



## **Speaking Notes**

**Dr. the Hon. Hubert Minnis  
Prime Minister**

**Resolution to Thank the  
Governor-General for  
Reading the Speech from the Throne**

**11 October, 2017**

Mr. Speaker:

I am pleased to give my support to the Resolution to thank Her Excellency the Governor General, Dame Marguerite Pindling, for graciously reading the Speech from the Throne at the opening of this new term of this ancient parliament.

To paraphrase one of my predecessors:

“We are in Her Excellency’s debt. Her posture and ... those of her predecessors in office, have demonstrated the importance of the office of Governor-General being above the political fray.”

In the Constitution, executive authority is vested in the Governor General.

The Constitution also mandates that the government of the day keeps Her Excellency informed about what her government is doing. This is a mandate that I intend to honour.

With her permission and at her convenience, I plan to deepen the longstanding convention by which a prime minister regularly calls on the Governor General to discuss matters of state.

This commitment is a part of my Government’s program of government and political reform.

We must continue to perfect and deepen our constitutional and parliamentary democracy, which enshrines ancient traditions, both necessary and relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Mr. Speaker:

A primary responsibility of the prime minister is the oversight and coordination of the Cabinet, and to ensure that the government's policies and programs are being carried out.

Accordingly, each government ministry will be asked to develop a multi-year plan, with clear annual metrics for that ministry, and in keeping with available finances and resources.

These plans will be developed by senior staff and technical officers in each ministry in accord with my Government's manifesto commitments and related objectives.

These plans will be developed with reference to the National Development Plan. My ministers will be held accountable for these plans.

In order to provide greater oversight of ministers, I have pledged not to have a substantive ministry. There are, of course, a number of items, including disaster preparedness, which remain in the portfolio of the prime minister.

I will meet with each minister individually on a quarterly basis to assess the work of his or her ministry and to help improve the effectiveness of each ministry in carrying out the Government's policies.

Both Grand Bahama and Abaco have sub offices of the Office of the Prime Minister. Sub offices will also be opened in Eleuthera, Exuma and Fresh Creek Andros.

To better connect the central government to these major islands, I plan to visit each of these offices on a regular basis. This will also improve the effectiveness of government. I have already visited the offices in Grand Bahama and Abaco.

Mr. Speaker:

As noted in the Speech from the Throne and in other communications, my Government has embarked on a program of reform and transformation. Such reform requires a long-term vision and concrete steps for change. Such change will not happen overnight.

But we are laying the groundwork for change in areas ranging from combatting official corruption to bringing local government to New Providence to dealing effectively with the New Providence Landfill to the expansion of the use of solar and renewable energy.

We will continue the important work of on-going reform in the public sector. We will establish a more independent Constituencies Commission.

We will ensure that government is more accountable. We will reintroduce the Ombudsman Bill (2017) to help make government more responsive to citizens.

We are introducing new and revised legislation to combat official corruption. This includes an Integrity Commission Bill, and a more advanced Anti-Corruption Bill, inclusive of Asset Confiscation and Public Disclosure.

We have already tabled legislation to provide for a stand-alone Office of Public Prosecution. We will ensure the appointment of honest and fair-minded individuals to the various offices and agencies which combat official corruption. This is essential if we are to stem public corruption at every level.

My Government will continue with forensic audits in order to identify wrongdoing and to stop such practices in the future. BE ASSURED THAT ONCE UNCOVERED, STATUS, POLITICS, OR FAMILY NAME, WILL NOT PERVERT PROSECUTION. We cannot simply ignore the massive abuse and theft of public funds, as some in the Opposition seem minded to do.

The Bahamian people elected this government to vigorously address the culture of corruption, which was a way of life for many in the PLP. We will continue to fulfill this mandate.

I read an article recently that stated, “you can have the best rules, the best anticorruption agency, but if your politicians are corrupt ... nothing is going to save the system.”

Political will is needed in order to address and stem corruption. This government and this prime minister have the will to confront corruption. We will promote law and order.

