

Senator The Honourable Latrae Rahming

Contribution to A Budget the Builds on Progress 2026/27

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Senate Chambers

Nassau, Bahamas

Introduction

Madam President,

I rise in this Chamber today as a Senator.

I rise carrying the honour of this office, but also the memory of the road that brought me here.

But I also rise as a young Bahamian who knows what it means to need a chance.

My father, Leslie "Ducky" Rahming, never lived to see this day.

He never lived to see his son walk into this Chamber.

He never lived to see his son take a seat in the Senate.

And Madam President, there are some absences that success can never fill.

I believe my grandparents, Viola and Doc Rahming, are smiling down on me.

I believe this would have been a proud day for the Brick House.

I believe they would have looked at this moment and said, "Look what God has done."

I am a proud son of the community we affectionately call The Valley.

The Valley raised me.

The Valley shaped me.

The Valley taught me how to survive, how to respect people, and how to keep moving when life gives you every reason to stop.

I am the nephew of Leon "Lee" Rahming, who served for more than 30 years in the House of Assembly.

As a teenager, he allowed me to camp out in Parliament.

I would sit there and watch the debates, the arguments, the traditions,

and the way words could shape the direction of a country.

Long before I had a title, I had a love for this place.

I am also the grandson of Sidney "Moon" McPhee.

But more than anything else.

I am the product of two extraordinary women: my mother, Latese McPhee, and my grandmother, Eleanor Forbes.

They stretched what they had.

I am here because of them, and because of their prayers.

Madam President,

I skipped high school classes to watch Parliament in the gallery.

That may sound strange to some people, but Parliament was my first classroom.

I sat in the gallery as a young boy trying to understand how the future of a country could be shaped by people who chose to serve.

Later, I went to China to attend university because it offered a quality education my mother could afford.

That decision changed my life, but it also tested me.

University was one of the hardest periods of my life.

There were days when I had to decide whether I would pay tuition, pay rent, or buy food.

Those were real decisions.

After classes, I taught English to Chinese students to earn extra money.

I was far from home, trying to survive, trying to make my family proud, trying to finish what I had started.

There were moments when I questioned whether I would make it. Singing quietly the song. It won't always be like this; sooner or later it will turn in my favour.

But through the help of a village, the grace of God, and the support of people who saw something in me, I made it through.

Madam President,

My road to this Chamber was far from straight.

I was 22 years old when former Prime Minister Perry Christie invited me to work with him.

I took time away from university on a leap of faith, believing that opportunity could change the course of my life.

Then the PLP lost the election.

And when the election was over, I had to face reality.

I had left school.

I had no clear path back.

I had no guarantee.

I had no safety net.

I felt the weight of having taken a chance that seemed to have failed.

At that time, people called me a "Christie boy." And Madam President, if you are from The Valley, you understand what Perry Christie meant to our community.

There was hardly a house without his picture on the wall.

He was part of the story of where I came from.

So yes, I admired him. I respected him.

I learned from him.

But after defeat, I was still a young man trying to figure out how to finish university and rebuild my life.

My uncle Funkie and I decided to hold a cookout to raise money for me to return to school.

Imagine that.

A young Bahamian who had stepped into national politics, now standing over a grill, trying to sell enough plates to pay his way back to university.

But that cookout taught me something.

It taught me that pride cannot carry you through hard times, but community can.

Around that time, I texted the then Deputy Leader of the PLP, Philip Brave Davis, to congratulate him on his recent success.

I told him that if he ever needed me, I would be around.

He responded.

And when we met, he told me he would do all that he could to help me finish university.

I will never forget that.

At a time when I was unsure of myself, he helped me see a future.

to this day, some people may still see me only as a "Christie boy."

In fact Madam President

During the PLP leadership race, I remember feeling so much pressure to prove where I stood that I took a picture of my ballot to show that I had supported Mr. Davis.

When I sent it, his response was one I will carry for the rest of my life.

He told me:

"Latrae, do not allow others to disturb your energy. I never doubted your

support, and no one in my presence has ever suggested that you were against me. I treasure your support and confidence in me.”

Madam President,

Those words meant more to me than he may ever know.

Because sometimes young people in politics feel as though they must keep proving that they belong.

That message reminded me that leadership can also lift a young person and can give a young person room to grow.

Shortly after that, I was fired from BAIC after the FNM came to office. In fact, the then Chairman of BAIC fired me, and later came to buy a cookout ticket to help me go back to school.

That moment stayed with me.

I came face to face with the harshness of politics.

It taught me how quickly people can lose opportunities because of who they choose to support.

