands including Abaco, Eleuthera and Andros.

**Madam President,**

Improving the workforce in every Island of The Bahamas is a priority of the NTA. To this end the Agency has been granted access to a school facility in Cat Island that is no longer being occupied by the Ministry of Education for the purpose of advancing its training mandates. The NTA is also launching its summer cohort 2021 that is available to every Island of The Bahamas.

### **Strategic Partnerships**

**Madam President,**

The Agency's partnership with Doctors Hospital resulted in 23 persons being trained and successfully employed by Doctors Hospital. This partnership is a model of the strategic partnership the Agency continues to pursue as it fulfills its mandates.

## **Partner in National Development.**

**Madam President,**

The NTA is a strategic partner in national development and in collaboration with the Ministry of Labour, Department of Labour and the NTC has developed the National Skills Gap Survey 2021 which will assist the Government and the Agency with identifying skills gaps, offering training and support to bridge these skills gaps and further enhance the workforce of The Bahamas. The results from this survey will be island specific as well as aggregate for The Bahamas as a whole. The results will also aid the Agency in determining the number of assessors and training providers needed for each island.

This survey is accessible at [www.ntabahamas.org](http://www.ntabahamas.org)

**Madam President**

I now turn to the Ministry of Transport and Local Government's 2021/2022 Budget and in so doing further demonstrate my Government's unwavering commitment to The Bahamian people in spite of the daunting challenges wreaked by the COVID-19 pandemic.

## **DEPARTMENT OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

**Madam President,** I will begin with an overview of the functioning of the Department of Local Government.

Each of us can attest to the fact that the very fiber of our existence has been tried and tested during this Pandemic; we have sought to adjust our way of living in order to persevere over the last sixteen months; and

it is on this note that I wish to recognize and commend all the hardworking Family Island Administrators and staff who have had to mitigate any number of circumstances, and who have demonstrated perseverance and resilience in the performance of their duties.

Additionally, I wish to similarly express my gratitude to our District Councils who continue to give yeoman service, and ascribe to the ideals of fiscal responsibility, accountability and transparency in the performance of their duties.

**Madam President,** I am pleased to say that many island districts have benefited from Local Government over the years, and the result of the hard

work of many of the councils and town committees are evident.

I note the many homecomings and regatta sites that have been constructed on a number of islands, rest and recreational parks, libraries, community centers, computer labs, inter-generational facilities, boat ramps, new District Council offices, and the list goes on.

During this twenty-fifth year of its existence, we take the time to thank God for our many accomplishments, to examine our current state of affairs, to determine what is needed to improve our position, and to make every effort to begin the process of implementing new strategies and procedures to ensure the Department's further growth and development.

## **Madam President**

The Department will move to complete the process of ensuring that every Local Government District benefits from the services of a Family Island Administrator. This will be made possible as a result of the twenty (20) New Administrators who were added to the cadre during the 2020/2021 fiscal year.

## **Madam President**

I wish to express my gratitude to all the long serving elected officials; those who have stayed the course, as

well as those who have found it necessary to leave, for whatever reason. Despite the many challenges over the years, they have served, and they have served well and for this, we owe them a debt of gratitude for their dedicated service.

**Madam President,** We are cognizant that in addition to addressing the impact of COVID-19 on our economy, we are also in the midst of the hurricane season; and while the Family Islands are ready to ensure that we withstand any impending storm or hurricane, we are patently aware that there are a number of offices and residences in various districts that require repairs. Funds were previously allocated once again and are provided for in the 2021/2022

budget to facilitate these repairs. Since these works were postponed due to the lockdowns, it is anticipated that these repairs will resume at the earliest opportunity.

**Madam President,** The Department of Local Government continues its efforts in processing the confirmation of one hundred and thirty-eight (138) persons who were regularized from the Local Government District Councils throughout the Family Islands. These employees have served at least ten (10) years or more without any benefits and will now be able to look forward to retirement benefits and other remunerations for their services.

## **Madam President**

My ministry is committed to ensuring that Local Government evolves in such a way so as to ensure the economic, social and environmental development of all Bahamian communities now and well into the future; and in this vein the Department intends to tangibly demonstrate that it is serious about investing in the nation's youth. Hence, this fiscal year, though mindful of the COVID-19 restrictions, we will endeavor to reactivate the Local Government Junior Council Programme, which is a succession planning initiative. The programme has had a positive impact on thousands of young persons on our Family Islands by influencing them to become more community minded.

