



Ministry of
Transport & Housing

MOVING TRANSPORT & HOUSING FORWARD THROUGH VISION, SOLUTIONS, AND EXECUTION

NATIONAL BUDGET PRESENTATION

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY, JUNE 14, 2022

3:00PM

The Hon.

JoBeth Coleby-Davis, MP

Minister of Transport & Housing

AS PREPARED FOR DELIVERY

Madam Speaker,

It is a privilege and an honor to stand before this Honorable House to report on the performance of, and share upcoming plans for the agencies in the Ministry of Transport and Housing and to also provide an update on the progress of our work in the Elizabeth constituency and share plans on the way forward for the people that have sent me to this Honorable House.

Madam Speaker,

The Honorable Prime Minister and Member of Parliament for Cat Island, Rum Cay and San Salvador presented the 2022/2023 national budget under the theme, “The Way Forward.”

While this national budget recognizes that The Bahamas has gone through a few challenging years coping with the Covid-19 pandemic and that the country is now on the path to recovery; the 2022/2023 budget also underscores the need to address emerging concerns such as global inflation due to the rise in prices of goods and services as a result of bottlenecks in the global supply chain and Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine; And too the need for our people to continue to mitigate the present challenges in novel and creative ways.

Madam Speaker,

A national budget is reflective of a government’s plans and commitments. This national budget is no different.

The Bahamian people expects this government, led by the Honorable Prime Minister, to demonstrate focused leadership that not only provides a comprehensive nationalistic vision, but also provides solutions that will continue to build on the path to recovery.

The Bahamian people are looking for national leadership that will execute its agenda in a transformative and meaningful way to inspire and unite our country.

Madam Speaker,

I am giving my pledge to work towards making this recovery a successful one that will leave every Bahamian better off and our country, The Bahamas – the land we all love - in a stronger position.

As I address this Honorable House, I wish to publicly place on record my immense gratitude to God for continuing to guide my steps; I want to pay special homage to my husband, my best friend, my peace-of-mind, the one who makes the burden a little lighter, and who kisses me on my forehead every morning before I leave, and wake up every evening to ask me how my day was? (just to make sure I am okay), Donavon Antoine Davis Jr., as we will celebrate our 6th wedding anniversary on Saturday, I want to say thank you and I love you! To my three-year-old daughter Bethani, who showers me with the most innocent form of affection that warms my heart, to my family for their love, support, and understanding; to my Cabinet and Parliamentary colleagues for their advice and guidance; and to my stellar administrative team at the Ministry of Transport and Housing – led by Permanent Secretary Antoinette Thompson, for their professionalism and stewardship of this ministry’s mandate.

Madam Speaker,

From St. Andrew’s Beach to Elizabeth Estates, from Yamacraw Beach to Hanna Road, from Lumumba Lane to Pine Barren Road; the people of Elizabeth have elected me to be their voice. I do not take this task lightly and as I stated during the official opening of my constituency headquarters on April 5, 2021, I intend to make; I might add, a **notable** difference in Elizabeth and The Bahamas;

Madam Speaker,

National budgets outline a government’s spending priorities and identify the sources of revenue it will use to pay for those priorities. This budget under the theme, “The Way Forward,” is a key tool for the Davis led administration in executing our vision and implementing solutions for the next 12 months.

Our vision in its simplest form is to move our nation forward and to leave our people better off. We understand that national transformation does not happen by accident, nor is it an overnight process. However, we know that deliberate, targeted solutions supported by a detailed, holistic vision will yield positive results.

Madam Speaker,

You will note that our plans for this fiscal year will revitalize the economy, mitigate the impact of inflation, bring much-needed relief to those who need it most, and create widespread opportunities at every level of our society.

Let us be very clear, **Madam Speaker**, this is the people’s budget and every initiative, every intervention, and every policy solution is geared towards positively impacting the lives of Bahamians – the people we serve.

Madam Speaker,

The foundations of this budget are rooted in our *Blueprint for Change*.

In that document, you will find our commitment to rescue the economy, bring relief to the Bahamian people, rebuild for resiliency (especially in our northern islands), and empower Bahamians, among other promises.

The *Blueprint for Change* wasn't simply a book of Election Day promises. The *Blueprint* represents the collective vision to transform this nation at every level. In those pages, you will find short, medium, and long-term solutions for nation-building. That is why, from day one, the Davis Administration was able to hit the ground sprinting.

We got to work for the Bahamian people immediately – no training wheels or baby steps necessary. In the *Blueprint for Change*, we have our playbook for driving the changes we promised – changes which I wish to assure the Bahamian people, that they can believe in.

Madam Speaker,

After 4 years of lacklustre governance, cynicism was at an all-time high. In short, we inherited a country in crisis.

I'm talking about:

- Historic levels of unemployment,
- A struggling economy,
- Record levels of debt and record-high budgetary deficits,
- We had our northern islands unable to properly recover due to an insufficient and incompetent response,
- And, of course, we had an inflexible, out-of-touch, economy-killing regime of lockdowns and curfews that did not adequately adapt to changing circumstances on the ground.

It was not an easy situation to step into governance. Many people doubted that any government would be able to turn around what appeared to be a hopeless situation. But, on September 16th, **Madam Speaker**, a government with real plans for change came in.

You know, **Madam Speaker**, the good book says, “without vision the people perish.” It was a fortunate day when the Bahamian people said goodbye to the former administration and welcomed a new government with a vision for a more abundant life. I am so proud of our accomplishments during the past eight months.

As soon as we took office and had our first Cabinet meeting, the Prime Minister made it clear that it was time to get to work on the agenda. And that's what we did.

Each one of my Cabinet and Parliamentary colleagues on the government side are hard at work delivering each day for the Bahamian people.

A lot of people are saying they have never seen a government come in and do so much in so short a time. What people were expecting was the typical narrative: a new government comes in and says, “we can’t do what we want to do because things were worse than we realized.” **Madam Speaker**, one thing you won’t hear from this administration is excuses. Accountability is a core value of this administration. And that accountability begins with holding ourselves accountable to deliver as promised. I believe we have successfully taken the first steps.

Madam Speaker,

Even before the passage of our first budget, we have brought about great changes in this country. Within our first few months, the Bahamian people felt the shackles of the Competent Authority fall away as we got rid of nonsensical curfews and business closures and replaced them with common sense, data-driven public health policies that allowed money to begin circulating through our economy again and got thousands of Bahamians back to work.

We became the first country in the world to be eligible for Blue Carbon Credits, introducing a new source of revenue that will aid us in our goals of increasing government revenues during the next five years.