I lived knowing that behind every political decision, there is a human being trying to pay rent, finish school, feed a family, and build a life.

Philip Brave Davis had just become Leader of the PLP. In my moment of uncertainty, when I asked for support, he gave it. I told him that I would go back to university, finish my degree, and do all that I could to help him become Prime Minister.

And by the grace of God, the rest is history.

Madam President,

To former Prime Minister the Rt. Hon. Perry G. Christie, I say thank you. You

gave a young man from The Valley a chance to see public service from the inside.

You allowed me to learn, to listen, and to understand that leadership is about people, memory, patience, and country.

And to the Prime Minister, Hon. Philip Brave Davis, I say thank you.

In one of the most uncertain periods of my life, you gave me support, confidence, and room to grow.

You helped me find my way back to purpose, and you trusted me with responsibility.

Madam President, it has been one of the great honours of my life to serve two Prime Ministers of The Bahamas.

One taught me to love the institution and country. The other gave me the

chance to help shape the work before it.

I carry both lessons with gratitude.

Madam President,

On May 12th, the people of this country chose progress.

And I am constantly reminded that what the people give, the people can take away.

So we must treat this mandate with humility.

The election result was a vote of confidence in the direction of the country and in the leadership of the Prime Minister.

But it was no blank cheque.

It was no invitation to arrogance.

It was a message.

The Bahamian people are tired of stopping, starting over, and falling behind.

They want steady progress.

They expect results.

They want a government that understands their lives, their struggles, their hopes, and their impatience for change.

The 2026/2027 Budget builds on progress already made.

It protects the gains.

It strengthens the foundation.

It moves our country forward.

Section 2: They Were Wrong Then They are Wrong Now

Madam President, my personal story brings me to the larger point.

Opportunity is important, but opportunity must be protected by good governance.

And that is where the contrast begins.

A government is judged on three things.

The People's Confidence in Them.

The Credibility to Deliver on Its Promises.

Competence to Deliver Results.

In my opinion on all three, the Free National Movement failed in office.

And this side, the Progressive Liberal Party, can hold its head high, because on all three, we delivered.

I will not ask this Chamber to take my word for it. I will use theirs, and then I will use the record.

When their record is raised.

They say Dorian.

They say COVID.

Both were real.

The pain was real.

No honest person pretends otherwise.

But the failure came before the storm.

Before Dorian, the FNM raised VAT from seven and a half percent to twelve.

A sixty percent increase, on every Bahamian family.

They told this country it would buy two things.

1.2 billion dollars in revenue.

And a balanced budget in three years.

They delivered neither.

Revenue for 2018 to 2019 came in three hundred and sixty-nine million dollars below budget. VAT alone missed by one hundred and thirty-five million.

The very tax they had just raised by sixty percent.

And as the revenue slipped, they dismantled the Revenue Enhancement Unit, the unit built to recover what was owed to the Treasury.

The reporting attributed to Moody's put its early collection near ninety million in six months.

The unit they put in its place came a year late, and collected fifteen.

Ninety million, for fifteen.

That is not a hurricane, Madam President.

That is a choice.

And I do not ask the Chamber to take only the Government's word.

I ask it to take the word of a leader who once carried another banner, and now carries theirs.

In 2019, before Dorian, the then leader of the Democratic National Alliance examined this same FNM record. In a statement published by her own party,

responding to the IMF's Article IV consultation, she wrote, and I quote, that *"the sixty percent increase in the regressive Value Added Tax rate ... has imposed significant hardship on the Bahamian people."*

She wrote that the FNM had relegated, and I quote, *"the endangered middle class and less privileged ... to the proverbial backburner, with no relief in sight."* Those are not my words, Madam President.

Those are her words, on her party's own record, before a single storm gave anyone an excuse.

So on the diagnosis, we agree. We both are of the opinion the FNM's sixty percent tax-imposed hardship. And that the FNM left the middle class on the backburner.

The only question that remains is what changed, because their record did not, and the numbers did not.

The only thing that changed was the colour of her shirt.

Madam President, criticism is easy.

Governing is hard.

And where they raised the tax and missed the target, this side did the harder thing.

We governed.

In five years, this is what the Progressive Liberal Party delivered.

We cut the people's taxes.

We cut VAT from twelve percent to ten.

We cut it again on food, to five percent.

And then to zero on unprepared food, at the register, in every store, for every family.

Where they raised the burden, we lifted it.

We turned the public finances.

We took a deficit of more than thirteen percent of GDP and brought it down to a fraction of one percent, and onto the path to surplus.

Three years of primary surplus, confirmed by the International Monetary Fund. A debt ratio bending downward.

