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75 CENTS

CORRECTING THE ECONOMY

BY BERTHONY MCDERMOTT
 Journal Staff Writer

Tourism Minister Dionisio D'Aguilar says, "since the coming to office of the Free National Movement government in May 2017, some 10,000 jobs have been created.

He said the Tourism sector saw an upswing in employment between May and November 2018.

Referring to the Labour report released on Monday, Mr. D'Aguilar

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▶ Minister of Tourism Dionisio D'Aguilar (File photo)

Tourism Ministry Must Avoid Another Fyre Fiasco

BY JAMEELHA MISSICK
 Journal Staff Writer

People are talking, that's the one thing that has come out of the fiasco called The Fyre Festival - a high end luxury concert set for the Exumas in

Spring 2017 that failed miserably, according to Minister of Tourism Dionisio D'Aguilar.

Speaking with reporters outside Tuesday's weekly cabinet meeting, he said yes, the situation was most

unfortunate, but at the time, tourism officials really did what they had to do and that's facilitate the event in terms of customs, license, etc.

"We do that all the

■ See page 3...

MINISTRY OF LABOUR & CHAMBER OF COMMERCE TO STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIP



▶ Strengthening Ties - Newly appointed Chief Executive Officer of The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation, Mr. Jeffrey Beckles recently paid a courtesy call on the Minister of Labour, Senator the Hon. Dion Foulkes. Pictured at the courtesy call are from left to right Ms. Cecilia Strachan, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour; Minister Foulkes; Mrs. Khrystle Rutherford-Ferguson, Vice Chair of The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation and Mr. Beckles. (File photo)

AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE FOR GRAND LUCAYAN STAFF

BY LICEA BASTIAN
 Journal Staff Writer

Bahamas Hotel and Managerial Union and the management of the Grand Lucayan Resort, Lucayan Renewal Holdings Ltd., are still meeting and talking things over when it

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HOUSE TO DEBATE LAND RESOLUTION FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES

The Government will seek approval for the conveyance of 1.2 acres of land in the Fox Hill community under a resolution to be introduced in the House of Assembly today.

The land will be developed for the sale of serv-

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Safety-Net For Gaming Addicts

BY JAMEELHA MISSICK
 Journal Staff Writer

Bahamas Gaming Operators Association (BGOA) Chief Executive Officer, Gershan Major,

told Rotarians yesterday of efforts to ensure that there is a safety net in place to protect those most vulnerable engaging in gaming.

"We have today, over

200 persons on a self-exclusion list," he said.

"Those individuals are some of who excluded themselves, some of whom the operators excluded," he added.

"These individuals also are getting the type of professional intervention that the responsible gaming policy demands through the Bahamas Gaming Operators Association.

"We have in place a partnership with Sandilands Rehabilitation Center, where we have funded five of their pro-

■ See page 4...




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ALL THE NEWS YOU NEED TO READ IN THE MORNING

ON-SITE HOTEL FOR LPIA

The Nassau Airport Development Company's (NAD) is moving ahead with plans for an on-site hotel at the Lynden Pindling International Airport.

NAD has issued a request for proposals

outlining submission guidelines to prospective proponents.

According to NAD, the successful proponent will design, finance, construct and operate a three star or more hotel that should meet the

needs of both domestic and international travelers.

The proposed site for the project is 4.68 acres of vacant land, just northeast of the current U.S. Departure terminal building.

Interested parties can find details on the submission requirement as well as deadlines for the RFP and all other documents online at WWW.NASSAULPIA.COM/RFP-PUBLIC.

Persons can also

email LPIAHOTEL-RFP@NAS.BS to request an electronic copy of the document.

Potential proponents are required to register for a mandatory pre-submission meeting and site visit.

Participants have the option of registering for the meeting on either Thursday February 21, 2019 or Friday February 22, 2019. Final proposal submissions will be due on Friday May 24, 2019.

CORRECTING THE ECON-

Continued from / PAGE 1...

said, "most of those gains came from the private sector. The FNM strategy is to create private sector jobs.

"I was also encouraged by the number of entrepreneurs that started their own businesses that factored into the report; so we are correcting this economy.

"The failed strategies of trying to create employment through giving government jobs, which then leads to greater government debt and further downgrade has been halted and we are now doing it the right way of allowing the pri-

vate sector to grow and to flourish," said the tourism minister.

