

Remarks by Renward Wells

“Empowering a Nation”

Job Creation & Empowerment Summit

Progressive Liberal Party

September 29, 2011

My fellow Bahamians, as Solomon the Wise said some three thousand years ago:

“Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: except the LORD keep the city, the watchman wake but in vain.”

To The Right Hon. Perry Gladstone Christie, the leader of this great party and Mrs. Christie;

To the Deputy Leader, Phillip Brave Davis and Mrs. Davis;

To the Members of Parliament and the candidates of this party, many of whom, the Lord and the Bahamian people willing, will form the next government of the Bahamas;

To the stalwart councilors, party officers and members of the PLP, invited guests;

And to the strong, creative, innovative, passionate, bold and beautiful Bahamian people—good evening! We believe in you, Bahamians!

There is a time and a season and a purpose to everything under heaven. Tonight we come together to begin our steps towards a shared future.

In times past, with plans in hand, our ancestors, our leaders, writing the Book of The Bahamas, built a nation that was envied by our neighbors. But as we now sift through the pages of that Book, there is an undercurrent that jumps off the pages -- all is not well in our land.

Bahamians are asking: what has happened to us? How did we get here? Year after year of record-breaking murder rates! Unemployment plaguing too many homes. Foreign ownership of too much of our economy. And a government that doesn't listen, and doesn't believe in Bahamians. A government with no true vision for building a nation.

As the scriptures says: “Where there is no vision the people perish.”

But Bahamians are asking another question, too, and this is the one that counts: they're asking, “How do we get from here to a better future?”

The Progressive Liberal Party is ready to light the way to that better future! We have an unbeatable combination – the wisdom of experience, and the energy and fresh ideas of a new generation.

Together, we seek to write the next great chapter in the Book of The Bahamas.

Bahamians are having a second great awakening. The first was the desire for majority rule and the struggle that ensued to achieve it. But this 2nd great awakening is all about economic empowerment: we know that you desire to own this economy, and there's no reason you shouldn't.

Now more than ever, you desire to cross the banks of the proverbial Jordan into the land of promise, into the land of peace, plenty and economic empowerment, and as the PLP led you out of your Egypt some 43 years ago, during the 1st awakening, we are ready to lead you again in this dispensation and 2nd awakening across the Jordan.

We know we cannot build a prosperous and moral nation when we are not safe, so the PLP has a comprehensive and innovative plan to fight crime and reduce violence. Read it for yourselves, Bahamians, because nothing matters more than winning the home-by-home, street-by-street, neighborhood-by-neighborhood battle for the hearts and souls of our youth. Go to myplp.org, get a copy, and learn about our Project Safe Bahamas initiative, which includes Operation Cease Fire, Urban Renewal 2.0, Swift Justice, and Saturation Patrols in crime hotspots.

We know that you desire greater Bahamian ownership in tourism and banking, in telecommunication and businesses, and we plan to deliver it. We know that you desire more food security; with proper government support for greenhouse technology, hydroponic farming, and technical training, we can dramatically reduce the half a billion dollars we spend on food imports.

Some estimate that once BahaMar comes on stream, our food import bill could reach a billion dollars annually; we in the PLP believe that the vast majority of those monies should stay in the pockets of the men and women in the Bahamian agriculture and marine resource sectors.

In fact, as Dr. Nottage reiterated recently, we can recoup half of the 22,000 new jobs created by the PLP during their last administration in agriculture alone.

Tonight, the PLP calls for a Renewed Agriculture Focus -- an aggressive policy to develop Bahamian agriculture, with a focus on technology and innovation, aimed at increasing the production, quality and marketability of locally-grown goods. Let's invest in Bahamians by investing in packing houses and canneries so that we can develop full-circle economies in the Family Islands.

In our Marine resources and Mariculture sectors, east of Eleuthera, Abaco, Cat Island and Mayaguana, for 200 hundred nautical miles is our exclusive economic zone (EEZ) under

international law. We need to use our exclusive economic zone for mariculture development. We need to grant licenses to *Bahamians* to do open ocean fish farming and other "safe ways of harvesting deep sea tuna, snapper..... And we must maximize the economic return from this multimillion dollar industry".

According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FOA) of the UN there are hundreds of millions of dollars worth of Tuna between Puerto Rico and North Florida; a large part of this territory lies in our exclusive economic zone (EEZ).

Opening up this industry to Bahamians could bring millions of dollars a year in foreign exchange, and if we establish canning factories and provide training and support, Bahamians will become not just employees but owners in this industry.

Deepwater commercial fishing would also add to our tourism sector from Japan and other Asian nations, since businessmen involved in obtaining fresh tuna and other deepwater fish for the Asian market, would come to purchase and negotiate their catch.

Our neighbors, the Dominicans, know of our rich resources and are harvesting these fish in abundance. Speaking of The Dominicans, you know, they had three Nassau grouper spawning sites, two of which are near completely gone, depleted.

Now they have come to overfish our 27 known spawning aggregation sites of Nassau grouper. You know if they were not willing to protect and conserve their own spawning sights they will not give two hoots about overfishing and destroying ours.

The Progressive Liberal Party, which believes in putting Bahamians first, intends to Reduce Illegal Fishing, with increased air and marine patrols. Our leader, Perry Christie, and my colleagues Ryan Pinder and Clay Sweeting, join all of us who feel passionately that the Bahamian fishing industry deserves its government's support.

What a difference it would make to Bahamians to have a government which believes in what they can accomplish.

The PLP believes that there's no reason Bahamians should not take control of our airspace. Did you know that right now, every national airline in The Bahamas – Sky Bahamas, Western Air, and Bahamas Air – has to pay Overflight Fees to the FAA in the United States anytime they fly over 6000 feet! They're still over The Bahamas – but we're paying fees to the United States. This doesn't make any sense. Tonight, the Progressive Liberal Party announces the Bahamian Skies Initiative, our commitment to a public-private partnership to negotiate management of Bahamian airspace and invest in the necessary technology and human capital. What's at stake for us? Tens of millions in revenue. New jobs. Reduced fees for local airlines, expanding tourism and helping family members stay connected. And upgraded radar and other technology which could also aid us in the fight against illegal immigration as well.

Cuba and Jamaica control their airspace. Why shouldn't Bahamians?

More ownership and more jobs in agriculture. A major expansion of our fishing industry. And control of our airspace. We can do these things, and we will. The first step: a government that believes in you.

For although our stories in this nation are singular, our destiny and success must be shared. We have a promise from the creator of all flesh, that as long as the earth remains there will be seedtime and harvest, summer and winter, day and night.

So we will, with seeds of our plan, plant gardens of empowerment in the economy of our country that will produce fruits to satisfy the hearts of the Bahamian people.

We want you to know that this task of your economic and political empowerment, we readily accept.

We will move this nation out of the desert, into the oasis of jobs and security.

Ain't long now before this long night of losing our way will give way to the dawn of a new day of hope, optimism, innovation and clear vision of our destination as a people.

I believe in The Bahamas, and I believe in a future greater than the past.

As the prophet Isaiah said, "Every mountain will be made low, every valley will be exalted, the crooked places will be made straight and the rough places will be made smooth, the glory of the Lord shall be revealed in this nation, and all flesh will see it together, for the mouth of the Lord has spoken it".

I believe PLP's it will be! And it will be through the PLP!

And as our national motto say, let us move Forward Upward Onward Together, until the road we trod lead unto your God march on Bahamaland, March On!

PLP's! PLP! PLP!