Notes on Mid-Year Budget Debate

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Leader of the Opposition Member for Farm Road and Centreville had this to say in response to this midyear budget:

The clearly neglected issue by the Prime Minister is that of employment for Bahamians. Bahamians throughout the country continue to lose their jobs; there is no clear method or forecast for any increased employment for Bahamians. This Government thought it advisable to tax the Bahamian people at their highest rates ever during the Budget, threatening any job creation in the private sector, yet articulating no clear plan to encourage the creation of employment opportunities to the ever growing number of unemployed Bahamians. The PLP says that the theme of this address by the Prime Minster should have been JOBS, JOBS, JOBS!!!!!!

That is the tack I mean to take… that the government missed an opportunity to correct the disaster of the budget itself back last year to make it possible to address the issue of unemployment and the dramatic fall in the quality of life in our country because of the bad polices of the government, now known as the Stop Review and Cancel programme.

In fact, I wondered to myself given how the FNM has increased the national deficits year after year, the national debt year after year, if it would not simply have been more productive for the government to simply go to the market, borrow some money and settle it on us individually, since what have been seen so far does not amount to much.

For example, while we are building roads: other roads are falling into disrepair… while we are building roads and spending hundreds of millions of dollars on roads, the children cannot get scholarships or find money to pay for their school fees.

This is a real experience. Yesterday at St. Paul’s Church in Fox Hill, a mother came up to me and told the story of four young men from the Gentleman’s Club including her own son in St. John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota where he is studying accounting.

She is the only one working. Her husband has lost his job and she has been notified that the school will soon put a hold in her son’s ability to attend classes.

The mother of another young man who is a nurse and also is the sole provider is so strapped for cash in seeking to pay for her son’s education, that there is also the threat of a hold on attending classes.

And the point she makes is, here it is a society that is always beating up on young men, you have four successful young men and they cannot get the help from the society that they need, desire, demand and require.

What good is a government if it cannot provide security for its people and it cannot take care of their basic needs like food, health care and education? That government is simply useless

It is a pity that the government did not take this opportunity to look at ways to improve the employment figure. You go thru my constituency, FNMs and PLPs, young men in their scores are sitting right now, this moment with absolutely nothing to do all day… nothing to do and it is not for want of trying. My constituency hours are consumed with people who cannot make their rent payments, their mortgage payments, buy food to eat for the day, not the week - but the day. That is the legacy of this administration's neglect.

It is fine to say that the economy is turning around, but turning around for whom?

I met with the Eastwood Property Owners Association yesterday and told them how embarrassed I was that after a month of asking, and the minister’s best intentions and promise, a 580 dollar job to repair a basketball pole on the court has not been done. So we are seeking to raise the money privately and see if we can get it done. The park itself needs a lot of work to stay clean; to make sure that the benches and equipment are safe, to ensure that the lights work and the garbage is collected.

Eastwood is a neighbourhood where people’s homes are worth near 300,000 dollars or more so their real property tax bills must be quite a tab for the government, but what do they get from the government?

I raised in here the question of the clearing of lots and await what the Minister of the Environment will do for that community and for Monastery Park.

But let’s concede that it may be difficult in a time of austerity to do the large capital works but what about fixing the pot holes in the road for Lord’s sake.

Why can’t you pick up the garbage…? Some neighbourhoods in Fox Hill have garbage collection twice a month so that garbage piles up in neighbourhoods and these were neighbourhoods that voted PLP so what do you think they will think that maybe it’s because of that the garbage is not being collected.  And as I said here if you can’t collect the garbage on time, a government is a failure.

In Bimini, the airport terminal has had a broken front door I am told for months. Can’t get it fixed.  The terminal itself is inadequate and in need of an upgrade.

The garbage truck in Bimini has two gaping rusty holes in its side. Juts a sign of the times.

In Grand Bahama, the government is squeezing the business community causing them to scream bloody murder re the issuing of the annual bond letters from Customs. Citizens are under attack from the government and so no wonder there is revolt in the air.

What does that woman in Fox Hill do who has a $3,000 power bill and no way to get the power on so she has been living without power for six months… six months without power in the modern Bahamas? Who do you think will get blamed for that eventually?  The government cannot be blind, deaf and dumb on the subject.

The interesting conversation about the price of land from another member of St. Paul’s who talked about the government’s  proposed subdivision in Fox Hill, and what the price of the land will be.

So that is why the Leader of the Opposition can say that this was simply a recitation of facts from the Central Bank report, it was like watching  a CNN report.

I don’t need the Prime Minister to mimic CNN, what I need is hope and help and something to tell me we are not looking thru a glass darkly but as seeing the future instead. What we got was hopeless and helpless.

The story of Nora Hanna and the Eastern Union Burial Society and the marches as a child…

I did not like it then but I love to march now…

Little did I know then that the act of marching was an act of Freedom...?

The Tribune’s editorial, the Government’s spokesman all denigrating the protestors, but I am proud of them, proud to have been part of the protest and will be part of further protests on this issue.

The government should be protecting the protestors and more importantly should listen to them.

The Egypt moment… all countries, China, The U.S. are now being influenced by the spontaneous protests and so it should be no surprise that this is happening in The Bahamas.

Here is what the founding fathers of the United Sates said on 4th July 1776 when they declared that they were independent of Great Britain:

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, [72] that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, That whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness.

 Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes; and accordingly all experience hath shewn, that mankind are more disposed to suffer, while evils are sufferable, than to right themselves by abolishing the forms to which they are accustomed. But when a long train of abuses and usurpations, pursuing invariably the same Object evinces a design to reduce them under absolute Despotism, it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such Government, and to provide new Guards for their future security.”

The Tribune’s editorial position this morning about this being a tourist country, the same claptrap that was trotted out by this paper editorially before, but when the protest were in support of the FNM and against Pindling that was fine: to  demonstrate while the Queen was here, to shout the Chief is Tief, to block the bridge. All of that was fine so long as it as the FNM doing the protesting.

Seeking to denigrate the protest by saying the PLP organized the protest. Aside from that not being true, so what if were organized by the PLP… PLP’s have a right of assembly, opinion and association and conscience too, the fact of being PLP does not end those rights.  Just as the Prime Minister is able to show up at a national function to open the airport in a signature red tie which indicates that he is proud to be FNM, those PLPs on the street have the same right to protest.

Then there is the question of paying demonstrators.  Aside from that being untrue so what if they were paid.

I recall reading about this in the early 1960s when the UBP challenged the PLP on the question of the number of unemployed in the country. The PLP brought out the unemployed in their thousands. To mobilize people takes resources: food, buses, and communication, emergency care to a name a few of the possible expenses. So let’s not get distracted by that fact. The people turned out and their voices were heard and I am with them.

More to come.

Frederick Douglas said: power concedes nothing without a demand.

End