

**2019/2020 BUDGET CONTRIBUTION OF HON. ADRIAN GIBSON, MP (LONG ISLAND) & EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN OF THE WATER AND SEWERAGE CORPORATION**



**Date: Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2019**



Mr. Speaker:

I am distinctly privileged to rise in this place on behalf of the great and hardworking people of Long Island, whose indomitable spirit is legendary. I thank them—my home people for the opportunity to serve on their behalf—and assure them of my unyielding commitment to them.

Mr. Speaker:

I am grateful to my Executive Team. I recently took them all to dinner to fellowship with them and express my love and appreciation for them. As we move towards fresh Association elections, I cannot put into words how much the support, encouragement, efforts and advice of these wonderful people mean to me. I thank them for all that they do. I appreciate you all. We remain focused on moving Long Island from strength to strength and, to borrow the words of President Trump, “making Long Island great again.”

Mr. Speaker:

I would like to begin by again wishing the fathers of my constituency a Happy Father’s Day. I would particularly like to wish my grandfather Bishop Edward Gibson—with whom I grew up—and my father a Happy Father’s Day as well.

Mr. Speaker:

This is the people’s budget.....so, let me say at the outset that I support it. That said sir, I would like to first address matters in my constituency.

### **LONG ISLAND MATTERS**

Mr. Speaker:

Long Island continues to face socioeconomic challenges due to a slow economy, unemployment and underemployment, lack of fully operational banking facilities, infrastructural challenges and various other shortcomings. That said, given some of the initiatives of this government, Long Islanders are becoming hopeful again; Long Islanders believe that the Minnis Administration will make Long Island great again!

## **International Airport**

Mr. Speaker:

I am grateful to note that our government has pledged to construct a new, fully functioning international airport in Long Island during the 2020/2021 budget. I thank the Honorable Prime Minister for making this commitment to the people of Long Island and respectfully assure him that, though I have been pursuing and nagging him a lot, I cannot and will not stop the nagging until we commission our new international airport. Sir, kindly forgive in advance.

This airport would represent the turnaround that the economy of Long Island desperately needs. Its construction would lead to an economic boom in Long Island, with construction activity likely picking up and new spin off businesses, from taxis to tour companies to restaurants and bars to fishing to rental cars to hotels/motels/bed and breakfasts, etc. This is the stimulus that the Long Island economy needs.

Mr. Speaker:

We need an airport with a runway of 6500 to 7000 feet, a decent terminal with concession and other booths that can seat about 200 people at any given time, an apron to receive the traffic, an area for customs and immigration and parking space for vehicles.

The lack of airlift is killing Long Island. This has held Long Island back.

Our economy is doldrums.....creeping out slowly but in need of sustained governmental intervention and infrastructure which would in turn spur private investment.

## **Cruise**

With President Trump now banning cruises into Cuba, this represents an opportunity for us. Mr. Speaker, through you, I say to the PM that both Gordons and Seymour/Newton Cay Long Island are aptly suited for cruises. There would also be jobs for tour operators, tender operators, crafts folk, etc.

## Water

Mr. Speaker:

Works on phase one of the Long Island water mains extension project are steadily progressing. Whilst that phase covers the capital and several large settlements, there is much more to be done. And much more will be done.

Water is a basic amenity and Long Island is one of a few major islands that were denied what I deem a universal right to potable water.

In recent months, we have installed seven 5-thousand gallon tanks in the southernmost settlements of Long Island. We have been unable to reach these settlements in this mains extension exercise due to budgetary constraints, among other factors. These settlements include Roses, Berries, Mortimer's, Wood Hill and Dunmore's. Three tanks are situated in Dunmore's.

In the Dunmore's settlement, our in-house teams have connected the community to the tanks, installing meters at nearly every house and supplying piped water. Many of these persons have never seen running water and gave all-to-familiar accounts of carrying water in buckets on their heads up the hill, etc.

We are already tendered a phase two for mains extension works in Long Island. The independent consultants and the Caribbean Development Bank—with whom we have a \$28 million dollar loan—have evaluated the bids, recommended a winning bidder and we hope to award that contract in short course.

Much like Eleuthera, Abaco, Exuma and Inagua.....WSC in-house teams have been conducting Non-Revenue Water reduction exercises in Long Island. The aim is to change out leaky pipes and fittings, preserve water and increase the water pressure given our discovery that a sizeable percentage of water was lost due to such leaks.

Mr. Speaker:

For many years, Long Islanders have been promised running water from one end to the next.

My grandparents are in their 80s and have never had running water.

We have long known that no potable water = no future development.

### **Infrastructural Works**

Mr. Speaker:

I want to thank the Minister of Works/Member for Carmichael for his noble efforts to assist in Long Island. Our island is suffering from years of neglect and degradation over years. More often than not, if we don't get "something" during FNM Administrations, we suffer and get little to nothing otherwise.

Mr. Speaker:

Over the last year, works begin on the Columbus Monument Road. The road is frequently travelled by both tourists and visitors alike. The monument is an historical and cultural site and the surrounding area is nothing short of breathtaking. This is the site of one of the best beaches in the world. The development of that site will see locals being able to set up stalls and embark upon entrepreneurial ventures. The Columbus Monument site is a major tourist attraction. It is also located near to two of the major resorts in Long Island and the location can evolve into even more of an economic driver for local entrepreneurship.

The Simms dock has been paved and, recently, the Ministry of Works issued a tender for the reconstruction of the Newton Cay Bridge and surrounding areas.

Mr. Speaker:

Whilst I don't wish to pre-empt the Member for Carmichael, I am excited to report that Long Island is in line to receive major road works over the next fiscal year. No doubt, the Member will expand upon this in his contribution.

Our roads are deteriorating. The main Queen's Highway and many of our side roads were constructed under the first FNM Administration and, whilst we have not had any works to our roads since that time, other islands who also received roads then are, in one or two instances, receiving their third round of major paving works.

We also have a number of heavily trafficked side roads that are desperately in need of repair: Oneils Road, Hogans Road, Church Street, Hardings Road (by Hardings Food store), Bridgewater and Dunmore's Road.

Over the years, Long Island has been beset by a plethora of infrastructural shortcomings that have seriously impacted and hampered our economic development and lent to residual effects such as high unemployment and underemployment, reduced interest on the part of local and foreign investors to invest large sums for fear that such business ventures would not see a satisfactory return—with the airport and water being foremost among them.

We appreciate that, whilst there is much to be done in LI, as the country's finances improve I'm sure more will come to LI. And so, Mr. Speaker, to my Long Island people, you can be assured that I have also drawn the Minister's attention to the urgent need for culverts, sink wells and trenches in certain areas, providing an extensive list of the same; to the need for bypass roads to mitigate when hurricanes damage the road network and essentially cut it in half; the need for a community center in North Long Island; and so on. He is keenly aware and I know he has these concerns at heart.

I am also counting on him to help me resolve many of the legacy infrastructural issues that have plagued Long Island, due to outright neglect and poor maintenance.

I also intend to seek the renaming of certain streets in Long Island in honor of prominent, community leaders during this term.

## **Healthcare**

Mr. Speaker:

Let me profusely thank the Member for Elizabeth for impending works in my constituency.

