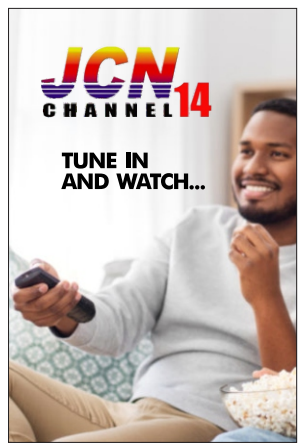




The Bahama Journal

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GOVT'S NEW AGENDA



BY GERRINO J. SAUNDERS
Bahama Journal News Editor

The new legislative session began on Wednesday (May 20th) with 41 members of the House of Assembly and 16 members of the Senate Taking their oaths of allegiance and the oath of qualification.

In the House of Assembly members selected Patricia Deveaux the Member of Parliament for Bamboo Town as the Speaker filling a position she held during the last term.

The newly re-appointed no nonsense Speaker set the tone for the new legislative session with a stern message for the members of parliament to respect the chair, respect each other and to not abuse the privileges of the House. The Deputy Speaker will be Sylvanus Petty the Member of Parliament for North Eleuthera who also fills a post held in the last term.

In the Upper Chamber Senators selected Lashell Adderley to return as President.

She too admonished members to conduct themselves with honour as she promised to be firm but fair to all.

The newly cemented members of parliament then reported to the Governor General Dame Cynthia Pratt who delivered the Speech From The Throne from the Imperial Ball Room outlining the government's agenda for the next five year term.

The subject of immigration both legal and illegal along with protection of the nation's sacred documents including passports, work permits, national insurance and voter cards was among the major issues for voters and according to the governor general the government plans to make significant improvements in immigration.

She said, "My Government believes strong borders and lawful immigration systems are essential to national stability and sovereignty; accordingly, my Government intends to introduce the Employer Immigration Compliance Act imposing stronger penalties for abuse of the work permit system and other unlawful employment practices.

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ELABORATE OPENING OF PARLIAMENT 2026

Forced indoors due to threats of inclement weather the State Opening of Parliament to begin the new legislative session following the May 12 general elections took place on Wednesday, May 20, with the taking of oaths of allegiance and oaths of qualifications by Members of Parliament in the House of Assembly and Senators in the Senate in downtown Nassau, before heading to the Imperial Ball Room at the Atlantis Paradise Island Resort for the reading of the Speech From The Throne by Governor General Dame Cynthia Pratt. While the nation's business was of utmost importance, it was also a time for comradery and a wonderful display of fashion in most instances. (Photos courtesy of BIS)



LEADERS REACT TO SPEECH FROM THE THRONE



Member of Parliament for Fort Charlotte, Sebastian Bastian

BY ALEXANDRIA RECKLEY
Bahamas Journal Writer

After the Speech from the throne was delivered by Governor General Dame Cynthia Pratt on Wednesday, political figures from both sides shared their outlook on what has been proposed for the legislative agenda for the new parliamentary term.

Speaking with reporters after the ceremony was newly appointed government minister for Innovation and National Development Sebastian Bastian, who addressed his recent appointment and approach to leadership moving forward. Bastian explained that before making immediate decisions or policy changes, he intends to carefully assess the current state of affairs within his portfolio. He told reporters “prosperity is perpetual. So obviously, things that may be there will continue to evolve over time. And I’m looking forward to working with that.”

He also mentioned the length of the national development plan and his intent is to read it thoroughly. It’s 400-something pages long. So obviously, it can’t be done overnight.”

Mr. Bastian shared that his team has already done a great job since being assigned and he plans to expand on that.

Meanwhile, former Free National Movement leader Dr. Hubert Minnis shared concerns surrounding corruption

and the overall structure of governance in the country. Minnis stated that corruption is deep and must be addressed for all national institutions.

“Asking for a commission of inquiry, that’s like asking to investigate the tip of an iceberg,” he said. “If you’re going to call for a commission of inquiry and call for a national commission inquiry, look at national corruption. Corruption is too deep within our society. Let’s deal with it.”