Mr. Speaker:

My Government's comprehensive vision for a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Bahamas includes:

1. Economic development, transformation and diversification;
2. Bolstering national security, including combatting crime and its causes as well as illegal migration;
3. Advancing democracy, good governance and freedom through government and political reform;
4. Social development, inclusive of education, health care, housing, child, youth and community development, and other elements of social well-being,
5. Promoting and protecting our cultural heritage;
6. Environmental stewardship and protection; and
7. Protecting and promoting Bahamian interests abroad.

We have a comprehensive vision for national development.

Mr. Speaker:

The Bahamas delegation to the hurricane-stricken Dominica returned home last week. We were all shocked to witness first-hand the devastation in our sister country.

It appears that a relatively small number of students from Dominica will come to the Bahamas as a part of our educational assistance effort. Most of these students will attend private institutions, with most attending church-operated schools. I again thank the Church community for their generosity of spirit and heart.

Because of the urgent need for emergency medical assistance, the Minister of Health will send a team of doctors to Dominica for a specified duration of time to be decided.

This is necessary to save lives and to prevent a humanitarian and health care disaster, which will compound the disaster brought by Hurricane Maria.

The HMBS Lawrence Major will soon embark on a historic mercy mission of a Royal Bahamas Defence Force marine vessel to a Caricom sister state.

The HMBS Lawrence Major will first visit Jamaica to take on relief supplies being donated by Jamaica to Dominica. As the House will be aware, Bahamian marines previously served in a mission to Haiti under the auspices of the United Nations.

Mr. Speaker:

One of the scenes we witnessed in Dominica was a cross still standing on the steeple of a church, that was reaching to the heavens. That cross was a symbol of hope. It is a reminder that we should be people of hope, and where there is life, there is hope.

I am proud of the overwhelming support of the Bahamian people to the effort to help bring relief to those in Dominica who have lost everything.

I believe that God will richly bless us that the people of the Bahamas offered hope and help to our neighbour in their time of trial.

It is sad that some members of the Opposition are more concerned with their narrow political interests, instead of the national interests of the Bahamas and the suffering of our neighbours.

Mr. Speaker:

As a part of our effort to reform and stabilize public finances, this is a government committed to financial prudence and good management.

The former administration unwisely ended payments to the Caribbean Catastrophic Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF). Instead of admitting that they were wrong, they continue to defend their catastrophic and risky mistake.

Under the headline, “The Caribbean’s pioneering form of disaster insurance”, *The Economist* magazine recently praised the region for the CCRIF.

*The Economist* article noted:



“On September 12th, before it could reckon how much damage Hurricane Irma had caused, Turks and Caicos got some heartening news.

“Within a fortnight the tiny Caribbean territory would get \$13.6m to pay for disaster relief. Days earlier, Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis and Anguilla were pledged \$15.6m. The sum, a substantial 1% of their combined GDP, won’t come from foreign do-gooders. It is a reward for home-grown prudence.

“Like 13 other members of the Caribbean Community (Caricom) and Nicaragua, the four had been paying into the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (CCRIF).

“Created in 2007, it has so far doled out \$69m to places battered by storms, floods and earthquakes. Unused funds are retained as reserves. Besides its own resources, CCRIF can draw on around \$140m underwritten annually by reinsurers.”

*The Economist* article continued:

“Spreading risk across Caricom and beyond—CCRIF is open to associate members such as Anguilla and, since 2015, to Central American countries—has kept premiums affordable.

“Parametric triggers release money automatically depending on how severe a calamity is (as measured by wind speed, rainfall or magnitude of tremors) rather than after a tedious damage assessment. That makes cash available in the critical early days ...

“The Caribbean pioneered sovereign parametric insurance taken out by governments, not companies or households. ...

“ ... CCRIF and the like are worthwhile, says Stefan Dercon, a disaster-finance expert at Oxford University. Insurance has not replaced broader preparations for disaster.

“On the contrary, Mr. Dercon observes, “paying for insurance forces you to think what to insure” and how to protect those assets. Some schemes dictate how payouts must be spent. ...”