I note his pledge to—during the upcoming fiscal year—undertake phase one of construction and repairs at the two major community clinics, i.e. McKinseys/Deadman’s Cay Clinic and the Simms Clinic. Per the Member’s pledge at our town hall last February, I am advised that he will ensure that these entities have the capacity to provide x-ray, ultrasound and point of care laboratory tests. Notably, any equipment presently in use at either clinic is either old or obsolete.

Mr. Speaker:

I also wish to thank the Member for his pledge that his Ministry has plans to purchase ambulances for the people of Long Island. We have two major clinics....as such, I wish to note here that that would mean two. For far too long, Long Islanders have had to suffer the indignity of being carried on the back of trucks after accidents or illnesses, sometimes in the hot sun. I remember all too well, given the experience with my late Uncle Aaron who, after a traffic accident, had to wait on the side of the road and then was carried on the back of a truck to the Simms Clinic. This is very personal to me. He died that day.

I also pleased to note the commitment of the Member to the posting of a physician to the Simms Clinic. At present, for an island as vast as ours, we have one permanently posted doctor—Dr. Yvette Carter. She is one of the hardest working persons I know and she is loved by the people of Long Island. Frankly, a few months ago, Dr Carter—along with a team of dedicated and wonderful nurses— saved my grandfather’s life, travelling with him by private aircraft and then riding with him all the way to the hospital.....only for him to almost die waiting. Thank God for the interventions of Dr Unwala and the Member for Elizabeth.

At that time, Dr Carter was running from end to end. At present, Dr Carter does not presently have a fully functioning vehicle (engine failure). It is important that she gets that in order to carry out her duties effectively.

What’s more, I am also requesting additional nurses to ensure the proper staffing at both clinics; that both of the main clinics remain current and equipped for telemedicine; and an additional vehicle is purchased for the nurses to strengthen home care services to the elderly and the informed.

Mr. Speaker:

Though private visiting dentists such as my good friend Dr Larry Levin visit here and there, we need a government dentist to make more frequent and consistent visits to LI.

I would also request that an optometrist—even if roving and/or coming in once or twice per month—comes to cater to patients with eye issues.

Mr. Speaker, there is a need for an eye, nose, throat and urological specialists to visit Long Island at least once per month. Some of our people have cancer and other illnesses and cannot afford to travel to Nassau. This will also result in cost savings to individuals and families.

### **Youth, Sports & Culture**

There is a need for the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture to establish a presence in Long Island. Community sporting leagues are hardly existent and/or dead.

We are desperately in need of a youth officer. We also have no sports officer.

The principals tell me that it is a struggle to keep the school sports programmes alive.

We need a Family Island Sports Council, a Long Island Sports Council.

I would also encourage the Ministry to re-establish the Bahamas Games. That was a positive move, where we discovered some of our nation's hidden gems, our best talent across the various sports. It was a fantastic idea to hold these games every three years.

I note that there appears to have been several summer camps earmarked for Nassau, with sports such as basketball, volleyball, tennis, track and field, soccer, cycling, karate, judo, baseball and swimming. Notably, only New Providence, Grand Bahama, Eleuthera, Andros and Exuma all have summer camps (sports/youth/cultural).....and Long Island does not. I call upon the Ministry to include us in such listings going forward.

We would like sponsorship in highlighting our culture and in putting on now-defunct junkanoo events. Ten islands received allocations for senior parades in 2018/2019 and we hope that Long Island would be the 11<sup>th</sup> this year. I will be encouraging the schools and principals of Long Island to participate in Junior Junkanoo. I note that parades were held on New Providence, Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Cat Island, San Salvador, Acklins, Inagua, Mayaguana and South Andros.....I want to put in an early plug for Long Island for seed funding.



Mr. Speaker:

Given the cultural highlights of Long Island, I am pleased to hear of the revamped cultural grant programme and will be encouraging Long Islanders to step forward.

We also need more green spaces, community parks and recreational sites in Long Island. We are in desperate need of repairs and upgrades to our recreational and sporting facilities.

Mr. Speaker:

I encourage the MOYSC to extend its assistance to initiating a youth band programme in Long Island.

I also encourage Long Islanders to approach the MOYSC to participate in the Fresh Start Programme and in the youth entrepreneurship programme “Be Inspired” which offers training and seeks to facilitate the ventures of young entrepreneurs up to age 35.

### **Passport Kiosk**

Mr. Speaker:

Gone are the days when Long Islanders will have to travel to Nassau to renew and/or get a passport.

During this budgetary period, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be placing two passport kiosk in Long Island. This will save a lot of money given that one would no longer have to pay for a ticket to New Providence, stay in a hotel, pay taxi or rent a car and incur other expenses.

I emphasized to the Member for North Abaco the length of Long Island and, given the same, he has acceded to my request for a kiosk to be placed in the central/south and in the north.

I thank him for his efforts.

I also note that local will likely be hired to facilitate this undertaking.

### **Housing.....Affordable Homes Bill**

Mr. Speaker:

Over the next few months, I will be inviting the Member for Marathon to Long Island. In the wake of the Access to Affordable Homes Bill, I wish to assure the Member for we are keen to have lots—throughout the island—identified for use for housing and commercial purposes. This would allow Long Islanders an opportunity to purchase lots, with clear title, at a very affordable rate for housing.

### **Crown Land**

Mr. Speaker:

Crown land is an issue of concern for Long Islanders. There are hundreds of acres of crown land in Long Island.

Mr. Speaker:

We were extremely pleased when the Most Honorable Member for Killarney announced that the government will be reviewing and issuing crown land grants starting in the southern Bahamas. No doubt, there are many applications. Just recently, I was approached by the residents of Salt Pond who were inquiring about acquiring additional burial space as the current community grave yard—given the boundaries—is near capacity.

The granting of crown land to Bahamians would represent a paradigm shift for thousands.

### **Social Services/Urban Renewal & Social Services**

I am pleased that Urban Renewal has come to Long Island. Led by Joann Knowles, the team is working assiduously with limited resources.

There is an urgent need for furniture and computers for office personnel to effectively perform.

The Urban Renewal head still has no vehicle.

Urban Renewal in Long Island is to be commended for their work, notwithstanding the challenges.

Mr. Speaker:

We have one social service officer to service an island that is nearly 90 miles long. The provisioning of a vehicle—and perhaps another officer, given some of the socioeconomic challenges—is of utmost importance.

## **BAIC**

Mr. Speaker:

I thank the Member for Marco City for committing to repairing our Packing House in Long Island. To Maurice Minnis, Judy Knowles, Daniel Dean and the team I say: your days of walking through water in the Packing House when it rains and/or staring at the sun from your desk (due to holes in the roof) or working in substandard conditions.....those days will soon be over.

Let me applaud the Member and his Ministry for their efforts to establish handicraft workshops, in straw production, conch shell carving, soap making etc. I encourage him to add Long Island to the list of places where such workshops are conducted. We have some of the greatest artisans and craftspeople that this country has ever seen, from Dyllis Smith to Charles Knowles of O'Neil's to Ms. Major, etc.

Moreover, given that Long Island has long been a farming and fishing community, I invite the BAIC Pop-up Farmers Market to make Long Island one of its stops. We have a local farmers market. No doubt, the Pop-up Farmers Market will reinvigorate farmers and perhaps attract the attention of young persons. This view also translates to the proposed training programmes for food processors.