He pressed that the country does not need new laws but instead needs enforcement of the laws in place. He lastly, responded to questions about the allegations of government officials in criminal activities and how this would affect the international outlook on The Bahamas. “The image doesn’t look good, but the matter is now under investigation,” he said.

Former cabinet minister Leslie Miller also spoke with reporters emphasizing what needs to happen now. He spoke about elected officials doing their job and their obligation to the people.

“Everybody’s been elected to have a position now. Go do your job. You have a lot to do for people that are depending on you to give them a better future.” he said. He spoke about equity and how government officials play a role in ensuring this is possible for Bahamians.

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GOVT’S NEW AGENDA

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My Government will establish a Bahamian E-Verify Portal to confirm work eligibility before employment. My Government also intends to introduce daily overstay fines for unlawful overstay, and strengthen re-entry ban enforcement.”

According to the speech from the throne the Government will also establish a National Biometric Immigration System with overstay alerts, biometric e-gates, and enhanced fraud detection capabilities.

This in addition to the establishment of an “Immigration Fraud Intelligence Unit dedicated to investigating and prosecuting immigration fraud.”

As for public service workers engaging in corruption in relation to immigration matters she said, “My Government intends to introduce mandatory sentencing provisions for public officers found facilitating immigration or passport fraud.”

In addition to food security, energy reform, education, and housing, another major issue for voters and the general public is the ailing healthcare system. According to the speech from the throne the government will continue its investments in upgrading the healthcare system for patients and healthcare workers.

The government said it believes access to quality healthcare must be strengthened across the Commonwealth. As a result it will continue to implement the Dental Professions Bill while modernising dental regulation within The Bahamas.

It intends to strengthen legal protections and support systems for elderly Bahamians through a new elder abandonment framework empowering social services to intervene and assist families before situations reach crisis point. This in addition to further extending contributory health insurance coverage to public servants,



including contract workers.

According to the speech the government will continue to advance the infrastructural development programme already underway, including the Health Campus in Freeport, the new hospital in New Providence, and other clinics throughout the islands.

Crimes against the person and property continues to be a challenge for the nation.

The government said safety and security of the Bahamian people remain among the highest obligations of the State.

As a result the government “will continue to fully implement the Protection Against Violence Act and expanding domestic violence support services throughout the country. strengthen gun laws and expand specialist firearm courts to support a zero-tolerance approach toward illegal firearms.

Story Cont. Pg. 4



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SANDS EXPLAINS WHY NO SENATE POST

After a major loss in the 2026 general election, concerns about the appointments of the Free National Movement senators and the future of the party began to arise. On Monday, May 18th, FNM Chairman Dr. Duane Sands spoke on the Love 97 talk show Issues of the day.

In his interview Sands stated that “I have a platform as Free National Movement Chairman I don’t need to be in the senate.” Sands continued, “We have a smaller number of parliamentarians and senators in as much as we can broaden the front, we have more people who can keep the government’s feet to the fire.”

The FNM chairman said, “As much as I appreciate the endorsement of your caller as Chairman of the Free National Movement, I don’t need another platform.”

Sands also explained that the FNM accepts as a part of a democracy that the people have spoken and they will play the role given as His Majesty’s Loyal Opposition.

“We support what we can support, and we oppose in the interest of the Bahamian people”, said Sands.

The FNM chairman explained, “The Leader of the Free National Movement will remain Michael Pintard. I will continue on as chairman at least until it is once again determined at a convention whether or not the party wishes to retain the same leadership and the deputy leader will remain Shanendon Cartwright.”

Sands also addressed the possibility of a convention stating that, “A convention will be held when it is practical and practicable, so we don’t anticipate that there is any delay in the timing of convention. However, if you were to ask me do we have a specific day and date set for a convention the answer is no not as yet.”

Sands expressed his thoughts on the size of the Progressive Liberal Party

cabinet stating that, “What is clear is that this is arguably a gussimae cabinet and if you look at the size of the cabinet relative to other countries like Great Britain, Jamaica, Barbados etc... it is the single largest cabinet per capita in the world.”