Madam Speaker,

This administration made the decision to reduce customs duties on several items to help Bahamians cope with the rising price of goods because of global inflation. What I love about our approach is that we lowered duty rates on things we want people to eat, like vegetables, meats, eggs, chicken – these things are now completely duty-free. And Bahamians will feel the difference at the checkout line.

Multiple food stores have already released statements stating that the savings will be passed on to consumers. The people have been crying for the government to do something significant when it comes to prices – while we may not be able to stop global inflation, I am confident that we have taken the right steps to provide some relief to our people.

Madam Speaker,

I could stand here for the full two hours talking about what we have done and are about to do; but instead I will simply highlight those I consider most meaningful, such as:

- Free catastrophic healthcare
- Raising the exemption for Real Property Tax from 250,000 to 300,000 dollars – a lot of homeowners will feel the benefit of that – their Property Tax bill just fell to zero.
- We are adding \$50 million dollars to the Small Business Development Centre budget
- We are building a new prison. This is a big one, **Madam Speaker**, not just when it comes to addressing the overcrowding, but also when it comes to improved outcomes. Implementing new policies for rehabilitation in an inadequate setting was counterproductive. We were fighting an uphill battle. Even the most well-intended interventions would likely struggle to succeed in that environment. **Madame Speaker**, we were essentially pouring new wine into old skins, but that will now end under the Davis administration. And I am positive that this investment will spark improved outcomes when it comes to the recidivism rate and rehabilitation efforts.

- An initiative that is near and dear to me is the construction of a new women's shelter. We are giving victims of abuse and assault an opportunity for safety and refuge. This is another big deal, **Madam Speaker** – another initiative that makes me so proud to be a part of this administration.

Madam Speaker, this is not exhaustive since there are so many things that we will accomplish with this first budget. We have set the standard high throughout the course of our first year and we intend to keep it high.

When we look at what we were able to deliver in such a short amount of time, I am confident that our government will have the greatest impact on the greatest amount of people.

Madam Speaker,

Homeowners and homeowners-to-be will also receive a boost through the customs duty reductions that will be in place for building and electrical supplies. Many building supplies have been zero-rated or significantly reduced. Once again, it is all about expanding access for the greatest amount of people possible. Bahamians at every level of our society will reap the benefits of this reduction.

You will note the common theme in our policy approach, **Madam Speaker**. It is all about the greater good. Social and economic equity are among our core values. We have a lot of work to do to get The Bahamas to the place where it needs to be in terms of equal access and widespread opportunity and empowerment. But this administration is taking those first, brave steps toward it. This budget is just the first. By the time we have completed this term, we will make significant progress towards balanced and shared economic growth.

The way forward is together, **Madam Speaker**. That is our vision.

Madam Speaker,

In keeping with the budget theme, "The Way Forward," my presentation is titled "*Moving Transport and Housing Forward through Vision, Solutions, and Execution.*"

This theme is not just a slogan for my budget presentation, **Madam Speaker**; it is indicative of the core objectives of our work at the Ministry of Transport and Housing.

More importantly, it speaks to the need to provide visionary leadership that not only motivates, inspires and galvanize a people, but leadership that invariably is solutions based and results driven.

Madam Speaker,

My Ministry is comprised of the following agencies – The Air Accident Investigation Authority (AAIA), The Bahamas Meteorological Department, The Road Traffic Department, The Bahamas Postal Service, The Port Department, and the Department of Housing.

Relations with The Bahamas Mortgage Corporation, The Bahamas Maritime Authority and mailboat service operators also fall under my Ministry.

Madam Speaker,

We at the Ministry of Transport and Housing have made significant progress in rolling out our agenda and we are pressing on progressively.

To be clear, **Madam Speaker**, we at the Ministry of Transport and Housing have been working diligently to deliver for the Bahamian people.

As they say, **Madam Speaker**, the proof is in the pudding!

Permit me to share with you, **Madam Speaker**, some of our accomplishments:

- During the period December 6th – 10th 2021, The Bahamas Aircraft Accident Investigation Authority (AAIA) was the focus of an audit by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). I am pleased to share with this Honourable House that compliance scores increased from 13.59% in 2017 to 90.29% in 2021. I want to congratulate the team at AAIA for doing an excellent job. It is also important, Madam Speaker, to note that the Member for Englerston was instrumental in establishing the Authority in 2016.
- The Department of Meteorology has recently developed a Storm Surge Model Atlas and Digital Platform for the islands of Grand Bahama and Eleuthera. This Storm Surge Atlas gives Meteorologists at the Department of Meteorology the ability to predict the extent and depth of flooding from storm surges for a set of individual hurricanes categorized by their intensity and heading. The development of this Atlas will assist in allowing the Department to better provide information to the Bahamian people.
- At the Road Traffic Department, we've opened an office on the island of Bimini, introduced an appointment system at the Carmichael Office, and increased resources at the Department to improve the delivery of services. We've also established two units with the Department – the Process Improvement/ Quality Assurance Unit and the Investigation Unit. We have also re-introduced the Enforcement Unit. Additionally, I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that over 280 Bahamians were granted taxi-livery plates. While we are careful not to saturate the industry, the granting of these new plates is a means of boosting entrepreneurship and expanding economic access for Bahamians.
- With respect to the Postal Service, upgrades, and refurbishments to Post Offices throughout the country have been completed or are underway. We heard the concerns of many Bahamians regarding the timely delivery of mail and have begun the process of addressing manpower shortages and technology weaknesses to provide a better quality of service for the Bahamian people.
- With respect to the Port Department, we re-opened the water sports industry on November 15th, 2021, after a lengthy hiatus. The public would recall that the industry was closed from March 2020. Additionally, in Abaco – following a two- plus years closure – we've secured an office space for the Marsh Harbour Port Department which is now open for business.

- Through the Department of Housing, let me first state that in the past eight months, we have built infinitely more homes than the previous administration. We've opened Pinecrest and have started work on the Central Pines housing project in Abaco. We've also signed off on the Renaissance at Carmichael housing project. Let me also note **Madam Speaker**, that the Department of Housing in partnership with The Bahamas Mortgage Corporation have held housing fairs on New Providence, Abaco, and Grand Bahama – receiving over 1,000 applications. Further, the Department of Housing's organizational structure was refreshed to include a dedicated and committed customer service and application team to improve the experience of applicants seeking homes. A new website has been created – www.moth@bahamas.com – to provide for a better interface and exchange of information. The website features a live chat platform that has so far been used by over 300 persons. Additionally, we have revamped the entire application process to allow for an efficient review processing. The Department of Housing has also partnered with the Broadcasting Corporation of The Bahamas in developing a television advertisement series to provide Bahamians with information on affordable housing solutions in progress, share information on the mortgage application process, and share tips on how to qualify for a mortgage. The series aired during national newscast in the month of May. Our vision is to provide widespread affordable housing to Bahamians across the archipelago and we are now executing the plan that will take us there. This is not just a promise, **Madam Speaker**, this is commitment. People already have keys in their hands. I don't say this to brag but to express my pride in being a part of an administration that is helping Bahamians to achieve their dream of home ownership.