In the coming weeks, I intend to write to the Member and the new Chairman of BAIC to encourage BAIC to come to Long Island and offer classes to teach islanders how to preserve fruits and vegetables and make jams, jellies, straw craft and so on. These classes will teach people how to preserve their farm produce and market them into New Providence and elsewhere.

Mr. Speaker:

Raising the amount that farmers are paid at the Packing House would likely encourage more young Family Islanders to see the economic benefits of farming, to get involved.

Mr. Speaker:

Given the fact that the local department head's vehicle no longer works, I am requesting that a truck is sent to Long Island. This truck is used to transport farm produce and attend to issues relating to the department. At present, this has hampered the operations at the local Packing House.

## **Fishing**

Mr. Speaker:

Fishing is a major economic lifeline in Long Island.

I fully appreciate the fishing community's concerns about poaching and poachers robbing them of their catch by pillaging traps.

Mr. Speaker:

Let me commend the Member for Marco City for the decision not to grant compressor permits for any foreign national or any vessel during the off-season.

Mr. Speaker:

Fishermen are concerned that we have boats fishing these waters with a Bahamian captain and an entirely Dominican crew. We must take a second look at curbing and/or removing the presence of these persons on Bahamian boats. Commercial fishing should be strictly reserved for Bahamians!

We must ensure that our fishermen are not encumbered by bureaucracy in getting duty free concessions to upgrade their boats and equipment.

Mr.

Speaker:

Fishermen has expressed grave concerns about Dominicans on fishing vessels.

Given the alleged marriages of convenience by Dominicans to Bahamian women, fishermen argue that it is oftentimes difficult to believe that Dominican divers, more so than Dominican carpenters and masons, are falling in love and getting married in the Bahamas.

The American INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service) were famous for sudden pop-ups and questionnaires to couples, some of whom they suspected of marriages of convenience: One wonders if our immigration authorities question folk about their wives and husbands? Pop up at odd hours at their residences? Perhaps make inquiries about any communication barriers posed, particularly if one particularly only speaks English and the other only speaks Spanish and how they were overcome?

Mr. Speaker:

I applaud the Ministry of Agriculture and Marine Resources for looking to employ new fisheries officers and I look forward to chatting with the Member further about Long Island's allocation.

Let me also applaud the Ministry's launch of a National Diver's Training Programme. I encourage my constituents to take advantage of such opportunities for comprehensive certification. This is the capacity building we need!

Mr. Speaker:

Whilst at it, let me also encourage Bahamian fishermen—especially those from Long Island—to engage in more deep sea fishing. I have noted that the price for fish such as wahoo, tuna and so on fetch a very high price in places like Japan.

### **Farming**

Mr Speaker:

Perhaps a substation of the Bahamas Agriculture and Marine Science Institute (BAMSI) could be placed in Long Island. After all, Long Island is a farming community!

There is a lot of potential on Long Island for large scale farming. However, without adequate governmental support, the people are disheartened and discouraged.

I call upon LI fishermen and farmers to come together and form Cooperatives.

We must continue to encourage and play an even greater role in supporting light manufacturing, fisheries, agriculture and food processing on the Family Islands.

We also look forward to the establishment of a Cooperative—in the rebranded co-op sector—in Long Island. I encourage the school co-op programme to expand to all of the schools in Long Island.

Mr. Speaker:

I support sailing becoming the national sport.

Moreover, I would encourage the Member for Marco City and the government to implement sloop building programmes so that this craft can be shared and passed on for generations to come. Long

Island would be happy to launch such a programme; we have produced some of the greatest boat builders and sailors in Bahamian history, with boat building legends and sailors such as Mark Knowles willing to pass their profound knowledge of the craft.

### **Road Traffic Department/Post Office**

Mr. Speaker:

At present, Long Islanders are unable to have drivers licenses printed. They must either travel to Nassau for a printed license or walk around with a piece of paper (receipt) in their wallets. This is disgraceful. Long Islanders pay road taxes like everyone else. This has been the case for far too long.

I thank the Member for his commitment today to address that.

I want to thank both the Member for Bamboo Town for assisting in fulfilling our campaign pledge to open a permanent road traffic office in the north. For years, it has been a great inconvenience for residents of north Long Island to travel many miles away or to only have use of the services of the road traffic officer for 3 or 4 hours per day on a Tuesday and a Thursday.

Mr. Speaker:

Much like RTD, there is a need for additional hires in the local post office. Moreover, the post offices in Long Island are in need of repairs works.

Mr. Speaker:

As I move about Nassau and the Bahamas, I note that various kinds of vehicles are being used for taxis and liveries. I encourage the standardization of vehicles in the industry so that persons are not using any kind of vehicle for such purposes.

Moreover Mr. Speaker, as we move forward, I believe that we must embrace Uber and Lyft and the convenience these services provide, not to mention the fact that it could potentially create hundreds of jobs and part-time jobs. We must move with the times.

### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Mr. Speaker:

Notably, the budget of local government remains at \$640,000, down from the \$900,000 allocation it was some 5 or 6 years ago. Local government councilors complain that they need more funding for capital works.

Mr. Speaker:

I'm of the view that local government districts should be empowered to assist with real property and other tax collections. Frankly, I believe that 40-50% of revenue collected on islands should remain and be reinvested into these communities. This would help to fund capital improvements.

Frankly sir, none of the Family Islands are going to be able to be responsible for themselves economically, socially, culturally or environmentally only we capture the true essence of local government.

### **Dumps/Landfill**

The dumps are environmental hazards. The dumps in Deadman's Cay and O'neils pose a serious environmental and health hazard to residents. In Deadman's Cay, the public dump sits on wetlands, poisoning the water table and destroying the habitats of all the organisms that live there.

Some years ago, there were plans to start a landfill in Millerton. I have advised that collection sites were previously mapped out for Pinders, Mileys and Orange Grove for transfers to the landfill. I will speak further to the member about this.

Notably, unlike Exuma and San Salvador, local government pays for the collection of garbage, i.e. \$100,000 per year. Central government only maintains the dump sites. I am requesting that the same is reviewed with a view to central government taking over the expense for garbage collection.

### **Permanent bank presence**

Mr. Speaker:

Royal Bank has closed its doors. Whilst Scotia Bank provides an ATM machine and, I am advised, that another one is slated to be installed in north Long Island in short course, the residents of Long

Island are without a fully functioning bank. We must do something to immediately address their concerns, particularly given the business houses and government agencies that handle a lot of cash.

Over the last few days, we have had several break-ins: Island Luck in Long Island where \$10,000 was purportedly taken; the Midway Food Store; the Midway Restaurant and Bar, etc.

I am calling upon the government to cause the Bank of the Bahamas to come to Long Island. Our island is the only MAJOR Island without a bank. This is an urgent need for business houses, government agencies, the elderly and every day Long Islanders.

Mr. Speaker:

I support and encourage local Bahamians being given bank licenses. The Canadian banks are, generally, withdrawing services from islands where they have operated for 50 to 100 years. Moreover, I've always been curious as to why there are no American commercial banks here? Perhaps, that is another avenue to be explored!

### **Education**

Mr. Speaker:

The reality is, we have a teacher shortage in this country. There are teacher shortages in Long Island, particularly in core BJC and BGCSE subjects.