He continued, “And so in a situation where Bahamians are asked to trim fat when their asked to do without how it is that our government finds it consumable to just sign a 2 million dollar per year bill for this cabinet and what exactly are all these people going to do?” “I hear the Prime Ministers comments about wanting all hands-on deck, but we will see whether bigger is better,” said Sands.

The FNM chairman also gave his views on persons like Leslia Miller-Brice and Sebastian Bastian who were appointed cabinet ministries despite their affiliation with the gaming industry. Sands stated that, “We are being quite deliberate in looking at the legal advance as to whether or not the appointments of both individuals were legal based on our Gaming Act.”

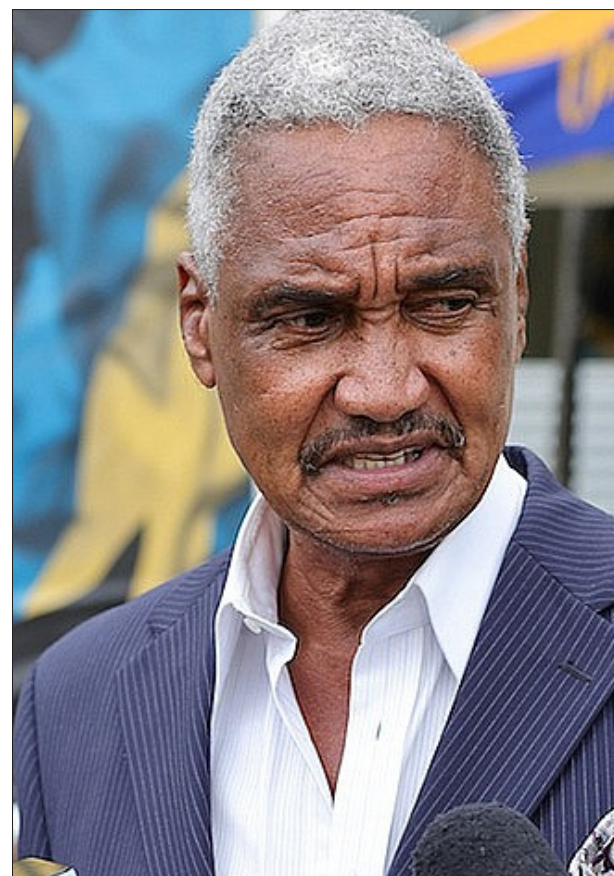
Sands continued, “Bear in mind that no less than Philip Davis himself intermated a year ago that he was not minded to make any adjustments to the gaming act in order to allow persons affiliated with the gaming industry to serve in cabinet.”

He explained, “Not only did we see that these individuals supposedly divested of their interests and not obviously one but two persons, one of whom was denied a role in the cabinet during the last administration and now she has been afforded a place and you wonder what has changed, how come solutions have turned?” Sands stated that they have expressed their concerns and the Bahamians people will hear more about it in due course.

Sands continued saying, “Bear in mind that Philip Brave Davis when he was in opposition spoke not very positively about the gutting of the legislation by large cabinets.” The FNM Chairman stated that the Prime Minister is entitled to change his mind but should change his principals accordingly. Sands stated, “Most people may change their posture, they don’t often change their principals.”

“In short order the Free National Movement will make a determination as to what else is appropriate in the interest of the Bahamian people regarding these appointments,” said Sands. When asked if the FMN was also guilty of appointing large cabinets in the past as well Sands responded, “We continue to focus on we did it then they did it we shouldn’t aspiring to do better.”

According to Sands moving forward the FNM current leaders remain and looks to address the legal means in which certain members of the PLP cabinet were given ministries despite their gaming industry affiliations.



Leslie Miller

LEADERS REACT TO SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

Story Cont. from Pg. 1

Mr. Miller calls for the government to stop making excuses for leaders, especially those prioritizing foreign talent. He said, “Don’t have no victimization in your government, especially government ministries and corporations that don’t support Bahamians, don’t support Bahamian-made products. That must stop.”