Madam Speaker,

As I indicated earlier, our mission is to move transport and housing forward for Bahamians. Our accomplishments clearly indicate that we are working to make a difference. We are a functioning team, **Madam Speaker**, and I sincerely acknowledge the hard-work of my leadership team for assisting in driving the transformation - Permanent Secretary Antoinette Thompson, Undersecretary Gaynell Rolle, First Assistant Secretary Betty Kerr, Captain Delvin Major of AAIA, Acting Director Jeffrey Simmons of the Meteorology Department, Acting Comptroller Bertram Bowleg of the Road Traffic Department, Comptroller Marc Ingraham of the Ministry, Postmaster Jennifer Johnson of the Postal Service, Acting Controller Berne Wright of the Port Department, Acting Chief Housing Officer Oral LaFleur and Acting Director Thomas Ferguson of the Department of Housing. Thank you to every staff member at the Ministry of Transport and Housing and the various agencies that fall under the remit of my Ministry.

Madam Speaker,

We are merely at the beginning of our journey, and these first steps have set the tone for high productivity and a result-driven culture throughout the rest of this five-year term and beyond.

We have realistic plans to move transport and housing forward. This budget is critical to achieving our objectives. We intend to be strategic and to execute our solutions as quickly as possible for the Bahamian people.

While there have been some critical voices referencing the allocation for travel expenses in the 2022/2023 national budget, let me quickly note that an allocation represents a tentative estimation, not a definitive expense. Additionally, let me note that government travel at my

Ministry is limited to a small delegation – with a key focus on bringing tangible results for the Bahamian people.

Madam Speaker,

As a Minister, I am cognizant to avoid the wasteful spending of public funds. Government does not have an ATM card with an endless supply of cash. Therefore, at my Ministry we are being accountable and purposeful with our handling of government funds.

By way of update, **Madam Speaker**, my Ministry completed a fact-finding mission to New York and Atlanta with view to improving services at the Road Traffic Department and the Port Department.

With respect to the Road Traffic Department, the focus of the trip was to gain insight and best practices from the Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority (MARTA) – a multi-model transit company in Atlanta and the Metropolitan Transportation Authority in New York.

As it relates to the Port Department, **Madam Speaker**, an important purpose of the trip was a visit to the Port of New York and New Jersey – the third largest port in the US and the largest port on the east coast.

The fact-finding mission, **Madam Speaker**, was a huge success. In the coming months, members of the public will see and feel the tangible results of the fact-finding mission- with many changes to our Public Bus Transportation sector being rolled out.

Additionally, **Madam Speaker**, my Ministry in conjunction with the Bahamas Maritime Authority recently concluded a trip to Greece where The Bahamas participated in the 2022 Posidonia Shipping Conference and Exhibition.

Greece, **Madam Speaker**, is one of the largest ship owning countries in the world and at 20 percent, Greek shipowners account for the greatest nationality interests on the Bahamian ship registry.

The purpose, **Madam Speaker**, behind our attendance at the Conference and Exhibition is to ensure that our nation remains on the cutting edge and up to date on international trends in the shipping sector. Additionally, our attendance at the Conference and Exhibition afforded our nation the opportunity to promote our ship registry. Specifically, a key purpose of the trip is to expand the number of ships under The Bahamas flag and to expand education and training opportunities for Bahamians.

Let us make no mistake about it, **Madam Speaker**, forming meaningful global partnerships is critical to driving reform and transformation of public agencies.

Madam Speaker,

As I indicated earlier, we are moving forward in the Ministry of Transport and Housing. I will now share our plans in the upcoming fiscal year.

In this budget cycle, we will see housing activity on the islands of New Providence, Abaco, Grand Bahama, Eleuthera, Andros, Bimini and Exuma. We have made intentional efforts to move away from Nassau-centric plans to incorporate housing developments across the entire archipelago. Therefore, Madam Speaker, we have allocated \$1.5 million dollars to the Department of Housing for the development of subdivisions.

Beginning with New Providence, on Carmichael Road, we have The Renaissance, which will consist of 365 residential and commercial lots. Of the four phases for infrastructure, phase one has already been completed. We are currently commencing the completion of phase two of the infrastructural works.

The homes will be built in two phases, the first phase will consist of 200 affordable homes, which will include single-family homes, condo-style homes, and multi-family homes. There will also be 165 commercial lots.

The second phase of Road works, Water & Sewer Works, Electrical Works, and Surveying Works will be commenced this week. This subdivision is aptly named “Renaissance” because it represents a revival of the affordable housing market with high-quality homes that represent a new level in affordable housing in New Providence.

Also in New Providence, we have the Dignity Gardens Subdivision. There were 2 multi-family lots in this subdivision with all infrastructure in place. Those lots have now been cut into four (4) single family lots for construction of affordable homes.

Site plans and house plans are completed and have been submitted to Ministry of Works for approval. These homes will be built by our small contractors and when completed will be used as the pilot for our Rent-to-Own programme.

With regards to our Rent-to-Own programme, I am pleased to advise this Honourable House that the Department of Housing will be assisted by an Advisory Council comprised of distinguished individuals from both the private and public sectors. This advisory council will assist with the drafting the policy for the Rent-to-Own. Some suggested ways to manage this program is to require a down-payment in a smallest amount to facilitate the move in and then monthly payments for a period of 18 months or 3 years to build up equity and transition to a full mortgage. We have some fine tuning with this proposed structure and I am certain the Advisory Council will get us to a more confirmed position.

I want to take a moment to appreciate this, **Madam Speaker**, Dignity Gardens will allow local families to live in high quality, affordable housing with dignity. These homes will be built by small contractors, ensuring that smaller firms benefit from our construction works.

Most importantly, through these homes, we are launching the government’s unprecedented rent-to-own initiative, expanding access to home ownership in a real way for people whose income may be suitable, but for one reason or another, may not qualify for a traditional mortgage.

Social equity, **Madam Speaker**. That is the Davis Administration’s vision.

We developed this rent-to-own initiative as a solution to inequities in home ownership and now we are executing on that vision with plans for this initial pilot programme. Eventually, this will be used as a national model for rent-to-own affordable housing.

This is change we can believe in, **Madam Speaker**.

