

**HON. KENRED DORSETT, M.P.
MINISTER OF THE ENVIRONMENT AND HOUSING
MID YEAR BUDGET COMMUNICATION 2014-2015**

FEBRUARY 18th, 2015

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Thank you Mr. Speaker

MR SPEAKER

I rise once again on behalf of the people of Southern Shores in support of the Mid Year Budget Review Statement and this PLP administrations efforts to transform our beloved Bahamas to the benefit of us all. As always I am grateful to the people of my constituency for the opportunity I have to serve this country and for their continued support.

MR SPEAKER

The last time I spoke in this place, I said something that I think bears repeating, and that is that we can no longer trade on the triumphs of those who came before us but we must blaze new trails for those who follow us. It is very important that the Bahamian people understand this point as it would seem that some would have no

problem with us remaining exactly where we are and that is not possible, this ship is on the move. The Bahamas is in transition mode and I for one am glad that these changes are taking place under the guidance of the Member for Centreville and this PLP administration. Contrary to what arm chair pundits and others may think, it is not an easy task to run a country, especially one with the geographical makeup of The Bahamas.

MR. SPEAKER

The fact that this PLP administration has been able to accomplish so much in the face of great financial strain should be no surprise to anyone as we have done so before during our term in office from 2002-2007. The fact that this PLP administration is able to create initiatives to help the Bahamian people and to advance this country in the right direction also should not be a surprise since most of the institutions on which we still depend today were conceived and established by the PLP administration from 1967-1992. This party Mr. Speaker, has an established track record of bringing The Bahamas back to life and doing so in grand style. While I fully

understand and admit that we have many more bridges to cross and mountains yet to climb especially in regards to our social ills, employment and fear of crime; I am satisfied that the Bahamas is heading in the right direction under this Progressive Liberal Party administration.

MR. SPEAKER

There are times when I listen to certain people in the country speak or read certain articles and commentary that I am reminded of the old nursery story of 'Chicken Little'. You see Mr. Speaker, one day an acorn fell from a tree onto Chicken Little's head and he was convinced that the sky was falling and that he must tell the king. On his way to the king Chicken Little convinced everyone who asked him where he was going that the sky was falling and to go with him to tell the king. I stand here as part of the government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas to let the Bahamian people know that contrary to the preachers of doom and gloom and the eager naysayers.....the sky is not falling. The Bahamas is on the way back to her glory days and there is much to look forward to.

MR. SPEAKER

The questionable stewardship of the previous administration in regard to their management of the country's economy has been debated many times in this place. Though those on the side opposite would like Bahamians to believe that the PLP is following in their footsteps of bad management, nothing can be further from the facts. To the credit of the Members for Centreville and Golden Isles we have come a long way from where we started and are continuing in the right direction. The previous FNM administration was unsuited to manage The Bahamas economy and their fiscal policies led to a loss of \$239 million of Bahamian's hard earned money. In contrast, the PLP administration has grown the economy by 6.2 per cent since taking office. In the Mid Year Budget Communication, the Prime Minister and Member for Centreville, Rt. Hon Perry Christie stated that, "I am pleased to report that my Government has met its initial commitments to reduce the deficit and increase revenue as a percentage of GDP. We have also succeeded in reining in the growth of public expenditure." Mr. Speaker, we are committed and on target

to reduce the deficit this fiscal year by \$160 million and the economy is forecasted to grow by 8% by 2017! If that is not the right direction....what is? Maybe the Chicken littles among us can answer that question Mr. Speaker.

One need only review the previous budget communications from the Member for Centreville since 2012 to understand the we are on track. We are fulfilling our commitments to the Bahamians people while simultaneously being prudent in our spending and reducing the countries deficits. This is an example of good fiscal management of which the side opposite should take note. Some may recall that the accounting firm of KPMG released an analysis of the 2014-2015 budget in which it was stated that, "Our overall view is that this budget is A GOOD STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, given the current macroeconomic environment and the fiscal issues being faced by The Bahamas government." This of course is the same budget that those on this side opposite voted against. A stance that to this day is still puzzling and clearly was nothing more than a publicity stunt meant to try to make Bahamians believe that this

government is a dismal failure like they were in managing the nation's fiscal concerns. But the stunt did not work Mr. Speaker. Indeed it backfired. You can imagine the member for Killarney aspires to be Prime Minister but he voted against civil servants getting paid. The member wants to lead the country yet he chose to vote against BAHAMIAN pensioners and those who depend on social services. He talks about advancing the interests of young people and ensuring that they have jobs but he voted against the Educational budget which includes scholarship funding for our young people. Killarney cannot be serious about supporting our public school teachers, police or Defence force officers when he was not even prepared to approve their salaries for the current fiscal year. As far as I am concerned he lost his moral authority to ask any question about this budget when he voted against it last year!