Moving into this new session requires visibility, transparency and fairness. He told reporters “Our kids deserve the same thing your kids get. Just give us an opportunity. I think that’s only fair for all of us.” When asked about his biggest take away about the new goals for the elected government he said “housing”.

He noted that “this is one of the greatest problems we have in our country.” He spoke to the struggles of parents and how leaders may not have a real idea of the how poverty looks for Bahamians experiencing it.

He said, “You all don’t know what poverty looks like. I want to show them. I want to take them to those places and show them what poverty looks like.”



FNM Chairman Dr. Duane Sands

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GOVT'S NEW AGENDA

Story Cont. from Pg. 1

"In collaboration with Court Services, the government will support the establishment of a Backlog Reduction Court and a dedicated Sexual Offences Court to improve the administration of justice and reduce delays. The government will also ensure the Independent Commission of Investigations is fully functioning and properly resourced."

With a measurable level of success the government said it will also continue to build on the success of its 'Five Pillar Crime Strategy' to improve Prevention, strengthen Policing, improve Prosecution and Punishment, and expand Rehabilitation Programmes, while, the successful 'Clear Hold and Build' approach will also remain.

In terms of food security the government believes a stronger Bahamas must produce more of what it consumes.

"Accordingly, my Government intends to establish a National Import Substitution framework with clear national production targets for key agricultural products and stronger sourcing requirements for government food programmes.

My Government will also introduce tourism agriculture incentives, to encourage hotels and tourism operators to increase local sourcing from Bahamian farmers and producers," according to the speech.

Reliable and affordable energy remains central to economic competitiveness and the quality of life enjoyed by Bahamian families and the sustainability of Bahamian businesses.

The government said it "intends to introduce an

Electricity Consumer Protection Code empowering URCA to enforce service standards, billing transparency, and consumer safeguards. My Government will also introduce Energy Equity legislation to ensure that Family Island residents are not penalised by higher electricity costs simply because of geography."

"My Government intends to embed mandatory local-content and training obligations into major energy contracts, to ensure Bahamians benefit from the national energy transition. The government will also reduce or eliminate import duties on energy-efficient appliances and renewable energy systems."

In terms of housing the Davis administration believes every Bahamian deserves access to safe and dignified housing. The government intends to establish a National Rental Property Registration System with enforceable living standards and stronger protections for tenants, along with expanding its existing Affordable Homes and Rent-to-Own initiatives."

As promised in the last legislative session before the elections the government will also establish a Residential Tenancy Authority with powers to inspect, investigate, and enforce rental standards across the Commonwealth.

With Deputy Prime Minister Chester Cooper taking over as the new Minister of Education the government said education remains among its highest priorities.

The government said, "Every Bahamian child deserves access to modern, high-quality education regardless of geography or circumstance, and as a

result the government will continue to implement the Education Act, the most significant legislative reform in Bahamian education in a generation, anchoring curriculum reform, accountability, teacher standards, and school governance in law."

This in addition to making pre-primary education universal and compulsory from age four and the continuation of its commitment to lifelong learning through Upskill Bahamas, and other programmes.

The government will continue implementing the Land Adjudication Act and Registered Land Act, to create a central searchable land registry, modernise records, and reduce delays in property transactions.

It also intends to establish a Foreign Direct Investment Compliance Unit to ensure investors honour the commitments they make to the Bahamian people.

The government will also review the Real Property Tax regime to provide "meaningful relief" for Bahamian property owners.

As for the second city Freeport and the wider Grand Bahama the government said it will continue to promote fundamental transformation in Grand Bahama through enhanced investments and economic development, reorganisation of arrangements with the Grand Bahama Port Authority, and strengthening of opportunities with key stakeholders.

As for the other Family Islands the government intends to devise individual Family Island Development Plans following consultation with residents of those islands.

The Davis administration believes it is making

inroads in the area of labour by signing many industrial agreements before they become contentious, raising the minimum wage, assisting entrepreneurs with funding and guidance.

