

SPEECH- SOUTH WESTERN REGIONAL CONFERENCE September 30th, 2011- Dr. Kendal V.O. Major

JOB CREATION AND EMPOWERMENT SUMMIT

WHAT'S IN IT FOR YOU? (ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT)

If we see the world at 40 years old the same way we saw it at 20, then we have wasted 20 years of our lives. This is a quote credited to Muhammad Ali, who knows a thing or two about tough fights. In just two short years, we will celebrate 40 years of independence. And the question is – what's the same? What's changed in that time for Bahamians?

As Lady Pindling so significantly reminded us, the fight of Sir Lynden Pindling goes on. We have come a long way, but we have not come nearly far enough.

When we look around, we know our challenges are many, that the mountain we must climb is steep.

How do we reach the top of that mountain, so we can look at a bright Bahamian future?

We do two things: we embrace traditional Bahamian values of the past, and we embrace the new and innovative ideas crucial to success in the 21st century.

You can't know where you're going unless you know where you've come from!

The most important thing to know is this: the PLP *believes* in you. We *believe* in Bahamians. We know that with the right vision and a new direction and a bedrock belief in the Bahamian people, there's nothing we can't accomplish together.

Some weeks ago, this party held a gathering in Eastern New Providence. There, our Leader, the Right Honourable Perry Gladstone Christie, said that the governing FNM party hasn't figured out the new world we live in; he said they needed their software updated!

I couldn't agree more. Here we are, in the 21st century, when a nation's future depends almost entirely on the talents, skills and education of its people. And yet they dismiss a national grade point average of D as no big deal.

Fellow Bahamians, we deserve better than this! How can we achieve emancipation and empowerment without education? How can more Bahamians become owners – owners of land, of homes, of businesses, of their own destiny – without being full participants in the new information and technology revolution?

Yet we have a government that cares more about things than about people.

I think you'll agree with me that it's time for a change! And I think you'll agree that we have no time to waste!

Tonight I want to emphasize a key PLP proposal: we plan to double the investment in education and training. We call it our New Century Commitment, and it represents our commitment to you, our commitment to giving every Bahamian a chance.

Starting with some of our smallest citizens, with our preschoolers, we need to do more and we need to do better. Quality early childhood intervention prepares children to succeed in school. Nothing is more wonderful than classrooms of 3 and 4 year olds, ready to learn, so excited they can hardly stand still. Let's expand the number of Bahamians who have access to preschool, and let's improve the education they're receiving; we need to support parents and teachers who want the best for these children.

Fellow Bahamians, let's acknowledge an uncomfortable truth: too many of our primary school children are socially promoted despite serious deficiencies in reading and math. Pretty soon, and I'm talking mostly about boys now, the major gaps in their learning lead to frustration and humiliation and they begin acting out, .

These boys become caught in the prison of their minds and trap themselves through acts of violence. With jumbled thoughts, angry hearts and baggy pants below their hips, they roam our streets, restless and unhappy. They do not understand nor are they understood. There are far too many Bahamian boys who meet this description, and that's a tragedy we're just beginning to come to grips with as a nation. I tell you tonight: We cannot afford to lose this generation.

Plato once said, "If a man neglects education, he walks lame to the end of his life." We cannot keep failing these children. A government cannot do everything – parents and grandparents and neighbors and friends must do their part, too. But the government can and should do so much more: We must have a National Vision for Education, we must arrest social promotion in our public school system, and we must implement comprehensive curriculum reform.

And in our high schools, we must have far greater access to vocational and technical education, and apprenticeships – you'll be hearing more about that as the Summit goes on.

We must empower our young men educationally and socially if true economic advancement is to be realized.

Ladies and gentlemen, doubling our investment in education also means more Bahamians should have access to higher learning. Tonight I'm proud to announce a new PLP initiative: a Scholarship Rebate Program. We propose that any company that provides academic scholarships for Bahamians to attend tertiary education institutions to pursue courses in teaching, information technology, engineering, surveying, architecture and more, will be offered business license fee rebates.

Because sometimes a scholarship makes all the difference in the world.

Let me tell you how I know...

It was in 1976 when a young boy came to Saunders Beach with his father and met Sir Lynden when he came for a morning swim.

The boy's father was asked his plan for his son after high school. "He wants to become a Veterinarian." Sir Lynden smiled and then advised to apply for a scholarship, one he said was designed for students interested in Agriculture or Veterinary Medicine.

Well the young boy applied, and received a 2-year City Market Scholarship.

The young boy knew he was fortunate, but he didn't fully understand – yet – what an opportunity like that meant. When he returned home, he began to practice his discipline. With one year of financial records he approached the banks to apply for a sizable loan to purchase state-of-the-art equipment and prime property. And yes, he too got the run around until he ran into two outstanding Bahamian Bankers. They believed in empowering Bahamians. Today when you apply for financing you need land, money, life insurance, personal guarantees, more land, ten reference letters and the application must go to Barbados for approval.

We must find a way to cut through the clutter and give Bahamian managers the clout they once enjoyed. This is achieved by revisiting the policy to Bahamianize the banking sector again. In my opinion, we will never own the land until we own the banks. Bahamians must be top decision-makers in local banks.

Of course, we also need a government that supports land ownership for Bahamians. This government has done the opposite – they have increased the stamp duty (a stamp duty that the Perry Christie administration eliminated for first-time home buyers), they have increased real property taxes and they have interfered with the market in determining sales prices for properties.

It should not only be a select few who can own land in their own nation. We must expand opportunities for Bahamian people to own their piece of the rock.

But I was telling you a story...

As the story unfolds, some 20 years after that visit at the beach, the young professional, who is not a Veterinarian but instead a qualified doctor serving as the first Specialist of his kind in the Caribbean, receives a phone call from the former Prime Minister for an appointment.

During that appointment, the full impact of the City Market Scholarship became clear when Sir Lynden affirmed that the vision must continue—*young men like yourself must find your place in nation building and move the vision forward.*

Ladies and gentlemen, you may have figured it out – I was the young boy on the beach, the young man later inspired by Sir Lynden's words. I stand here tonight as the ratified Candidate for the Garden Hills Constituency, proud of my party and proud of my nation. My story is a Bahamian story, but the good fortune I experienced is shared by too few Bahamians.

It would be so easy to sit back, enjoy professional success, let the nation's troubles be someone else's problems.

But me and my colleagues don't feel that way – not for one minute. We know we're in a party where our voices and our ideas will be heard and implemented, and we can't wait to make a difference.

So you young people of the great Garden Hills Constituency, it's time to believe in yourselves and in your goals again. It is time to believe in the Bahamas again. It's time to believe again in YOU by putting Bahamians first. This is our pledge to you.

So as we approach one generation of nationhood let us pull up our socks, straighten our backs, tightened our belts and write the next chapter in our nation's history.—You have a

significant part in rebuilding this country –obtain knowledge, embrace the opportunities and be guided by wisdom.

There is no more time for economic stagnancy and dependency. No more time to waste. It is time for vigor, creativity, productivity and empowerment to rise up.

The next PLP government believes in you. Just like that young boy who stopped by the beach and whose life changed to one of ownership and empowerment.

Let us work together to create a productive nation.

God bless you all and God bless the commonwealth wealth of the Bahamas.