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THE PLP CONDEMNS INGRAHAM AND THE FNM

11<sup>th</sup> June 2010

Office of the Leader of the Opposition  
Nassau, The Bahamas

Last night following the vote of cloture on the Budget debate, the PLP Caucus issued the following statement:

We condemn the FNM administration and Hubert Ingraham for their intolerance in shutting down the debate on the budget last evening. They shut down the debate in anger because the PLP offered an amendment, which was agreed to be proceeded with by the Prime Minister and his Cabinet sitting in the House. Any possible claim of unconstitutionality therefore falls away. They participated in the vote and voted against it. They were part of the process. They cannot now walk away from that fact. The amendment would have added to the budget money, which would have given an additional 1.3 million dollars to help poor people bury their dead. The government rejected this and then in anger shut down the debate. This is undemocratic. This is not acceptable. The PLP condemns the Prime Minister and the FNM.

We adopt this position here this morning.

The story for us then is a simple one. This is about an attempt by the PLP to help the poor. This is about the haughty and undemocratic manner in which Hubert Ingraham and the Free National Movement run the Parliament and the business of government. It is my way or the highway. The Bahamian people are sick and tired out it. Certainly, we all are in the parliamentary caucus.

An Opposition party is in a peculiar place in our system of government. It has responsibility without authority. In other words, it has no executing power. It cannot order the organs of government to perform. However, what the system contemplates is that the Opposition must be involved in the governance of the country, tweaking and challenging the policies of the majority. The system contemplates that you will have sane and sober individuals at the head of the government who understand their roles.

At each point in last night's travesty, the individual officers of the state failed in their duty. The Prime Minister failed in the lesson of tolerance. His members failed to stand up to the bullying tactics of an intolerant leader, forgetting that history will in fact be unkind to them. Further, the Deputy Speaker failed to properly consider whether the call for a vote of cloture was appropriate. Clearly, it was not, since we were only at head 44 in the recurrent appropriations bill, with several more heads to be examined.

The system contemplates that Ministers will be examined at budget time about their offices, the budget, and their spending priorities. By shutting down the debate as they did, the government side shortchanged the public in its right to know, this principle of transparency that the Prime Minister is so fond of boasting about.

We will continue to do our job. The Prime Minister must do his job. He and his colleagues must learn the lessons of good governance.

Our side intended to vote no on the third reading and passing stage of the bills if the government did not change course on what we believe will be ruinous to the economy of our country. We abstained on all votes to send the matter to committee, because we did not want to stop the forward progress of the bill to a stage where we would be allowed to offer constructive criticisms. The Opposition was denied that opportunity to make meaningful change, therefore, the no vote was even more justified.

Our Senators will now take up the people's battle when it meets to discuss the budget.

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