STATEMENT BY FRED MITCHELL MP

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RESPONDING TO DESMOND BANNISTER ON THE WALTER

PARKER PRIMARY SCHOOL

Grand Bahama International Airport

Freeport, GBI

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There is an expression that the late George Mackey once used: “Not only one woman born a crazy child… if you could play crazy I could play crazy too.”

That is my starting point in my response to the Minister of Education as the sought to dig himself out of the hole he has created by his poor leadership in education in the country.

This is a response to the vicious attack on Alfred Sears, our spokesman on education and me as Opposition spokesman on the public service in the House of Assembly and which was carried extensively in the Freeport media. It is our reward for the public service of keeping the government’s feet to the fire. But I speak for both of us when we say that Mr. Banister is not in a position to rebuke any one and further any such rebuke is worn as a badge of honour. We have done our jobs.

Let’s get a couple of things straight for the minister:

He has lost this battle and the PLP has accomplished good for the teachers, students and parents of the Walter Parker Primary School by forcing a change of leadership at the school. There is a new principal Angela Burrows at the school and from all accounts she is working well with her staff. Peace has been restored and that is all that is needed for the good conduct of education which is the chief mission of the school. So the minister can try to sugar coat the fact of that change all that he wants, the facts are the facts: the former Principal is gone.

In fact I was advised that many of his political colleagues warned the Minister not to go down the road he chose to go.

In fact, if you examine the record the only person who has called the name of the former principal of Walter Parker Primary is the minister. Not once did we call her name and I do not intend to do so today.

What is particularly reprehensible is the scandalous and scurrilous way that he attempted to mix up the conviction of a former teacher at the Eight Mile Rock High School with the issue at Walter Parker Primary. One has nothing o do with the other. If he wants to open that Pandora’s Box, he ought to explain the shocking dereliction of duty of the Ministry of Education during their time in office in dealing with that criminal matter. But again I say that had nothing whatever to do with the leadership issue at the Walter Parker Primary School.

It is also patently offensive by a wink and nod to attack the Superintendent of Primary Schools in Grand Bahama Sandra Edgecombe. The PLP is concerned that the Minister is trying to make Mrs. Edgecombe a scapegoat in this whole matter, when in fact the evidence is clear that Mrs. Edgecombe was following the instructions of the Permanent Secretary in this matter. The Minister cannot change that fact. He must stop victimizing Mrs. Edgecombe for simply doing her job.

We are not certain what usefulness can be given to releasing the Annual Confidential Reports (ACRS) of the former principal of the Walter Parker Primary into the House of Assembly. They do not answer the question of the investigation that continues into the conduct of the school’s monies and purchases; they do not answer the fact that the teachers themselves were in revolt and the Minister promised those teachers that he would come back to them once he has resolves the issues. He has not done so. He owes those teachers an explanation. They do not answer the questions which my colleague Mr. Sears has on the House of Assembly’s order paper which the Minister studiously refuses to answer.

I would like however to remind the public on the more general issue to which this relates. This matter was raised again in the House of Assembly last week because the Minister cannot answer to the hundreds if not thousands of parents around the country who can no longer access monies to pay for their children to go to university. He was angered by the point which he cannot answer and that is that while his government is spending hundreds of millions building roads in the country, the children cannot get scholarship money to go to university. He has no answer for it.

The PLP has pledged to resolve that issue when it comes to office again.

Two days ago the Leader of our party came to this city. During his visit, he made a solemn pledge to work toward the restoration of this city. He said that the PLP loves this city and does not want to see it fail. He said that he cannot understand how five of the six representatives in this island are FNM, three of whom are Cabinet ministers and they are silent as this city lurches from one economic crisis to the next.

The bottom line then is this. Mr. Bannister’s attack on the PLP is simply idle. It does not deal with the issues which face the country, a vision for education in Grand Bahama. It was simply an attempt to cover up the failure of policy on his part and that of the Ministry; I believe that this matter is now at an end. There is no more to be said than to repeat the facts on the ground. No matter what the Minister says the Principal of Walter Parker is now the former Principal. That is good thing and that is all that matters.

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