MR. SPEAKER

The member for East Grand Bahama said the government had more luck than it was good, or something to that effect. Mr. Speaker every success we attain is due to reasoned, well thought deliberate

action....NOT LUCK. Mr. Speaker, through you, I will also bring to the member's attention a quote attributed to to the Roman philosopher Seneca. The quote is as follows: "luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity". Mr. Speaker on the road to victory in 2012 the PLP was prepared and ready to govern on day one. The people gave us the opportunity to serve in May 2012. You say luck....I say we were prepared for the opportunity to govern.

MR. SPEAKER

One need only to follow the budget presentations made by the Member for Centreville; to realize that the rhetoric being touted by the opposition that the PLP is all talk and no action holds less water than a sewing thimble. For example Mr. Speaker, in the 2012/2013 Mid Year Budget Statement which was delivered in this place on February 25th, 2013, the Minister of Finance and Member for Centreville announced the launch of Value Added Tax. He said, "Recurrent Revenue will be significantly and structurally enhanced through a wide range of measures, including:

- the establishment of a Central Revenue Agency to strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of revenue collection across a number of major taxes.
- As set out in the White Paper on Tax Reform, the Government is implementing a broad tax reform package that includes the introduction of a Value Added Tax (VAT) in July 2014.....”

Although the implementation of Value Added Tax was postponed (to allow for further public education and private sector readiness) the fact still remains that we committed to tax reform in the Charter for Governance, we announced our intentions, in this place, to introduce Value Added Tax and as I stand here in February 2015 it has been done. It has been implemented smoothly and provides a fair and equitable system in the Bahamas. In contrast, the Opposition went from implementing VAT before May 2012 to voting against the legislation. Then they promised to repeal VAT in the interest of the middle class and poor, then after the smooth implementation of VAT they promised to only repeal SOME VAT categories not the

entire legislation. If this be the trend, the Flip Flop National Movement should be back on the VAT band wagon in short order.

Mr. Speaker, the Opposition cannot think that it can just oppose for opposing sake when it is obvious that the fiscal initiatives of this administration are working. It has already been reported that in the month of January 2015, \$10.9 million dollars was collected in Value Added tax funds by the Customs Department with an additional \$5 million being deferred due to Head of Agreements with various hotels and companies which fall under the Industries Encouragement Act. This is a good indication that the government will meet its projected VAT revenue of approximately \$300 million at years end. The bottom line is VAT will generate revenue that will be put toward services to benefit all BAHAMIANS and reduce BAHAMIAN debt. That is a step in the right direction.

MR. SPEAKER

In the 2013-2014 budget the government outlined its intention to modernize and reform the administration of real property tax. The Member for Centreville said in his communication that, “Specific

reforms have been developed which could significantly increase property tax revenues. Our reform process is continuing and, in this Budget, we have included a legislative amendment to increase the coverage of the property tax roll. We will also modernize the Information Technology system supporting the administration of the tax, and equip the staff of the RPT unit to undertake Computer Mass Appraisal. It has been reported that over \$50 million dollars in Real Property Taxes were collected during the period July to December 2014. We said we would do it and it is being done. Those are only two examples Mr. Speaker. So I don't want the public to mind the naysayers....the PLPS is about action but more importantly we are not about business as usual.

MR SPEAKER

I now turn to my portfolio in this discussion on the management of the government's accounts for the mid-term period beginning 1 July 2014 and ending 31 December 2014.

During the first half of the 2014/15 fiscal period, all of the departments and units in the Ministry of the Environment &

Housing exercised fiscal restraint in spending. Under Head 72 (which includes the Department of Forestry, the Botanic Gardens, the BEST Commission and BNGIS), the Ministry was allocated \$3,610,061 for recurrent expenditure and as of 31 December 2014 we have spent 40.76% of that sum. The Department of Environmental Health Services, Head 65, was allocated \$32,364,052 for recurrent expenditure and to 31 December 2014 had spent 43.13% of that amount. The Department of Housing which was allocated \$1,953,695 for recurrent expenditure, had spent up to 31 December 2014 41.43% of that amount.

