

Contribution  
by  
Hon. Philip "Brave" Davis, M. P.  
to debate on  
Chronic Disease Prescription Drug Plan Regulations

22nd July, 2010

Mr. Speaker, A life of reaction is a life of slavery, intellectually and spiritually. One must fight for a life of action, not reaction. One must fight for a life of action, not reaction."

These are not my words but those of American author Rita Mae Brown. Her words of wisdom are sound advice for this reactionary Government. Reaction is their modus operandi. They appear answer less when it comes to dealing with root causes of problems and instead focus on managing symptoms.

Mr. Speaker, today's Bahamas is being lead by a group of symptom managers and we dare wonder why we are continuously faced with the same nagging problems and national issues.

What is their response to crime? They have made very poorly thought out and ill-conceived attempts to deal with some of the challenges facing our courts and prisons, while crime continues to plague our country. In this regard they have failed. They have ignored the root causes of crime. They have watered-down urban renewal and other similar programs and today we are all living in fear because of it.

What is their response to the economy? They were again reactionary. They wasted away a vibrant economy in the name of partisan politics. They frightened away capital at the beginning of the global recession. Now that we are all catching hell because of their failure to be proactive, we have been saddled with an oppressive reactionary budget that is a day late and a dollar short.

Mr. Speaker, when it comes to the health of our people, this Government is

again stuck in reactionary mode. The prevention of chronic diseases was a major component of the National Health Insurance Plan proposed by the former PLP administration. This FNM government scrapped that though. They have instead removed the focus from prevention, and in their usual fashion have opted to focus on managing symptoms.

That is what the Prescription Drug Plan is all about. It is about managing symptoms. While I support the plan in the absence of no other, this approach is wrong. This approach is evidence that this Government is not seriously concerned about the health of our people. This plan is unsustainable. Without a comprehensive program of prevention, our people will continue to fall prey to the chronic diseases we experience today.

We ought not to allow politics and narrow agendas to interfere with the health and welfare of our people. People, Mr. Speaker are our most valuable resource!

Right out of a heated election in 2007, with politics, favors and promises to be fulfilled, this Government announced that it would be introducing a Prescription Drug Plan for chronic diseases. Yet after three plus years, it would appear that they are still not fully ready to commence the program. In the meantime, Bahamians are dying from these chronic diseases. In these tough economic times too many of our people are forced daily to make a decision between purchasing medication or feeding themselves. Such is life in The Commonwealth of The Bahamas in 2010.

Their lack of readiness is seen clearly in this Bill. The Regulations placed before us are very mechanical and lack transparency. There are no clear and transparent rules to govern participating pharmacies and the Board. What are the terms and conditions under which participating pharmacies will operate? How will their relationship with the Board function? These are serious concerns. We cannot be making this thing up as we go along. Even though the plan is deficient in terms of what is needed in our country, we must get it right!

What are the terms and conditions that will govern the sourcing of the drugs

and the cost of drugs? How exactly are drugs to be distributed to retailers and program participants? These are answers that we need now. These are matters that should be more precisely addressed in these Regulations before us. There is no wonder why so many pharmacies have been apprehensive about joining the plan. They want answers and they deserve answers. It is their livelihood that we are also talking about.

Mr. Speaker, is the National Insurance Board administratively structured to deal with all of these new functions? I am aware that the talent exists at NIB but are we properly utilizing the talent. What is being done to address the structural and administrative deficiencies which exist? Are we perhaps, putting too much responsibility on NIB? Since 2007, in addition to all of its other major responsibilities, NIB is now being called on to manage the Prescription Drug Program and the Unemployment Benefits Program. We must make sure that NIB is adapting to meet these challenges and that NIB is not biting off more than it can chew.

National Insurance is a major part of our country's social safety net. In this regard, it is important that its practices and policies do not overburden those that it is mandated to serve and help.

As I stand in support of the Regulations before us, I implore the Government to focus on both book ends of health services. The first end is prevention and the other end is treatment. The emphasis ought to be placed on prevention as opposed to treatment. Should we not place the focus on the right end, we will continue to be plagued with chronic diseases. The sad truth is that many people may not live to be treated, but the likelihood is that many more may live if we focus on preventative measures.

Mr. Speaker to reiterate the words of the American author Rita Mae Brown, "a life of reaction is a life of slavery, intellectually and spiritually." We can no longer afford to be enslaved. Bahamians deserve better!

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