

Remarks
By
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South Western Summit
Workers House
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Job Creation and Empowerment
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“Defining Our Party’s Future”

Some fifty-eight years ago the first political party in The Bahamas was founded to fight for the liberation and equality of all Bahamians and for representation for the Labour movement in Parliament.

The party’s most illustrious leader and the nation’s first Prime Minister and Father of the modern Bahamas was Sir Lynden Oscar Pindling.

The ideals and values espoused then remain at the core of our belief system today, namely

- Strong community
- Strong values
- Christian heritage
- Social justice
- Equal access for the pursuit of opportunity
- High ethical standards and morality
- Equality for all
- Reward for hard work

The ideals, values and beliefs which the PLP, under the leadership of the Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie, advocate today, are those which have guided our party throughout its existence and will once again lead Bahamians to a brighter and more prosperous future.

Now, an extraordinary new generation of Progressive Liberal Party candidates has joined the fight. A new generation, with new energy and new ideas, and with a commitment to core Bahamian values, and a respect for the history and culture of The Bahamas. These young candidates are smart, passionate, committed, and fired up – they’re ready to bring real change and real progress to all Bahamians. They understand the challenges we face, and they’re ready to fight the good fight.

Because ladies and gentlemen, we face perhaps the most difficult and perplexing time in the post-Independence history of our nation. A time when the level of unemployment and underemployment in our beloved Bahama Land are astounding! There are very few things that are more demoralizing than being unemployed.

The FNM government loves to talk about the global economic crisis. And there's no question that hard economic times elsewhere have an impact on The Bahamas. But the real truth is, FNM policies have made this recession much worse for The Bahamas. The record will show that this government has always chosen to put politics first, never Bahamians. In fact, one of the first things the FNM did when it came to power was cancel legitimate contracts executed by Perry Christie's government, resulting in far too many jobs delayed and deferred and lost forever. Jobs that families were counting on – gone, because of petty politics.

The FNM summarily dismissed long-standing Customs, Immigration and Police Officers – again, jobs that families were relying on. They raised taxes on everything that moves, and some things that don't, like the Bible. They have presided over massive mismanagement of public funds.

And they've run up the national debt while forgetting the most important thing: you.

They don't listen, they don't consult, and they don't care. If they did, they'd know that people want a government that's serious about reducing violence. 103 murders and the FNM has offered nothing more than a bunch of excuses, playing the blame game while the streets turn red.

My Brothers and Sisters, all of this sadly and profoundly speaks to the deterioration or massive decline in the 'standard of living' of Bahamians and more specifically to the thousands of families who have sunk below the poverty level. The level of abject poverty and social decay in New Providence and especially Grand Bahama is atrocious. The middle class is being ripped to shreds and the poor are now wards of the state, depending on indiscriminate handouts from the Government to survive.

Ladies and Gentlemen, what is so sad and depressing is that our very own PM Ingraham has told us, the Bahamian People, on September 6th 2011, that “No new job growth is expected for the next year to year and a half”. This message was a clear signal to the Bahamian people that the FNM no longer has the vision or passion to generate jobs for Bahamians.

In Perry Christie's government, 22,000 jobs were created – did you know that in 2005 and in 2006, under PLP leadership, the Bahamian economy outpaced the US economy in growth?

We need a government that knows how to create jobs, jobs for *Bahamians*, not for foreigners, jobs for everyone who needs them, not just for party supporters, *sustainable* jobs, not jobs that disappear.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let's do a little comparing and contrasting. I'll offer you one example of the difference between the FNM and the PLP...and assure you there are plenty more, more than you can imagine.

The Nassau Straw Market

Ladies and Gentlemen, you will recall that The PLP executed a contract to build a 165,000 square foot Straw Market for \$22 Million Dollars, including a BEC electrical infrastructure upgrade, accommodating 630 vendors in stalls no less than 48 square feet in size. The cost of the construction was then estimated at \$ 133.00 dollars per square foot.

It was a good design at a good price. The FNM's response? They cancelled it. They couldn't let the PLP take credit, after all. Remember – they always put politics first, they never put Bahamians first.

Their next step: the FNM executed a new contract to construct a 37,000 square foot market tendered @ \$11.2 Million Dollars, *excluding* BEC electrical infrastructure upgrade. The cost of this project, now in the final stages of completion, has been revised upward to \$16 Million. Instead of accommodating 630 craft vendors it can only accommodate 440 vendors. Instead of stall sizes of 48 square feet, the stalls are only 12 square feet.

The adjusted cost of construction for this mini-facility, which makes no allowances for growth or variety, has been estimated at \$432.00 per square foot - \$301 more per square foot than that contractually agreed under the PLP government!

The PLP proposed Straw Market was a four story structure with the rooftop fourth level dedicated to other income generating amenities, such as restaurants, entertainment facilities and a 100 foot tall panoramic observation tower. It had scope for expansion and further variety and would have cost taxpayers \$133 per sq. ft.

