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"GOV'T IN QUANDARY ON WTO" SCATHING REVIEW OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

BY LICEC BASTIAN
Journal Staff Writer

Bahamas Against WTO organizer and member, Fayne Thompson, said yesterday that the World Trade Organization (WTO), Impact

Assessment, produced by Oxford Economics, is a scathing review of The Bahamas' accession to the organization.

Speaking with this Journal, Mr. Thompson suggested that the report indicates that The Bahamas "government is

in a quandary" when it comes to accession to the WTO.

"If you listen very carefully to what the [report] reveals, it examines the nature of the Bahamian economy; it talked about the reciprocal nature of our economy. It talked

about draw backs of the economy and then it makes a very, very simple suggestion of the structural reforms that's needed simultaneously; it should be done before we join the WTO.

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Economic Growth To Be Felt Soon, Says DPM

BY BERTHONY MCDERMOTT
Journal Staff Writer

Deputy Prime Minister Peter Turnquest says that

economic growth in the country will be felt within a year. He was responding to concerns that despite the touted growth

in the economy, this is not being felt by everyday Bahamians.

According to Mr. Turnquest, this should be

the case sometime this year.

"You have the con-

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CANCER SOCIETY BOARD OF DIRECTORS PAID A COURTESY CALL ON THE GOVERNOR GENERAL



► The Board of Directors of the Cancer Society of The Bahamas paid a courtesy call on Her Excellency the Most Hon. Dame Marguerite Pinling, Governor General (centre), at Government House on Monday, May 6, 2019. Cancer Society Founder, Susan K. Roberts is pictured third right, and President, Dr. Williamson Chea, fourth left. (BIS Photo/Letisha Henderson)

MITCHELL: PM ABUSED THE CHURCH

BY LISA KNOWLES
Journal Staff Writer

Members of the Progressive Liberal Party were totally offended that former President of the Bahamas Christian Council Reverend Ranford Patterson would

allow Prime Minister Dr. Hubert Minnis to use the church to spew out propaganda and lies about the PLP. Speaking at a Press Conference yesterday, the Chairman of the PLP, Senator Fred Mitchell denounced

■ See page 3...



► Chairman of the PLP, Senator Fred Mitchell

"WE ARE IN SERIOUS PROBLEMS," SAYS PLP LEADER

BY LISA KNOWLES
Journal Staff Writer

Progressive Liberal Party Leader Philip Davis yesterday said the Government is on track to miss its Revenue Target by at least \$40 million dollars.

"They were wrong to undo many of the rev-



► PLP Leader, Philip 'Brave' Davis

■ See page 4...

UNION SAYS WSC BOARD LACKS ACCOUNTABILITY

The Water and Sewerage Management Union says that the Executive Chairman of the Water and Sewerage Corporation Adrian Gibson and the Board lack accountability.

The Union says it reviewed the recent

eleven page press release by the Board of Directors of the Corporation in which the Board claimed to be in the process of reviewing new corporate policies guidelines and provide a

■ See page 4...





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OXFORD ECONOMICS WTO IMPACT ASSESSMENT RELEASED

BY LICEC BASTIAN
Journal Staff Writer

The Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation (BCCEC) has released the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Impact Assessment, as conducted by Oxford Economics.

And while the consulting group did not give a definitive yes or no to if The Bahamas should join the WTO, it pointed to more positive than negative implications for the country becoming a full member.

The report provides a detailed scrutiny of current laws and regulations in The Bahamas and its level of compliance.

Trade and Investment Consultant with Oxford Economics, Ramesh Chaitoo, told a BCCEC breakfast group that in most instances of regulatory regimes of different sectors scrutinized, the fundamental issue is lack of clarity.

However, Mr. Chaitoo also noted that all investments in the country were decided by the

state.

"The economy here has been largely shaped by government policies, not market forces over the last 40 years.

"That's expressed simply by the fact that all of the investment into this economy is decided by the state. A wonderful little entity called the NEC, which, I guess has its reasons and requirements in its historical basis, however, market forces don't decide where the capital flow is in The Bahamas.