MR. SPEAKER

As you can see, the Ministry of the Environment & Housing and its units and departments are practicing efficiencies and operating within its budgetary allocation.

MR. SPEAKER

While fiscal discipline and restraint are critical values, we must still continue to provide projects to better the lives of the citizens of The Bahamas; and we must continue, in this Ministry where prudent, to

fulfill the role of protector and manager of the environment. We must also assist where possible with plans of action aimed at expanding economic and employment opportunities for all Bahamians. And we must also assist the government with identifying revenue earning potential. One such endeavor, Mr. Speaker, is the Environment Levy, introduced after lobbying by this Ministry, which has yielded to the government in the period under review, \$4,431,243.39 for the Consolidated Fund.

MR. SPEAKER

The staff of my ministry are hard at work as usual. There has been much accomplished within the Ministry of the Environment and Housing this year and there is much more to come before the next annual budget of 2015/2016. I have tabled many pieces of legislation in this place that have been passed and will assist those in my ministry to carry out their duties. Some of the legislation will also bring major change to how we do things in the Bahamas, especially as it concerns the environment of the country. Most recently the Electricity (Amendment) Bill was debated and passed in this place. It

is a bill that will usher in a new day as Bahamians will be able to receive credit for electricity generated through alternative energy sources. Legislation was also tabled and passed to establish the Public Parks and Public Beaches Authority, an authority that will change the way our parks and beaches are managed providing additional places for communing with nature and community events etc. My staff also worked tirelessly to draft legislation, which has been tabled in this place to govern the upstream Petroleum Industry along with creating a Sovereign Wealth Fund which will also impact the country greatly.

ENERGY REFORM

MR. SPEAKER

Energy reform is a commitment that the Progressive Liberal Party made to the Bahamian people while in opposition. Since assuming office we have made steps that place us well on our way to total energy reform. As you would recall the last time I stood in this place to make a communication was on the Electricity (Amendment) Bill which provides for generating stations to provide excess energy into

the existing electricity grid and to receive credit on their monthly bills. Though some naysayers have said that this bill will not effect the Bahamian people en mass, the fact of the matter is that there are many persons who now and for a long time have used alternative energy to power their homes and businesses. This bill should encourage more persons who have access to the means to do the same. The fact is that this is a step forward on the journey to total energy reform and will also allow for utility scale grid connected generating plants.

MR. SPEAKER

Just recently, I attended the 5th Session of the Assembly of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) held in Abu Dhabi, UAE. The Bahamas has recently joined IRENA. One of the main reasons for us becoming a part of this organization was their advancement of international standards associated with renewable energy technologies. They have committed to assisting The Bahamas in developing our national standards as regards renewable energy sources. This is important as we move forward in our renewable

energy deployment efforts. Mr. Speaker, during the 5th Session of IRENA The Bahamas was elected a council member representing the Caribbean for the year 2016.

We have also entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Carbon War Room and the Ten Island Challenge. The Ten Island Challenge was established to assist nations such as ours in their transition from 'heavy dependence on fossil fuels to the use of renewable energy resources.' Under that programme 20MW of utility scale solar power plants throughout our Family Islands will be advanced. Having regard to the fact that when the Electricity Amendment Bill is passed by the Senate and becomes law an additional 25MW of solar or wind through the Residential Energy Self Generation PROGRAMME will be allowed to connect to the grid, the country will be well on its way to meeting its minimum RE target of 30% by 2033.

MR. SPEAKER

I was apart of a delegation headed by the Prime Minister to the Caribbean Energy Security Summit which was held in Washington

D.C. Hosted by U.S. Vice President Joe Biden. This meeting was held to discuss the way forward for the Caribbean in “promoting cleaner and more sustainable energy future”. The summit concluded with a joint statement being released by the White House in which a commitment was made to the following:

- Comprehensive, planning-based and research-driven approaches to energy transition, including implementation of pilot and demonstration projects, based on successful models so that individual clean energy projects are part of a fully integrated, climate-resilient energy transition plan toward clean sustainable energy for all.
- For Caribbean countries, necessary and specific reforms , including recommendations from the 2013 CARICOM Energy Policy and the outcome of the 2015 Dominican Energy Pact, to support policy and regulatory environments that facilitate the introduction of new technologies favoring sustainable and clean

energy that provide legal certainty for investors and improved predictability in price and supply for users.

