



CONTRIBUTION

TO

THE 2013/2014 BUDGET DEBATE

BY

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MINISTER OF YOUTH, SPORTS & CULTURE

WEDNESDAY, 5TH JUNE 2013

Introduction:

Mr. Speaker,

Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the Great Constituency of Carmichael and again take this opportunity to thank them for the trust they have bestowed on me.

The Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture, the cornerstone of youth development in our country, continues to create access and opportunities, thorough the provision of programmes in a number of diverse areas, which enable our young people to function independently rather than at the discretion of others. **“We Build Access and Opportunity”**

Mr. Speaker,

My Ministry has had a very fruitful year. We have remained prudent in our spending, ever mindful that the resources that we have been entrusted with is for the development of our people and indeed the further development of this great country. Despite cost savings of almost \$2 million we have still been able to achieve much with the assistance of the brilliant hard working staff of the Ministry.

In the upcoming fiscal period, My Ministry will endeavor to continue to uphold the financial policies that have been put in place to eventually lead us to a balanced budget.

SPORTS DIVISION

Mr. Speaker,

We are poised to level the playing field for young persons in the area of sports development. No longer will those youngsters whose parents are unable to pay for their kids to be a part of the sporting club be excluded access to opportunities that can propel them to higher plains.

Mr. Speaker,

The Prime Minister in his introductory remarks on the Budget would have indicated that the sum of \$10.0 Million dollars has been allocated to Capital for my Ministry for the development of Sporting Centres of Excellence over the next four years. This allocation, **Mr. Speaker**, will aid us in building a bridge to the future by leveling the playing field for all children across the length and breadth of The Bahamas.

The lack of existing facilities has resulted in disappointment for many of our children who feel disadvantaged when comparing the quality of sports facilities, equipment and conditions under which they have to recreate and compete.

The establishment of a National Sports Academy is the most effective means of addressing the Government's agenda to develop a nationally funded training programme to ensure that all sports talents throughout the Bahamas have an opportunity to develop to their full potential. Such an agency will consist of a series of activity hubs referred to as "Centers of Excellence" providing tutorship in all aspects of athletic and human development.

The Academy is intended to tap the abundant sports potential found in the country, much of which is prevalent in the Family of Islands. Athletes identified for the programme will be groomed through scientific training at the Academy for achievements of excellence until maturity. The academies will not be limiting their attention to athletic development only, but will also focus on developing academic studies. The intent is to produce world class athletes from within the country in selected disciplines through a systematic process of identification and selection of talent at a young age.

Mr. Speaker,

The Academy also seeks to raise the competence of persons involved in sports science, sports management and coaching, in collaboration with the National Sports Authority. This will be achieved through the organizing of conferences, seminars and workshops on sports related subjects.

It should be noted that my Ministry has already visited existing local programs that have exhibited the core components of a Sports Academy and, more importantly, have a proven measure of success. Funding will be provided to these entities to pilot the concept of the Sports Academy/ Center's of Excellence.

Mr. Speaker,

The Centres of Excellences/ Complex Development Team consist of Mr. Nick Dean, representing IBS, in collaboration with a multi-agency, multi-disciplined team who has worked in partnership with IBS on the Sports Centre Redevelopment Project. The agencies concerned include the Department of Lands and Survey, the Ministry of Works and Urban

Development, Water and Sewerage Corporation, Bahamas Electricity Corporation, BTC and the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture.

Mr. Speaker,

In compliance with the Prime Minister's objectives and with the aim of holding a tight schedule which would enable the completion of all six facilities by 2015, the team is committed to maintaining a momentum which would allow the design phase for each site to be completed as soon as possible.

In order to complete the designs, the site data collection and stakeholders interviews must be conducted. In this regard, the team has visited and identified sites for development in Abaco, Moore's Island and Exuma. In each instance, the team conducted stakeholder meetings to ascertain their views, gather sports intelligence data, explain the project scope and other relevant details.