"And when you look at the regulatory environment, you find that things are unclear; and all the surveys and all the research etc, basically shows that where you have unclear regulatory environments, where it's not predictable, where it's not consistent, where it's not transparent, bad things happen," Mr Chaitoo said.

Of the sectors assessed, Mr. Chaitoo revealed that the Tourism sector is WTO ready. He also revealed that the Financial Services and Insurance sector have no negative implications; Wholesale and Retail is

reserved for Bahamians; Construction Regulatory regime needs development; Professional Services targets a specific sub-sector for market opening and Light Manufacturing and Agriculture's main threat is tariff reduction.

"So, our recommendations in the report are that the horizontal restriction on investment should disappear and in the sectors in which there is sensitivity that you put Economic Needs Test (ENT) in the sectors specific commitments.

"That is the main problem in terms of the regulatory regime in The Bahamas. You have a very unclear, non-transparent, unpredictable set of procedures, there not rules not qualified in law, in terms of investment," Mr. Chaitoo said.

Mr. Chaitoo also reiterated what lead negotiator for The Bahamas' accession, Zhivargo Laing has been pointing out, and that is that joining the WTO will not have a deleterious effect on immigration.

"There is no trade agreement in the world

that makes a state or a member of that state give up its right to run its own Immigration rules and regulations and policy objectives.

"General Agreement in Trades and Services (GATS) which has provisions on investment, clearly stipulates that is shall not apply to measures affecting natural persons seeking access to the employment market of a Member, nor to measures regarding citizenship, residence or employment on a permanent basis.

"It also does not prevent a Member from applying measures to regulate the entry or natural persons into, or their temporary stay in, its territory, including those measures necessary to protect the integrity of, and to ensure the orderly movement of natural persons across its borders," Mr. Chaitoo said.

During the presentation, the Oxford Economics group presented several modules and scenarios that suggested that joining WTO is not the panacea, but showed that there has to

be structural and regulatory changes.

Mr. Chaitoo, however, during the question and answer period, when asked to give specifics as to why The Bahamas should join the WTO and more specifically to give example samples of countries that have and the success or failure of such, admitted that one thing The Bahamas does not have a National Development Plan, which speaks to a larger conceptual and policy issue for the country.

"What is the vision of where you want to go as a society, as an economy. I have not found any government documents, any public thing that talks about that.

"For example in most countries you can go and find a 2040 or 2050 sort of agenda, but I am not finding that here. So, it's unclear to figure out where do the powers that be, between the government and private sector, where do you see this economy going; where would you like to take this economy?"

"And, that's the larger discourse that should

take place and inform some kind of new thinking around sectoral focus of whether you want to develop self-driving car or whether you want to develop the blue economy or whether you want to get into pharmaceutical research, and that discussion, I think, needs to happen, but that's outside the remit of what we did," Mr. Chaitoo said.

Lloyd Barton, Associate Director in the EMEA Macro Division Consultancy of Oxford Economics and Head of Global Trades, also agreed that there needs to be decisive structural reforms.

The country ranks 118 on the World Bank Ease of Doing Business, and with a high GDP per capita, it ranks below some of the low income countries in the region, Mr. Barton revealed.

The consultant group said that joining the WTO does not solve the structural problems of the economy, but three things support The Bahamas' accession: predictability, transparency and consistency.



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"GOV'T IN QUANDARY ON WTO"

Continued from / PAGE 1...

"It's a curious kind of conclusion for that to draw, saying if only because we need to address some of our structural reforms, it takes place before you join.

"So, that was the nature of the conversation; that's where it essentially ends. But it's a very good report in that it actually reveals some of the weakness and strengths of the Bahamian economy and for that we got a lot out of it.

"But, if I were to hazard a guess, this is not a report that the government wants to hear. This is not a report that would lead them naturally to want to join the WTO," Mr. Thompson said.

He added, "this is a report which will tell them stop, pause, kick this down the road; let's just do what we have to

do for The Bahamas [but] not to join the WTO.

"As a good Boy Scout, you don't prepare as you join, you prepare before you join".

