



MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

P.O. Box N-3217

NASSAU, THE BAHAMAS

SPEAKING NOTES BY

**SENATOR THE HONOURABLE KEITH R. BELL
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF NATIONAL
SECURITY**

On:-

The Mid-Term Budget Resolution

BEFORE THE SENATE

Monday, 18th April, 2016

**Remarks by Senator the Hon. Keith R. Bell
Minister of State for National Security
The Commonwealth of The Bahamas
Before The Honourable Senate 18th April, 2016
On
The Mid-Term Budget Resolution**

Madam President, Honourable Senators, Good morning. Today, I rise to in this Honourable Chamber to lend my full support to this Resolution to approve the Mid-term budget statement and accompanying documents made in that other place by the RightHonourable Prime Minister and Minister of Finance.

In making his statement, the Rt. Hon Prime Minister outlined the facts and figures which evidence the miraculous transformation that this Progressive Liberal Party Government has overseen. Indeed, we need only remind ourselves that just four years ago, the Free National Movement left the treasury near collapse through imprudent financial decisions and outright mismanagement.

Even their sell-off of state assets and taxes from ‘one off’ transactions did not help. We were spending more than half a billion than we were collecting – Yes Bahamians, more than half a Billion Dollars!

Today, under the leadership of the Rt. Hon Prime Minister, the deficit has been slashed. Despite a more muted recovery of the global economy than had been widely expected and the resulting less robust expansion of our domestic economy, we have nonetheless succeeded in reducing the Government Deficit from \$539 million three years ago to the projected \$141 million this fiscal year. That is some \$398 million that we are **not** borrowing - \$398 million!! MY God is an awesome God!

YET, the Opposition and their ‘spin doctors’ would have you believe that we are on the wrong track- Utter Nonsense!

Madam President, as I look around this Country, I am amazed each day of our limitless potential and the tremendous progress being made in creating a stronger Bahamas. That is not to say that we do not have our challenges- we do; but each day, we face them and build this Country. For a long time, I believed that notwithstanding political affiliation, there was sufficient commonality between all Bahamians that our intentions were all towards the same objective- that is to make this Country great.

Recently however, as we consider the national discourse, I am forced to question if that is indeed the case as there are many who have determined, that they will pursue their objective irrespective of the consequences to the Country and others.

This attitude well documented in many of our communities which continue to struggle with crime.

You want something nice, why work, just steal it. Need to pay a bill or obtain money, just hold up someone, snatch a purse or steal a car. Their only concern is their immediate need- nothing else matters.

Unfortunately, this attitude extends to crimes against the person – just kill...This extends to even when it is clear that within their criminal communities, their actions will cause an equally deadly response- the illogical nonsense continues.

This is in part why the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister and the Progressive Liberal party have been such vocal proponents of Urban Renewal and Community support. It is a frank honest recognition that our communities were being destroyed through the adoption of this reckless selfish attitude.

Madam President, the phenomenon I described is not only confined to disadvantaged communities and criminal gangs, but also seem to be infecting senior members of our communities who appear prepared to do anything in furtherance of their objectives.

You pick up the newspaper, you see it wrapped in warped inaccurate advertisements, you turn on your radio you hear the advertisements; Even in this Place their consultants sat.

How could this be seen as in the national interest? How or rather why would so many disregard logic, law and sense of national duty to become pawns?

In considering what matters to discuss today, I debated within myself if I should comment on this issue.

However, I believe that as it relates to a number of salient facts with respect to the political campaign being levied against this government, many of the misrepresentations should be corrected.

Madam President, before my appointment to this Place, I worked as an attorney with a considerable amount of my work focusing on Land and Planning law. In that role, I was part of a number of meetings with government representatives including the then Minister related to the Planning and Subdivision Act. The reason why there were meetings is because there were serious concerns voiced by members of the 'Bar' on the legislation and the negative impact it would have on land development.

In those meetings, it appeared that the government itself was not certain of what they were passing, how it would be implemented or how it actually would work in practice.

No one could understand why the Free National Government was passing such a badly drafted piece of legislation- and to make it worst, had no plan or scheme to provide all the resources needed to administer the legislation.

To give an example under the old law, to build a house on your lot, you applied for a building permit, if it met the requirements it was approved. Under the new law, you would require Site Plan Approval- which is a complex structure whereby, the application would have to be published in the newspaper and the community would have the opportunity to object - and this was supposed to happen within a government office which was already struggling to have building permits issued in a reasonable timeframe.

Needless to say, this would increase the cost of home ownership and land development, making it more expensive to purchase homes.

The FNM response was to drive the legislation through without reference to the consequences - then continues to act, issue permits and approvals without following the process of the Act. In fairness to them, necessity dictated that the government function, even though they passed legislation that created requirements that they could not be fulfilled.

I simply could not understand what their objective was in passing such a convoluted complex ill thought of legislation with such adverse consequences to Bahamians. That is until it was invoked to process the application of Peter Nygard. It all then made sense.

Madam President, I am no consultant and I have no interest in the Lyford Cay saga. As an attorney familiar with the Planning Act, I will say that it is a horrendous piece of legislation that never should have been passed. What is being told to the people is simply not true. The fact is that if the Lyford Cay saga is any example, then essentially, it is dangerous to buy land in this Country.

We have a Constitution which speaks to the right of a person to hold and keep their private property. Whilst it is expected that there should be laws to address development, it is simply not acceptable to essentially deprive a person of the use of their property through constant and protracted challenges to their development.

The sad reality is that when persons are advocating for the preservation of the Planning and Subdivisions Act, many do not have a full appreciation of the implication of that Act.

At its core, it allows anyone with deep pockets to obstruct development without an interest in the land. It is easy to ignore issues when it is not impacting yourself but imagine buying a property, the title is clear, there are no restrictions on use the land and yet, you are unable to develop the land because you are now forced to spend untold sums to fight site plan approval. It could happen to anyone who owns land and it simply cannot be allowed to stand.

This issue impacts us all and could overnight destroy our reputation as a Country which promotes foreign direct investment.

Just look at some of the nonsense said over the development of 'the Pointe' by members of the Opposition party. We had a senior party official and member of that other Place argue that the building height was restricted- not realising that they repealed the guidelines and regulations in 2010 when they passed the Planning and Subdivisions Act.

I guess saying such nonsense should not surprise anyone since they clearly did not know what they did or its implications.

Madam President, the unrelenting drive to advance at all costs appears to have taken over the Opposition such that many are perplexed on their conduct and positions on matters of serious consequence.

I suppose however, it is not new to them and given their role in creating much of the issues we now grapple with, they may have difficulty of adopting policy positions. Take Value Added Tax- the opposition voted against the Bill, - they left the treasury broke, offered and still have no alternative but voted no.

Today, hundreds in millions which they spent is being paid down by the tax revenue that VAT brings in, but again nothing from them- their suggestion of increasing exemptions has been rejected by accountants, business people and the experts – and that was the best they had.

When we turn to crime and justice, the same pattern emerges. No plan, no ideas- just a tract record of abject failure.

Today, we remain challenged in the fight against crime in our communities. We are making progress and I believe that we are headed in the right direction. The socio economic issues which plague many of our communities require a sustained coordinated attack.

The hardworking men and women of our uniformed forces are unrelenting in their efforts to keep the Bahamas safe. In the next few weeks we will begin the debate on the budget at which time I will fully outline our progress in the crime fight.

God Bless the Commonwealth of The Commonwealth of The Bahamas. I support the resolution.