

Press Statement by
Bradley B Roberts
National Chairman
Progressive Liberal Party

June 24, 2010

Subject: The Water and Sewerage Corporation

The Progressive Liberal Party noted with interest the headline caption (page 3), in the June 23rd edition of The Nassau Guardian, 'Water and Sewerage Corp. explosion ruled an accident'. We found it most interesting because the Hon. Min. Phenton Neymour, who was being quoted, still appears to be downplaying the serious state of affairs surrounding the health and safety program at the corporation.

While the Guardian reporter mentions the fact that (WSC) 'employees were voicing serious health and safety concerns', sufficient attention is not being paid to the handling of chlorine canisters by the corporation and the potentially devastating impact on the environment. All of this comes in the aftermath of a recent report by the corporation that seven (7) canisters of chlorine went missing from its compound.

If these canisters find themselves in the wrong hands, there will be widespread negative implications for our country.

In light of all of this, the Jr. Minister of State for Energy & The Environment choose to provide a 'singular' surface answer to substantive and profound problems, notably that the (recent) explosion at the Corporation was an accident.

Bahamians should be reminded that in early April, immediately after the unfortunate explosion, Jr. Minister Phenton Neymour reported that an independent investigator out of the US was appointed to look into the events leading to the "accident".

Today he is reported as saying that the accident was an accident.

The Progressive Liberal Party finds this most troubling, as the Jr. Minister was put on his guard as early as April 12, when the PLP provided him and the government with four questions that had to be answered, including a question on the corporation's chlorine maintenance regimen, namely:

"What is the new prescribed treatment for chlorine canisters at the corporation and when will employees and the public be made aware of what actions to take in the event of a similar re-occurrence?"

Not providing answers to these publicly raised questions, speaks not only to arrogance and/or the actions of a person who is out of his element, but directly to negligence. If any

attempt was made to think through the question and provide answers, the corporation could have proactively secured the now missing canisters.

Perhaps most telling in the Minister's reported response was that he was 'tight-lipped as to what steps the corporation would take going forward', in view of the 'accident' report and in light of the widespread health and safety concerns.

This cavalier approach, uncaring attitude, and sophomoric behavior displayed by the State Minister in his leadership role at the corporation, leaves the PLP even more concerned. We see this as Min. Neymour's penchant for showcasing the positives and hiding his negatives by ignoring important issues and providing the nation with 'retread' and surface answers.

This was vividly highlighted in State Min. Neymour's budget contribution, when he provided information on the long awaited IDB sponsored report, by Castalia Strategic Advisors. A report that he repeatedly staked his very credibility on, as his answers to most questions regarding WSC's problems, were invariably deferred until the completion of this report. Not surprisingly the Castalia Report recommendations, as highlighted by Min. Neymour, were very similar to recommendations contained in the Thames Water Overseas Consultancy Report (2002).

This suggests that under the watch of this government, and in particular Hon. Min. Neymour, three years of corporation and taxpayers' time and money have been wasted on consultations for which he already had the answers.

What the country expects from Min. Neymour is demonstrative leadership and resourcefulness, even if it means executing remedies that he met in place.

The PLP will like to remind all Bahamians that the explosion and chlorine incidents all occurred under the vigilant watch of Ministers Deveaux and Neymour who have yet to match the visionary leadership and accountability exercised by the former Minister of Works & Utilities, under whose watch WSC made many more advancements.

Today the Progressive Liberal Party is once again renewing the call for specific circumstances surrounding the 'chlorine leak' incident and the results from any investigation conducted. In addition, the Government needs to provide answers for the "seven cylinders filled with chlorine gas" that went missing. The Country needs to know who was responsible and how they were dealt with.

Finally the PLP repeats its call for all members of the press to objectively exercise their obligations to the public, to expose any risk or undue behavior that adversely impacts the general public.

-- end --