He concluded then that the "report is scathing in terms of its conclusion, that The Bahamas government should not bother with this WTO".

Maintaining the Bahamians Against WTO stance, Mr. Thompson said the report supported the group's decision.

"[The report] supports our position in so many ways. It supports our position that we are not prepared for this type of journey; that the WTO is not designed for us and it sought to compare us to countries and places like Vanuatu and the Seychelles and Montenegro.

"The Bahamas is a sophisticated, successful

economy. We don't have [any] problems but, the majority of the WTO is not part of a whole overall scheme," Mr Thompson said.

During the question and answer period at the Bahamas Chamber of Commerce and Employers Confederation Breakfast meeting, attempts were made to compare The Bahamas to Jamaica and Barbados, Mr. Thompson said this attempt "makes no sense".

"Essentially there's a reason why The Bahamas has been so slow. We need more deliberation, we need more thought and we must join something which will allow policymakers to protect Bahamians.

"It was a scathing report, I say this again, I diametrically oppose to the idea of joining the

WTO.

At one point, during the discussion, Trade and Investment Consultant with Oxford Economics, Ramesh Chaitoo, admitted that some things have to be done before The Bahamas does join the WTO, Mr. Thompson recognized that there was some attempt on the consultant's part to be objective.

"But, you also get the impression that they were trying to be free traders, that is to say, they wanted to pretend that there is some sort of objectivity involved in this whole process. There's no objectivity involved.

"Our economy is not ready for it, our economy is not prepared for it; it makes no sense joining

"To the extent that they were paid a handsome fee, I'm sure for the report; it was close to

objective, but of course bearing in mind the fact that there were free traders in the room, those who believe in opening up your borders and so forth to achieve a particular end, I'm going to say this, for all the reasons they believe this, say fine say we need to form this economy, it does not involve joining the WTO.

"We're in the process of a number of attempts of liberalization, why then do we have to join? That was the crux of the conversation in the room and it was a clear statement in the way that they sought to deal with the answers. There is no reason that they gave, outright reason that they gave for joining the WTO," Mr. Thompson said.

As far as regulations, one of the recommenda-

tions the report made, Mr. Thompson argues that if regulation or deregulation is needed it can be done in the absence of joining the WTO.

"We take the point that The Bahamas needs management, better control and so forth.

"We also made the point that there is no National Development Plan. With there being no National Development Plan, how then do we move in the direction of joining something and we have no idea as to where we want to be?

"We're talking about a 10 to 15 to 20 year-development plan. In my humble view, not dispelling parts of what they said, it was a scathing critique; if even the suggestion The Bahamas is ready to join, and that's what I got from it [report]," Mr. Thompson said.

MITCHELL: PM ABUSED THE CHURCH

Continued from / PAGE 1...

Reverend Patterson for allowing Dr. Minnis to come into his sanctuary, overtake the podium and abuse the church.

Mr. Mitchell was reacting to the Prime Minister's conduct at the Free National

Movement's second Anniversary Church Service held at Cousin McPhee Cathedral this past Sunday where Rev Patterson is the pastor. Mr. Mitchell claims that the church was used as a political arena.

"The Reverend ought to rethink whether he

ought to have these people back in his church. They simply do not know what is appropriate to say and what is not. Had he been in certain churches, the Prime Minister would have been stopped dead in his track for violating the terms of reference of appearance in church,"

said Senator Mitchell.

"There are certain protocols and norms which obtain when you speak in a church and one of them is while you can thank God for what he has done for you, you do not use it to make direct political speeches. The speech in that church on Sunday was

totally out of the norm apart from being a vicious, concocted lie. It is no wonder that some churches do not allow politicians in their pulpits at all.

"I am appealing to the Christian Council to rein in this kind of outrageous use of the pulpits.

"I recall when Prime

Minister Perry Christie would lean over to me and say that this is simply a fellow who does not behave when he is in church. He continually abused the privilege by going over the line. The practice continues today and we denounce it," said the PLP Chairman.

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Economic Growth To Be Felt Soon

Continued from / PAGE 1...

struction sector that will feel it before the ordinary retailer or ordinary worker and so we have gone through two years of planting seeds.”