And this new, uplifting programme – this dream facilitating initiative –is solely a product of the Davis Administration’s people-centred policies.

In Fire Trail Gardens, there were two reserved parcels of land that were cut into six single family lots for construction of affordable homes.

All utility works including water, sewer, electricity, survey markers and the survey plan are all in place. Site plans and house plans are completed, and these homes will also be a part of the Rent-to-own programme.

Madam Speaker,

The Leonard Sugarman Subdivision is a special case.

This Fox Hill-based Subdivision is one where the occupants have possessed the land and built their homes but were never regularized over 20 years ago. As a result, some of the homeowners never had utilities connected to their homes. The Davis Administration could not let this egregious act continue under our watch. The Ministry of Transport & Housing is in the process of completing the infrastructural works that will finally allow the residents in the subdivision to be connected to the utilities and live more comfortably.

Madam Speaker,

On May 27th, we handed keys to three homeowners at the Pinecrest opening ceremony. Additional homes are under construction, and several more will be completed over the next few weeks, not months, FEW WEEKS. So, we can expect more keys to be handed over very soon. We began construction in January of this year, and in just six months, these homes were ready for occupation.

We know there are concerns about the subdivision's location. The southern part of the island is prone to flooding, and we recognize that. Pinecrest will be the first subdivision by the Department of Housing to adopt comprehensive measures to mitigate damage from both hurricanes and flooding. But nobody must take my word for it. This ministry and this administration are here to deliver results. The proof will be in the outcome. Not only can any independent observer inspect these measures with their own eyes, but we will also see these mitigation measures at work as heavy rains fall.

Madam Speaker,

I now turn to our Family Island housing initiatives.

The development in Central Pines, Abaco will feature 30 homes that will be built through a Public-Private Partnership. The lots are currently in various stages of completion, with 10 having lots that are now up to blocks and the remainder lots being levelled and prepared for construction. The cost of these homes will range in price from one hundred and thirty thousand to one hundred and eighty thousand dollars.

Eighteen additional lots are being developed in Central Pines and are being made ready for infrastructural development.

As many Bahamian companies are offering to participate in the Public-Private Partnership programme in Abaco, the Department of Housing's technical teams are presently looking at land in our inventory that could be potentially developed to further meet the need of the community and our private partners. We do have land in Central Pines but the big question is how much work it will take to get the land ready for construction and how much it will cost. Cost will be a deciding factor, as the intent is for these homes to be as affordable as possible.

In Spring City, roadworks, water works, electrical works and surveying works are underway for 21 lots that will serve as another site for affordable homes to be constructed.

The Sand Cove subdivision has all infrastructure in place and was originally developed to be sold as lots. However, today we have some 30-plus lots available that have not been sold and are looking to build on the lots through our PPP programme. The lots are ready for construction and an RFP document for surveying is completed and ready.

Once approval is granted for a PPP partner or other funding source, construction of the affordable homes will commence. In the meantime, lots will continue to be offered for sale as is.

Madam Speaker,

We have assessed the Spring City dome site and it was determined that many of the people occupying the domes could be moved because their placement there was not hurricane related.

I am advised that shortly, we will be giving notice of a deadline for all persons there to vacate. The domes were intended as a temporary housing solution and their suitability and utility has long passed. They were an emergency housing solution that unfortunately was not properly monitored and it is now imperative for us to deal with that situation now. But this is the Davis Administration, **Madam Speaker**, and we will not put people out heartlessly. Those who qualify, will get further assistance from Social Services and some others who qualify will be able to purchase one of the homes that are being built by the Department of Housing in Abaco.

The Department of Housing technical staff have already assessed the site and have designed a plan for the construction of affordable homes on the site for which those persons will also have access to – if they qualify. So far, we have been able to complete and approve a design for eleven houses on the site. Consideration is also being given for this site to be used to introduce the Government's Rent-to-Own programme in Abaco, to ensure that those who cannot qualify for a traditional mortgage can have access to a viable housing solution. Madam Speaker, altogether we are looking at well over 100-plus affordable homes in the Abacos. The plans are in place, and we are now executing at record speed.

Madam Speaker,

The island of Abaco was decimated by Hurricane Dorian. While tremendous progress has been made in rebuilding the island, there is more work to be done. Abaco is important to the economic growth and well-being of our nation. I am therefore, pleased to share with this Honourable House that my Ministry has been gifted with project plans for a new Town Centre at Marsh Harbour by former Prime Minister and former Member of Parliament for North Abaco, the Rt. Hon. Hubert Ingraham.

Major elements of The Town Centre will include a government complex, police and fire stations, a library, courts, mini-hospital, amphitheatre, central park, and a gymnasium. (Show Photo)

In the coming months, my Ministry will begin efforts to make the Town Centre a reality – turning the dream of a former Prime Minister Ingraham into reality for the benefit of Bahamians and the people of Abaco.

Madam Speaker,

I want the people of Grand Bahama to know that they have not been forgotten. The Davis administration is hard at work to ensure that the people of Grand Bahama take part in this housing boom. I am pleased to advise this Honourable House, that the Pine Forest subdivision's infrastructure has been completed.

One of the issues we encountered was that the demand for homes is high in this area while individuals qualifying for mortgages are not. Our vision for social equity cannot be denied by this state of affairs. The very nature of social equity is to replace existing systems that perpetuate inequality with new systems that empower. There was a time when the conclusion would have been that housing developments would not be possible in this area due to these limitations. But under the Davis administration, this location is being looked at as a prime location for the introduction of the Government's Rent-to-Own programme on Grand Bahama. Once approval is granted for a PPP partner or other funding source, the construction of eight affordable homes will commence.

In the West Heights subdivision, infrastructure is in place for 36 lots. Once again, we are conscious of the financial situation of residents who may not qualify due to no fault of their own. Grand Bahama has been through hard times that were exacerbated by Dorian. We understand this fact and we are exploring our options when it comes to building affordable homes in this area.

One Hundred and eighteen lots, **Madam Speaker**, are slated for the Heritage subdivision. Approval to acquire the land has been granted, and we will be moving, similarly as with our other housing projects; starting with construction on the eighteen lots which already has infrastructure as we design and commence infrastructural work on the remaining 100 lots.

Madam Speaker,

The people of Eleuthera will be happy to know that they are also included in these plans.

At the Alice Town Subdivision, all infrastructure is in place. Once approval is granted for a PPP partner or other funding source, the construction of affordable houses will commence. Consideration is also being given to introducing the Government's Rent-to-Own programme on the Island of Eleuthera at this location.