The speech from the throne revealed that the government intends to introduce the Employment Bill 2026, representing the most significant modernisation of labour protections in a generation.

"The legislation will strengthen workplace standards, expand maternity protections, provide leave for mental health and wellness, and establish new safeguards for working parents. My Government also intends to reform and modernise the National Insurance system through stronger anti-fraud measures, improved digital systems, enhanced oversight, and expanded inclusion of informal workers. My Government will establish a Public Sector Pension Plan creating the framework for contributory pension coverage for public servants," said the government through the Governor General.

In conclusion the Davis administration says it acknowledges that the Bahamian people have entrusted the government with a serious responsibility. It said, "The work ahead will require focus, national unity, and continued discipline in governance. My Government accepts that responsibility fully, as my government believes this country possesses every ingredient required to succeed in the modern world."



BAHAMAS HOSTS LANDMARK IPCC CLIMATE MEETING

TYNIA BROWN
Journal Staff Writer

Prime Minister Philip Davis welcomed leading climate scientists to The Bahamas this week as the country hosted a crucial meeting of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), stressing the urgent need for global climate action.

Addressing delegates at the Lead Author Meeting for Working Group II, Davis said climate change is already having severe effects on vulnerable nations like The Bahamas.

"For us, climate change is not an abstract concept. It is not a distant risk to be modeled for a future generation. It is here. It is present. It is personal," Davis said.

Prime Minister Davis also pointed to rising sea levels, intensifying storms, coastal erosion and coral reef degradation as ongoing threats facing the country. He also referenced the impact of

Hurricane Dorian in 2019, calling it a clear example of the dangers posed by climate-fueled disasters.

Despite these challenges, Davis said The Bahamas continues to focus on resilience and adaptation.

"Our approach to climate change is grounded in resilience, innovation, and partnership," he said.

Davis outlined several national initiatives, including investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, renewable energy expansion, and nature-based solutions such as protecting mangroves and seagrass beds. He noted that adaptation remains critical for small island nations.

"For small island states, adaptation is not optional. It is essential," Davis added.

Prime Minister Davis also emphasized the importance of the IPCC's work, describing the organization as a critical source of scientific guidance for governments worldwide.

"The IPCC represents the gold standard of scientific collaboration," Davis said. "Your assessments inform global policy, guide national decisions, and shape international negotiations."

He noted that the conference marks the first time an IPCC author meeting has been hosted in The Bahamas and the wider Caribbean region. Davis said hosting the event in a Small Island Developing State allows scientists to directly observe the realities faced by climate-vulnerable countries.

Davis reaffirmed The Bahamas' commitment to international climate cooperation and praised

Bahamian climate scientist Dr. Adelle Thomas for her contributions to previous IPCC reports and her current role on the Bureau of Working Group II.

Closing his remarks, Davis urged scientists and world leaders to continue pursuing bold climate action before the opportunity for meaningful intervention disappears.

"The science is clear. The impacts are accelerating. The window for effective action is narrowing, but it has not yet closed," he said.

DAHL-REGIS GETS LIFETIME WHO AWARD



Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis

BY ALEXANDRIA RECKLEY
Journal Staff Writer

Distinguished Bahamian physician Dr. Merceline Dahl-Regis urged global healthcare professionals to transform the global healthcare system for the betterment of all people including the next generation, stressing that action must be taken now. Her plea came as she accepted the World Health Organization's (WHO) Director-General's Global Health Leaders Award in Geneva, Switzerland on May 18 during the 79th World Health Assembly.

"Urgent challenges remain," she said. "Millions, especially those living in conflict zones, still lack access to basic healthcare." She added, "Delegates, we must act now. Our humanity is inseparable from our responsibility to preserve dignity and expand opportunity for all. Cooperation must remain our guiding principle. The future can be brighter, but only if we act with purpose."

Dr. Dahl-Regis believes that cooperation and purposeful acts will contribute to the expansion of healthcare which should be an important initiative for everyone.

She implored, "We must never grow weary in doing what is right. As we pass the torch to the next generation of public health professionals, let us do so with confidence that they will build a better future than we have known. We've done it before. We can do it again and do it even better."