“We’re beginning to

see the green shoots as a result of that and I suspect that this year we will expect to see some real growth,” the Deputy Prime Minister said.

There is the added hope that this will lead to unemployment figures decreasing.

“Our expectation is that that should be the case given that we have had GDP growth this year, given that we have investments that are starting to come out off the ground this year and again we are optimistic about projects that are in

the pipeline; that we will start to see some activity,” he said.

Last week Bahamas Chamber of Commerce Chief Executive Officer Jeffrey Beckles said more must be done to ensure all sectors benefit from the economy’s

growth as the small and medium sized businesses are not feeling it.

He added that if not sustained, that 2.6 per cent growth the economy is experiencing will decline, specifically in the tourism industry.

Speaking to

Rotarians, Mr. Beckles suggested that the country should start having apolitical conversations in hopes of fostering growth.

Mr. Beckles last week called on the government to work to maintain the economy’s growth.

“WE ARE IN SERIOUS PROBLEMS,” SAYS PLP LEADER

Continued from / PAGE 1...

enue building initiatives that the PLP Government left in place. This elusive deficit target is being pursued at the expense of the social deficit. The record is clear the PLP significantly reduced the budget deficit, but not at the expense of the social deficit.

“Since they are not growing the economy, simple math dictates that in order to meet this elusive deficit target, the Government must reduce

overall expenditure by this same amount. As a result, Customs and Immigration Officers, Police Reserves, Teachers, and Nurses are not being paid overtime and their allowances. In addition, small and medium business are not being paid on a timely basis for providing goods and services to the Government and its agencies. Many of these businesses are hanging on for dear life as a result of monies owed from the Government,” said Mr. Davis.

He said, “we are in serious problems, as has been confirmed by the Central Bank in its report. More pointedly how can a deficit be going down when the Government is still approximately \$1 billion dollars away from its annual revenue target with only three months left in the fiscal year? And Customs Revenue Collection is behind last year’s revenue.”

In the face of this massive short fall, how will the Government make this up? Will there be new

taxes?” the Opposition leader asked.

Mr. Davis also addressed the shooting death of Defence Force Officer Petty Officer Philip Perpall while on duty at the Government House by his alleged assailant, a fellow Defence Force Officer. The incident prompted concerns about safety in the country.

“The emotional and psychological fitness of individuals who hold sensitive positions in the uniformed branches of the

Government, are critical of the effectiveness of these branches of the Government, hence, the question arises as to what protocols are in place to ensure the mental, emotional health and stability of individuals who are in these highly sensitive positions,” he said.

“You would recall our calling out of the National Security Minister Marvin Dames for his emotional and seemingly violent outburst to what appeared to be an innocent comment by a Parliamentary

colleague within the precinct of the House of Assembly. I can call then for the evaluation of Mr. Dames’ emotional and psychological fitness to hold high office. Additionally, just watching him on the television program, the other night, “On The Record”, only heightened my deep concern about the Minister’s psychological and emotional stability. Mr. Dames ought not to be holding that position in any event,” said Mr. Davis.

UNION SAYS WSC BOARD LACKS

Continued from / PAGE 1...

New EXCOM handbook Anti-Corruption, Procurement, and internal promotions.”

In a press statement yesterday the Union asked: Can the Executive

Chairman and the Board withstand an internal Audit today?

Among other questions were:

How is it that the Internal Compliance & Control Department (Company Police) is

being unraveled and no thought being made to address this issue?

Why did the Executive Chairman appoint himself as the person in charge of the contracts committee?

How is it that the Executive Chairman

Adrian Gibson, General Manager Elwood Donaldson, and Assistant General Manager John Bowleg can travel all over the world at WSC’s expense? The most recent trip was to China, this team also travelled to

London England, Rio de Janeiro Brazil, Portugal, and Tokyo, Japan. What business does WSC have in these destinations? Was the board aware these men travelled business class to each country? WSMU is reliably informed that one

of the Corporations International Vendors funded the trip to Portugal.

How is it that Executive Chairman Mr. Adrian Gibson can

See page 7...



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