The site reconnaissance visits and stakeholder interviews are the first two tasks on the tasks list for phase one of the project. In the next immediate phase, IBS will engage more of its staff and technical sub-consultants to

begin the process of properly surveying the sites and preparing the conceptual master plan.

Mr. Speaker,

The team is fully cognizant of the urgency for the prompt completion of the projects and will therefore dedicate their every effort to meeting the required timelines.

The project team's next step will be to prepare the site analysis reports and provide design options for the complex sites, inclusive of buildings, playing fields and surface courts.

Construction of the first of five National Sports Facilities is expected to commence in Abaco within the next six months. This will be followed by other Centres of Excellence on the islands of Eleuthera, North Andros, Exuma and Long Island.

AID TO STUDENT ATHLETES

Mr. Speaker,

This initiative was primarily designed to empower The College to recruit and retain exceptional student-athletes through an athletic scholarship. The Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture remains the single largest **external** contributor to the Athletics Department at The College. Thus far, The Ministry has contributed just over **400,000.00 in total to this programme (inclusive of a Grant of \$82,887.41 received just last month)** towards financial aid for student-athletes since the inception of the scholarship programme in 2008. The scholarship funds cover student-athletes' tuition, books and dormitory expenses only.

Since the implementation of the Ministry's scholarship programme, The College has nurtured 14 student-athletes that have made national teams in basketball, track and field, soccer and volleyball.

Currently, there are 82 student-athletes, 57 of them are on financial aid from the MYSC. Of those athletes, 13 are from the Family Islands (***Grand Bahama, Abaco, Eleuthera, Exuma, and Andros***).

Mr. Speaker,

My Ministry recognizes the need for a continued partnership with sports and civic organizations. These organizations, through their work, are able to extend the reach of the government in the area of sports. The public is advised, however, that we are expecting and require a greater degree of accountability. Usual Grants awarded to organizations will not be issued until the reporting obligation as to how the Government's funds were utilized has been met. All reports will be carefully scrutinized to determine their authenticity.

ELITE ATHLETES SUBVENTION PROGRAM

Mr. Speaker,

My Ministry is pleased with the ongoing Elite Athletes Subvention Program which provides financial assistance to our elite and developing athletes to reduce their concerns associated with training expenses and related costs. The majority of these athletes have gone on to represent our country in the international arena in various sports.

The program will be reviewed this year to ensure that it meets the criteria of the Subvention which includes athletes making themselves available to represent the country on National Teams, when required.

YOUTH DIVISION

Mr. Speaker,

There is a familiar saying, “Our children are our future”. I believe that our youth are not only our future, but represent our past and our present. They are our past because they are a direct reflection of us as a people. They are the sum total of the decisions that our grandparents have made, that our parents have made, and that we as a country are currently making. They are also our present and indeed a bridge to the future Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker,

We live in this Bahamian society that is blessed with opportunities and advancements; however, it is also plagued with societal issues such as teenage pregnancy, drug abuse and defiance amongst our young persons.

This, Mr. Speaker, is the “here and now” that we live in. This is also the future, the legacy that we will leave if we do not make the appropriate adjustments now.

With all of that being said, Mr. Speaker I present to you the Division of Youth’s strategic plan to help us bring greater focus to our present, thereby changing the current path that we are on.

300 CONNECT PROGRAM

The Division of Youth has developed a five–year strategic plan whose goals are to encourage **Youth Well-being and Youth Participation in their Development**. The **300 Connect Initiative** is a multilayered comprehensive approach designed to achieve this goal. This program is divided into three to meet the needs of the youth population through strategic partnerships. The three focused partnerships are divided into the following:

Community Connect – Partnering with uniform organizations and youth serving organizations to provide support both financially and in the area of Human Resources through volunteer Bahamas and other initiatives that will see to involve unattached youth to join youth organizations in their area and for the organizations to be prepared to attract these unattached youth.

Corporate Connect – Our Ministry seeks to enlighten the corporate sector of our country to the needs of both youth and youth organizations. It is our intention advocate for a continued level of Youth Mainstreaming and support from these entities to support the expansion and assist providing resources that will readily assist those organizations **who are working** to extend their reach. To date My Ministry is proud to announce that talks with corporate Bahamas have been going well.