The lifetime achievement honor was conferred for her extraordinary contributions to global health, immunization, and historic disease elimination across the Americas and globally.

Some of Dr. Dahl-Regis' many achievements and contributions include advancing disease elimination, immunization, maternal and child health, and primary health care across the Americas.



Story Cont. from Pg. 6



BTVI EYES NEW CAMPUS AS OFFICIALS PUSH TECHNICAL EDUCATION EXPANSION

TYNIA BROWN
Journal Staff Writer

The Bahamas Technical and Vocational Institute is preparing to embark on a major expansion initiative with plans for a new campus, as government officials and education leaders stressed the growing importance of technical and vocational education in The Bahamas.

During a visit by U.S. Ambassador to The Bahamas Herschel Walker, BTVI executives unveiled elements of a proposed campus master plan and outlined their vision of transforming the institution into a regional technical education hub for the Caribbean.

BTVI Chairman Elvis Taylor said the institution is among the country's most critical agencies, arguing that technical education remains central to national development.

"BTVI in my opinion is the third most important institution in The Bahamas," Taylor said, noting that approximately 70 percent of graduating students are technically inclined.

It was revealed that the government has identified more than 20 acres of land for the new campus, which is expected to include upgraded labs, expanded training facilities, improved student spaces and modern equipment.

BTVI President Keyshan Bastian said the institution currently operates 35 active programs and is expecting roughly 500 graduates this summer. She emphasized that partnerships such as the one with the U.S. Embassy and EducationUSA are essential to strengthening technical

education opportunities in the country.

Vice President Kevin Basden noted that BTVI recently received international accreditation from the Council on Occupational Education based in Atlanta, Georgia, a move he said enhances the value of BTVI certifications and creates greater international opportunities for graduates.

"What the accreditation has done for us, it's added value to the product of BTVI," Basden said.

"When students leave BTVI, they can matriculate to international institutions that are recognized across the accreditation body."

Ambassador Walker praised the institution's focus on technical training and argued that vocational education should not be viewed as secondary to traditional academics.

"Technical school is just as important," Walker said. "And some technical schools are more important."

Walker also highlighted opportunities for Bahamian students seeking to study in the United States through EducationUSA partnerships and pledged the embassy's continued support for BTVI initiatives.

While officials said projected costs for the new campus are still being calculated, estimates discussed during the event ranged between \$150 million and \$180 million.

BTVI leadership said the institution plans to launch a capital campaign and seek funding support from government, the private sector and international partners to advance the project.

PARLIAMENT OPENS



DAHL-REGIS GETS LIFETIME WHO AWARD

Story Cont. from Pg. 4

As Chief Medical Officer of The Bahamas, she spearheaded key initiatives in adolescent health and maternal and child care, while also pioneering regional efforts to eliminate mother-to-child transmission of HIV and syphilis.

She accepted her award with a speech thanking her colleagues and mentors along her journey. However Dr. Dahl-Regis explained that children continue to inspire her to be of service.

She stated "Through my journey, I've been guided by exceptional mentors and multidisciplinary personnel whose resilience, compassion continue to inspire me.

However, my greatest teachers have been the children, their courage and enduring hope that remind us why our work matters."

The award winner admitted that her experiences were challenging as she served in groups such as PAHO, WHO, GAVI, and other groups and committees "often tested my resolve but also strengthened my sense of purpose."

The Ministry of Health and Wellness congratulated Dr. Dahl-Regis for her contributions and in a press release that said "Beyond her international accomplishments, Dr. Dahl-Regis has remained deeply committed to mentorship, knowledge-sharing, and the continued development of healthcare professionals in The Bahamas. She consistently emphasizes the importance of discipline, professionalism, and continuous learning while encouraging young professionals to pursue excellence, expand their skills, and use their knowledge in service to others. Her career stands as a reminder that Bahamians can contribute meaningfully to global health while continuing to strengthen communities here at home."



PARLIAMENT OPENS