And in 2025, we refinanced nearly eight hundred million dollars of expensive debt on better terms for the Bahamian people.

We put money back in people's pockets.

We raised the minimum wage from two hundred and ten dollars to two hundred and sixty, the first increase since 2015.

We expanded price controls on the everyday items that families buy.

We grew the economy. Five straight years of growth above the old two percent ceiling.

Four point two percent in 2024.

Three point eight percent in 2025.

Unemployment down to, the lowest since 2008. A record twelve and a half million visitors in 2025.

And more than ten billion dollars in foreign direct investment.

We won back the world's confidence.

S&P upgraded The Bahamas.

Fitch rated us.

Moody's upgraded us.

And the IMF lowered its assessment of our sovereign risk, from high to moderate.

Madam President, that is a record. Line by line. Number by number.

We delivered.

**AND EVERY STEP OF THE WAY,
THEY SAID WE COULD NOT**

When we cut VAT, Peter Turnquest warned of a loss, and I quote, "*as high as \$200 million.*" In the first six months, receipts rose by thirty percent, to five hundred and ninety-one million dollars. By 2024 to 2025, VAT reached one point four billion.

He predicted a hole. We produced a rise.

When the deficit fell, the Leader of the Opposition swore it was headed past three hundred million. It closed at one hundred and ninety-four. He forecast the next year near two hundred million.

It closed at seventy-nine. Twice the alarm, twice the country proved him wrong.

And the agencies they said would never move? Moody's, which once called our forecasts, and I quote, "*overly optimistic,*" upgraded this country

twelve days before the Bahamian people went to the polls.

They forecast collapse. We delivered progress.

They were wrong then, before the storm.

They were wrong about us, in the clear light of the record.

They raised VAT. We cut it.

They missed their revenue. We grew ours.

They promised balance and failed. We narrowed the deficit and reached for surplus.

They broke their collection unit.

We reintroduce it and rebuilt it properly and deliver revenue.

They predicted collapse. We delivered upgrades.

They made Bahamians pay more for less. We gave Bahamians more, for less.

That is the contrast. That is the record.

That is the difference between that side and this side.

This administration inherited debt, doubt, and an economy in shock. We did not answer with excuses.

We answered with decisions.

We made promises.

We kept them.

We said we would. We did.

So when they rise to attack this Budget, let them first answer their own.

The sixty percent tax.

The missed millions.

The broken unit.

And then let them explain how a party that failed in clear weather expects to be trusted now.

Because at the end, this debate is about trust.

About who the Bahamian people believe can manage this economy.

Section 3: A Reflection on Our Politics

Madam President, once the record is clear, we must also speak about the politics used to challenge it.

By examining the spirit in which we seek power.

Over the past few months, many people have spoken about the future of Bahamian politics. Some now call for sober-minded leadership. Some now appeal to the high ground. I welcome that language, but our politics must also have memory.

I was tempted to leave the campaign behind us. I understand the principle often associated with former Prime Minister Hubert Ingraham, that elections settle scores.

In one sense, they do. The people vote, the result is declared, and the country moves on. But elections settle who governs.

They do not erase the conduct used in pursuit of power.

I find it telling that the opposition has now largely abandoned what was, in my view, one of its most prolific campaign themes: "Save Our Sovereignty."

For months, they built their campaign around suspicion, national documents, and institutional doubt.

Then they came into this debate, after the people had spoken, and that great alarm suddenly became quieter.

That raises a serious question.

Was it a matter of country, or a matter of campaign?

Because when language flirts with the proposition of state collusion, when speech places doubt over national institutions, and when fear is used as a road to office, the country deserves more than silence after defeat.

The deeper error was this: the FNM confused real public concern with proof of its own political case.

Immigration is a serious concern for Bahamians. So too is our National documents .

The integrity of institutions are critical.

But the existence of a serious issue does not make the FNM a serious custodian of that issue. The Bahamian people heard the claims.

They weighed the tone. They saw the evidence of a government acting, investigating, and protecting the country. And they chose progress.

That choice should humble all of us. It should also teach the opposition that people can care deeply about an issue and still reject the politics used to exploit it.

The public did not ignore the concern. They rejected the approach. They rejected fear without proof, suspicion without responsibility, and a campaign that too often treated national confidence as collateral damage.

That is why this moment calls for reflection, because winning at all costs

can cost a country more than any party should be willing to pay.

Madam President,

Yet there are moments when silence gives permission to behaviour that should be rebuked.

During the campaign, Senator Rick Fox referred to PLP as a party filled with demons.

That language should trouble every side of this Chamber.