The Three Hundred (300) Re -Connect Initiative also provides for intensive training of young leaders in communities spread across the islands. It is not foreign to us that many young leaders after high school and college forget their responsibility to their community to give back through service. Reconnect has been training these very leaders to reconnect them to their community. Young leaders, trained through the 300- Connect Initiative have been exposed concepts that would enable them to develop

sustainable, effective, community-based programs to impact positive change in their respective communities.

Each newly trained leader will be charged to connect with 300 young people over a three year period. . The first wave of young leaders selected represented twenty communities within New Providence and four family islands. Program proposals were drafted and vetted by a panel of civic minded professionals. This summer another group of young leaders, from other communities, will receive more training and execute pilot programs in a major urban community.

This initiative ensures that:

- Available Youth programmes are diverse and appeal to a wide number of young people;
- Youth development programmes are delivered directly in communities in which they are needed;
- More innovative and youth friendly approaches are used to improve the delivery of the programmes.
- The presence of youth organizations is enhanced within communities

- The public is made aware of what is available for our youth thereby increasing accessibility and opportunities.

Critical to the effective follow through of the 300 Connect Initiative is the creation of a Youth Center to serve as the **300 Connect HUB**. This centre will serve as the delivery site for programs, provide resources to help youth prepare proper Resumes, and develop entrepreneurial skills, among other things.

FRESH START

Mr. Speaker,

In 1993 a committee was appointed to study the special needs of the young people in the Bahamas and to make recommendations to the Bahamas Government for the positive development of the youth as an integral part of our National Planning and Development. The committee headed by Bishop Drexel Gomez found that the largest population of people in the Bahamas resides in New Providence. They also found that young persons make up the largest portion of the population in the Bahamas.

The Committee, in its findings also revealed, that unemployment among the Nation's youth is a major concern for most communities. In 1993, it was estimated that 43% of the entire population of young people in the Bahamas between the ages of 15-24 years were unemployed. As a result of the committee's findings, it was recommended that a National Career Development and Job Training Scheme be created that would embrace the youth of this nation. Today while the youth unemployment rate sits at 34%, it supports the Government's agenda to combat youth unemployment as outlined in the Government's charter

Six years later, in 1999, the Fresh Start Programme was created and implemented to address the concern of long term unemployment among the nation's youth. The programme, however, was revamped and expanded to facilitate a program that provides more skills and competencies to the youth involved. To date, this program is driven by my Ministry's view that we should be providing access and opportunity for our youth. This is evident as the program clearly provides Education, Empowerment, and standards of excellence to its participants. This revamping of the program was necessary to properly address the current needs of these youth.

As a result, a partnership was forged between the Bahamas Technical & Vocational Institute and the Ministry of Youth, Sports & Culture. Through this partnership, participants of the Fresh Start Programme enrolled in Personal Development Courses in Barbering, Acrylic Nails, Natural Hairstyling, Face Care & Make-Up Application, General Maintenance, QuickBooks, Accounting and A+ Review. We anticipate that upon the successful completion of these courses, Fresh Start participants would be adequately prepared for the world of work.

Since November 2012 a total of 281 young people have benefited from this New and Improved programme. On April 29, 2012, 65 of these participants will enter the work force to put into practice their training and demonstrate that they are now better equipped to become model employees and or entrepreneurs. The remaining 116 participants commenced skills training on Monday March 8 and are expected to be completed in July 2013; upon which they too will enter the workforce.

Mr. Speaker,

While this programme has met with some success, there is a need to create a tiered program to meet the participants at the point they find themselves in their lives.

I regret to advise that some of the participants are unable to continue their journey of training to completion because of lack of basic reading skills and other challenges. Some mothers have no food to give their children before leaving for class and do not have adequate support networks to assist them to take care of their children while in class. Others are young fathers who say that it is easier to go and try and hustle and immediate dollar than continue their training because of the pressure to provide for their children. The story of a mother residing in an abusive environment – feeling helpless as in her view there is no place to go without financial support. These are some of the realities of the participants of the Programme.