The Ocean Hole Site, in Rock Sound, has been assessed for affordable housing development. And we are making plans now, to begin work and moving towards building affordable home in Eleuthera, a first ever. This is such a warm and exciting feeling for me, as I served in the Senate with the Member for Central and South Eleuthera, and we would sit next to each other and talk about how we would make a difference and show that young people are capable to lead, if we got the opportunity to serve. Today, we are standing in this Honourable House and I am think many would agree that we are doing a GREAT job, he is making Agriculture Sexy and I am popping houses out of the ground!

Madam Speaker,

Seventy-nine lots were surveyed many years ago in Breezy Hill, North Andros but it was never developed. The technical team is looking at the site to determine the possibility and cost of developing that site for a hybrid model, where we construct some homes and offer other lots to

be sold as a possible site for those Androsians who may wish to return home or any Bahamian who wish to build a retirement, vacation, or other home on the island.

We are also looking at the Money Rock Subdivision in South Andros for future development, as well as the Love Hill Subdivision in Central Andros. Other areas will be explored over the course of the year.

On the island of Exuma, two sites are being targeted in Bahama Sound and at the Old Navy Base site. They do not currently have all the necessary infrastructure in place but they are ideal for housing developments.

We have made a lot of progress on the islands of New Providence, Abaco, and Grand Bahama while on other islands we are doing preliminary work. Within this budget cycle, we expect to continue to make progress on the Family Islands to ensure that we are meeting the housing needs of all our people.

Madam Speaker,

The Post Office Department continues its efforts to address the dire need for upgrades, and the overall transformation of its operations.

While focus over the past few months has been on formulating and applying new innovative technologies geared toward improving and expanding, the postal product and generating new revenue streams, it is important that the approach is a holistic one. This includes the:

- 1) The building of a permanent home for the Post Office;
- 2) Upgrade and refurbishment of Post Office sub-station buildings,
- 3) Assessment and Acquisition of additional Human Resources,
- 4) Expansion of Parcel Post service offerings, and
- 5) The Automation, upgrade and expansion of the Post Office Bank and counter service offerings.

The new postal product will require additional manpower for the timely delivery of expanded services at the highest standards. We remain optimistic about the profitable advantages that the Post Office will achieve by improving its service products.

Adequate human resources are critical to achieving the goals and objectives of the department and currently most family island locations are manned by a single officer. Additionally, New Providence has seen a serious depletion of top and middle managers, resulting in weakened management controls, low staff morale, and an inability to sufficiently deliver a superior postal product.

The department has begun the process of recruiting new talent, at the senior and lower management levels.

The Parcel Post Operations is the new direction for Post Offices around the globe. This will be our primary focus during the first phase of the service expansion exercise. The Post Office is

currently engaged in setting up the critically needed infrastructural IT features necessary to upgrade its parcel and small packet express mail service (EMS) delivery systems.

Consequently, the department has engaged expert IT professionals to develop software compatible with the universal postal network's system and to assist the migration of the postal (CDS), with the required local customs clearance network (Click to Clear). This new and improved product will generate significant revenue intake and is expected to be introduced to the public within the next 3 months. The end product will be a reliable and efficient parcel delivery system through which Post Office customers can ship packages internationally. While this capability exists already, we are modernizing this operation so that it can be consistent in quality with other similar operations operating locally and internationally.

Madam Speaker,

Many in New Providence may not be aware of this fact, but the Post Office Bank service is an essential service in almost all our Family Island locations. With the departure of commercial banks from several Family Islands, for many Bahamians, the Post Office Bank is essential. Considering the continued need for this service, it is critical that the Post Office is modernized to meet the demands of the 21st century.

To this end, an enhanced and intentional effort is underway to ensure that all Family Islands have access to some form of secure financial service, in the form of a fully automated money transfer system that will be user-friendly to accommodate both the young and not so young customer.

The automated infrastructural upgrade to the Post Office Bank will seek to eliminate the bulk of over-the-counter cash transactions and strengthen accounting controls in New Providence and remote Family Island locations. The new system of operations will improve the overall efficiency of the bank at all Post Office locations.

Madam Speaker,

We are excited about the forthcoming new features to the Post Office Savings Bank, and as additional service offerings emerge, Post Office customers can benefit from improved services. If you are a Family Islander who currently uses the Post Office Bank, you would be pleased to know that we are dedicating the necessary resources to make this service faster, more secure, and more convenient so that you have a reliable system in place to meet your banking needs.

The Davis administration is focused on country-wide national development. Family Island-specific initiatives like the Post Office Bank often slip through the cracks as Nassau-centric issues get all the attention. But those days are over. Family Islanders, we are listening, we are tuned into you, and we will deliver for you. The Post Office Bank is just the start.

Madam Speaker,

The department indicated, early in the current fiscal period, plans to address the repairs and upgrades to several sub and district offices that have fallen into disrepair and have been in these conditions for years. Repairs have proven to be more extensive than projected and the limited resources allocated were soon depleted. Currently, repairs to the Fox Hill, Grants Town, and South Beach Post Offices are completed. The Cable Beach and Shirley Street Offices are about

90% completed. The Carmichael Road Post Office is expected to have cosmetic finishes completed over the next four weeks.

Family Island offices were not left out. We intend to expand the design plans for the Post Office in Grand Bahama and will be working closely with the technical team of the Ministry of Works, as it is our intent to restructure the use of that building and allocate office space for relocation of the Ministry of Works and the Port Department. Efforts are ongoing to replace destroyed offices on Abaco, namely the Green Turtle Cay, Hope Town, and Treasure Cay offices.

Construction of the Rum Cay Post Office is completed and awaiting furnishings that we hope to have shipped over the next three months so that the Postal Clerk can finally work in a comfortable and safe environment.

The Post Office Department's internal audit and building assessment teams are currently touring Family Island districts to address outstanding environmental, IT, and infrastructural upgrades, so that we can maintain the same standard in all post offices across the archipelago. There should be no perceivable differences in the conditions of post offices on the Family Islands compared to their Nassau counterparts.

Madam Speaker,

I now pivot to the operations of the Port Department, which is charged with the responsibility of regulating all private and commercial activities within the local maritime industry of The Bahamas.

The safety functions of the Department assigned by way of the Ports Authorities Act, the Boat Registration Act, the Commercial Recreational Watercraft Act and the Water Skiing and Motor-Boat Control Act.

Among a myriad of other things, the Ports Authorities Act makes provision for the upkeep, maintenance, and regulation of all lighthouses throughout the Commonwealth of the Bahamas. In keeping with this objective, on February 18th, 2022, the Port Department signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Elbow Reef Lighthouse Society, with the understanding that both parties would work together to ensure effective oversight of the historical Elbow Reef Lighthouse located in Elbow Cay on the island of Abaco.