The current buildings are run down. How can one justify a little more than 250 students (80 at NLIHS, 180 at NGM) and 40 teachers?

Its high-time we start streamlining these schools. There is no economic rationale for all the schools we see. This is not just a Long Island issue, its country-wide. The combined Central High School, which was on the drawing board since 1998, makes more sense.

I remember attending Simms Primary School when it was in the grave yard, falling into graves and using an outside toilet. Our classrooms were partitioned off by wooden displays in on big open hall. And then former PM Hubert Ingraham came along and constructed the new Simms Primary School which I attended from January to June before attending high school. As head boy, I vividly recall escorting him about the campus. The new Simms Primary School took on students from McKanns School to Sam McKinnons Primary to Millerton Primary School—all merged into



Simms Primary School, which today has 60-plus children—a modern school that can easily house 150 students. There is a need for more amalgamation.

In Exuma, they have a lower primary—that also features kindergarten (K3 to grade 3)—and an upper primary school (grade 4 to 6). It would make good sense for the same to be reproduced in LI.

Today, the Old McKanns School is being used as the Oasis Centre; Grays School is a resource center; Scrub Hill is used by cancer society; Salt Pond All-Age used as a farmers market; Millerton is used by the church and there are plans to set up a museum; Clarence Town All-Age was converted to the police station (damaged in the storm). I'm certain the same can be done across the islands. The govt buildings can become centres of entrepreneurship, youth centres, given to NGOs, they could even be rented and the MOE could make money from them....they do not have to be abandoned.

Mr. Speaker:

Over the next year, I will be liaising with, and encouraging BTVI, to provide an extension of BTVI on Long Island to service all of the islands in the Southern Bahamas or, at the very least, to put on courses for residents.

Mr. Speaker:

We need special education teachers on Long Island. Hardly anything is in place to cater to special needs children. We have special needs children on Long Island who are kept home and hidden by their parents or who simply cannot keep up with regular classes.

Mr. Speaker:

Serious consideration must be given to a greater centralization of education at the secondary level.

I have spoken to former Director of Education Iris Pinder and to NGM Major Principal Endal Adderley....they share the view that we should move in to direction of LN Coakley, constructing a new central high school – likely situated in the Bight settlement. With the anticipated spin-offs from the airport, water works and other infrastructural initiatives, there is a desire to see more technical and vocational programmes and that could better be facilitated with one high school.

Mrs. Pinder has told me about plans that were drawn in 1998, by the Ministry of Works, for such a school.

There ought to be no need to duplicate programmes, human resources and infrastructure between two small high schools when resources could be better utilized by amalgamating both entities into the much-hyped, promised and seemingly ditched central high school.

I am also calling for the confirmation of persons who have served in positions for long period without the same: Machon Cartwright, who has been acting District Superintendent (retiring next March); Endal Adderley, who has been acting as principal for years; Cathy Cartwright, who has been acting as Vice Principal; and Monique Cartwright and Beryl Fox (retired with nothing) (janitresses unconfirmed in their positions). I will be writing to both the Member for Garden Hills and the Member for South Beach.

### **Local Government/Mail boat**

Mr. Speaker:

I have spoken to Minister Wells about the need to improve mail boat service in south Long Island. South Long Islanders continue to complain that the boat is inconsistent; shows up at the dock at any hour the captain feels; that product is spoilt due to an inconsistent schedule. The Minister has assured me that this will be rectified in short course.

### **Policing**

Mr. Speaker:

I want to praise my good friend the Member for Mount Moriah, for whom I have great respect. He is the best Minister of National Security we have in a very long time. I want to assure the people of Long Island of my confidence that he will address our policing concerns.

Mr. Speaker:

The police are experiencing gross manpower shortages on Long Island.

Sir, I have spoken to some of the officers. I also advised that two officers are have just resigned to pursue other interests, including tertiary education. A few others either retired and/or transferred in recent years. As such, and given the sheer length of Long Island, there is a need for:

- (a) Three constables in the north;
- (b) Four constables in the south (the DC station is also earmarked to be open 24 hours per day. As such, officers would be needed for smooth transitions during shift changes and it would allow officers to take their allotted time off (welfare situation);
- (c) Two jeeps, one for the north and one for the south, given the vehicular shortages;
- (d) One truck (a F30 double cab truck);
- (e) A full slate of firearms, thereby outfitting all officers with 9mm;
- (f) Repairs are needed to the Simms Police Station, DC is in pristine condition;
- (g) Overall budget would the island could do with an increase, i.e. for prisoners meals and other related expenses;
- (h) Another police bike, wherein both bikes can be used to police the island, from a particular point to another

Mr. Speaker:

The police have also expressed challenges with a drug peddling/smuggling. Right now, at Stella Maris, a plane is impounded. Given the drug issues, the police would also need a speed boat to interdict persons operating on the seas. As Long Island develops, the resources of the police would have to increase.

Mr. Speaker:

The Clarence Town Police Station was severely damaged during Hurricane Joaquin. It would take quite an investment to repair. However, given the closure of the Morrisville Primary School, this site provides an option for a police station to be situated in the south. At present, south Long Island has no fixed police presence. Perhaps this is a angle that my esteemed colleague, the Member for Mount Moriah, might wish to consider. He and I will no doubt speak further on policing matters....we begin doing so last night, whereby I expressed concern about particular personnel matters.

## **Long Island Constituency Fund**

Mr. Speaker:

Every year, MPs are required to give a detailed breakdown as to how the constituency funds were spent in our respective constituencies. Today, I will give insight into how mine was spent:

1. Tablets for the graduating classes of the high schools
2. Construction of bus shelters
3. Payment of balance on OMNILED lights/wifi systems (soon to be installed at Salt Pond Cultural Site and Glintons Park)
4. Donations towards Long Island Regatta and LI Mini Regatta
5. Donations to various LI schools—from AC units to computers to laptops to tablets to funds for field trips and District Sporting Events to District Spelling Bees, etc
6. Clearing of firefighting trailers
7. Donations to shared events with the local Urban Renewal Office
8. Donation to the Long Island Farmers Market
9. Donation to the North Long Island High Basketball Jamboree
10. Imminent launch and outfitting of a STEM centre
11. Back to School
12. Christmas Annual Party
13. Etcetera

In the next fiscal year, I've undertaken to carry out several small capital works on the island.

## **THE BUDGET**

Mr. Speaker:

Let me applaud the government for wisely amending the Business License Act, which would allow for business houses to renew licenses at different points in the year and lend to the ease of doing business.

I also support the reduction of duty in hybrid motor vehicles though I believe that this reduction should be across the board. This would encourage persons to purchase newer vehicles and lend to emissions control.

Mr. Speaker:

There are many persons who were gifted property but could not register them due to stamp duties; there are many people who transferred mortgages, even to family members, and were hit with stamp duties. I am extremely pleased to note that we have amended the Stamp Act to exempt these transactions—among others—from payment of stamp tax. I commend the government sir!

### **Second Home Owners**

Mr. Speaker:

We welcome all tourists and foreign nationals who wish to legally reside in Long Island.

However, in recent years, we have seen a proliferation of second home owners who have been purchasing property at very low rates; utilizing the Family Islands Development Encouragement Act for duty-free concessions and constructing homes; and renting these homes whilst competing head-to-head with locals and hotels. We see this in settlements such as the Cape, at Lochabar, Whymms, etc.