Mr. Speaker,

These realities call for an intervention at a national level; one that must be considered as a form of National Service. It requires the collective will of several agencies to act in a concerted effort to help these young persons prepare for their journey to independence.

I am proposing the formation of an inter-ministerial body that will field such cases when required and offer swift service. This body should be comprised of the Ministries of Youth, Sports and Culture, Social Development, Health, Labour and Education and Science among others. This body should focus on those persons who are being challenged to take advantage of the programme, remain in the programme, and subsequently be placed in a working environment and sustain employment. We must remain with them every step of the way; for many, we are their last bit of hope.

Mr. Speaker,

Many will question the impact that this Government will make during this fiscal year considering the cuts that have been made. I believe that we will

still be able to make considerable progress if we reduce the amount of duplication of efforts in agencies and focus more on collaboration and the sharing of limited resources.

Mr. Speaker,

MY Ministry stands ready to do so!

NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

Mr. Speaker,

The National Youth Policy is designed to address the major needs, challenges and opportunities of young men and women, accommodating island variations and specific sectoral issues. The policy seeks to define a common vision and framework for youth development. It also endeavors to provide all young women and men to access to meaningful opportunities so that they may reach their full potential, both as individuals and as active participants in society.

The Policy addresses the major concerns and issues critical to young men and women and gives direction to youth programs and services provided by government and non-government organizations.

After many years of research and compilation of data, the dedicated group of young persons on the National Youth Policy Team produced a finalized written draft of the National Youth Policy in the 2012/2013 year. Thus far, this draft has been submitted to the Director of Youth and myself. It has also been formulated into a “Push for Policy” campaign, which has been broadcast over social media sites and is used to inform the public on the policy issues. The Policy is also being reviewed by relevant stakeholders within the community.

Mr. Speaker,

During this fiscal period the National Youth Policy Team will be asked to give further consideration to the Gomez Report on Youth to determine where areas can be merged with the findings of the existing Draft Policy with a view to focusing on immediate implementation. It is anticipated that more public education and dialogue will take place on the Policy before the

actual document is presented to the Government of the Bahamas. **Mr. Speaker**, I cannot begin to stress the importance of this Policy and the affect that its implementation will have on the future of the Bahamas and our young persons in particular.

YOUTH ENTERPRISE

Mr. Speaker,

Based on the CARICOM initiative to enhance youth entrepreneurship in the Caribbean, and the National Directive given by the Government of the Bahamas to improve youth empowerment, CEBO is designed to provide young persons with a practical opportunity to develop ideas from concept to fruition. The four tiered program which consists of a one week workshop, a mentorship program, continuing education seminars, and quarterly follow up will be stretched over a one-year period with both Nassau and Family Island components.

According to the Labour Statistics Report (Bahamas Statistics, 2012), 29.4% of the 14.7% of unemployed Bahamians are young people ages 15-24 years.¹ This staggering rate of unemployment in our youth undoubtedly

adds to the amount of crime experienced among them. It was reported by The Eleuthera News², citing the report by the Crime Analysis Section of the Royal Bahamas Police Force, that of the 111 murders that were committed in 2012, 63% were murders between the ages of 18 – 35 years, and 91% were male.

Mr. Speaker,

Allowing young people to be positively engaged and empowered will provide a dent in the amount of crime experienced in The Bahamas. CEBO provides such opportunities for wealth development, positive engagement, and self-development.

Over the last year, three CEBO one week sessions have been held, two in Nassau and one in Abaco. These have impacted a number of young persons from marginalized communities, as well as disenfranchised young people who were frustrated with the process of obtaining employment in The Bahamas. These sessions fostered team work, personality development and a renewed sense of hope in entrepreneurship. From the sessions, six business groups have been created and are functioning.

Persons from the groups have also gone into private businesses or are developing business ideas.