Recognizing the Elbow Reef Lighthouse Society's thirty-plus years of direct involvement in the restoration and upkeep of the last manned lighthouse in the world, I wish to thank the Society for their tremendous contribution, and the Lighthouse Keepers of the Port Department for their continuous work to preserve this national treasure.

In the same vein, I wish to add that the Port Department is also reviewing contracts to repair, replace and/ or maintain all aids to navigation in The Bahamas.

Continuing with Port developments in Abaco, I am pleased to announce to this House and to the public that two-plus years following Hurricane Dorian in 2019, we have secured an office space for the Marsh Harbour Port Department, which is now open for business. Located on Queen Elizabeth Drive, Marsh Harbour, this office allows customers on the mainland of Abaco and surrounding cays to access our staff with ease, to conduct Port business, and for staff members to work under the same roof to accomplish their shared goals.

Restoring critical infrastructure and services is essential to regaining some semblance of normalcy in our hard-hit islands. The truth is that we wish it could have happened even sooner, but we are pleased to bring port services back to the people. We will continue to prioritize the rebuilding of our hurricane-hit islands until they are even better than before.

Madam Speaker,

To meet International Ship and Port Facility Security Code standards, an expression of interest was shared with the public to attract bids for the redevelopment of the Coopers Town Port and the Marsh Harbour International Facility. This redevelopment would create a public-private partnership between the Government of The Bahamas and the contracting party. It is anticipated that all concerns related to the security of the named ports will be addressed in this partnership, as well as the creation of a port that is up-to-par with other international ports around the world.

On another note, the public may recall the relocation of the Port Department's head office in Nassau to the East Bay Shopping Plaza to facilitate the construction of the Nassau Cruise Port. Noting the Department's current space needs, efforts are being made to expand the Department's work area, to accommodate additional officers in a suitable environment that is conducive to productivity.

To continue its mandate to offer efficient service to its customers, the Port Department has also commenced staff hirings, particularly for Family Island offices which are faced with staff shortage concerns. We anticipate a quick completion of this goal, which is now in its final stages.

As a part of its regulatory mandate, patrol of vessel traffic within the Bahamas is required to ensure that commercial and private operations are conducted using vessels and watercraft that are deemed seaworthy for the purpose for which they are being used. As such, I am pleased to share that the Port Department has acquired two additional patrol crafts, to be used within the Family Islands, namely Exuma and Abaco, for monitoring of vessel traffic.

Boaters are therefore reminded to ensure that their vessel and/ or watercraft are registered with the Port Department to avoid enforcement against illegal maritime activity. The public is reminded that they can visit a Port office or log on to www.bahamas.gov.bs/port to complete the registration process.

In Nassau, Potter's Cay dock stands as a hub for maritime activity, with vessels constantly moving in and out of the harbour for the purpose of transporting cargo. To emphasize the message of safety, I am proud to announce that we have installed signs at the Eastern end of Potter's Cay Dock to advise boaters of the proper use of that area, thereby eliminating the possibility of incidents.

As we continue to raise the standard at Potter's Cay Dock, to improve the overall look and operations of that area, the Port Department, by way of the Ministry of Transport and Housing, is also in discussions to complete phase three of the Potter's Cay dock project. Once completed, a freight depot will be created with security checkpoints, control access, and proper regulation of traffic. Additionally, clean-up of the Nassau Harbour is ongoing, to remove derelict and abandoned vessels in and around the harbour.

Recognizing the strides that my Ministry is taking to ensure that the Port Department is equipped to deliver its mandate, we also see the need to ensure that staff members feel

empowered to perform their job with confidence and in the spirit of excellence. Therefore, the Port Department and the Bahamas Maritime Authority have signed a Memorandum of Understanding, which provides for technical training and support of Port officers, and collaboration between the two agencies, to enhance the vessel inspection regime and ensure that vessels not only meet local standards but also comply with standards set by regional and international bodies of which The Bahamas is party to. Our work will only be as good as the people getting the job done. This administration understands this fact, and at the Ministry of Transport and Housing, we will continue to explore opportunities to upgrade staff, improve competencies, fill identified gaps, and build capacity.

Further, the Port Department, in conjunction with the New Providence Port Authority Board, is collaborating to amend all Port legislation, which will affect fines and fees associated with the Department, among a list of other things.

Overall, we recognize the importance of emphasizing safety in the local maritime industry, and we are determined to achieve this goal for the betterment of all stakeholders and the public. As my Ministry commits to offering service that is commensurate with technological developments, the Port Department is in discussions to secure a viable party to provide a full-scale digital solution that would allow all Port services and functions to be accessed on a single website. We anticipate the roll-out of this solution in the short-term future.

Digitization is key, **Madam Speaker**. It is through digital transformation exercises like this one that the Davis Administration will expedite the delivery and quality of service throughout the government. The result will be an improved experience for users of government services, improved ease of doing business, and a more productive public service. The Ministry of Transport and Housing is fully embracing the digitalization agenda with the digitalization of port services being one of the many ways that we are incorporating technology throughout the ministry.

In the meantime, we are committing to maintaining partnerships with regional and international stakeholders including the Port of Miami, and the Port of New York and New Jersey for the purpose of information-sharing, technical assistance, and staff training.

Madam Speaker, The Road Traffic Department is an important agency of the Ministry of Transport and Housing.

The Department was previously located in the Clarence A. Bain Building, Thompson Boulevard; however, as result of changes with the structure and maintenance of the building, extensive consultations were held with various technical experts in both the private and public sectors, in conjunction with the Bahamas Public Services Union, and it was determined that there was an urgent need to temporarily relocate staff, while seeking a more permanent location for the department. The Thomas A. Robinson Stadium was identified and has been housing the department and its operations for more than three years. It has now come to attention that the department has been requested to relocate with immediate effect.

Therefore, **Madam Speaker**, a new facility will be constructed that would house the headquarters of the Ministry of Transport and Housing, as well as the Road Traffic Department. The facility will feature a service and inspection garage, that checks brakes, tires, weight, exhaust systems and other areas to ensure safety and protection for all licensed vehicles. Our vision also includes to have a driving course on the property, as well as a 15 bus lane terminal that facilitates

an area for busses to use as a rest stop, or a bus collection point. We are still in the early stages of discussing the completed design, but we intend to build a modern building, fit for purpose.

Madam Speaker,

Another, important focus of the Department is to ensure the introduction of the TMS system to the islands of Cat Island, San Salvador, Rum Cay, Berry Island, Acklins, Crooked Island, Mayaguana and Inagua.