- Where viable, alignment of national legal and regulatory approaches to facilitate greater clean energy investment throughout the region, provided that countries can access finance and other resources on affordable terms, to set the stage for future electrical interconnection in keeping with the goals of Connect 2022.
- Where technically and commercially feasible, promote and develop affordable: (i) no- or lower carbon electricity generation through wind, solar, geothermal power, hydropower, bio-energy, ocean energy, energy recovery from waste, and other clean energies; and (ii) energy efficiency measures. Recognizing also, that alternative fuels, such as natural gas, can play a useful bridging role.

- Open, transparent, competitive and criteria-based processes, including liberalization where cost effective, to procure energy investment and facilitate access to finance for cleaner and climate resilient energy projects and infrastructure.
- Data and energy information exchange and coordination with, between, and among countries and stakeholders to minimize duplication and enable the monitoring and evaluation of energy projects to maximize the impacts of efforts toward fully integrated, low carbon and climate-resilient energy transition plans.

The goals expressed at the Caribbean Energy Security Summit are in line with those expressed by the government of The Bahamas for our own energy sector. I am pleased with the progress that is being made and will continue to ensure that we move forward in this regard.

I also had the opportunity to represent The Bahamas at the CARICOM Council for Trade and Economic Development (COTED) Meeting focused on Energy which was held this month in Guyana. This main topic for discussion was the establishment of the

Caribbean Centre for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency (CCREEE). The centre will provide support and coordinate the Regional renewable energy and energy efficiency programmes.

MR SPEAKER

It is important The Bahamas be represented at such meetings as we are on our own journey to total energy reform that assistance that is available through technical assistance, advice and monetary assistance in greatly needed as we move toward meeting our goals

ENVIRONMENT OVERSIGHT AND PROTECTION

MR. SPEAKER

In the first half of the 2014/15 fiscal period, the Ministry of the Environment & Housing continued to provide for the protection of the environment upon which national development is based. The Bahamas Environment Science Technology (BEST) Commission implemented 3 projects sponsored and/or co-financed by United Nations Organizations such as United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Global Environmental Facilities (GEF). One such is the Second National Communication Report for

eventual submission to the UNFCCC. Preparation of the Third National Communication Report is underway. In addition, technical training in climate modeling and energy scenario modeling were provided to increase the capacity of technical experts within government.

MR. SPEAKER

As The Bahamas leads the world in the percentage of people living in coastal zones, the Ministry is now fully engaged with the IDB in implementing the Feasibility Studies for a Climate Risk Resilient Coastal Zone Management program (IDB) which was officially launched in January 2014. The outcome of this project will be strengthened capacity for the phased establishment of a climate risk-resilient Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM) Program in The Bahamas. An expected outcome of this project is optimized contribution of the coastal zone to national sustainable economic development and the building of resilience to coastal hazards, including the impacts of climate change. The implementation of a risk-based ICZM approach will also assist the country in meeting the

development target of 20% conservation of the near shore environment by 2020.

We are now fully engaged in the process for reserving Marine Protected Areas (MPAs). Consultation through Town Meetings is underway to inform Bahamians on opportunities for the MPA for now and future generations. A recent meeting was held on February 9th, 2015 in New Providence.

MR. SPEAKER

The Ministry's relations with our NGO partners continued to be a good one. The Bahamas National Trust (BNT) continued to provide support and assistance to my ministry supporting initiatives coordinated by the Bahamas Environment Science and Technology Commission and the Forestry Department, as well as other environmental initiatives coordinated by the Ministry.

The BNT supported the Ministry in the successful repatriation and translocation of the rock iguanas (*Cyclura rileyi cristata*), and in December, in collaboration with San Salvador Living Jewels and the Gerace Research Center, hosted an Iguana Monitoring Workshop on

San Salvador. The workshop was free and sought to involve local communities in the monitoring of their local iguana populations.

MR. SPEAKER

One example of synergies between the Ministry of The Environment & Housing and the BNT is the project for the development of Lake Killarney which is the brainchild of the Right Honourable Member for CENTREVILLE. At the request of the Prime Minister, my Ministry, the BNT, the Nature Conservancy and other stakeholders will develop a proposal for the development of Lake Killarney as recreational green space for New Providence, incorporating in phases nature trails, camping sites, sightseeing, eco-tours and kayaking.

THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

MR. SPEAKER

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) has provided technical support, including GIS mapping, to the government as we seek to complete the consultation process of the declaration of the Marine Protected Areas. Together, we have circulated all proposed boundaries via the web, newspaper, and local government offices between October and

December 2014. Proposed boundaries were also published on the local community channel (TV13) and via radio PSA. The Ministry of the Environment has been compiling comments and input from the public during this period. Once declared the MPAs will assist in further protecting the precious marine resources that underpin tourism in the Bahamas. The MPAs will also be a direct economic drive by forming the backbone of a “Blue Economy.” To help raise awareness among tourists of the Bahamas’ ongoing efforts to protect our marine environment, The Conservancy is partnering with the Ministry of Tourism to erect an MPA display in the newly renovated Festival Place. The MPA Display forms part of the Government’s effort to revamp and revitalize the gateway for millions of cruise ship passengers into our county. The display speaks to the Bahamas’ commitment to the Caribbean Challenge Initiative and provides information about ongoing efforts to expand the protected area system throughout The Bahamas and the diversification of our tourism product to include greater focus on eco-touristic opportunities throughout our islands.

During the first half of this fiscal period, TNC continued its work on coral restoration. With public and private partners, the Conservancy is monitoring and working to restore the health of our coral reefs. In 2014 TNC expanded its underwater coral nursery off New Providence and Andros. This will eventually provide a supply of endangered corals to transplant onto damaged reefs – bringing them back to life. Coral reef restoration will assist with maintaining the shoreline protection offered by reefs and will continue to attract tourists to this iconic underwater ecosystem.

In the summer of 2014 The Conservancy partnered with Stuart Cove to offer a specialty PADI coral restoration course. This eco-friendly/conservation course has been designed and written by the Nature Conservancy, and Stuart Cove Dive Bahamas is the first dive shop in the Caribbean to offer it. During the course divers learnt coral identification, biology, reproduction, why coral nurseries are needed and how the nurseries are created and maintained. By the end of the course divers were certified to assist in the coral nursery restoration including cleaning of coral structures and identification of

paling, bleaching, predation and disease. The course is available for tourists and Bahamians and is now a part of the regular excursion packages offered by Stuart Cove.

Through support from the Atlantis Blue Project Foundation, the Conservancy assisted scientists, Dr. Craig Dahlgren and Dr. Patricia Kramer, with the writing and production of the first ever New Providence and Rose Island Coral Reef Health Score Card. Officially released in January 2015, the Coral Reef Report Card, based on a five-year study to evaluate the health of the coral reefs of New Providence and Rose Islands, shows that despite the impacts these reefs have endured over the last forty years, there is hope for their recovery by implementing proven conservation measures. Though half of the reefs in the New Providence area are in fair to good condition and about half are in poor condition, the areas studied still have their reef structure intact and provide habitat for key species that will be essential to bring back the reefs of these islands. TNC along with its partners are now excited to move on to the next steps which include creating a Coral Reef Report cards for the coral reefs

of Andros Island and eventually a report card for the reefs of the whole country.

B.R.E.E.F

CORAL REEF SCULPTURE GARDEN AT CLIFTON

OPPORTUNITIES FOR ECONOMIC ADVANCEMENT

FORESTRY

MR. SPEAKER

During the first half of this Budget period, the Forestry Unit continued activities under the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization's Technical Cooperation Programme (TCP)/Forestry Training Activities. In October, A second logging pilot took place in Norman's Castle. Similar to the previous logging pilot, 5 Bahamians were recruited and skilled as forest workers. There were harvested trees from a thinning site and a regeneration site in mature forest with trees that are significantly bigger than in the Spring City forest. In December, the final workshop Prescribed Burning was organized in collaboration with the RBPF Fire Services on New Providence with assistance of BNT. The workshop was led by Chris Bergh

(TNC), Bob Bale and Alex Belote (both WRI). Participants started the workshop with lectures and an introduction to prescribed burning equipment. In the Coral Harbour forest, the actual burns were organized. Each training workshop was successful in fulfilling the mandate of the Forestry Unit and the Ministry of the Environment and Housing. These workshops enhanced the skill set of employees and potential employees while also yielding vital forestry data to ascertain the economic potential of the various forests. This information can then be used to further assist in revitalizing the Bahamian timber industry.