Whilst I appreciate that we are moving legislation to levy VAT on such rentals, I would be remiss if I didn't point out the potential loopholes that arise.

This is a real challenge on many islands. The second home industry has been virtually untaxed and generated millions over the last few years with minimal benefits accruing to the Bahamas.

So, the homes are built duty free; many times, these persons do or participate in undertaking their own construction work.

In Long Island, I've been reliably informed of second home owners now renting vehicles with their houses. I call upon the Road Traffic Department to investigate this....I will be providing names to the Controller. Rental car operators must pay business license, franchise and vehicular licensing fees.....by contrast, these persons don't. I'm also advised that these persons rent boats, with a GPS apparatus with the coordinates for the flats and fishing grounds for them to simply

follow, thereby cutting out local fishing guides. What's more, the homes are now being rented full of groceries and, I received several recent complaints, about an owner using their garage as a petty shop and selling alcohol and groceries. This is egregious! Nothing short of unconscionable! Unacceptable! When and how would the local community benefit?

These have become unregistered all-inclusive resorts where, in times past, everyone was deemed family but today it is blatant.

I've even heard of a particular second home owner arranging for visitors to purchase properties and arranging the entire construction process. This particular owner has purchased and/or built a number of houses; however, I am doubtful that these rooms have been registered anywhere.

I spoke to Matt Brear, General Manager at Cape Santa Maria yesterday. I've known Matt for some time and he lamented the fact that these persons can compete with their resort all whilst avoiding having to pay employee salaries, business license based on turnover, hotel license fees, NIB and other registration fees. The result of this, I am advised, will perhaps see traditional resorts having to downsize.

Yes, local hotels have been complaining!

Whilst I note our efforts to apply VAT, what do we do when such an owner now decides not to use the Home Away website, AirBnB, etc.

They are laughing all the way to their foreign bank accounts!

Whilst the decision to charge VAT at the point of business is better than the current state, what prohibits these homeowners from collecting monies at the residences (some have multiple homes and spend substantial time in the Bahamas) or receiving direct deposits to their bank accounts or receiving cash transactions?

Mr. Speaker:

In the BVI, Airbnb property owners have to pay a hotel-accommodation tax.

Let me say sir, I appreciate the local entrepreneurs being created. However, there is a proliferation of well-heeled second home owners who are competing head-to-head with them and doing so without making any contribution in the communities!

Let me also note that we have a lot of so-called “yachties.” Thousands of dollars are being made from fisheries excursions—by foreign operators. What’s more, persons are fileting fish out to sea and boldly sailing into the US with loaded coolers. One of our employees in the Berry Islands recently told me that some of these persons come in with the fish and “give the natives the head.”

In our manifesto, we pledged to mandate GPS tracking on all Bahamian registered boats. That would greatly assist in enforcement and in flagging those who breach Bahamian law.

Mr. Speaker:

We need a major Family Island crackdown. Persons are abusing our country and exploiting loopholes in enforcement.

I have seen a number of second homes recently constructed—throughout the islands—with slips. Are fees being charged, particularly given the fact that persons are purportedly being charged to dock?

Mr. Speaker:

I encourage the Ministry of Finance to visit Long Island. There is an urgent need to assess property as—per my chat with the Chief Councilor and several other Long Islanders—homes are being purchased but the purchasers are defrauding the government by simply not stating the true value of the property.

What’s more, I have advised that several high-end homes sold to foreign owners have not been registered, that the transfer of ownership was never accounted for in a deliberate attempt to avoid paying taxes.

Mr. Speaker:

I support the Family Islands Development Encouragement Act and its amendment. It is valuable to Family Islanders. However, I believe that the Act should be amended to perhaps apply to Bahamians only or feature a clause that states that same cannot be used for duty free imports and then these places become illicit hotels.

## **WATER AND SEWERAGE CORPORATION**

Mr. Speaker:

We have embarked upon a reformist agenda at the Water and Sewerage Corporation (WSC). Our goal is to transform WSC into an efficient, customer focused organization that provides quality service and enjoys a reputation for consistently high performance.

Let me begin by acknowledging and thanking the BOD at WSC. I want to personally thank, and publicly acknowledge, Deputy Chair Deanne Wallace-Whitfield, Mr. George Carey, Mr. Bennet Minnis, Mrs. Nicola Russell-Pedican and Mr. Carl Oliver.

Mr. Speaker:

I have the good fortune of working with a great man, a superb Minister. I have the privilege and honor of serving with and being mentored by one of the greatest ministers in the history of this country. He is a statesman.....precise, never rattled and giving sound advice. I want to thank the Honorable Member for Carmichael for the trust and confidence he has reposed in me.

### **Institutional Reform/Restructuring**

Last year, a new General Manager was appointed at WSC. This year, a new CFO has been brought on and additional personnel adjustments are anticipated and/or have been advertised. The Board is about to interview candidates for the Internal Control and Compliance Division. Notably, the Board has also resolved to develop Sewer and Strategic Planning and Coordination Divisions (2 new divisions). We have already identified the persons to head those areas and they will be announced in short course.

The Board will be writing to the Member for Carmichael relative to WSC restructuring—much in the way that BPL has been—in the very near future.

### **CDB WORKS**

Mr. Speaker:

WSC has undertaken major works throughout the Family Islands.

We have:



1. Completed works in Pinewood Gardens Phase B Water Supply Project (\$2,286,673.81)
2. Completed works at Coral Lakes and Boatswain Hill area (\$1,252,464.22)
3. Presently undertaking phase one of works in Long Island (\$5,293,247.42; 60% completed);
4. Undertaking works in South Andros (\$5,566,372.95; 85% complete);
5. Completed and commissioned works in San Salvador (\$1,399,509.84; virtually all of San Salvador has running water);
6. Tendered further works for Long Island; and
7. Tendered works for Crooked Island. The Member for MICAL will be accompanying me to Crooked Island tomorrow morning to sign the new water contract.

Mr. Speaker:

Oh Cat Island, oh Cat Island....

Today, Cat Island is the only island that does not have an inch of pipes. Notwithstanding the fact that it had a DPM and Minister of Work during the last Administration! Not an inch!

We are revising the scope of works for Cat Island and intend to tender that project shortly.

It's the people of Cat Island's time. Isn't it the people's time, Member for Cat Island?

Mr. Speaker:

Whilst everyone else woulda-coulda-shoulda, this caring FNM government delivers. Cat Island, it's a matter of trust!

We don't sell pipe dreams. We give you pipes!

Even Cat Island must agree that it's the people's time!

The woulda-shoulda-coulda-almost did Opposition will say, oh we started this or that, oh we did this or that. But, where is the water?

### **IN-HOUSE WORKS**

Mr. Speaker:

WSC has oversight of 26 islands and cays, 50 water production systems, 27 reverse osmosis sites, 25 wellfields and 22 commercial offices. We have a number of other operational offices.

Mr. Speaker:

We have undertaken substantial in-house works throughout the Family Islands. We have improved service laterals; extended coverage to subserviced areas and new developments; improved operational efficiency; and fostered institutional strengthening.

He who feels it knows it sir. I grew up without running water; bathing and having residue left on your skin; having to store water when hurricanes come as well were muddy; toting water when the pumps went down; and constantly changing fixtures.