As a subset of CEBO, the National Entrepreneurship Competition was developed. This competition was designed to foster creativity and national development through private enterprise amongst Bahamian young persons aged 18-30 years. There were 13 young Bahamian applicants who entered full proposals. Of the 13, eleven made it to the semi-finals. During the semi-finals of the competition, the applicants were expected to pitch their business idea in a five minute time frame and the judges were allowed ten minutes to ask questions. In the end, five of the eleven businesses were advanced to the final stage of the competition of which one outstanding business won.

During this fiscal year, CEBO will continue and will move in to an additional Family Island.

SUMMER YOUTH PROGRAMME

The **Summer Youth Programme** is the ideal vehicle to drive a measurable impact in – **Youth Employment and Employability**. The Summer Youth Programme has been in place for several years and has provided jobs for many youth; however the Ministry has re-designed the programme so that it is more than just paying a summer wage to a few hundred students, but also provides an enriching work experience.

This year all workers will complete a 2-day Camp Instructors' Training Workshop. The Ministry will offer this training, in series, to maximize the number of qualified Camp Instructors working with young people as well as to ensure that local standards meet global **Quality Standards in Youth Work**. Participants will be required to sit a proficiency examination and the Division of Youth will generate a Trained Camp Instructor Database so that the public can verify the credentials of persons with whom they are entrusting their children.

The issues of youth violence and crime will be directly addressed by the **Summer Youth Programme** as each camp will offer a Social

Competencies Curriculum to improve the way the youth of our nation interact with each other. Campers participating in Youth Camps will be exposed to a new skill set that could spark entrepreneurial intent or expand their consideration of occupations. Specialties will include: Science, the Environment, Multi-Media Arts, Creative Expressions, Rake-N-Scrape, Art, and Artisan Crafting.

The **Summer Youth Programme** will partner with other groups to offer specialties in aviation, boat building, dog training, agri-business, wellness, among other things. More than four thousand (4,000) young people will benefit from this partnership through access to over thirty (30) privately operated camps which are expected to employ as many as four hundred (400) youth in New Providence alone.

Support will also be given to the Family Islands to execute programs that would benefit hundreds more youth and young people throughout the nation.

THE G.O.L.D. INITIATIVE (GREATNESS, OPPORTUNITY, LEADERSHIP AND DEVELOPMENT)

Mr. Speaker,

My Ministry will continue its partnership with the Governor General Youth Award to engage young people between the ages of 14 and 25 in wholesome activities that will build strong character.

This partnership is facilitated through the GOLD Initiative which is an acronym for Greatness Opportunity Leadership and Development. The Grant provided through the GOLD initiative was executed in accordance with the terms of a three year contract between the Government of the Bahamas and the Governor General Youth Award (GGYA). Although the contract will expire this year, I am proposing that it be renewed for a further period after discussions with the Executives of the GGYA.

JUNIOR ACHIEVEMENT

Mr. Speaker

The Government will maintain its in-kind and financial supports to Junior Achievement to assist with the effective and sustained management of this organization.

We are ever mindful that the Government has partnered with the private sector for over 30 years through the Junior Achievement Programme, and we are most appreciative to the sponsoring firms that continue to contribute to the sustainability and development of the Junior Achievement brand in The Bahamas.

CULTURAL AFFAIRS DIVISION

CAT ISLAND RAKE-N- SCRAPE FESTIVAL

Mr. Speaker

Before I begin to speak on the initiatives proposed for execution in the Cultural Division this 2013-2014 fiscal period, I wish to again share with this

Honourable House the plans that are underway to uphold the Cultural traditions in Cat Island this coming weekend.

I am indeed pleased to advise that the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture will be supporting the upcoming Rake n Scrape Festival which will be held this from 6th -8th June in Arthurs Town, Cat Island.

This Festival forms part of the celebrations to commemorate the 40th Anniversary of our Independence.

This year's Festival will feature, among other artists, the Region Bell who celebrate their 65th Anniversary of singing. The music of Mr. Phil Stubbs, a well known Cat Islander from the settlement of Dumphries, will also be featured during the festival.