The FAO TCP managed by the Forestry Unit was successfully completed in December 2014.

MR. SPEAKER

The Forestry Regulations 2014 also became law and was gazetted. These Regulations give effect to the Forestry Amendment Act which assists in the revitalization of forestry in The Bahamas and the declaration and protection of the National Forest Estate.

Lindar Industries, the holder of a five year license to thin out selected areas of pine forest on Abaco Island, for the manufacture of high end forest products provided a much needed boost to revitalizing the forestry and timber industry in The Bahamas thereby fulfilling one of the mandates of the Forestry Unit. The Lindar Industries project continued successfully in 2014, and provided royalty revenues (\$8,696.73) to the Government from sale of pine round wood (329 m³/tons).

ADDITIONAL INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE FOR
FORESTRY

MR. SPEAKER

A Project Coordinator was recruited to prepare the project preparation grant for the Global Environment Facility (GEF) Full-Sized Project (FSP) proposal related to the land degradation focal area strategy, entitled Pine Islands –Forest/Mangrove Innovation and Integration (Grand Bahama, New Providence, Abaco and Andros) The PROJECT Preparation Grant process commenced in 2014. This will adopt a multi-disciplinary approach to the conservation of

biodiversity and ecosystem services, and further contribute to the linkages between ecosystems and human well being. It has been identified as the highest of priorities by the GEF Secretariat and the Government of The Bahamas.

MR. SPEAKER

The staff complement of the Forestry Unit is slowly increasing. The Public Service Commission is currently processing applications for three additional staff under the Permanent and pensionable establishment as Forest Supervisors, and Forest Assistant I, respectively. This will bring the staff complement in the Forestry Unit to some six persons.

The Bahamas Public Parks and Public Beaches Authority Act, 2014, drafted by the Forestry Unit, was passed in the first half of this Budget Cycle. The Bill was and was passed by both Houses. With an adequate budget and sufficient and competent human resources, the Public Parks Authority stands every chance of being successful. This Act is consistent with the Ministry's plan to create and properly manage green spaces for the enjoyment of Bahamians.

IMPROVING ACCESS TO DATA FOR DECISION MAKING
THE BAHAMAS NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION
SYSTEM

MR. SPEAKER

The Bahamas National Geographic Information System (BNGIS) Centre celebrated its 10th Anniversary in July and produced the first series of stamps that depicted GIS technology. This event highlighted how essential the work of the Centre is to help solving many problems that emerge from time to time in areas such as national security, environmental protection, healthcare, land use, utility infrastructure, marine and coastal zone management, energy, matters related to climate change and disaster preparedness, as well as in areas of educational and social inequalities and other programs stipulated in the Millennium Development Goals.

The Ministry continued to facilitate the Centre's transition to Departmental status. The Geospatial Advisory Council has been appointed to commence dialogue on matters related to co-operative data sharing as well as for exploring areas where significant synergies

can be facilitated to improve governance efficiencies. As the focal point for all matters related to the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management Initiatives, the BNGIS Centre is currently playing an active role in the proposed development of a Global Geodetic Reference Frame by the Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management that was established by the Economic and Social Council of the UN. In December 2014, BNGIS participated in preliminary training for the establishment of a regional geodetic infrastructure which received \$4 million in funding from the Mexican Government. BNGIS continued to provide technical support to agency specific initiatives/projects. One such was with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, on matters related to the United Nations Convention on Laws of the Sea, in particular performing complex geodetic calculations regarding the delimitation of the country's maritime borders between The Commonwealth of The Bahamas and the USA, as well as providing assistance with matters related to submission on The Bahamas' claim to the Outer Limits of the Continental Shelf. In more general matters, BNGIS

continued technical support to multiple agencies in the areas of Health, national security, disaster preparedness and other sectors.

DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

MR. SPEAKER

KEEPING THE ENVIRONMENT CLEAN

During the period under review, the Department of Environmental Health Service (DEHS) vigorously pursued the elimination of shanty towns and successfully completed removal from three locations: Joe Farrington Road; Faith Avenue, where 133 structures were demolished; and scores were demolished in the Sandbank in Treasure Cay. The programme continues and more shanty towns will be demolished as funding permits.

Mr. Speaker,

Under the Derelict Vehicles Program, over 500 hundred vehicles were removed. In the second half a more aggressive campaign will be advanced when The Derelict Vehicle Amendment Bill takes effect.

