

Remarks by:  
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Southwest Summit  
September 29<sup>th</sup> 2011

Mr. Party Leader and Mrs. Christie, distinguished ladies and gentlemen gathered here tonight, and those Bahamians in radio and television land, good evening. Firstly, I want to thank God for placing me in the right place at the right time, in a position where I can make a difference in the lives of so many Bahamians and residents of this country.

Secondly, I want to thank my wife of 25 years, who came into my life and made it complete. She is the kind of wife every man dreams of, the kind of parent every child would be proud to call mother and the kind of friend which seems too real to be true. Then, I want to thank the wonderful people of the great constituency of Golden Gates who have elected me on two consecutive occasions to represent them in the Honorable House of Assembly.

My record of service to the workers of this great country is well known to many, and my association and membership with The Progressive Liberal party was a well thought out and deliberately planned move. I was convinced ten years ago and even more convinced now that the PLP is the political party that represents the best interest of the workers and the people of The Bahamas.

In fact, the PLP can be credited with creating some 22,000 jobs in this Country between 2002 – 2007. The IMF said that the PLP had taken unemployment to an irreducible minimum; nearly every Bahamian who wanted a job could find one. Compare that to this FNM Government's performance, with nearly 38,000 Bahamians sitting at home waiting on meaningful employment.

Thousands of people have lost their jobs since this FNM came to office. ZNS workers, Air Traffic Controllers, BTC employees, BTC phone card retailers, Urban Renewal workers, NIB workers, hotel workers, construction workers, Customs Officers, Immigration Officers, and Police Officers, and in many cases they've lost their homes or have their lives plunged in darkness. Does this sound like a government which believes in Bahamians?

In fact, check the record during each of the FNM's three terms in office. They put hundreds of Batelco workers out of work during their first term in office, through a down-sizing exercise, they sent home more Batelco and Air Traffic workers during their second term in office, and they sent home many others since coming to office in 2007. God forbid they win the next elections – we can't afford much more of them.

When the Christie Administration came to power in 2002, even in the midst of having to pay off FNM debt, we fired no one – all of those temporary jobs they created leading to Elections, we kept, because no matter their politics we understood that they had mouths to feed. We put Bahamians first, not politics.

The economy is so grim right now, it's tough to remember what a booming economy felt like, but it was booming under Mr. Christie. In 2005 and 2006, the Bahamian economy grew faster

than the US economy, something you should consider next time you hear complaints about the global recession. Many of the projects and plans and developments put in place are still a source of employment for Bahamians – did you hear the Prime Minister bragging the other day about the 500 jobs which became available in Abaco? Jobs connected to Anchor Properties envisioned and implemented by the Rt. Hon. Perry Christie.

Like our Leader always says, if you want to know whether we are better off today than we were under his Administration, just stick your hands in your pocket and compare what comes out!

But the PLP under Perry Christie didn't just create jobs; we were creating ownership opportunities for Bahamians. We implemented targeted policy solutions such as:

- A Venture Capital Fund for Bahamian entrepreneurs needing a start up seed for their businesses;
- Added 25 million dollars to the Bahamas Development Bank to offer loans at a far lower rate than commercial banks for Bahamian entrepreneurs;
- Enacted an exemption in stamp duty for first time home owners up to \$250,000.00
- We also created the Domestic Investment Board, which was essentially an Umbrella agency for Bahamian Investors – a one stop shop providing assistance in application and funding for Bahamians wishing to invest in their Country. The slogan became, "Cutting the red tape and rolling out the red carpet for Bahamians!"

The biggest problem with the FNM is that they simply don't believe in Bahamians. We wanted to sell 49% of BTC; they sold 51%. Just two little percentage points – but they mean everything – it's the difference between Bahamian ownership and control and foreign ownership and control. Can we agree tonight – Bahamian industries should be kept in Bahamian hands!

During my time as President of the BCPOU, I fought for the workers of Batelco. I felt their pain and took a stand for the betterment of the employees. Nothing has changed as I speak to you here tonight .....standing in the gap for all the workers, young and old, and future generations of workers in this great country. I am a trade unionist at heart, it is in my blood, and tonight I stand before you, just as I have in my days as a Union Leader...with passion and vigor and much fight, to endorse and fulfill the PLP's mandate for Job Creation and Empowerment for the Bahamian people.