The opposition contends that the latest labour statistics tell a sad tale, but despite the .7 per cent uptick in unemployment, Labour Minister Dion Foulkes seems pleased with the way things are headed.

He said, "in Abaco, there was a 3 per cent decrease in the unemployment rate, something that is very significant.

"In Grand Bahama, this is the second consecutive survey that has shown a decrease in the unemployment rate in Grand Bahamas; so we're very pleased about that.

"One of the things we are focusing on as a government is to increase employment for young people and this survey, although it was only one percentage point shows an uptick of employment for young people between the ages of 15 and 25 that was revealed in the survey; so we are extremely pleased about that," Mr. Foulkes said.

As for discouraged workers, the past six months showed that this group dropped by 6.7 per cent overall.

A closer look at the numbers coming out of New Providence and Grand Bahama shows that number fell by 9.1 per

cent and 9.8 per cent respectively.

"This is an area that is not well understood by a lot of people. The ILO describes a discouraged

worker as a person who is not looking for a job, because they believe there is no jobs out there.

"That is what a discouraged worker is, a dis-

couraged worker is not formulated and is not included in the unemployment statistics," he said.

The next labour force survey is due in May.



MINISTRY OF NATIONAL SECURITY

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD (USCG) ACADEMY 4 YEAR MILITARY DEGREE PROGRAM

The Bahamian Government in collaboration with the United States Embassy (Nassau) invites all qualified persons who are interested in applying for a four-year degree scholarship at the United States Coast Guard Academy in Connecticut, United States, to submit their applications to the Royal Bahamas Defence Force Headquarters, Coral Harbour Base by 31st January, 2019.

To qualify, applicants must:

- Be a Bahamian citizen
- Be between the ages of 17-22 years old
- Be unmarried and with no dependents
- Be willing to serve in the Royal Bahamas Defence Force for a minimum of five years on completion.
- Must be physically fit
- Must be able to swim
- Have SAT scores of 600 in both Math and English (or ACT minimum of 26 in Mathematics and 27 in English).
- Have a high school diploma
- Possess excellent English skills

Bachelor's Degree Programs are offered in:

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- Cyber Systems
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- Naval Architecture
- Operations Research
- Marine and Environmental Sciences
- Government
- Mechanical Engineering
- Management

Deadline for submission of application is 31st January, 2019.

Deadline for registration for SAT examination is 8th February, 2019 for the 9th March, 2019 test date (results from March test are only accepted if results from previous test are received by 1st March, 2019).

Students may register at:

<https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat/register/international>

The USCGA code number for the SAT exam is 5807.

Deadline for ACT registration is 11th January, 2019 for 8th February, 2019 test date.

Students can register at <https://www.act.org/content/act/en/products-and-services/the-act-non-us.html>

The USCGA code number for the ACT exam is 0600.

Applicants can make application to sit the SAT/ACT at local SAT Centers in New Providence as follows: Aquinas College, St. Andrew's School, St. Anne's School, The University of The Bahamas, Government High School and Queen's College.

For further information, please contact the Royal Bahamas Defence Force Human Resource Officer, Lieutenant Commander Michael Hanna at telephone 362-3705 or 362-3711 or via email at michaelhanna@rbdf.gov.bs or visit the website www.rbdf.gov.bs

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Ministry of Labour & Chamber of Commerce To Strengthen Partnership

Continued from / PAGE 1...

The Minister of Labour, Senator the Honourable Dion Foulkes and the newly appointed Chief Executive Officer of The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation, Mr. Jeffrey Beckles both pledged to further strengthen the partnership that exists between the two organizations for the betterment of Bahamians and the local business community.

This renewed commitment came as Mr. Beckles made a cour-

tesy call on Minister Foulkes on Monday, January 21, 2019 at the Minister's office in Charlotte House on Shirley and Charlotte Streets. Minister Foulkes was accompanied by Ms. Cecilia Strachan, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Labour. Mr. Beckles was joined by Mrs. Khrystle Rutherford-Ferguson, Vice Chair of The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation. Both parties discussed a wide range of topics pertaining to the local business community.