*The Economist* added this very telling point. It stated:

“The Bahamas let its policy lapse and missed out on a \$32m payout after Hurricane Matthew socked it in 2016. In some territories Irma has wiped out assets worth more than annual GDP. CCRIF will cover a fraction of that.

“As similar tragedies grow more common with climate change, governments may increasingly view premiums not as a cost, but as an investment.”

The Bahamas has paid its recent premium and will continue to be a part of the Caribbean Catastrophic Risk Insurance Facility.

Because we are a far-flung archipelago, with many islands, we are negotiating to see if the Bahamas can be divided into three zones for the purpose of this facility.

Mr. Speaker:

The Government is focused, resolute and determined to improve the economic vitality of the Bahamas, and to improve the standard of living for all Bahamians.

Our vision is the ongoing development and transformation of our economy through: creating wealth and opportunity for more Bahamians; diversification within tourism, and the boosting of new and other industries; and through the reform of public finances and the public sector.

My Government is bringing fiscal discipline and order to public finances. Such discipline and order is required to forestall dire economic consequences, which can cripple growth and the longer-term prospects of the country.

If we do not get our economic house in order, the foundation and the house are at risk of collapse. Sadly, the former government was reckless, wasteful and incompetent when it came to public finances. They were not stewards of good government.

The previous five years was the worst period of governance in the modern Bahamas! This administration is reining in public expenditure in order to provide for long-term growth and economic stability.

We have created an Economic Council of The Bahamas, which is providing advice on job-creation and growth, which are critical to economic recovery.

An Ease of Doing Business Committee has been appointed. Its mandate is to make specific recommendations to make it easier to do business in the country for Bahamians and foreign investors.

My Government will detail such efforts as they are implemented.

We are laying the groundwork for the introduction of targeted tax incentives for inner city communities.

Mr. Speaker:

Development does not solely refer to public infrastructure and economic growth, though both are essential for national development.

As essential, development also refers to the cultural and social habits and mindset which help to make a country successful and well-run.

These habits include: a population committed to education and learning; the rule of law; an efficient and effective public sector; the development of arts and culture; a commitment to civility and public cleanliness; and the cultivation of values like working together for the common good and social justice, and tolerance for and the celebration of diversity.

Law and order are as essential for development. Moreover, when we ignore or disrespect law and order in small things, we tend to adopt this attitude with the bigger things.

Mr. Speaker:

I note today that the Government intends to vigorously address traffic and motor vehicle violations including: tinted glasses; parking in handicapped spots; broken lights and other violations. There will be no toleration for traffic offences.

My Government will amend existing laws to increase penalties for the infraction of laws dealing with a number of environmental issues. Those who ignore these laws will face legal consequences.

Mr. Speaker:

I advise the House that the Government will continue to address the vexing issue of illegal migration.

We will continue to root concentrate on the Immigration Department, with particular emphasis on the process for granting and renewing work permits and visas.

We will continue to process permanent residency applications for those who have legally been in The Bahamas for an extensive period of time, who have contributed to The Bahamas and satisfy the requirements.

This is a fair and just course of action.

We must be a country that abides by the rule of law. Those migrants who are here illegally must leave by December 31, 2017. After which period, they will be aggressively pursued and deported. This applies to all nationalities.

Those Bahamians and residents who employ illegal migrants have until December 31, 2017, to regularize these individuals or to stop employing them.

I implore Immigration Officers to execute their duties in a professional and humane manner.

Those who illegally employ such migrants are legally liable and they will be prosecuted. We must be a country of law and order.

Mr. Speaker:

The Progressive Liberal Party has a complicated legacy.

It led The Bahamas to majority rule and independence. It was once the compelling voice against forces who denied the dignity of the majority of our people.

However, soon after taking power the PLP was seduced by the narcotic of unbridled power.

They forgot that they ruled on behalf of the people. Deals were made to make PLPs rich. Policy was advanced to ensure PLP influence crept into every sector of our economy and society.

The public service was stacked with political appointees who did not need to work in order to get ahead.