I remember my days as I marched in Parliament Square on behalf of the workers, -HAI remembers those days too. (joke) He remembers my determination so well he has a personal place in his heart for me. (joke) I still maintain as I did then that HAI and his administration are detached from the Bahamian people. They cannot see that their actions rob Bahamians of dignity. It almost seems that they are trying to create a nation of beggars and thieves. The indifference to the despair of the unemployed is breath-taking.

Look at Grand Bahama: this government has shamelessly neglected the people of Grand Bahama. The MPs in Grand Bahama are labeled and will from this day forth be known as "men without conscience". More businesses have been shut down under this callous FNM government in Grand Bahama than any other government in the history of The Bahamas, more people are out of work as the "men without conscience" idly make frivolous excuses and false promises.

This “Job Creation and Empowerment Summit” is such a timely and relevant platform, as it gives the Progressive Liberal Party an opportunity to begin sharing our ideas to create sustainable jobs for thousands of Bahamians throughout The Bahamas.

I’ve spent a lot of time looking back tonight, at PLP accomplishments in our prior term. I want every Bahamian to know – we created jobs in the past and we’re ready to do it again. You’ll be hearing many, many proposals in the next two nights, proposals for expanding opportunity for all Bahamians.

Tonight, the Chairman of our Party has spoken about Business Rebuilding Support, a new PLP proposal to help small businesses suffering from the poorly planned road works. Dr. Johnson has spoken about the innovative and comprehensive PLP plan to fight crime and reduce violence. And Dr. Major has spoken about the PLP’s commitment to double our investment in education and training, something we believe is a necessity, not a luxury. Dr. Major also introduced the Scholarship Rebate program, which offers companies business license fee rebates for sponsoring scholarships.

Allow me to add a final new proposal tonight: new Technology Centers, across the nation, to expand access to the computer and information technology skills we all need to thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I can’t stand the idea of so many Bahamians getting left out or left behind. We intend to work with the private sector and with civic partners to build world-class tech centers where Bahamians of all ages can receive instruction and upgrade their skills.

I passionately and proudly endorse the PLP and all its philosophy. The PLP has always been and remains the party for the people. When I looked at the FNM'S record and position on employment and labour, in good conscience, I could no longer support them. The PLP, unlike the FNM, which we have watched line the pockets of all the big businesses in this country in the past 4 ½ years, has always believed in the Bahamian people. The FNM helps people only when it is convenient and expedient to do so – in other words, every five years or so.

But when you're in the PLP, you're among people whose commitment to the people is genuine. People all over The Bahamas have shared their troubles with me. I am especially moved when my constituents come to see me to share their hardships. The hotel worker who watched his days cut from five to four to three to two...how can he survive like that? The parents who had been proud of their hard-earned middle class status who now struggle with electricity bills and school uniforms and lunch money. How can their children be expected to learn and grow and thrive, if their basic needs are not being met? As my grandmother would say, this problem is 'far-reaching' – I'm not talking about isolated cases, I'm talking about a shamefully large segment of the population that is underwater and in trouble.

How can we create a future of shared prosperity when our children are exposed to such hardships and suffering and violence? I haven't heard the FNM offer any kind of answer to that question – in fact, I haven't even heard them ask the question. They don't listen, and they don't have a plan.

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The PLP does listen, and we're prepared to act. We believe in our students, and believe they deserve the best quality education. We believe in Bahamian entrepreneurs, and believe they deserve affordable credit and technical support. We believe in our workers, and believe they deserve access to the training they need to make their jobs secure.

We believe in the unemployed, too, people who are looking for a way forward.

We will seek to empower The Bahamian people and expand their horizons to prosperity and success.

From the very beginning, the PLP has always been a party for the people. Sir Lynden Oscar Pindling had the foresight. He created the Hotel Corp to encourage ownership thus creating jobs. The FNM has since dismantled the Hotel Corp. resulting in many hotel closures and job losses.

I'm here to reaffirm to you that the PLP always has and always will believe in The Bahamas and we will do all within our power to ensure that the people of The Bahamas will never doubt or have to question, whether or not we believe in them.