Tourism Ministry Must Avoid Another Fyre Fiasco

Continued from / PAGE 1...

time for many projects. Unfortunately, probably a greater level of due diligence should have been done to ensure that the disaster that happened while the Ministry of Tourism wasn't complicit in the failure, it certainly caused the country some reputa-

tional damage," he said.

That aside, the Minister accepts that his ministry must avoid a repeat of something of this magnitude.

"Moving forward we really have to be mindful of that and don't accept everybody willingly through the door that

came in. And maybe the previous minister probably in his exuberance to make the deal done, went all in. And [in] hindsight that was a mistake," he said.

Expected to rival California's Coachella Music and Arts Festival, the hyped up Fyre

Festival went downhill due to rapidly depleting cash flow.

Festival attendees in hopes of receiving an exclusive, luxury experience instead met a remote island with little to no running water, electricity, or food.

AGREEMENT IN PRINCIPLE FOR GRAND LUCAYAN STAFF

comes to Voluntary Separation Packages (VSEP's) for the line staff at the resort in Grand Bahama.

Minister of Labour, Senator Dion Foulkes, confirmed with reporters just before the weekly Cabinet meeting that there is an "agreement in principle" with the line staff

union.

"The union executives for the last week or so have been in consultation with the management at the hotel.

"We have a global figure that we have agreed [on] with them. We are trying to work out the specific payout for 160 persons, just to make sure

that it is accurate," Sen. Foulkes said.

Mr. Foulkes also confirmed that there is also discussion on back pay for the line staff employees. However, he declined to give further comment on the amount that may or may not be agreed on.

"Some of the monies that are owed to some of

the employees at the hotel go back for several years, so we want to ensure that it is accurate.

"We do not have a settlement with the management union at this point, but we hope to have that soon.

"I prefer not to comment on that at this time, because that is the subject

of discussion between the union and the management. When they settle that, then I'll be happy to," Mr. Foulkes said.

Just last week while giving an update on the negotiations, President of The Bahamas Hotel Managerial Association, Obie Ferguson said that the union "will not be

moved by nonsense".

According to the union president, \$1 million had been shaved off the settlement, taking it to \$4 million plus an annuity of what was negotiated from 7 per cent to 4 per cent of worker's pay.

Mr. Ferguson added that workers are still standing firm.



MINISTRY OF FINANCE DEPARTMENT OF INLAND REVENUE REAL PROPERTY TAX NOTICE for 2019

In accordance with the Real Property Tax Act, Chapter 375 as amended, the Chief Valuation Officer hereby gives notice:-

- that copies of the assessment lists are available as required by Section 7 subsection 7 of the Act, and may be inspected at the Office of the Chief Valuation Officer;
- that a notice of assessment addressed to each owner of property liable to tax under the Real Property Tax Act is available at the Valuation Office, located at rear of the shops at Carmichael Plaza, Carmichael Road and may be collected therefrom by or on behalf of the owner of such property during normal working hours;
- that pursuant to subsection (3) of Section 7 of the Act, upon the expiration of five days after the publication of this notice, a notice of assessment shall be deemed to have been served on every owner of property liable to tax under the Act;
- that without prejudice to the provision of subsection (3) of Section 7 of the Act, the Chief Valuation Officer may at any time after the publication in the Gazette of this notice send by post, a notice of assessment addressed to any owner of property liable to tax under the Act;
- that pursuant to Section 11(1) of the Act, any person aggrieved by a notice of assessment deemed to have been served under this Act may object thereto by serving on the Chief Valuation Officer within thirty days after the date on which the notice of assessment is deemed to have been served, a notice in writing of such objection stating the grounds upon which he relies;
- that pursuant to Section 18 of the Act, the tax is due and payable by the owners of property not later than sixty days after the date on which notice of assessment is deemed to have been served. Accordingly, it is the duty of each taxpayer to ensure that he receives a Notice of Assessment;
- that the exemption has been allowed for 2019 on those which have been declared as owner-occupied residences, and have satisfied the conditions. However, under Section 43 of the Act, the owners are required to disclose to the Chief Valuation Officer any change in the circumstances which does not entitle the property for the exemption allowed;
- that pursuant to Section 10 of the Act, every owner of property shall not later than the thirty-first day of December in each year, make to the Chief Valuation Officer in the prescribed form a return of such particulars of that property as may be prescribed, for the purpose of enabling that Officer to compile and maintain accurate assessment lists, and such owner shall declare to the correctness of such return before an authorized person.