As a result of their participation, these young people will obtain a greater understanding of Local Government and its importance. It is our hope that this will result in an increased number of younger persons serving as District Council practitioners.

**Madam President,** permit me to thank the Director of Local Government, staff at head office, as well as those in each of our Family Island Offices, in addition to all of the District Councils, Town Committee Members and Statutory Boards and Council Staff, for the magnificent work they continue to do on a daily basis for the people of The Bahamas.

# **ROAD TRAFFIC DEPARTMENT**

**Madam President**

I now turn my attention to the operations of the Road Traffic Department.

The Road Traffic Department continues to automate its services in order to be more transparent, efficient and effective in the delivery of its mandate. In keeping with this objective, the Department opened its new satellite station at Fort Charlotte on Wednesday November 4, 2020, with modern, cutting edge, state of the art technology. The location is cashless and by appointment only. Since the opening of this satellite station customers have lauded and praised the delivery of the service provided at this venue. This cashless facility will lend itself to much

needed reform with regards to revenue collection. Once this process is completed along with the Transport Management System, the Department will be a formidable revenue collector for the country's purse and offer a more transparent, timely and accountable process.

### **Madam President**

It is our intention, in keeping with the Government's transformation and modernization agenda, to cascade the e-services to all of the Department's facilities; which would bode well for the efficiency and effectiveness of revenue collection. At this juncture I wish to express our gratitude to the Ministry of Finance, who assisted the ministry with this progressive initiative, and to say

that we are most appreciative for their unwavering assistance and commitment with this project.

## **Madam President**

I am pleased to inform that the Road Traffic Department is cashless at the following locations: on the Island of New Providence - Fort Charlotte and Carmichael Road; on the Island of Eleuthera – Governors Harbour, Rock Sound and Lower Bouge; and on the Island of Abaco – at the Coopers Town office.

Additionally, I am pleased to report that the Transport Management System has been completed in the

following islands: New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco, Andros, Long Island, Bimini, Eleuthera and Exuma; this now only leaves the Southern Bahamas to be completed.

It is also noteworthy that we will be pursuing additional revenue streams for the Road Traffic Department this fiscal year. These initiatives will be inclusive of those that were previously hampered by the effects of COVID-19; namely, the specialty/organizational plates, novelty tourism plates and the personalized vanity licence plates.

We will achieve this by upgrading and enhancing the licence plate production facility at The Bahamas

Department of Corrections with a capital injection of approximately one million dollars (\$1 M).

## **Madam President**

The new colour for the self-drive plates will be introduced during this fiscal period. We anticipate that the plates will be available in New Providence by the end of August.

The colour of the plates will be a white backdrop with green prefixes and lettering; eliminating the confusion that presently exists with deciphering the difference between Taxi's and Self Drive Vehicles.

**Madam President**

I would also like to make mention of the fact that the Road Traffic Department is presently offering online services in the following areas: Drivers Licence renewal, appointments for theory and practical examinations, and also appointments for vehicle renewal; services which are only available at the Fort Charlotte location.

**PORT DEPARTMENT**

**Madam President**

Due to the devastating impact of Hurricane Dorian in 2019, the Marsh Harbour Port was completely destroyed. In an effort to provide a secure and efficient Port, the Government is considering a Public Private Partnership (PPP) to effect the rebuilding and management of the Marsh Harbour Port. The Ministry of Transport and Local Government in conjunction with the Disaster Reconstruction Authority (DRA) has formed a joint committee which is in the process of formulating plans for the PPP.

We have placed significant emphasis and focus on Port Security. The International Ship and Port Security Compliance Unit (ISPS) was established on October 22, 2019 and is now fully

functional; maintaining regulatory oversight of the compliance requirements for all international port and ship facilities throughout the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

With the aim of facilitating protective security measures and reduce the risk of terminal to ship interface to an acceptable security level, the multi-sectoral Port Security Advisory Committee, which has been dormant for the past three years, was reconvened in March of this year. This committee, which is chaired by the Permanent Secretary, meets on a quarterly basis, to amongst other duties; liaise with security organizations in CARICOM and other external agencies to discuss security issues and receive information concerning security threats to Bahamian interests.