1. We are acquiring a standalone small RO plant for Crooked Island;
2. We are acquiring the same for Acklins;
3. Completed 12 mains upgrades/lateral replacement/NRW works/RO projects in South, Central and North Eleuthera;
4. Approved an additional 10 projects for South, Central and North Eleuthera;
5. Completed Cedar Harbour wellfield refurbishment and expansion in North Abaco;
6. Replaced the force main in Treasure Cay, Abaco;
7. Improved the lift station and back up generation in Treasure Cay;
8. A new RO plant for South Andros;
9. Installations of new mains in Nicholls Town and Mastic Point, North Andros (90% complete);
10. Secured and fenced in reservoirs in Central Andros;
11. Purchased, own and operate a new RO Plant in Ragged Island following Hurricane Irma;
12. Installation of new mains in Dunmores and Grays Long Island;
13. Installed community tanks in South Long Island;
14. Installed new service laterals in North Acklins;
15. Upgraded the Lovely Bay Wellfield System;
16. In progress with the upgrades to the wellfields in the Berry Islands (the equipment has been shipped);

We have a number of pending in-house capital projects in the progress for Long Island, Exuma, North Abaco, Russell Island, BAMSI in North Andros, North Andros, the Berry Islands, Cat Island, Acklins and Eleuthera.

During my tenure, we have formed small in-house project implementation teams that can be mobilized at a moment's notice. These teams address non-revenue water, small projects and system maintenance optimization, roving collections teams and so on.

In New Providence, WSC is preparing a Cabinet Paper seeking central government funding for a water supply system for Millar's Heights (19,000 feet of pipe, 360 service laterals).

WSC has also collaborated with the MOW prior to road paving exercises, throughout New Providence, from Farrinton Road to the Eastern Road to Bernard Road to Beatrice Avenue to Pinewood to Seabreeze to Harmony Hill to Peardale to West Bay Street and so on.

### **RO Plants**

Mr. Speaker:

Since being appointed, I've noticed a number of bad contracts.

Our research has shown that we can purchase a brand new plant, ranging from 2500 gallons per day to 20,000 gallons per day, for prices ranging from \$15,000 dollars to approximately \$45,000/\$50,000 per plant. This is with WSC owning the plants outright. The bulk of WSC plants range from 2500 gallons per day to 10,000 gallons per day.

Mr. Speaker:

Beyond the high cost of the water, unsustainable for WSC to pay for a plethora of additional, questionable and onerous costs in certain water contracts.

As we renegotiated, reassign and take over contracts, WSC has had to:

- (a) (e) WSC provides the land;
- (b) pay for consumables used (chlorine, etc);
- (c) WSC staff assists with maintenance and operations at these plants (changing filters, oil changes, change out the belts, daily spot checks and initial troubleshooting, etc);

- (d) WSC even paid for and contributed to the salary of a private company's staff member in Ragged Island—for 15 years;
- (e) directly pays for any and all electricity used at all WM plants;
- (f) WSC provides the buildings the plants are situated in in some cases (north Long Island, Black Point, Farmers Cay, Ragged Island, etc);
- (g) WSC pays for any and all building maintenance costs for the buildings the plants are in;
- (h) WSC pays for the maintenance/landscaping of the grounds;
- (i) WSC pays for the drilling of ALL the wells, including the Water SUPPLY well (usually 2 supply wells) and the DISPOSAL well (that cost alone has been reported by hydrologist/senior engineer John Bowleg as costing WSC \$300,000 per drilling contract);
- (j) WSC provides the BACK-UP generator to maintain the water supply for the plants, barring which there are no back-up generators if power fails;
- (k) WSC pays for the fuel for all generators;
- (l) WSC pays for all set-up fees and labour costs associated, including costs of technicians going in;
- (m) WSC separately pays for the distribution pumps (pumping system) on construction and anytime there is a failure and replacement by WM (something unseen in several other contracts and a cost that is traditionally borne by an operator when installing a plant);
- (n) WSC paid for/pays for all storage tanks;
- (o) WSC pays for the construction of all plinths that the plants sit on;
- (p) WSC pays for all automatic transfer switches and power connections (electrical connections) to all the plants;
- (q) WSC has exempted the operator from ALL customs duties for all reverse osmosis equipment;
- (r) If shipped, WSC is obliged to pay for shipping costs;
- (s) WSC assists with and/or provide work permits and/or exemption from the same for technicians;
- (t) WSC is required to pay for any and all emergency trips required to fix a problem at a plant (Long Cay, Snug Corner, Masons Bay, Salina Point are examples) (cost at \$700 dollars etc per trip); and

(u) WSC is required to pay for all meters installed at the plant, associated pipework and fittings, pressure tank and distribution systems from the plants (costs that WM should've absorbed).

Let state emphatically, that WSC will not be renewing these contracts. We currently have about 15 expired contracts.

WSC is moving to standardize all RO contracts and has been in talks to engage the services of a well-respected international RO consultant.

I have also formed an RO unit. This unit is comprised of hydrologists and specialist RO engineers and technicians. We undertook a recruiting exercise and continue to do so.

Mr. Speaker:

Last year, we had an incident where a plant operator in Eleuthera did not pay BPL, leaving a bill of \$200,000 dollars—i.e. notwithstanding the fact that WSC included payments of electrical bills in its remittances. BPL consequently disconnected, which meant that that section of the island would not be able to access water after our reserve tanks were depleted. What's more, the plant did not have a backup generator. I had to intervene and, along with Minister Bannister, was able to have BPL re-connect with the undertaking that WSC would garnish outstanding BPL amounts from their future payments.

Mr. Speaker:

Sometime ago, the government awarded the plant in North Eleuthera to a noted international RO operator. Notably, the plant is well behind its completion delivery date, i.e. 22<sup>nd</sup> January, 2018. As such, WSC has applied the contractual clauses and has notified the contractor of liquidated damages of \$500/day which have been applied from 22<sup>nd</sup> January and will continue to run until delivery.

Notably, several of the larger RO operators have taken or pay clauses built into their contracts. Essentially, that means that even if WSC does not use or take a certain amount of water, WSC still has to pay for it.

Speed is only now being applied to complete.

Mr. Speaker:

It is unfortunate that a previous iteration of WSC management and government agreed to gross disadvantageous contracts. Many contracts have watered down, in favor of the contractor.

Mr. Speaker:

WSC has written of a number of concern with our New Providence providers, ranging from automatic dumping systems to failed LSI testing requirements to tariff meter calibration frequency to proof of competitive bidding for fuel to maintenance schedules to follow through on the familiarization of WSC personnel with RO operations and so on.

Today, we have paid more than **\$80,000,000** to Family Island based RO plant operators.

In New Providence—between 1997 and present day—we have paid CWCO **\$304,000,000** dollars. As at 16<sup>th</sup> May, 2019, total CWCO invoices outstanding stood at \$12 million. WSC also pays the property tax for these operations.

Mr. Speaker:

When one calculates the amounts paid, this is tantamount to enough RO plants to run the entire Bahamas and then some.

At present, the only two plants owned by WSC were acquired under my tenure—Sweetings Cay and Ragged Island. By owning these plants, we have saved \$200,000 per year. We are in discussions to purchase a number of smaller plants in short course.