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Labour Ministry signs contract to establish parameters for vehicle road-worthiness

The Ministry of Labour has entered into a Pre-Export Verification of Conformity (PVoC) agreement with EAA Company Ltd. of Japan, to establish parameters for road-worthiness of all vehicles imported from Japan into The Bahamas.

The Hon. Dion Foulkes, Minister of Labour, described the agreement as a “milestone achievement” during the contract signing ceremony Monday, January 21, 2019 at the Ministry of Labour, Charlotte and Shirley Streets.

The contract, which comes at no expense to the government or taxpayers, will begin with a one-year initial pilot programme. As of Monday, January 21, 2019, a 90-day period follows to finalize the implementation process and public education. The \$150 inspection fee will be cov-

ered by the exporters in Japan. The Bureau of Standards and Quality (BBSQ) receives \$20 for each inspection.

Minister Foulkes remarked that Japan has suffered several nuclear accidents, the latest in 2011 in Fukushima, and it is “imperative” that potentially radiated used vehicles are not allowed to enter The Bahamas.

The PVoC programme specifically addresses the risk through a mandatory requirement for radiation inspection on every inspected vehicle.

The contract also includes inspection by EAA of the following: Steering wheel alignment, breaking force, noise level, exhaust gas and pipe emissions, brightness of head lamps, horn sound level, engine, cooling system, fuel system, transmission system, propeller shaft, final draft system,

axle housing, suspension system, axles, wheels and tyres, mileage meter, warning lights, frame and vehicle body.

“Many countries around the world have moved and are moving toward the introduction of import regulations that require the pre-shipment inspection of used motor vehicle imports. There is strong evidence to support that such a PVoC programme serves to keep the roads of the countries free of potentially unsafe vehicles,” said Minister Foulkes.

“These regulated programmes are generally self-funding and can provide a source of income for National Standards Bodies (such as BBSQ), through administration fees. This in turn provides income to allow the Regulatory Authority to administer the pre-export inspection programme

(without the need for separate funding).”

Minister Foulkes said based on statistics from Arawak Port Development, the vast majority of vehicles were imported from Japan with more than 11,000 passenger and commercial units in 2016, 18,469 in 2017 and 17,191 in 2018 with anticipation for import numbers to be similar to that of 2017 and 2018 in 2019.

“From these statistics, the need to ensure these imports are ‘roadworthy’, prior to leaving the countries of origin, is essential to protect The Bahamas from continuing to be a “dumping ground” for unsafe motor vehicles,” he said.

Renee Ferguson-Bufford, Director, BBSQ, said many vehicles, one year after being imported, are being dumped on the side of the road, and left

for the government to move.

“We want to ensure, [we’ve had a lot of accidents with many of these cars] moving forward that we are not a dumping ground for such vehicles,” said the Director.

“We will begin to work with Road Traffic [Department], a part of our National Technical Committee, [Ministry of] Public Works, Customs [Department], Ministry of Finance and other regulatory bodies and used car dealerships. Road Traffic is now looking at their laws to ensure compliance to these specifications.”

According to Lee Sayer, EAA Vice-President/Director, if a vehicle does not pass inspection it will be rejected and required to be brought to standard or renegotiated with the importer for a replacement.

“Every vehicle that passes inspection will receive a certificate of compliance. Each vehicle will have window stickers placed on the vehicle. One of the stickers will be certification that has passed the radiation inspection. The vehicle itself also will have an EAA road readiness inspection sticker placed on it. As an importer you will have access, if you have the chassis number of the vehicle, to our website database to which you will be able to determine the inspection confirmation. The regulatory authority will also have separate access to the database also any other regulatory stakeholder in The Bahamas,” said Mr. Sayer.

EAA is a used vehicle inspection specialist that was established in 2007. Its headquarters are based in Yokohama, Japan.



► Lionel Fredrick Albury, President, Bahamas Motor Dealers Association and President of the Auto Mall Group of Companies, is pictured at the microphone, flanked by (from left) Renee Ferguson-Bufford, Director, Bureau of Standards and Quality; Cecilia Strachan, Permanent Secretary; the Hon Dion Foulkes, Minister of Labour and Lee Sayer, Vice-President/Director, EAA.