Loyalty to “the chief” was what was important. It did not matter if you came to your government job on time. It did not matter if you showed up at all.

When you did turn up, you could run your own business out of the state's offices.

One could use government supplies and equipment at will. The PLP looked the other way. It was primarily concerned with getting rich. Many standards fell dramatically. Our culture was harmed.

Some of them got in bed with international drug traffickers who were allowed to set up shop on our islands shipping untold millions of dollars' worth of poison to North America.

Some of the poison stayed here bringing ruin to many young and promising Bahamians. Some PLPs got extremely rich in this illicit trade.

The PLP at the highest levels turned a blind eye to this cauldron of drugs and corruption, and its devastating effect on our children, on our values and on our good name as a country.

Many Bahamians developed the misguided view that hard work was not needed to succeed. Fast money was what was sought. Again, standards fell. Our culture was degraded. Much of our social fabric was ripped apart.

The party that was charged with making this nation great perverted it. Today our streets are violent. Our education standards are low.

Corruption is a way of life for too many, especially those who have gotten away with their corrupt ways for decades.

But this is a new day. My Government will prosecute the corrupt. We will make the privileged ones pay their bills just as ordinary Bahamians must pay their bills. We will vigorously fight crime and its causes through policing; by working for judicial reform with the courts; and through innovative social intervention programs such as targeted programs for youth development.

We will ensure the government only pays those who work. We will not place harsh taxes on the people and then give their hard-earned dollars away to cronies and those who easily get no-bid contracts.

The PLP laid the foundation for much of the crime in our country. They tolerated all manner of corruption for decades, including massive corruption in their last term. They put up signs in at roundabouts complaining about the murder rate during the 2012 general election.

One of them was the Leader of the Opposition, who was pictured in a photo in one of the daily newspapers smiling as he helped to hold up one of the signs. He said at the time that this was in the interest of getting the truth out.

Yet the murder rate climbed on their watch. But in the so-called interest of getting the truth out the PLP did not put up signs on the murder rate after they were elected.

Some in the PLP are more interested in crime as a political issue, than as a serious national security concern.



There is vast hypocrisy from the PLP when it comes to crime. I remind the House of a 2014 story in *The Nassau Guardian*. The story read:

“Despite being robbed at gunpoint in his home last month, Deputy Prime Minister Philip Brave Davis said The Bahamas is not ‘as dangerous as it is made out to be’.

“Davis was responding to a question from *The Nassau Guardian* about the security upgrades at his ... home following a December 8 armed robbery. ...”

In that story the Leader of the Opposition said:

“I think The Bahamas is not as dangerous as it is made out to be. We do have pockets of young men who have lost their way and are wreaking havoc, but I think it is all confined within what I call groupings.”

We should not forget that this is the same man who put up signs about crime statistics at roundabouts two years earlier during a general election.

The Leader of the Opposition also said in the newspaper article:

“We have to find ways and means of eliminating the fear of crime that cripples us, and that is what I attempted to show, that we ought not to fear crime.

“We need to look at it in the face and deal with it, and let the criminals know that we are not afraid of them. I am not.”

It is amazing that for some people, crime is a more serious issue when the FNM is in office, but not as serious when the PLP is in office.

The FNM takes crime seriously when we are in or out of office.

Along with job, and wealth-creation, combatting crime is the utmost priority of this government.

Mr. Speaker:

As a young man I came from a simple home, but I had a dream. Medicine and healing were among my passions. I want our young people to dream of being doctors and teachers; engineers and entrepreneurs; artists and hotel owners; marine biologists and fishermen; public officers and farmers. I want them to dream of building a more developed nation – one that could be an example to other small countries in the region and around the world.

My Government will invest in opportunity for our people. We seek a meritocracy. We will work every day to build a better and safer Bahamas.

We will create a fairer society – one in which you do not need to know a politician in order to succeed; where you do not need to belong to a particular political party to get fair play from your government.

My administration will be dedicated to transforming our Bahamas into one of the best and most successful small countries in the world.

This is the FNM's vision and mission.

Thank you Mr. Speaker.

May God continue to bless our country.