### **Subsidy/Receivables/Pension Liability/**

Mr. Speaker:

WSC allocation in this budget—like last year— is \$25m. For the most part, this subsidy is used to pay for water purchases and the payment of loans, namely to NIB (\$12m) and the IDB (\$81m). Over the fiscal year, WSC has had a funding shortfall of \$8.5 million for CWCO, \$4.7 million for MIYA and \$5m for CDB works.

We spend nearly 50% of our OPEX on water purchases, i.e. \$40 million annually whilst salaries account for nearly \$27 million.

Mr. Speaker:

WSC has an unfunded pension liability of \$90 million. The BOD and EXCOM will soon be conducting an actuarial review with the aim of finding avenues to address the same.

We continue to carry out a number of capital works from loan funds and monies generated internally.

Mr. Speaker:

Whilst WSC is executing a \$28 million dollar loan from the CDB—with counterpart funding of \$13-plus million from the government—that loan is not reflected on WSC's books (and instead that of the government/MOF).

Mr. Speaker:

At the end of 2017, WSC had an operating revenue of \$50.6 million.

Mr. Speaker:

WSC is currently owed \$31.9m for water purchases on New Providence (\$19.1m for residential; \$5.2m for non-residential; \$7.5m government agencies); \$7.4m for sewer usage in New Providence (\$4.4 for residential; non-residential for \$1.9m; \$981,503 for govt); \$6.5m on for water purchases on Family Islands (\$4.7 for residential; \$1.2m for non-residential; \$554,528 for government); and \$23,483 for sewer usage (Treasure Cay, Spring City) (\$21,609 for residential; \$1,874 for non-residential; 0 for government). The total is some \$45.9 million. We have been working assiduously to collect these monies. Moreover, I have directed the GM and the Finance Division to conduct a review of all accounts, determining those that can be collected; written off; pursued via the courts.

Mr. Speaker:

We are also bring on two legal officers to outfit the newly formed legal department.

### **Bonds and PPP**

Mr. Speaker:

We are currently undertaking our yearly audit. We will also be undertaking an asset and liability assessment in short course. In 2017, WSC's assets was listed at \$327,287,558 and liabilities at \$223,662,017.

WSC is an incredible asset but for many years has had a poor balance sheet and been beleaguered by bad deals.

Mr. Speaker:

Over the next few months, we will be approaching the government—via our Minister—for support for a bond facility, much as has been done by the Jamaican NWC wherein they raised \$270+ million. We believe that such a bond facility would transform the entity into a viable asset for long-term investment. It is believed that bonds will allow WSC to refinance and/or pay off a significant portion of its high interest rate foreign currency denominated loans, which will reduce the Commission's exposure to foreign exchange losses.

WSC would become a financially viable asset--will be able to engage on equal footing with the private sector, through public/private partnerships, because it has a stronger balance sheet to execute projects. A financially stronger WSC would be able to finance capital projects, which include laying pipes, dealing with sewerage infrastructure, treatment and repairs.

Mr. Speaker:

There is also future value to WSC entering into public private partnership arrangements, where project financing can be raised.

This will encourage mutually beneficial private sector participation.

## **Digitization**

Mr. Speaker:

We no longer live in the analog age. As such, WSC must transform.

In recent months, I directed that WSC embark upon a digital transformation journey. This digitization, I believe, will transform the water sector, accelerate the adoption of digital solutions in addressing critical global water challenges such as climate change, population growth, and aging infrastructure and increasing urbanization; drive sustainable water and wastewater management; and heighten efficiency. The idea is to create an innovation culture, to embark upon pilot projects



to as means to explore new technologies and build momentum; and use data to optimize business processes and increase connectivity throughout WSC—from the headquarters in New Providence to every satellite office.

As such, an IT committee has been formed to drive the process. They are mandated with implementing a document management system;

Mr. Speaker:

Thus far, the following has been completed:

1. Modernization and total revamp of the call centre;
2. A procurement portal ([www.wsc.procureware.com](http://www.wsc.procureware.com)) (this will standardize all procurement activities for WSC)
3. A new document management system being put in place to retain all data and move WSC towards becoming paperless;
4. Automation of all human resources processes from on boarding to exit;
5. Automation of payroll and finance;
6. Smart phone meter reading have been deployed to the islands and computers and other apparatuses have been procured;
7. Increased daily and weekly reporting on all systems;
8. Inventory bar coding
9. Digital signatures
10. Digital forms
11. Website design
12. Mobile App ([www.wscmobile.me](http://www.wscmobile.me)) (complaints, integration w/online offerings)
13. A hotline for reporting leaks and outstanding trenches left by WSC (825-9855/302-5510)
14. Active KPI Dashboards
15. Mobile Work Order System

### **RFPs/Contract Reviews/Re-negotiation**

Mr. Speaker:

This week and over the next two weeks, WSC will be issuing RFPs for general insurance; cleaning services; security services; solarization of WSC HQ on University Drive (this will also include the changing of bulbs for more energy efficient builds) to reduce energy costs; etc.

### **Union Matters**

Mr. Speakers:

I have appointed an Industrial Relations Committee, led by GM Elwood Donaldson and comprising of two other Executives. This committee is charged with liaising with the unions, with a view to have productive conversation and fostering a harmonious environment.

### **GPS**

Mr. Speaker:

We have been installing GPS on all of our vehicles and, over the next week or two, will sign a contract with the supplier which would see GPS apparatuses purchased on installation on our heavy equipment and all Family Island vehicles. At present, one of the vehicles at WSC are tracked. This prohibits abuse; theft; and fosters an environment of greater accountability.

I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

### **Over the Hill**

Mr. Speaker:

The Office of the Prime Minister has asked WSC to put in place a plan for potable water connections in the OTH area. We are currently working on a proposal and will be submitting the same in short course.

### **Sewer**

Mr. Speaker:

Too many Bahamians continue to utilize pit latrines, aka outside toilets. In New Providence, the areas with the highest use are Golden Isles (423), Garden Hills (346), Elizabeth (208), Englerston (115) and Carmichael (108).

On the Family Islands, there are 2345 pit latrines/outhouses in South Abaco, 162 in North Abaco, 93 in Cat Island, 56 in South Andros and 51 in North Eleuthera/Spanish Wells/Harbor Island.

Mr. Speaker:

WSC—via an IDB loan—has developed a waste water master plan for New Providence. This plan addresses waste water collection and treatment, disposal needs and the rehabilitation of critical sewerage infrastructure on the island.

Major works—to the tune of \$16 million—has been undertaken at the Fox Hill WWTP, the Malcolm Park WWTP, the LPIA WWTP and Flamingo Gardens WWTP.

Mr. Speaker:

The full roll-out of the New Providence sewerage master plan—which would see the installation of an expanded sewer network, pumping stations, expanded waste water treatment plant, house connections, engineering and contingencies—is projected to cost \$640 million.

WSC also has a comprehensive sewer plan for the OTH areas. That plan calls for the expenditure of \$75m, inclusive of house connections, street sewers, local pump stations, surveys and designs, engineering and contingencies.

### **Smart Metering**

Mr. Speaker:

WSC is exploring the opportunities of a smart metering system.