In contrast, the newly constructed market is approximately 2.5 stories, with one floor designated to vendors, no room for growth or expansion, and has cost taxpayers \$432 per sq. ft. All things factored in the estimated overall development cost for this market is \$27.0 million or \$730.00 per sq. ft.

Ladies and Gentlemen you don't need me to do the math – you're paying a lot more for a lot less!

That's not all – as we now know, the cancellation of the PLP Straw Market resulted in a loss of the \$2.3 Million construction deposit; loss of fees due to the termination and hiring of new Architects, Engineers, Quantity Surveyors and a General Contractor; and additional legal costs for attorneys or arbitrators in respect of the recent judgment against the government.

In summary we now have a market that is 20% of the size of what makes sense for current and future usage but costs \$5 million more than what was budgeted for by the PLP. \$16 million in construction costs and \$11.2 million in stop review and cancel compensation fees.

Who here thinks that Bahamians just has money to throw out like that? Who here believes that Bahamians deserve better, deserve a government ready to invest in them instead of throwing money out for political reasons? They didn't do right by the straw vendors. They didn't do right by the Bahamian people. They just looked after themselves.

And a government which has presided over massive job losses has to tell 190 vendors that they cannot be accommodated in the new market.

My brothers and sisters do you all agree that it's time for a change? It is time for Hubert Ingraham and his FNM Band to go!

You don't even want to get me started on the road works, do you? But I invite you to listen carefully to me for a minute. Road Works which obligated the Contractor to conduct his operations as to offer the least possible obstruction and inconvenience to the public and he shall

have under construction no greater length or amount of work than he can properly manage at a time with due regard to the rights of the public in maintaining a free flow of traffic. Here is what we got instead like the song says “the road them Dig Up, Dig Up everywhere”. The Contractor obviously with impunity was allowed to breach the contract with the Government. I asked the question whether it was because the DPM Brent Symonette Company was a major sub-contractor in the Road Works? The Progressive Liberal Party isn't against building new roads – far from it. It's the way that this government has allowed it to be done that has received the wrath and disgust of the people – they went ahead without listening, without consulting, without planning properly to minimize damage to residents and businesses. Road Works on West Bay complied with the terms of the Contract but not the inner city.

The PLP is different. We listen, and we care. You're going to hear a lot of new ideas over the next three days, and I'm going to get things started with the following PLP proposal: a Business Rebuilding Support program – tax holidays and rebuilding incentives for Bahamian businesses experiencing major negative impacts during the road works in New Providence. Why should some businesses bear such a disproportionate burden? They deserve a chance to rebuild, to get back on their feet. What is amazing the after all the pain and suffering Bahamians have endured during these Road Works, taxpayers will have to bear cost over runs that totals some \$25 Million and growing on an initial contract of some \$120 million. All of this we can lay at the feet of terrible mismanagement by Hubert Ingraham and his deputy Brent Symonette.

Land empowerment of low income Bahamian earners

Finally, I wish to conclude my brief remarks by touching on a very important issue; one that is a major concern for thousands of young and not so young Bahamians, who have been bitterly complaining about the dwindling prospect of their ever owning land in New Providence.

- Fact 1: Housing conditions for low income earners leave much to be desired, including the lack of maintenance by the Government of its own rental units. The aspiration of Bahamians to purchase and live in their own homes must and will be addressed.
- Fact 2: Land for housing in New Providence, unfortunately, is limited and the cost to purchase is far beyond the pocket books of many.
- Fact 3: The PLP long held philosophy is that every Bahamian has the right to decent and affordable housing.
- Fact 4: Aggressive policies will be enacted to empower low income earners "to own a piece of the rock", and improve the lives of their families.

Andros Island, the Big Yard, the largest land mass closest to New Providence, has a sizable Crown Land Bank, which can be made available for the creation of a new city and extended housing. The Natural resource of Potable water is definitely not an issue, as it is currently available nearly everywhere on Andros.

The PLP will cause the development of a minimum of one-third acre lots on Andros. These subdivisions will be supported by Commercial Centers, Post Offices, Clinics, Police Stations, Banks, and Schools.

The guidelines for the grant of Crown Land to qualified Bahamians and the time frame for building homes will be clearly defined for efficient and regulatory progress.
A low cost, scheduled fast ferry service will be introduced to allow persons, who embrace the offer to go to and fro between New Providence and Andros with ease.

Ladies and Gentlemen – the PLP understands that these times call for innovative thinking and it is our patriotic duty to reach into our ‘Belief System’, refine the essence of who we are, restore order, optimism, financial, and the moral health of our country.

This is not an option – This is a necessity!!

We have seen 4 ½ years of dispassionate leadership, un-paralleled cronyism, blatant conflicts of interest and the down-spiraling fortunes of Bahamians. The time is here, and the opportunity is ours – to combine the strengths and experience of talented Bahamians, all fighting for one cause – the restoration of The Bahamas, at the apex of this region and the world. To regain the title of the ‘best little country on the face of the earth’!

Ladies and Gentlemen – I thank you and may God bless the Commonwealth of the Bahamas.