The Vehicle Emission Regulations have been drafted and are presently being circulated for stakeholder and public consultation. Those consultations will also examine the quality of the fuels the downstream Petroleum Sector imports for sale to BAHAMIANS and use in our vehicles.

MR. SPEAKER

In the area of capacity building, the DEHS has an active training/building program. The training program encompasses practical and theoretical, local and international. To date persons have been trained in various advanced mosquito identification, oil spill response and remediation, urban and industrial environmental management, ULV machines repair and calibration, green growth, fishery products, standards in refrigeration and air conditioning and in solid waste management.

The DEHS continues to work with the Pan American World Health Organization (PAHO) on the Strategic Approach to Integrated Chemicals Management (SAICM). The overall goal of the project is to improve chemical safety in The Bahamas. The project seeks to set

an organizational structure composed of public, private and civil society actors; assess our infrastructure and capacity; and prepare a National Plan on Chemical Safety. The project has completed its assessment of infrastructure and capacity and is completing its situation analysis and is completing a Proposed Chemical Event response Plan.

MR SPEAKER

The DEHS has also embarked on another bulk waste collection exercise. The last time this exercise was undertaken over one million pounds of waste was collected. Bulk waste consist of green waste and white waste. Green waste being hedge clippings and other gardening debris and white waste being items such as household furniture, appliances, mattresses. The trucks that have been going around have found furniture, refrigerators, stoves, mattresses etc thrown in bushes, along remote roadsides and along shorelines. I must state at this juncture that we as citizens must do better when it comes to the indiscriminate and illegal dumping of waste. It is unconscionable to drive to the wetland and leave your mattress or

old stove or broken furniture on the shoreline. It is not right to politely or impolitely place mountains of garbage on the first vacant property that you come across instead of driving straight to the New Providence Landfill. It is also not advisable to keep bulk waste around your home for lengthy periods of time as they may become homes for rodents and other pests.

MR SPEAKER

As is well known, the management of the New Providence Landfill was taken over by Renew Bahamas in 2014, while the government of The Bahamas remains the owners. Recently the landfill has experienced fires which were allegedly the result of arson. To the credit of Renew Bahamas those fires were extinguished in a timely manner and at no expense to the government. At the time of a statement that I released to the media in June of 2014 the government had already spent approximately \$600,000 on the extinguishing of various fires at the landfill during that fiscal period. Renew Bahamas has also been able to provide the property with

various security measures. However, these measures will have to be enhanced and possibly supported by the Government.

Renew Bahamas has also begun work on the construction of a \$4 million, 125,000 square feet, Materials Recycling Facility (MRF) at the landfill. This will be the very first MRF in the country and usher in a new era in waste management in the country. Ground has been broken and we are on our way to having a functioning MRF in the capital. The projected time for completion is this April functioning at full capacity by May of this year. For those who do not know a MRF is a facility which receives, sorts and prepares items for recycling. Those who wish to see the progress being made can visit Renew Bahamas facebook page where there are photos posted.

HOUSING

THE DEPARTMENT OF HOUSING

The Department of Housing continues to try to satisfy the constant demand for affordable housing.

In Strachan Hills Subdivision, almost 22 units have been completed despite challenges with cavities on several lots that were only

discovered after construction started. The Department of Housing also began the exercise of constructing 4 system houses that have turned out extremely well and it looks forward to using this technology in the future.

In Fire Trail Subdivision, construction has begun on three lots and preparation to clear land for the construction of an additional 8 units has commenced.

In Sunset Subdivision Extension plans are underway for the construction of 8 units. The property is presently Crown land and all assurances have been given that in short order this property will be conveyed to the Department of Housing.

In Dignity Gardens Crescent where the Department expects to construct 9 units, all the infrastructure is in place and the Ministry of Public Works & Urban Development has approved the plans for this development to proceed.

In Romer & Reeves Streets, the Department is working on the process of compulsory acquisition that would allow it to construct 10 units on these lots.

We are also in the process of finalizing plans for the construction of 303 homes in Carmichael Village and 60 in Ardastra. Carmichael Village is planned to be the nation's first green housing development. Each home will include a PV solar grid tie connected energy generating system. These housing projects are some of the public-private partnerships which I forecasted in my budget communication this past June. At present there are new models being considered along with new construction methods that are in line with the environmentally friendly theme. As always I will keep the public abreast of progress as it happens regarding this project.