► The Hon. Dion Foulkes, Minister of Labour (3rd from left) and Lee Sayer, Vice President/Director, EAA, are pictured following contract signing ceremony. Also shown from left: Renee Ferguson-Bufford, Director, Bureau of Standards and Quality, Cecilia Strachan, Permanent Secretary; and Toyohiko Hashino, Manager, EAA. BIS Photos/Patrick Hanna

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Safety-Net For Gaming Addicts

Continued from / PAGE 1...

fessional clinicians to specifically study in the area of gambling addiction.

“The more persons who show themselves as needing help, the broader the safety net that we want to have to provide those types of interventions,” he said.

There have been talks

of a national lottery, despite the government imposing increased taxes on gaming operators.

In terms of feedback from gaming operators, Mr. Major said the BGOA has not given the issue any consideration at this point, as its simply an assertion.

“The government is

the government, the government will be minded to do what it needs to do relative to whatever report it needs to get to make informed decisions.”

“The industry will continue to operate as a regulated concern,” he added.

The BGOA's mandate is awareness, education and advocacy.



WARNING SHOT



By Jerry Hutchinson

Auditor General Reports: Time to End the Charade

The mandate of the Auditor General as stated in The Constitution of The Bahamas Article 136 is as follows:

- The Auditor-General shall submit his reports made under paragraph (3) of this Article without undue delay to the Speaker (or, if the office of Speaker is vacant or the Speaker is for any reason unable to perform the functions of his office, to the Deputy Speaker) who shall cause them to be laid before the House of Assembly without undue delay.
- In the exercise of his functions under the provisions of paragraphs (3) and (4) of this Article, the Auditor-General shall not be subject to the direction or control of any other person or authority.
- The accounts of the department of the Auditor General shall be audited and reported on by the Minister of Finance.

Another year and another auditor general report years after the event. One may be forgiven if they view this as a pointless exercise, especially as very few persons appear to have ever been held accountable for their wrongdoings. It is inconceivable that the frequency and extent of alleged thievery can go on and on and only small level thieves face the courts.

So, whilst these reports some years after the fact make good political theatre, the underlying problems remain unaddressed. How can it be that the Auditor General's Office can state unequivocally that millions of our funds are misappropriated yet no one is brought to account? This may be because the wrongdoers are civil servants and not politicians and, that remediation is not a priority. According to the International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS).

"Naturally, the vulnerabilities in the company's system revealed after the theft should be addressed first, and any holes in the system should be closed. Job duties should be analysed, and some tasks may need to be re-assigned to prevent any single employee from having too much control over a function. Segregating duties is one of the most basic fraud prevention controls that all companies should implement, and, this is a very cheap method of fraud prevention if it is done correctly".

In the Tribune reporting of January 15, 2018 entitled "Auditors uncover \$450k bonus fraud" we see once more laid out in detail the nature of the fraud. If you read the article through you will see that it was affected by the very same systems failures the remediations recommended by the IFRS was intended to prevent. I believe that if the frauds detected by the Auditor General (AG) over the years, involving virtually all the government's revenue centres were totalled, it would probably be in the millions of dollars.

The question must be asked why? Why, after all the thefts and misappropriations documented is there not a professionally staffed accounting department in every ministry, whose properly prepared accounts can be audited by the AG's staff on a timelier basis? These accountants will also detect in good time, efforts by dishonest staff to commit fraud. This is a problem which has existed across administrations but, has been left to fester and proliferate. It is unconscionable to expect the AG with his minimally staffed and underfunded department to unravel these matters long after the fact. It is also criminally negligent to allow the flagrant theft of our funds to continue year on year without legal consequences. The Bahamas can use the stolen funds to grow the economy and ease the taxpayer's burdens but, I guess I am being altruistic. Okay, we know incontrovertibly that government revenue has been stolen over significant periods of time so, let's explore why nothing is being done to bring the culprits to justice.

Not believing anyone was a big victim.

There are some misguided persons who believe that government funds are endless. So, what if they thief a bit, no one will miss it. That's a spirit of criminality, avarice and covetousness. But they are right about the not missing it part. The lack of consistent oversight and protection of our funds is a disgrace. The idea that no one is a big victim is also selfish and short-sighted. Stolen funds represent a drain on the governments consolidated fund. It funds unfunded pension liabilities estimated to be around \$26 million. Civil servants expect their salaries, gratuities and pensions to come from the fund. With all the fraud being perpetrated on public funds, theft puts the safety of these benefits at

risk. At risk because of rampant dishonesty and theft literally, of your pension funds!