I must mention also that the youth of Cat Island will be performing the traditional dance and rake-n-scrape music.

This is very important to note as their participation in our culture ensures that the rich culture of Cat Island is sustained for generations to come.

Mr. Speaker,

I take this opportunity to invite all persons to support this event, and in particular, I call upon my fellow Cat Islanders to support this event and all activities leading up to this historic Rake n Scrape Festival. Come out and let us celebrate our culture and our 40th anniversary of Independence.

Mr. Speaker,

The Cultural Affairs Division will continue to assist persons in their quest to expose their talents and gifts through music, children's story books, television drama productions, dance workshops, handicraft and biography.

Cultural Review

The Cultural Affairs Division recently commenced auditions for the "Dis We Culture" Cultural Review Production which will be staged at the National Performing Arts Theatre later this year as one of the 40th Anniversary of Independence activities. It is envisioned that an International Tour Group will be born out of this production and will perform throughout the world, showcasing our Culture. Locally, the Review will be sold to the Cruise Lines

and Hotels with the view of improving the Bahamas' tourism product. Additionally, another event to come on stream shortly is 'Culture in the Square' which will provide visitors with a taste of our Bahamian culture through, food, handicraft, dance, songs and storytelling.

It is further proposed that the Division will participate in International Culture Exchanges and Festivals this fiscal period, including CARABANA in Canada. The Department will also play a vital role in all local Festivals through its naming of Festivals for each Island, as well as its cultural content. For example, Long Island Mutton Festival, Grand Bahama Sea Food Festival, South Andros Coconut Festival and Bimini Conch Festival.

Mr. Speaker, it is also proposed that Cultural Commission will be established this year to assist the Department with its implementation of various cultural programmes.

Mr. Speaker,

I would like to take this opportunity to commend the staff and instructors at the National Dance School for the magnificent work that they continue to do.

The National Dance School was established in 1976 under the directorship of E. Clement Bethel during the tenure of the late Honorable Livingstone Coakley who then served as Minister of Education and Culture.

The school aims to stimulate the culture and creative expressions of Dance and Drumming and be the centre of the Dance and Drumming Communities in The Bahamas. This will be achieved by identifying, nurturing and developing students into professional dancers, choreographers and drummers; aiding other schools that offer dance and drumming curriculums in their endeavors to develop these entities in The Bahamas, thereby providing a place for all persons with an interest in dance and drumming to attend and realize their potential as dancers, choreographers, drummers and enthusiasts of these expressions.

We continue to see an increase in the number of students at the school. Enrollment has increased during the last five years from 5 students in January 2007 to 401 students in January 2013. (in January 2012 there were 323 students registered)

I encourage the public to view the work of the school whenever they showcase their talents in their productions. I can assure you, they are of a

high quality and can actually be considered for inclusion in the Cultural Review.

TRANSFORMING JUNKANOO

Mr. Speaker,

Most people regard Junkanoo as a fun cultural experience that affords them the opportunity to “loosen up” on Bay Street during the Boxing Day and New Year’s Day Parades. It can also, however, become an opportunity to generate income, provide jobs, and expand the tourism base if we can now move this great Bahamian cultural expression called Junkanoo from the traditional parades into an industry where costumes are produced, marketed and sold both locally and internationally on-line, and are ready for collection upon the arrival of visitors and Family Islanders.

Mr. Speaker,

It is anticipated that we will see a new form of Junkanoo street parade coming on stream this fiscal year which will become our Bahamian equivalent of Carnival; one similar to those held in Toronto, Canada; Nottinghill, England, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and Trinidad & Tobago. Mr.

Speaker, I see the introduction of a festival of this nature as a portal for diversifying the Bahamian economy, thereby reducing the stresses placed on the Banking, Public Service, and Hotel sectors.