Plans, **Madam Speaker**, are also in the works for a Road Traffic sub-station to be opened in eastern New Providence. The introduction of this office will improve the delivery of services by the Department and alleviate the long lines at the main office of the Road Traffic Department.

During this budget period, The Road Traffic Department has recommended for consideration new revenue measures. These measures include the introduction of commercial driver's license and vanity license plates. My Ministry is in the preliminary stages of planning an artist competition in partnership with the Ministry of Youth, Sports, and Culture for a limited vanity license plate design competition to commemorate our nation's 50th independence anniversary.

A focus of the Department of Road Traffic during this budget period, **Madam Speaker**, will be to give greater attention to the promotion of road safety practices. As the Minister of Transport and Housing, I am disturbed by the number of traffic fatalities involving the young people of our nation. I am pleased to advise this Honorable House that my Ministry intends to launch a national road safety campaign before the end of this year.

Madam Speaker,

The concerns of the surrey drivers have been brought to the attention of my Ministry. I am advised that as a result of the signing of the lease agreement for the Nassau Cruise Port and the subsequent construction that surrey drivers have been displaced.

I wish to take this opportunity to assure surrey drivers that Ministry is actively engaged with relevant stakeholders on a plan to have them re-located and to ensure that their location is conducive to obtaining business from cruise passengers.

I wish to also thank my Cabinet colleagues for agreeing to grant a one-time subsidy payment to the Surrey drivers to assist with the care of the Horses and to get them prepared to resume services to our tourist sector soonest.

Madam Speaker,

I would be remiss if I did not speak to the concerns of bus drivers. Public transportation is an important facet of our society. It is integral to how we interact with each other on the job and in our communal lives. I wish to thank the public transport providers and drivers for the essential service they provide.

Madam Speaker,

We acknowledge that the cost of fuel has impacted the operations of the bussing system, however at this time we are unable to consider bus fare increases. However, I wish to advise that my Ministry will meet with the Ministry of Finance to design and structure a temporary relieve package for the industry.

Madam Speaker,

I now wish to report on the activities of the Aircraft Accident Investigation Authority (AAIA), which is a specialized unit under the remit of the Ministry of Transport and Housing.

The mandate of the AAIA includes the investigation of accidents and serious incidents.

The evolution of the AAIA from a unit within the former Civil Aviation Department to a stand-alone, functionally independent investigative authority, has not been an easy feat and much work is required for the Authority to remain in a position as a leader in aviation safety.

The ICAO monitors a State's level of compliance with the Standards and Recommended Practices (SARPs) of the Convention on International Civil Aviation via safety audits, and The Bahamas was the subject of such an audit in November and December 2021. The AAIA's portion of the ICAO safety audit was conducted in December 2021 and yielded remarkable results, improving from a low score of 13.59% from the previous audit in 2017, to an outstanding 90.29%.

What makes this achievement so special is that unlike the 2017 ICAO audit, where foreign consultants were engaged to plan, prepare and advise, this latest audit initiative was planned and executed solely in-house by the AAIA's all Bahamian staff, led by Chief Investigator Capt. Delvin Major, with assistance from the AG's office for legal guidance relative to statutory and regulatory matters. **Madam Speaker**, a stellar example of Bahamian excellence. Clearly, there is no limit to what we can do when provided with the right support and opportunity.

Madame Speaker,

For this upcoming budgetary period, it is envisioned that areas identified by the ICAO auditors as deficient or requiring additional mitigation measures, would be given special attention in order to strengthen the capabilities of the AAIA.

Subsequently, the following initiatives are planned for the fiscal period 2022 – 2023:

- We will amend the AAIA Act 2019 and AAIA Regulations 2021.
- We will expand AAIA staff by two (2) investigators to build capacity.
- We will facilitate safety training for aviation stakeholders throughout The Bahamas to provide support to the AAIA and its investigative process.
- And we will continue recurrent training and initiate training as appropriate for AAIA staff to remain on the cutting edge of investigative techniques and technological advancements.

Madam Speaker,

I now turn to the Department of Meteorology. The Department of Meteorology is fully committed to providing the most accurate and timely meteorological products, services and information using the latest technology available to fully meet the needs of its customers.

In October 2016, **Madam Speaker**, The Government of The Bahamas, through the Department of Meteorology, signed a contract with a Finnish company, to install a network of Doppler Weather Radars and Automatic Weather Observing Systems in The Bahamas. This contract included the installation of four (4) Doppler Weather Radars, the refurbishment of an existing Doppler Weather Radar, the installation of nine (9) Airport Weather Observing Systems and the installation of a Low-level Windshear Alert System at the Lynden Pindling Airport.

Madam Speaker,

To date, the nine Airport Weather Observing Systems are installed at the following airports: Marsh Harbor; Lynden Pindling International Airport (3); Governors Harbor; Fresh Creek; Bight, Cat Island; San Salvador and Inagua. The four new Doppler Weather Radars are all installed in: New Providence, Marsh Harbor, Abaco; Millerton, Long Island and Mayaguana. The refurbishment and installation of the existing Radar is completed in Ragged Island. Seven of the eight towers required for the Low-Level Windshear Alert System at the LPIA are also installed.

Works remaining to be done on this project are the connection of the Mayaguana radar to the power grid and the installation one more tower for the Low-Level Windshear Alert System at the LPIA. Plans are to complete the remaining works on this project by December 2022.

Madam Speaker,

During the fiscal period 2021/2022, four veteran Meteorologists retired from the Public Service. It is anticipated that an additional five Meteorologists will reach the mandatory retirement age within the next three years. It is necessary to replace these retirees with competent individuals who would be able to contribute to the continued growth and development of the Department. Provision are made in the 2022/2023 Budget for the hiring of twenty (20) young Bahamians to be trained in the science of Meteorology.

Madam Speaker,

In the 2022/2023 national budget, we have allocated over 8 million dollars for mail boat service contracts. We understand that to operate a mailboat is not cheap – in fact the annual fuel costs can be significant; however, as this service is government subsidized, the residents of the family islands should not have to pay exorbitant fees and suffer from inconsistent pricing.

My Ministry, **Madam Speaker**, will seek to partner with the Department of Local Government – which falls under the Ministry of Agriculture, Marine Resources and Family Island Affairs and family island MPs, to ensure that we give family island residents a voice in the decision-making process with a view to improving the mailboat service. Further, my Ministry intends to establish a Helpdesk for family island residents to report missing goods and other issues.

Madam Speaker,

I now direct the House's attention to the operations of the Bahamas Maritime Authority.

Members would no doubt be aware that the Maritime sector is a key pillar of our economy. We intend to continue to make inroads in this sector by offering new opportunities for The Bahamas and for Bahamians.