The Department of Housing has also been proceeding with housing developments on the Family Islands. On San Salvador, it has identified 15 lots in our existing subdivision that will provide some relief to the demand for housing on this island. On Abaco in Spring City, further development should take place in our existing subdivision to alleviate some of the housing demands that exists.

MR. SPEAKER

The demand for repairs to existing houses in the government housing programme keeps the Department of Housing busy, along with repairs and maintenance of its rental units. A comprehensive assessment of the Windsor Lane (Big Yard) rental unit complex has been conducted and it is hoped that this exercise will provide the blue print for the handling of the other properties that we intend to attack in a similar manner. Regular cleaning contracts have been issued to keep these properties in the most sanitary condition possible.

MR SPEAKER

The government's housing programme has seen its challenges in the past months. Mainly in regard to those who have applied and had been assigned to homes obtaining mortgage financing. It was initially planned that all homes would be fully occupied by December of last year. However, we are working as we speak to correct these issues and to ensure that existing homes and those recently constructed are occupied by Bahamian families with their mortgages firmly in place. This is vitally important as these homes were

constructed with a loan from the National Insurance Board which must be repaid as it is the nations social safety net. I would also like to urge BAHAMIANS to be truthful when they complete their loan applications. Far too often, applicants are not revealing all of their commercial loan obligations and judgments against them. This causes a lot of delays in the loan approval process and warrants re-assignment. Approximately 12 of the homes assigned in Strachan's have had to be re-assigned for similar reasons, which delays the ability to get completed homes occupied quickly.

MR SPEAKER

I have encouraged the Bahamas Mortgage Corporation to aggressively pursue and provide (private) mortgage loans to individuals seeking to construct, purchase, repair and/or enlarge their own home, or persons purchasing vacant land to construct a dwelling home.

Lending Activity

In this regard, under the Government Initiated housing program and particularly Private Initiated home and lot purchase and/or

construction program, BMC since we took office, has been able to place new mortgages in its portfolio as follows:

Government Initiated Mortgages

- One hundred & sixty-one (161) loans
- \$15,613,707 (fifteen million, six hundred thirteen, seven hundred and seven dollars)

Private Initiated Mortgages

- One hundred & seventy-six (176) loans representing 176 new homes
- \$21,934,251 (twenty-one million, nine hundred thirty-four, two hundred and fifty-one dollars)

TOTAL-\$ 37,547,958 (thirty-seven million, five hundred forty-seven, nine hundred fifty-eight dollars)

A key component in this regard has been the drive to partner with private home developers to meet the country's demanding housing needs, as per my direction.

No new BMC bonds were issued to facilitate these new mortgages, as improving the current status of the fund for future maturities is of

utmost importance to BMC, thus the desire not to worsen the position of the BMC Bond Sinking Fund.

RENTAL UNITS

MR SPEAKER

My ministry has also embarked on a programme to repair the government's rental units. We are currently in the process of recouping outstanding rental payments from persons who occupy the units. It must be understood by the persons who occupy these rental units that these units are for persons who are in need of assistance, they must be kept clean, they are not generation property to be passed down from parent to child or other family members and this is not a FREE housing programme. These units are publicly owned and we must live up to our respective responsibilities...as landlord and tenant.

MR. SPEAKER

I commend this government on the efforts being made on behalf of the Bahamian people. I commend this government for making the tough decisions and being able to face the detractors. I commend this

government for being about change and transformation. I commend this government for continuing in the PLP tradition of not being afraid to try new things because that is how we got NIB, Development Bank, Mortgage Corporation and others. I also commend this government for the innovation, creativity and thought that is being given to how the country can move forward moving away from the adhoc governing style of our immediate predecessors.

In the face of many naysayers, challenges and delays we are getting the job done. The people of this country can rest assured that this government has their best interest at heart and it is only for them to do the same by taking advantage of the programmes and initiatives that are being made available to them. While the Opposition hopes that the people buy into their doom and gloom crusade, things are happening. While the naysayers would have you believe that this Progressive Liberal Party administration is doing nothing, much progress is being made. While some people are satisfied to dwell in

negativity there are others that are being uplifted and are uplifting others to be able to advance their dreams and aspirations.

I want the Bahamian people to know that should all go as planned good days are here but even better days are on the way.

Colleagues, we are moving in the right direction.

Southern Shores supports this resolution.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.