Attorneys advise against legal action.

One of the most effective shields against civil servants being prosecuted in our courts is General Orders (GO). The passage of time before the fraud is discovered and, the intentional absence of a paper trail makes a prosecution problematic.

The wrongdoers know this, and unions use it as a defence. So, employees are either transferred or interdicted in accordance with GO. In some instances, criminal staff are given the option of having the pilfered funds deducted from their salaries; this solution challenges logic. It is doomed to fail as, now the employee must double down on their thievery to replace the funds deducted! If, the fraudster is a kleptomaniac or a degenerate gambler then, heaven help us.

In each of these instances the public loses; the transferred employee is given another venue to continue their fraud; and, the interdicted employee is put on half pay. Eventually interest [or files] is lost forestalling the prosecution of the alleged fraudster. There is more than anecdotal evidence to conclude that neither of these options is in our interest. Indeed, some interdicted employees are being paid long after they have found employment outside the service and in several cases have died.

Emotional ties with the employee.

The Bahamas is a small society and, we all develop close workplace relationships. In some cases, friendships cover the course of many years. It is not unusual to find family members working together in some government departments. So, department heads will find it difficult to deal effectively with fraud in their departments especially as friends will not "rat" on each other. This is where you must rely on effective accounting and management systems which alerts department heads to fraud and other staff wrongdoing. Another serious issue is that deferential department heads will usually pass critical staff dishonesty issues to their Ministers. This creates a whole raft of human resource problems; undermines staff morale and creates "untouchables" within a department. Since Ministers hardly ever make other than politically expedient decisions, especially if it involves a constituent, the culprits remain in place, unpunished and emboldened. Indeed, Bahamian funds and operations are placed at risk when political appointees are sent to head highly technical departments with no training or experience in how they operate. They usually seek to cover their deficiencies with bullying tactics, bluster and arrogance; a deadly combination in any environment.

Not trusting the judicial system.

There is growing public perception that the legal system is not fit for purpose. There are too many instances when clear cases of fraud are brought to the courts and never prosecuted because of the non-appearance of witnesses, police and otherwise. Public servants, especially heads of departments are busy people.

It is unfair to repeatedly ask them to appear to court for a case that is not called. The glacial pace of our legal system, therefore, militates against civil servants being brought to justice for financial wrongdoings in the rare instances that they are charged. So, what do we do? Clearly, the accounting systems and methods must be overhauled and improved. The Bahamas cannot afford the continued "leakages" of public revenue because proper focus and resources are not being provided. What I find incredible is the lack of urgency being given to the prevalence of systemic fraud across multiple government ministries; rampant fraud which endangers the financial health of the country.

Imagine the national development projects we can undertake without seeking expensive bank loans if this criminal activity is remediated. I know that once the most recent auditor general's report is widely disseminated our politicians will propose all manner of fixes for the problem. They might even begin another police investigation with probably no results, just like in the past. For sure, eventually some small fry will be hammered in the courts, but the underlying problem will remain unaddressed; this is unhelpful. The necessary financial means and political will must be exerted if these scandalous episodes in our public life are to be ended. Our elected officials and law enforcement need to step up and solve this vexing problem.

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EDITORIAL

UNBELIEVABLE NUMBERS

The unemployment figures released by the Department of Statistics has many Bahamians wondering if and what they can believe. These figures show that while unemployment has increased in the Bahamas from 10 per cent to 10.7 percent as of November last year, that employment has increased in Grand Bahama. This is unbelievable, given the level of distress and human suffering in the nation's second city.

The Department said, "two of the three most populated islands that were surveyed experienced decreases in their unemployment rates, and one experienced an increase..

"At the time of the survey, the rate in Grand Bahama was 11.9 per cent; and in Abaco 7.7 per cent." The Minister of Finance, Peter Turnquest, obviously encouraged by the news also said that the numbers of discouraged workers also decreased, pointing to greater confidence in economic prospects among job seekers."