We believe that it would lend to improved meter accuracy and reliability (WSC changes approximately 4000 stuck meters annually); improved customer awareness of their water usage; possible monthly billing and elimination of labor intensive meter reading with current staff being deployed to other areas; allow WSC to poll all of our meters at the frequency we desire to all for

real-time comparisons of water supplied vs customer demand; introduce pre-paid metering; and possible allow for the remote disconnection and reconnection of customer supplies.

### **Sabotage/Court Actions**

Mr. Speaker:

A few months ago, I reported to this House our suspicion that certain persons—intimately familiar with the workings at WSC—engaged in an illegal shutdown of the water supply in various parts of New Providence.

This illegal act of sabotage featured the tampering with pressure regulating valve (PRV) alarms were going off across New Providence. The pressure regulating valves were shut off throughout New Providence in a concerted and intentional effort to disrupt the water supply. Additionally, persons threw stones/rocks into the valves to cause irreparable damage, major costs to WSC and untold hardship to our customers.

Mr. Speaker:

The areas affected include Wulff Road South, Prince Charles, Soldier Road, Fox Hill, Elizabeth Estates, Bain Town, Palmdale, Constitution Drive, Fort Fincastle, PMH, Doctor's Hospital, Baha Mar, Camperdown, etcetera. Areas in southern, central and western New Providence are also affected.

As a result of these acts, the country is tremendously inconvenienced by this wonton disruption of the water supply—a necessary amenity—to thousands of Bahamians. WSC continues to assess the residual damage to roads and our pipe network.

Mr. Speaker:

Upon a review, it was determined that only a handful of people had the training, the intimate knowledge of the system and knew the location of the District Meter Area (DMA) valves. Given that, five to six names were submitted to the police. Moreover, WSC submitted CCTV footage (from WSC cameras and those generously provided by businesses and households in the areas in

question) and other relevant information. Last week, the police questioned several WSC employees surrounding this matter.

What's more sir, WSC has implemented a protocol to account for all persons with valve keys.

Mr. Speaker:

Let me note that we have instructed legal counsel to pursue civil actions relative to the Gladstone Road Waste Water Treatment Plant and the Naval Base in Eleuthera. The police are also carrying out separate criminal investigations.

Mr. Speaker:

WSC has sent 100 accounts to an external law firm. They will be pursuing actions against these account holders who have sizeable balances. Many of the matters will be pursued in the Supreme Court and a few in the Magistrate Court.

### **Non-Revenue Water**

Mr. Speaker:

Substantial improvement has been made in NRW. These reductions in New Providence has reduced leaks and ought to lend to reduced operational expenses. Notably though, we are losing some of these gains due to high reverse osmosis rates.

### **Overtime**

Mr. Speaker:

Upon a review of overtime, I discovered that WSC has had an extremely high overtime payout. Frankly, some \$1.6 million was paid in overtime last year. Once observed, I directed the GM and the EXCOM that no overtime is to be worked unless emergencies arise. We are also rightsizing the departments and making internal adjustments to reduce overtime. Crew sizes will be minimized and overtime must be approved by the Division Head and/or senior managers with written justification.

## **Policies**

Mr. Speaker:

I am pleased to report that the Board has taken on several policy and procedural initiatives. I list a few below:

1. Conflict of interest/code of ethics policy
  2. Procurement governance guidelines
  3. Formulation of three tenders committees
  4. Supplier code of conduct
  5. Supplier conflict of interest disclosure form
  6. Supplier registration form
  7. Anti-corruption/anti-bribery policy
  8. Various financial policies
- etcetera

The penalties and consequences for failures to report and abide by policy will be enforced.

## **Tariff Reform**

Mr. Speaker:

WSC sells water at merely a fraction of what it pays from thousand gallons. Notably, the first 3,000 gallons is free before any charge (only meter rental fee). This is unsustainable. Given the 3 month cycle and the 20-day period given to customers to pay post-billing, which means that WSC has to wait nearly four months before collecting a dollar. This does not bode well for the Corporation's cash flow position. Imagine buying water at premium rates (per month), selling it at a loss and having to wait nearly four months before any payment!

Mr. Speaker:

The average tariffs are well below the cost recovery levels. Tariffs have not increased since 1999....imagine running a business and charging the same as one charged in 1999?

As we move forward, I am preparing a document for the Member for Carmichael that will discuss the rate disparity between FI and NP; explore the reduction of the current consumption block from

3000 to 2000; reducing the billing period; to streamline billing, ensuring to identify and separate all commercial properties, including owner occupied; exploring factors taken into account by our Caribbean counterparts; and undertaking a cost/benefit analysis.

Hotels/commercial enterprises on FI should pay commercial rate. Many currently do not.

### **WSC/BPL COLLABORATION**

Mr. Speaker:

The Chairman of BPL and I are planning joint BOD meetings. We have agreed in principle to offset the bills owed by each entity to the other and, over the next year, into to have several joint BOD meetings to discuss:

- (a) Automatic meter reading and establishment of joint network-- prepaid water meters;
- (b) Joint meter reading and customer billing initiatives (e.g. one stop centralized call centre, billing, customer service--parties can establish an SPV type arrangement or mutually contract to address these activities);
- (c) FI commercial offices (bill payments @ office as we use same HTE system, shared rental space, etc);
- (d) Pooling/Coordinating activities such as road reinstatement, shared heavy equipment or shared rental costs related to same;
- (e) Sharing infrastructure overlays through GIS software;
- (f) Renewable energy and desalination--helps reduce capital/generation needs and feedback into the grid;
- (g) Joint shipping to Family Islands and shared costs; and
- (h) Joint purchases--economies of scale.

WSC and BPL are sister entities, sharing one Minister. This inter-sectoral collaboration bodes well for both entities and allows for the coordination of the operations.

## **Training/Retrenchment**

Mr. Speaker:

WSC has recruited a number of qualified personnel, including RO specialist engineers and accountants for the internal audit division. Notably, WSC has to get younger. In 5 years, 100 staff members will reach retirement age. In 10 years, 200 people must retire.

We have hired a new training officer and are revamping the training department. This would create what I have deemed to be WSC University. Persons being hired will be expected to go through an orientation process; re-training every two to three years for those engaged; and opportunities for external training. This will increase productivity, foster team development and enhance skills.

At present, a corporate-wide training needs assessment is being undertaken which would also align with our digitalization roll-out.

## **Legislative Reform**

Mr. Speaker:

We are moving to revamp the current WSC legislation. As we move towards having a separate sector regulator, I am reviewing legislation from the Caribbean jurisdictions and elsewhere to present informed suggestions on the progressive water entities.

This proposed legislative undertaking—which will be communicated via our Minister—will take into account climate resilient water governance, an extraction fee, overall reforms to the sector, etc.

## **CONCLUSION**

Mr. Speaker:

Over the last 2 years, I have heard the usual refrain of the Opposition. I liken it to a nursery rhyme—you've heard it so much, you know it by heart. Think of a nursery rhyme, maybe "Mary had a little lamb." Any time the side opposite tears down everything the government does, they say they started it or "woulda-coulda-shoulda-almost did it to." They have popularized their own political nursery rhyme—the "woulda-coulda-shoulda-almost did it to—we supposed to do it but forgot in five years."

Mr. Speaker:



Nothing is perfect but this budget moves us closer to the economic and societal standards we all expect.

Long Island supports this budget!