Because when politics teaches people to see opponents as demons, it stops being a contest of ideas and becomes a politics of destruction. Once that door is opened, decency is treated as weakness, truth becomes optional, and victory becomes the only standard.

That is the danger we must reject.

I hear some in the FNM now focusing on percentages of votes and the mathematics of the result.

But let us be honest.

Had the election gone in their favour, there would have been no debate about percentages.

The result would have been called the will of the people, and rightly so.

So I hope my colleagues opposite will take time to reflect. The public did more than withhold confidence from their leadership. The public also rejected the politics they used to pursue power.

Every party loses. Every party knows defeat. But defeat should teach something. It should call us back to humility, to respect, and to the discipline of seeing fellow Bahamians as fellow citizens.

I believe Senator Fox owes my colleagues an apology. He owes PLPs an apology. He owes the country an apology.

Conclusion

Madam President, the past tells us who delivered. The campaign tells us what the people rejected.

But this Budget asks us to look forward, to the opportunity now in front of us.

As we leave the FNM to wrestle with its own politics, we must return to the work the Bahamian people placed before us.

We did not run on perfection. We ran on progress.

And progress, at its best, is the quiet belief that our tomorrow can be better than yesterday.

In the last term, we began building an opportunity mandate. We restored confidence. We steadied the economy. We brought relief where we could. We made decisions that others said could not be made. We proved that government, when focused and disciplined, can move the country forward.

Madam President,

There is a phrase I have been thinking about deeply: a crisis of opportunity.

At first hearing, it can mean two very different things.

It can mean a crisis caused by the absence of opportunity, when people have ability but no access, ambition but no pathway, education but no opening, talent but no room.

But it can also mean a moment of crisis that presents a great opportunity, a turning point when a country must decide whether it will simply survive the pressure before it, or use that pressure to become better than it was before.

Madam President, The Bahamas is living between those two meanings.

Opportunity is the deepest promise of democracy. It is the belief that every citizen, regardless of who they are should have a fair chance to build a life of dignity.

That is the work before us.

That is the first meaning of the crisis.

But there is also a second meaning.

This moment itself is an opportunity.

The world is changing. Technology is changing. Energy is changing. Work is changing. Capital is moving. Young

people are thinking differently. Citizens are demanding more. Governments everywhere are being tested.

The question before us is whether The Bahamas will meet this moment with old habits, or with new courage.

I believe this Davis Administration is up to the task.

And I believe the Prime Minister, the Hon. Philip Brave Davis, is the leader to guide us through this moment.

We must take on the structural challenges that have held our country back for too long: the future of the Port Authority, competition legislation, energy reform, the cost of doing business, the cost of living, and the need for a public service built for speed and delivery.

These are large fights. They will test us. They will demand courage. But a government elected for progress cannot be satisfied with managing old problems. We must have the discipline to solve them and change the status quo.

And Madam President, this is where young Bahamians must enter the centre of the national project.

We often say young people are the future.

We usually mean it as a compliment.

We say it to encourage them.

We say it because we believe in their promise. We say it because we see what they can become.

But today, I want to offer a different view.

STOP CALLING US THE FUTURE!

Not because young people do not have a future.

Not because we do not believe in what is ahead.

But because too often, calling young people “the future” becomes a polite way of telling them to wait.

Wait until you are older. Wait until you are more experienced.

Wait until someone decides you are ready. Wait until the country has already made the decisions that will shape your life.

Because the future will belong to the countries that trust their talent early.

So I will advocate for a serious youth leadership agenda: a target of at least 30 percent of senior public sector roles, board appointments, and national leadership opportunities to be filled by qualified, prepared young Bahamians.

I will also advocate for a Bahamian Fast Stream programme, modelled on the best features of the United Kingdom’s approach, to identify our best and brightest, bring them into public

service, train them across policy, finance, diplomacy, technology, administration, and delivery, and prepare them to lead the country with competence and care.

Madam President, it is admirable that young Bahamians such as Keenan, Dasante, Trevor Johnson, and I can sit in this Senate Chamber. But that cannot be the finish line.

It must be the beginning of a wider opening.

There are many more young Bahamians who must be pulled forward.

They are ready for more.

And the country must be ready for them.

Our mandate is to expand opportunity until it reaches the Bahamian who has the talent but lacks the connection, the discipline but lacks the pathway, the

dream but lacks the support, the ability
but lacks the chance.

We must build on the opportunity
mandate from our last term and take it
further, deeper, and wider.

That is the work before us.

That is the meaning of this Budget.

And that is the future we must build.

Thank You Madam President.