If the government's numbers are correct, then we would be happy. However, the improvement of the economy has to be seen and felt among the people. When people are screaming and crying because of hunger and when Bahamians are losing their homes and are unable to pay electricity bills and rent due, then these numbers and the optimism being espoused by politicians are unimportant.

Two days ago, there were reports of Grand Bahamians who are considering suicide because they were unable to feed their children. No one in the Bahamas over the last five decades considered suicide due to a bad economy.

Last night, many residents of Freeport meet at the Flamingo Restaurant at Castaways, including clergymen, to find ways and means of helping these individuals who are in distress. This was the prevailing atti-

tude of our people over the years. When their fellowmen were in need, they came to their rescue.

The situation in Grand Bahama and other parts of the Bahamas shows clearly that the leadership of our country is not connecting with the economic plight of the people. If they were, there would be a higher concentration by the Ministry of Social Services to bring relief to residents who are in poverty stricken conditions. We question what has happened to the Urban Renewal program in Grand Bahama. Why are we not hearing from the policy makers on this?

In addition, there is a need to re-engineer the economy of the Bahamas to bring about a degree of food security. The Bahamas has never had a famine because the people depended on the land and the sea to feed themselves. Even during World Wars, Bahamians were able to feed themselves.

The islands in the south, from Eleuthera to Inagua were considered the breadbasket islands of the Bahamas. However, with mass tourism and the mass migration from those islands after majority rule in 1967, there has been a depopulation of those islands, with people moving to New Providence and Freeport, Grand Bahama.

So, the economy of the Bahamas changed drastically. We became a consumer society where people needed income from a job to sustain themselves. The time is now for the government of the Bahamas to put in place policies and programmes to repopulate the southern islands. This can happen with the development of seaports for cruise passengers to visit those islands and also with the empowerment of Bahamians to return to the land and the sea to feed themselves and those who visit our shores.

THE BAHAMAS
Sun, Sand, Sea ... and the
The Bahama Journal
NO BETTER READING

The advertisement shows a copy of The Bahama Journal with headlines: "Four Bodies Claimed", "22ND MURDER VICTIM IDENTIFIED", "Brush Fire Scorches Acres of Land", and "Alleged Election Fraudster In No Show In Court". The background is a scenic view of a beach with waves crashing on the shore.

HOUSE TO DEBATE LAND RESOLUTION FOR AFFORDABLE HOMES

Continued from / PAGE 1...

iced lots, and is part of the Government's commitment to develop new subdivisions to address the demand for affordable housing and homeownership.

The focus of the Department of Housing is on installing the necessary infrastructure on land to be developed and sold at cost to first time homeowners in New Providence and the Family Islands, rather than selling already con-

structed homes.

The availability of these serviced lots will allow more Bahamians access to affordable homes, said Minister of the Environment and Housing Romauld Ferreira who will lead the debate on the Resolution. "The Ministry began preliminary work on this property in early 2014, those works included the initial clearing of the property for the surveying of the proposed site and design of a small subdivision," said Mr. Ferreira.

"The subdivision will comprise 10 serviced lots that will be sold to young Bahamians and will be called the Lionel Davis Subdivision." These new serviced lots are part of the Government's new access to affordable homes programme.

The late Lionel Davis served as the Member of Parliament for the Fox Hill constituency from 1968 to 1977. He was one of the founding members of the modern day Fox Hill Festival.

Under the Access to

Affordable Homes Act 2018, owners of serviced lots in a government-approved subdivision may apply to the Minister of Finance for exemption from customs duties and excise tax on all materials necessary to construct a single-family dwelling home.

The Ministry of the Environment and Housing launched its serviced lots initiative in July 2018 with the opening of Sunset Close Subdivision.

This serviced lots initiative gives Bahamians

who ordinarily could not afford a home of their own, access to affordable housing.

Serviced lot owners are able to construct their own homes using their own contractor and architect or use pre-existing housing plans offered by the Government.

The serviced lots in Sunset Close were sold for under \$20,000 to police officers, defence force officers, customs officers and teachers, said Mr. Ferreira. A number of mortgages have also been

approved for the construction of homes.

The lots in Lionel Davis Subdivision are expected to be sold for a similar price, he added.

The Minister emphasized that serviced lots are available to all Bahamians who qualify, including civil servants.

The Department of Housing has identified land for subdivision development in Abaco, Andros, San Salvador and Carmichael Village Subdivision in New Providence.

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