Madam Speaker,

I have just returned from Greece, where the international shipping exhibition – Posidonia 2022 – marked the first major gathering of the maritime world since the onset of the pandemic. The Bahamas' delegation included Ms. Jacqueline Simmons, Chairman of the Bahamas Maritime Authority, Permanent Secretary Antoinette Thompson, Deputy Chairman, Mr. Peter John Goulandris and Director and CEO, Captain Dwain Hutchinson, supported by BMA staff from the London and Greece offices.

Madam Speaker,

We met in person with the Greek Minister of Maritime Affairs and Insular Policy, we met with the President of the Union of Greek Shipowners, with whom we have a very close working relationship, and we met with some of the world's major shipowners, many of whom fly our Flag.

I am pleased to report, that under the aegis of the BMA, The Bahamas remains solidly among the Top-10 registries in the world. The BMA has been profitable for The Bahamas every year of its existence, having now returned to the Treasury in excess of \$110 million.

I am also pleased to report that, we see significant opportunity for growth for The Bahamas in the maritime sector, in terms of fleet growth and hence enhanced revenue for the Bahamas Treasury and in terms of enhanced opportunities for Bahamians by way of education, jobs, careers, advancement in the maritime field, etc.

In Greece, we engaged with the Government and maritime industry leaders to discuss areas of mutual benefit – in order to grow existing business opportunities for The Bahamas, and explore new ones for Bahamians. At the forefront of our discussion was climate change – through the introduction of practical and effective maritime regulations – and quality customer service. In this regard, I was heartened to hear that The Bahamas, through the Bahamas Maritime Authority, was sought out for its expertise, its competence and its regulatory leadership.

As one of the largest flags in an increasingly competitive ship registration field, I was pleased to hear that our clients continue to benefit from the quality of our service, and continue to bring tonnage to our Registry. The trust of Greek companies, large and small, from shipping dynasties such as Livanos, Tsakos, Thenamaris, Dorian, Chartworld, Stamco, and many others who are advocates for our Flag, and also for The Bahamas as a centre for investment, for financial services and residence and by extension championing The Bahamas as a tourist destination.

Madam Speaker,

Presently, we are in the enviable position, as it relates to the international ship registry, in that we have access to shipowners ranging from bulk carriers, tankers, car carriers, container ships and gas carriers who are committed to fly our Flag, in addition to having the largest number of cruise ships in the world under our flag. These facts present significant opportunities for the Bahamas. Bearing this in mind we must embrace the opportunity to structure ourselves to not only safeguard our present position, but to also grow and increase our revenue streams.

We must grow our market share in Greece, and also in the Far East, where the Flag is not as well-known as in the West. The key to this growth is – and will be – customer service. The maritime regulatory world has become very complex, with new environmental issues and environmentally-friendly technologies now overlaid on traditional mechanical, structural, electronic and operational ship – safety issues. Other major registries are competing every day for major shipowners’ business. If we are to compete and prosper, we must maintain and enhance our level of client service. This means continuing to assure that the BMA has sufficient people with the specialized knowledge to regulate – to support – our shipowner clients. Where necessary, we will continue to make these investments in people, including in our Greek and London offices, and elsewhere as needed.

One of the most noteworthy requirements however, is to strategically focus on our BMA’s operations at home. We realize that in positioning ourselves strategically, we must augment and enhance our specialized expertise at the Bahamas office to support our domestic maritime sector, our port operations, our ship and boat inspection capacity, our environmental oversight, and our ability to monitor marine traffic, both domestic and transient. This will yield efficiencies, and enhanced safety, that will benefit all Bahamians, and all visitors to our beautiful country.

We will continue to collaborate and support maritime education in The Bahamas, with other government ministries and agencies. We will continue to nourish the Bahamas Maritime Cadet Corps (the BMCC), that is funded by the BMA, and that provides free maritime basic training to our high school students. We will make every effort to help leverage the state-of-the-art LJM Maritime Academy as a key part of the Bahamian maritime education cluster. And we will work with academic institutions and other maritime stakeholders here in the Bahamas to help build The Bahamas as a world-class center for maritime education.

Finally, Madam Speaker,

We will more effectively marry maritime training and education to real jobs in order to provide good opportunities for Bahamians. We are aware that the pandemic has created major dislocations in the employment chain, particularly for the cruise industry, in which a single cruise ship can require in excess of a thousand crew. People are needed. We will work with the maritime industry, with our manning agencies and with other stakeholders in The Bahamas, to assure that as many job opportunities as possible are made available to qualified Bahamians.

The Bahamas is quintessentially a maritime nation. We have set a course for the maritime sector to provide productive avenues for the Bahamas and for Bahamians – to provide enhanced revenue, quality maritime education, accessible opportunities and good maritime jobs.

Madam Speaker,

We recognize that the expectations of the Bahamian people for the Ministry of Transport and Housing is high. We understand that there must be accountability and delivery of our commitments. Therefore, my Ministry is in the process of establishing a Delivery Unit to ensure that solutions are efficiently executed and the desired outcomes are achieved on behalf of the Bahamian people.

Madam Speaker,

As stated at the start of my budget presentation, the people of the Elizabeth Constituency have elected me to be their voice in this Honorable House.

In preparation of the hurricane season, **Madam Speaker**, cleaning of drains in all areas of the constituency is taking place. Additionally, truckloads of sand to prevent the flooding of homes have been made available in 8 different locations in Elizabeth for constituents.

In May, we celebrated the Mothers of Elizabeth and we will be hosting our Father's day event on Elizabeth Estates park, this Friday at 5pm.

We are continuing, **Madam Speaker**, to provide free breakfast on the last Friday of each month at the constituency office from 6:00am to 8:00am.

Plans are currently underway for an Awards Ceremony, to recognize and salute outstanding students in the Elizabeth Constituency. Further details will be provided shortly.

Madam Speaker,

In closing, I wish to reaffirm my commitment to my constituents and the Bahamian people whom I serve and to whom I have pledged to make a difference. In so doing it is my hope that they will be the beneficiary of modern, innovative, transformative service in every agency of my ministry and that their lives will be positively impacted in a tangible and holistic way.

I again thank my teams at the constituency office and the Ministry of Transport and Housing for their support.

Madam Speaker,

I am fully aware of an old Bahamian saying, "Dog don't bark at parked car." I am working diligently to execute my duties for the betterment of the Bahamian people and to make a notable difference. The attacks and character smears will come – but I move each day fully aware of the expectations of our people.

Thank you, **Madam Speaker**, and may God bless the Commonwealth of The Bahamas.

- END -