JUNIOR & SENIOR JUNKANOO PARADES

This year will mark twenty-six years since the start of the Junior Junkanoo Parades. With more and more schools offering to participate, the Department is gearing up for two days of Junkanoo with the PRE K'S & PRIMARY SCHOOLS on the Thursday, and the JUNIOR & SENIOR SCHOOLS on the Friday. It is hoped that this year's parade will truly be a NATIONAL one, with more schools from the Family Islands participating. We continue to say 'thank you' to the ESSO STANDARD OIL COMPANY for being our major sponsor and also to BTC for coming on board this last year. This year, we are hoping to see participations from Junior and Senior High Schools from the Private sector.

Mr. Speaker,

The Ministry said farewell to the founder and coordinator of the junior parades, Mr. Percy 'Vola' Francis, who retired from the Public Service. During one of his many trips to 'Carnival' in Trinidad, Mr. Francis saw how the schools were given their own days to participate in the festival and he thought that this would be a great way to bring the schools in The Bahamas together in a creative competition, and 26 years later, it has grown tremendously. We wish Mr. Francis well in his retirement years and we are looking forward to him writing a book to tell his story of this great event.

The Senior Parades are also growing throughout the Country, and to-date, the Department has received requests for four new groups to be registered. Because of the numbers, there is a possibility of having one lap parades. As these parades account for three quarter of the allotted budget, it is imperative to now look at Junkanoo as a business. As we look forward to the annual '12 DAYS of JUNKANOO FESTIVAL', it will be necessary to charge an entry fee to every event. As Nassau is NOT The Bahamas, greater emphasis will be placed on developing the parades in every Family Island. Fixed dates will be set for all parades so that those in the Family

Islands can reap the economic benefits as well, through local and international visitors. The Junkanoo Parades are held from December to June.

With the continued growth of the Junkanoo programmes, it has become necessary to re-establish a Junkanoo Unit within the Department. This Unit will oversee all aspects of our Festivals and ensure the smooth operations of the parades throughout our Bahamas. There are presently some seventy three (73) organized groups throughout The Bahamas and requests are coming in for the development of new groups.

THE E. CLEMENT BETHEL NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

Now in its fifty-fourth year (54th), The E. Clement Bethel National Arts Festival continues to grow in participation and entries. This programme is not only open to the Public and Private schools, but to entire communities.

Mr. Speaker,

As we move forward, consideration will definitely be given to transforming this program by splitting the country into 3 zones. Participants will have the opportunity to be adjudicated by local persons in their jurisdictions who possess the required expertise in various disciplines.

The Festival will then culminate in a Concert featuring the National Winners.

THE NATIONAL SPORTS AUTHORITY

Mr. Speaker

Before I conclude, I wish to touch on The National Sports Authority (**NSA**), which is the Board that has Legislative authority for the management and ongoing development of the Queen Elizabeth Sports Centre, (QESC) in the first instance; but under the Act this body has responsibility for the

management and development of sporting facilities throughout the Bahamas.

Mr. Speaker, the Sports Authority has commenced the orderly development of some facilities recommended for construction in the Master Plan for the QESC development. However, there still remains a number for facilities to be developed on the QESC site.

I should note that the NSA played a pivotal role in ensuring that the Thomas A. Robinson National Stadium and the surrounding grounds were adequately prepared to receive athletes and dignitaries for not only the 2013 Carifta Games, but also the Chris Brown Invitational and the recent International Soccer Match.

Mr. Speaker,

The NSA's task is not an easy one as they have had the task of advising the public of the revised fees to utilize the facilities. The public should note, however, that the proper and professional management of the many sporting facilities at the QESC and elsewhere is crucial for the performance

of our athletes in all of the core sports. In order for this to be achieved, the support of the community is required, especially when it comes to the payment of fees for the use of the facilities.

We cannot expect to have the look of a first class facility and not contribute to its upkeep or future expansion.

I am therefore encouraging all Federations, and organizations that may wish to use the sporting facilities to respect the policies that have been put in place by the NSA and to support their efforts towards the full redevelopment of the QESC.

Mr. Speaker, in closing I wish to note that my Ministry's 2013/14 agenda is a very ambitious one which is focused on accomplishing those projects and activities I have highlighted and that would undoubtedly benefit the young people of our nation.