## **Madam President**

I am pleased to report that since the re-implementation of this committee a very successful national exercise - the first of its kind here – took place 8<sup>th</sup> April, 2021. This exercise was organized and coordinated by the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Compliance Unit under the leadership of Lieutenant Commander Bertram Bowleg and included the participation of twenty-four (24) ISPS facilities.

## **Madam President**

I consider this information noteworthy and pre-imminent since the security of The Bahamas is of paramount importance. Also noteworthy, is the approval for the hiring of sixteen (16) security assistants for the Port Facility at Marsh Harbour, Abaco which will invariably aid in ISPS compliance and augment our security measures at that Port Facility.

## **Madam President**

I will now report on the ongoing port projects underway in the Port Department as follows:

- The dredging of the harbour channel at the North Abaco Cooper's Town port facility; this project is still ongoing and is about 60% complete.

- The installation of five (5) navigational lights on the Great Bahama Bank. And is 99% complete. To date four out of five lights have already been successfully installed. However, only the light of the northwest channel remains outstanding and will be addressed as soon as the weather is conducive.

- The removal and disposal of abandoned wrecks and derelict vessels in and around Nassau Harbour, Paradise Island and is 90% complete. Twenty-two (22) out of the twenty-three (23) vessels identified have already been removed and properly disposed of.

**Madam President,** With regards to the conduct of the Ports operations, I wish to inform of the

relocation of the Port Department from Prince George Wharf, where a lease agreement has been signed between the Government and the realtors for a period of eighteen (18) months.

Nassau Harbour control will be housed on the third floor of the Hilton Business Centre and the remaining sections within the Department will be relocated to offices at the East Bay shopping plaza.

It is proposed that the Potter's Cay Administrative Offices be re-developed to accommodate future operations.

Additionally, as it relates to the automation of the Port's operations, I wish to report that the e-services now offered represents a collaborative effort between

the Port Department, the Department of Transformation and Digitization, and the Ministry of Finance; the first phase of which, with the click of a mouse, will allow customers to complete applications, register private and commercial boats or watercrafts.

Customers can also apply for an 'A' or 'B' Operators License and apply for a 'D' Class Master's License. Further, they will also be able to upload documents with their applications and will receive email updates from port officers on the status of their applications.

The Port Department's online solution is 95% completed with staff training and familiarization presently ongoing.

**Finally, Madam President,** The Department proposes that Budget Allocations be made for the acquisition of three (3) patrol crafts for the islands of Abaco, Eleuthera and Exuma which will enhance revenue collection and enforcement in those jurisdictions.

## **POST OFFICE DEPARTMENT**

**Madam President,**

I now wish to report on the functioning of the Post Office Department during this fiscal period.

The Post Office Department commenced its pursuit of transforming its operations, beginning with the exploration and application of latest technological tools to enhance service efficiency levels throughout its office locations on New Providence.

This process is in its infancy stage, and so infrastructural and training processes are ongoing.

## **Madam President**

The Post Office is currently in the final stage of implementing and transitioning to a cash receipting

system, and has outfitted office counters, at all New Providence locations, with the required hardware such as computers, and printers to facilitate a more efficient and controlled operating process. Additionally, as a result of an innovative initiative of the Ministry of Finance, applications for Post Office Box rent and rental services are now accessible online, with new services to follow. The Department is continuing the progress towards e-commerce readiness and service expansion, which will allow the Post Office to embrace new revenue streams comprising of online shopping delivery and customs clearance payments.

Madam President

I wish to assure the Bahamian people that the delivery of services in the ministries of Labour and Transport

and Local Government will be conducted in the most fiscally prudent and responsible manner possible.

Madam President,

The Bahamian people appreciate the effective and wise leadership of our Prime Minister during this Pandemic.

The Bahamian people appreciate the excellent job the Prime Minister and his team have done with respect to the economy.

The Bahamian people appreciate the compassion and care we have shown and delivered to the less fortunate among us.

This is one of the main reasons why we are or why we should be in politics.

There is a verse in the bible which has guided my political life.

I refer to the Book of Matthew, Chapter 25 Verse 40:

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, in as much as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

**Madam President, positively impacting lives of Bahamians** is what this Minnis led administration is all about.

The twin disasters - Hurricane Dorian and COVID-19, brought social and economic hardship that adversely impacted this country and placed a harsh burden on our health, social and economic way of life.

However, more than a year later, The Bahamas is beginning to bounce back. And with God's help this budget will allow us to emerge victorious and rebuild our country stronger and better than before.

I thank you.